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How to Dominate Local Search: The All in One Digital Marketing Guide for Small Business Owners

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Introduction

The Internet is flooded with information about Digital Marketing including helpful resources for Social Media Marketing, Reputation Management, and Business Listings Management but how do you sift through all of the information to find what you need to dominate Local Search Results and Succeed Online?

Chances are that you've typed something relevant to Digital Marketing into a search engine, expected a one stop - all inclusive solution, but were left astounded by the vast amount of resources available online - much of it nothing more than click-bait that leaves you more confused than before you started. So how do you know where to even begin?

In this book, we'll walk you through setting up an Online Presence for your business that will get you to the coveted top positions in Local Search Results. You'll start out by setting up or claiming business listings for your business such as Google, Bing, Yelp, and others. From there, we'll cover setting up Website Search Console tools like Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools that help get your pages/sites indexed quickly, and allow you to submit website URLs and sitemaps which tell search engines to crawl your site/pages for new content to index. We'll talk briefly about Google Analytics before moving on to web design options. Whatever option you choose for creating/hosting/managing your website, you'll need to know how to prepare your content for Search Engine Indexing using Search Engine Optimization(SEO) techniques that are proven to get results. Once your website is setup and indexed in search engines, you'll want to generate traffic to your site, as well as to build an Audience for your content. That's where Social Media sites like Facebook, Twitter and

Instagram come in. We'll cover setting up business pages on those and other Social Media Platforms, how to create engaging content relevant to your business and gain followers, and what types of content are the most effective by platform to help you grow your Social Media Following. Finally, we'll discuss review sites, such as Yelp and others. We'll discuss the pros and cons of various review sites, and give advice for which platforms to use (and which to avoid if possible), how to respond to both positive and negative reviews, and how to manage those listings for best results.

We've got a lot of material to cover, so let's jump in and get started setting up a Stellar Online Presence for your business.

Chapter 1. *If you build it, they will come*

The people looking for your goods or services are looking for you online before they go out to shop and before they make purchasing decisions. If your business is not Online, it does not exist to the more than 90% of people who use Social Media and Search Engine queries to find businesses online. At a minimum, every business needs a website, Google and Bing webmaster accounts, Google and Bing Business Listings, at least two Social Media Pages, and Google Analytics. Every business needs to create or claim a variety of essential listings and pages, and to keep business information accurate across all of their different platforms.

Business Listings and why they Matter.

Business Listings are an online collection of important information about a business. They are a freely available and essential tool to help customers find your business online and at your physical location.

Essential Information for Business Listings.

A simple acronym, **"NAP+W"**, summarizes the required information that should be included in all business listings. NAP+W stands for **N**ame, **A**ddress, **P**hone number, + **W**ebsite. They are essential information that potential customers will need in order to research, locate, and contact your business. Providing helpful details such as hours of operation, service areas, appointment links, and photos from your business is important to help answer common customer concerns that may be deciding factors in their buying decisions.

Google Business and Bing Places for Business

Google Business(https://www.google.com/business/)and Bing Places for Business (https://www.bingplaces.com/) are the most essential listings to have, as these two combined provide listings data for nearly all other

listings sites. You may have heard that your business needs to be listed across hundreds of listings sites, and that you have to pay ridiculous amounts of money to services that list you on them. While the former is partly true, the latter is a deceptive ploy by unscrupulous SEO scammers. Simply creating free listings on Google Business and Bing Places for Business provides your listing data to all major listings and review sites automatically, and at no charge. Even better, once you create or claim a Google listing, you can sync the data directly to Bing.

Some caveats regarding Google Business Listings Scams.

There are several scams associated with Google Business Listings, and it's important for business owners to be aware of these scams to protect themselves from fraud. Here are some of the most common scams and caveats associated with Google Business Listings:

1. Fake Verification Calls: Scammers may pose as Google representatives and call business owners to verify their business information. These calls can be convincing, as scammers often use spoofed phone numbers and official-sounding language to trick business owners into providing sensitive information. However, Google does not make unsolicited verification calls, and business owners should be cautious of any calls claiming to be from Google. If in doubt, business owners should hang up and verify their listing information directly on the Google My Business website.
2. Paid Verification Scams: Scammers may also offer to verify a business's Google listing for a fee. However, Google My Business verification is a free process and business owners should never pay for this service.
3. Impersonation Scams: Scammers may create fake Google Business Listings for businesses that don't exist or for businesses that have closed or moved. They may also claim to be an authorized representative of a legitimate business and update the listing with fraudulent information, such as a fake phone number or website. Business owners should regularly monitor their listings to ensure that all information is accurate and up-to-date.

4. Phishing Scams: Scammers may send phishing emails that appear to be from Google, asking business owners to verify their account information. These emails often contain links to fake Google login pages where scammers can steal login credentials. Business owners should be cautious of any emails claiming to be from Google and should always verify the authenticity of the email sender and link before entering any login information.

Once you create or claim your listing, don't be surprised if you start receiving calls purporting to be from Google, or to be about your Google listing. These callers generally say something like "Your listing is inactive" or that it is "unverified". Google does not directly contact business owners via phone calls or texts, so if you get these calls, ignore them, and consider marking them as spam to help combat these types of scams. If Google needs to contact you, they will reach out via email. The only exception to this is a single automated call or text from Google with your verification code when initially verifying your ownership of the business and only if you choose that method of verification. By the end of this guide, your Google and Bing Business Listings **WILL be VERIFIED**, so you can safely filter these deceptive callers. Legitimate SEO and Web Design experts will not use this type of *ambulance chasing* tactics. It is not only unethical, its probably [CRIMINAL](#).

Consider the following tips to recognize and avoid Google Business Listings scams:

- Unsolicited calls or emails: Be wary of unsolicited calls or emails from people claiming to be from Google. Google does not make unsolicited calls, and they will never ask for payment to verify your business listing. If you receive a call or email that seems suspicious, hang up or delete the email and go directly to the Google My Business website to verify your listing.
- Poor grammar or spelling: Scammers may use poor grammar or spelling in their communications, which can be a red flag that something is not legitimate. Legitimate communication from Google will generally be well-written and free of errors.

- Suspicious links or attachments: Be careful of clicking on links or downloading attachments in emails from unknown senders. Scammers may use these links or attachments to install malware on your computer or steal your personal information.
- Unusual payment requests: Google does not charge for business listing verification or optimization. If someone asks you to pay for these services, it is likely a scam. Be cautious of any payment requests that seem unusual or suspicious.
- Verify information independently: If someone asks you to verify your Google Business Listing information, do not provide sensitive information like your credit card or social security number. Instead, verify your information independently by going to the Google My Business website and logging into your account.

Google also provides additional tips for avoiding scams on their support page.

You should report any Google Business Listings scams to protect yourself and other business owners from fraud. Here's how to report a Google Business Listing scam:

1. Report the scam to Google: If you receive a suspicious phone call, email, or message related to your Google Business Listing, report it to Google by visiting the Google My Business Help Center and clicking on the "Contact Us" button. You can also report a scam directly from your Google My Business account by clicking on the "Support" button in the top right corner of the page and selecting "Need More Help?"
2. File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC): The FTC is responsible for investigating and prosecuting fraudulent business practices. You can file a complaint with the FTC online at ftc.gov/complaint or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357).
3. Contact your local law enforcement: If you have been a victim of a scam, you should contact your local law enforcement agency to report the incident. Provide as much information as possible, including any phone numbers or email addresses used by the scammer.

By reporting a Google Business Listing scam, you can help prevent other business owners from falling victim to the same fraud. Remember to stay vigilant and protect your personal information by verifying any requests for sensitive information before providing it.

Further Information:

- Google My Business Help: Avoid Scams and Fraudulent Calls
  https://support.google.com/business/answer/6212928?hl=en
- Federal Trade Commission: Scams Targeting Small Businesses
  https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/bus69-scams-targeting-small-businesses.pdf
- Better Business Bureau: Beware of Scammers Impersonating Google My Business https://www.bbb.org/article/news-releases/21906-beware-of-scammers-impersonating-google-my-business

Make your Listings Work for You.

Your Business Listings' effectiveness depends on the availability and accuracy of listings. What I mean by this is that there are a variety of sources for business listings including search engines, directories, maps, and social media sites. When it comes to business listings, more is better. Your presence on as many sources as possible will cover the most common avenues for customers to find you, but remember that your information should be uniform across all sources. Be sure that you provide the same accurate information across all listings including using the same formatting (i.e., your website should not be "somesite.com" on some listings, but "www.somesite.com" or "somesite.org" on others - even if all of those point to your website).

Accuracy in Business Listings is Critical.

Listings are free advertising with unlimited potential reach for your business. Accurate and readily available listings assure that customers are able to find your locations while you're open for business. However, missing or incorrect information can lead to

customers [lacking confidence in your brand](#), and choosing a competitor's product or service.

Claiming What's Already Yours

Unless you are starting a brand new business, chances are that some listings for your business already exist, and this is especially true if you have created social media pages or websites. As you have already learned, Google and Bing Listings provide the data for nearly all other business listing and review sites, with Bing now gathering much of its own data from Google.

Add/Claim your Business on Google Business and Bing Places for Business

Head on over to https://www.google.com/business/ to setup your free listing. To use an existing Google Account, choose to "Sign In". Otherwise "Manage Now". Follow the prompts.

Now that you are signed in/up, click on the "Add Business" item at https://business.google.com/locations and choose to "Add single business". Enter your Legal Business Name. If there is an existing listing for your business, Google will display it, and you will choose it. If not, create a new listing by following the prompts. You will be required to verify your ownership of the business using your choice of a variety of options. By far, the simplest method is to use the phone number already listed for your business to receive a call with your verification code. In the rare case that you do not have access to the listed phone,(i.e., your phone number has changed) you will have to use the address verification method which simply means you have to wait for a code to be sent to you via USPS.

Once you have verified your ownership, Google will create and publish your listing. At this point head over to https://www.bingplaces.com/ where you will follow very similar steps to create or sign in to an existing account. Once signed in/up,

you will simply choose to import the data from Google My Business and sign in to the relevant account to start syncing.

Search for and Claim other Listings/Pages for your Business

If your business already had a Google listing, there most likely are other listings for you, which you should claim where possible. Even if you have just created a new Google Listing using this guide, you should simply search your favorite search engine for your legal business name, and follow any listings links where you will look for an option to "claim this business". Some important listings to specifically search for are, Yelp (https://yelp.com), CitySearch (https://citysearch.com), Yellow Pages (yp.com), and Facebook (https://facebook.com), as these popular platforms are very likely to already have your listings submitted via their users. Once you have created or claimed as many of these listings as you can you simply need to wait for your listings to appear automagically all across the web from your new/claimed Listings.

By following these tips, you can make your online business listings work for you and attract more customers to your business. Remember to keep your listings up-to-date and engaging to maintain a strong online presence.

Chapter 2. SEO Demystified - HTML Semantics

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a process that involves using tactics both within and outside of a website to assure that the website is indexed in Search Engines, like Google and Bing, and that both the brand and the website are highly ranked in searches for relevant keywords and phrases.

SEO is not as hard as the SEO guys make it seem.

Search Engine Optimization does not require any addons, subscriptions, or extensions to be added to your website, does not require you to purchase advertising, and does not require an SEO expert or specialist. In fact, most SEO occurs within the design of a website by understanding basic html and tag semantics and using markup to highlight keywords and phrases. This sounds more complicated than it actually is. This guide will walk you through the steps needed to Optimize a Website for Search Engine Indexing and Submit a Website to Google and Bing.

Step 1: HTML SEO Basics.

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) is a web development language which uses *Elements*, which are indicated by *Tags* such as <h1> to indicate a level 1 heading or or <p> to indicate a paragraph to *Markup* content for display in a *web browser*.

Required Tags for SEO

There are some HTML tags that are required in order to be indexed by search engines, starting with the <title></title> tag. This is your first and most important opportunity to highlight keywords specific to your site. A website title should convey the name and location of your company, an indication of your category of business, and a brief tagline which incorporates some keywords. Titles should be fairly short, no more than 60 or so characters. Example: <title>KDG Web Solutions Athens, TN |

Helping Local Businesses Succeed</title> The semantic meaning of the title tag is simple: a Title. Give it a name that includes keywords that YOU would use to search if you were searching for your own goods and services.

The next required tag for SEO is the *Meta Description*. The format for this tag is a little different than other HTML tags. the structure for this tag looks like <meta name="description" content="50 to 80 words describing the business, the website, services, or products." />. Here, you get to tell search engines exactly what keywords you want to rank for by including them in a natural sounding way in the content (it should be speaking to the potential customer in a natural seeming manner, and avoid stuffing keywords. This tag is also used in the search engine results pages to summarize the page for the listing, so it will be what searchers see in the Search Engine Results Pages(SERPs) - so the content you use here shapes a potential customer's *First Impression*. Remember: First Impressions Last. This is your best opportunity to woo your customer before they ever visit your business.

Both the website title and the meta description tags are placed within the head tag of a website and are absolutely required in order for a website to be indexed by search engines.

Robots Meta Tag

The Robots Meta Tag is not actually required, but it is useful for giving specific instructions to search engine crawler bots regarding page indexing. You will need to provide instructions for bots to index the main page of the site, and follow links which results in a bot automatically crawling and indexing all linked pages which are not expressly excluded. The Robots Meta tag should look like this: <meta name="robots" content="index, follow" />

HTML Semantics

Each predefined html tag has a semantic meaning which should be considered when designing a website. Many designers will use these tags

simply to style their content, without considering their semantic meaning. For example, there are a total of six heading tags (<h1> through <h6>)each with both inherited and individual semantic meanings. A level 1 heading indicates a headline, should be used only once on a page, and its correct usage is essential to search engine optimization. A website is a collection of webpages, and each page should have a single unique h1 heading that effectively uses keywords and phrases to summarize the page. The h2 through h6 tags have a slightly lessening importance in descending order. H2 has less weight than h1, h3 has less weight than h2, and so on. Where the h1 heading should be used only once per page, a page can contain multiple h2 through h6 tags. Each heading tag gives high importance to its content for SEO purposes. In other words, the content inside of these tags becomes keywords or key phrases with importance commensurate to the weight of the tag with h1 having the highest importance, and h6 having the lowest. Consider heading tags to be page subtitles and use them to frame and format your content.

The paragraph tag (<p>) is used to indicate a paragraph and really isn't very useful by itself for SEO, but can and should contain attribute tags - such as the strong and b tags which can further assign importance to keywords and phrases within the paragraph.

The *Strong()* tag is the next most weighty tag with SEO connotations. It assigns a heavy weight to its content, which also assigns the content a high importance to search engines. Strong should be considered to mean "This is the most important content to consider here" and should be used to markup brands, products, services, service locations, or important information. Limit the length of strong content to one word to just a few words.

The *Bold()* tag is similar in use to the strong tag, but is less weighty, therefore less important for consideration as key content. Bold is mainly used to make text stand out to a viewer, and tells a search engine that its content may be common words, but is important. Bold should be used to markup descriptive words/phrases such as "all natural", or "hand-crafted".

Using Strong and Bold Together

Strong and Bold can be nested within the heading and paragraph tags, but not within each other. Some examples of properly nested combinations of tags would be:

- Strong within heading/paragraph: <p>KDG Web Solutions, Athens, TN </p>
- Bold within heading/paragraph: <p>Digital Marketing Experts </p>
- Strong and Bold together in a heading/paragraph: <p>KDG Web Solutions, Athens, TNDigital Marketing Experts </p> (Remember: Strong and Bold CAN be nested within headings/paragraphs, but CANNOT Be nested within each other.

SEO for Website Images

Images provide several opportunities for keyword inclusion - starting with the image filename. Filenames for images can and should contain hyphenated keywords. For example, for a photo of Pappa Greene's Large Deluxe Pizza with the filename "IMG01.jpg" think: "pappa-greenes-pizza-large-deluxe.jpg". The img "alt" tag is required by ADA Mandate, and another opportunity to markup keywords since keywords included in the attribute get a great deal of weight in indexing. The content of this tag should describe the image for those viewers who cannot see the image but should incorporate your keywords. The img element can also have a "title" attribute, which displays the content on hover, and gets a small amount of indexing importance. An SEO optimized img element would look like:

Step 2: Google and Bing Search Consoles

Now that you have marked up your website's keywords, you will need a Google Search Console (aka Google Webmaster Tools) account. This account will serve as your dashboard for initially submitting your site for indexing, and for uploading/maintaining sitemaps. Sitemaps are not required for this approach, and are beyond the scope of this guide. We will be using manual url submission. To signup, visit https://search.google.com/search-console and follow the prompts to "Get Started". If you already have a gmail account, you can use it here. Once signed up, you need to create a property which is Google Speak for adding your website. You will click the top-left dropdown and choose "Add Property". Because of varying methods for adding DNS records, I will not cover DNS Properties here. After choosing to add a property, you will use the "URL Prefix" Option to verify your site ownership for Google. Enter your site url and tap "Continue". First, Google will try to automatically verify the domain, but this will most likely fail. Google will next generate a simple html file which you will download from Google, and then place in the root of your website. This simply means uploading the file to your server or host. Leave the filename unchanged, upload it, then head back to the Google Search Console. Click the "Verify" Button, and Google will check the file that you uploaded to your site to simply verify its existence and content. After verification, leave the file on your site so that you won't have to verify again later. Note that if you have both http and https versions, you will need to create a separate property for each. The hard stuff is done for Google. All that's left is to point Google Searchbots to your index or main page by typing your full url into the url inspection tool at the top center of your console and submitting. That's it, you're indexed (unless you got warnings or errors that will need to be fixed and rechecked before they can be indexed). Waiting time for indexing to propagate can vary from nearly instant to 48 hours or more. Generally, new websites that are not already indexed get priority, so its best to request indexing for a specific url only after its final publication because subsequent crawls of indexed urls are not prioritized. Most of the time, newly submitted urls will be indexed within minutes. In most cases where indexing is delayed, you will find that Google has sent you a message regarding errors that prevented indexing with links to help for fixing the issues.

Now, head over to https://www.bing.com/webmasters/ and you will repeat a nearly identical process to the Google Search Console setup to complete your Bing Webmaster Tools setup. Follow the prompts to add your website, to verify ownership, and then to submit your index page URL. Your website is now Optimized for Search Engine Indexing, and will shortly have all of its pages included in both Google and Bing searches. Chances are, if you are performing these steps for the first time, you will see a huge jump in your site search result ranking within a few days. By choosing good, relevant keywords and phrases, this strategy WILL get you to the coveted top positions of search results for those keywords very rapidly.

Chapter 3. Keyword Analysis Simplified *These are not the Keywords you're Looking For*

Though the "SEO industry" would paint it otherwise, **Search Engine Optimization** is not a closely held secret that requires membership in a secret society of psychic warriors to learn. Terms like "**Keyword Analytics**" were created for no other reason than to make "what would people type in the search engine to find me?" seem like an obscure science. Keyword Analysis is that simple: **"what would people type?"**. For our fictitious "Pappa Greene's Pizza" in Chattanooga, Tennessee our keyword analysis simplifies to "pizza near me". The problem then becomes that the franchises dominate results for those keywords. Pappa Greene's needs to stand out in the crowd of big household names.

Long vs Short Tail Keywords

Common search terms relevant to Pappa Greene's pizza such as "restaurant", "pizza", "delivery", et. al., as well as general geographic terms such as the searcher's city and state, are referred to as "*Short Tail Keywords*". Unless Pappa Greene is prepared to spend many millions of dollars in advertising, these keywords alone are not going to get Pappa Greene to the top results in searches using these terms.

Pappa Greene's is known for their **signature homemade sauce**, their **hand-tossed crust**, and their **cozy, family atmosphere**. Very Specific search terms such as brand names, descriptive words such as "homemade", and trademarks are known as "*Long Tail Keywords*". Specific geographic details such as "south side" or "downtown" are also "*Long Tail*".

Keyword Strategy: Stand out in the Crowd

We know that we need to use a variety of both *Long Tail* and *Short Tail* Keywords to help Pappa Greene's climb to the top of searches. A

Keyword Strategy is SEO speak for the process of implementing the chosen keywords.

Through our Keyword Analysis, we determined that we want to optimize for "hand tossed crust", "pizza", "downtown Chattanooga", "family owned", "homemade sauce", "family atmosphere", and "pappa greene's pizza". Now we can start implementing our keywords EVERYWHERE. Starting with the domain name, we might want to choose something like "pappagreenespizza.com" or "downtownpizza.com". When writing content we use our keywords in headings, titles, meta description tags, image filenames, image alts, URLs and within the first 100 words on the page. Once we have written our SEO optimized content, we can use semantic HTML markup to further emphasize our keywords.

Pappa Greene's Hand-tossed Pizza Features our Signature **Homemade Sauce**. Located in **Downtown Chattanooga**, our cozy, **family atmosphere** is the perfect place for Lunch or Dinner.

Pappa Greene's Hand-tossed Pizza Features our Signature Homemade Sauce. Located in Downtown Chattanooga, our cozy, family atmosphere is the perfect place for Lunch or Dinner.

SEO doesn't stop on the website. The same content strategies for websites apply to all Internet content. Social Media posts, email marketing content (if you must), even printed material can and should be ***Branded***.

Keyword Stuffing: Don't overdo it

It may seem tempting to markup every imaginable keyword that you can think of, but this is known as "*Keyword Stuffing*" and should be avoided. Search Engines such as Google look for relevant, high quality content over quantity and will penalize any such strategies by removing the content from indexing. Using keywords over and over or Marking up every occurrence of a keyword are other examples of *Keyword Stuffing*. Content should not seem as though it is targeted toward search engines. It should be written as though speaking directly to a person.

Chapter 4. Reputation Management: *What's in a Name?*

Reputation Management involves finding/claiming/creating listings and monitoring reviews on review sites, efforts to cultivate reviews, responding to both positive and negative reviews, and efforts to prevent or remove fraudulent or deceptive reviews (such as false reviews from malicious competitors).

Your business reputation can be the difference between success and failure. In today's digital age, your business's reputation is determined by consumer reviews on review platforms like Google, Facebook, and Yelp. Review platforms provide an invaluable tool to business owners who write timely and effective responses to reviews. Though it is important to respond to negative reviews and resolve complaints or concerns, its just as important to respond to positive reviews to show that you appreciate customers taking the time to review your business while also encouraging other customers to do the same. Since [92% of consumers](#) read reviews online, review responses are a free and powerful tool for businesses to reach new customers. An effective response will assure that a happy customer becomes a regular, but even better - 70% of complaining customers will return if you resolve the complaint. The review response process allows the opportunity to engage with the reviewer to publicly show that you genuinely care about your customers and addressing their concerns.

How to respond to positive reviews

Responding to positive reviews is very simple, and a powerful opportunity to promote customer loyalty and attract new customers. Thank the customer - by name - for their review, brand it, promote it and invite the customer to come back (and bring their friends)!

1. **Thank the Customer for their Review and make it Personal**

   You wouldn't ignore a compliment in real life. Likewise, never ignore a positive review! Make sure to personalize your response to you customer's compliment. This let's the customer know that their opinion was important enough for you to take the time to acknowledge them, and that feels good.

2. **Brand It**

   Positive Review responses are a great opportunity to improve the chances of those reviews appearing in search results. Using your business name and location in your response will greatly improve visibility of those reviews. Likewise for using your business category (i.e., restaurant, hotel, nightclub, law office, etc.)

3. **Extend an Open Invitation**

   Invite the customer to try your "signature homemade sauce" or to come in for your promotional event next month. Positive review responses are a great place to spread the word. Invite them to try something different on their next visit or to bring their friends!

Each positive review presents a unique opportunity to promote your business! By giving each review that personal touch, you foster customer loyalty, while also getting the word out. Best of all... potential customers reading the reviews will also appreciate that personal touch.

How to Respond to Negative Reviews

Believe it or not, most of the same rules that apply to positive review responses also apply to negative review responses. However, your response to a negative review should be handled delicately. The first thing to do is to apologize for the problem. Acknowledge the complaint, and sympathize. You have this one opportunity to turn a bad experience around.

Tactfully resolving challenging complaints shows that you value your business, and your customer's experience. Follow these simple steps to make your response to a negative review count:

How to respond to negative reviews:

1. Apologize and Empathize
   No matter what happened, you should simply apologize and express your regret that your customer's experience didn't meet their expectations.
2. Make the conversation private
   Invite the reviewer to reach out via phone, email, or both. Don't discuss or disclose details, and don't ask questions in the review response. Just as you would delicately manage an unhappy customer at your physical location to avoid making a scene, these discussions should be steered toward a private arena.
3. Promote
   Pappa Greene's Signature Sauce may not be everyone's cup of tea, but its what they're known for. Everyone has different likes and dislikes, so when a customer leaves a negative review about the horrible special sauce, feel free to suggest alternatives. However, leave your business name, location and category out of out of your response to a negative review to help assure that this one negative review isn't the first thing that searchers see. Putting it all together, an effective response could look like:

   > "Thank you for taking the time to share your experience. I am so sorry to hear that our signature sauce didn't meet your expectations. Our Signature sauce is a customer favorite, but I understand that taste's vary. I invite you to try one of our other sauces or a wide variety of other menu items. Please reach out to us via email at customer-care@somesite.com or by phone at 555-1212 so that we can personally discuss your experience."

How to respond to Fake or Malicious Reviews

Dealing with fake or malicious reviews is a challenge for businesses because they can harm the company's reputation and impact its bottom line. Yes, it really does happen. An unscrupulous competitor, a disgruntled employee, a random malicious actor - whatever the reason, not all reviews are honest accounts of genuine experiences. When it happens, let's face it, you are going to be angry. Its unfair, unethical, and probably illegal and how dare they smear your good name! You should be angry - I certainly would be! But, you should still treat these reviews just like any other negative review, even if it seems unfair or even counter-intuitive to not call them out for their dishonesty. Consumers are no fools, they will recognize a fake review - good or bad. If it sounds like an ad for your competition, it probably is. But you don't just take it lying down! Fake reviews violate the policies of every legitimate review platform. Fake reviews from competitors or solicited by competitors are unlawful - and probably criminal under deceptive business practices laws. Every review platform has a method for business owners to dispute or flag reviews, and their policies are easily accessible and freely available. You should first closely examine these policies for terms prohibiting the deceptive content, and point to those terms in your dispute. Some common terms of use that can be helpful in your dispute are:

- provisions that the review "must" reference an actual visit or interaction with the business
- prohibitions against false claims or misrepresentation of facts
- prohibitions against fake or duplicate accounts
- rules against reviews from competitors or their employees
- rules preventing vindictive or retaliatory content
- rules against posting anything that violates applicable laws
- provisions against reviews that contain hate speech or personal attacks

While awaiting a review platform's decision on your dispute, your next step is to respond to the review. A professional and courteous response can demonstrate to other potential customers that you take customer feedback seriously and are committed to providing excellent service.

You can help mitigate the impact of malicious reviews by frequently engaging with satisfied customers, encouraging them to leave positive reviews on multiple platforms. This can help counterbalance any negative reviews and improve your business's overall reputation. Keeping an eye on your online reputation and monitoring new reviews as they are posted can help you quickly respond to any fake or malicious reviews. You can set up alerts for new reviews or hire a reputation management service to help you stay on top of your online presence.

If a dispute fails to get a fake review removed, consult an attorney to determine if there are legal measures that you can take to force the removal, such as if it contains defamatory or libelous content. DO NOT be tempted to publicly discredit the reviewer, as this can lead to an ugly public dispute that can do more harm than good.

Overall, dealing with fake or malicious reviews requires a proactive approach to reputation management. By responding to reviews, engaging with satisfied customers, and monitoring your online presence, you can help minimize the impact of negative reviews on your business's reputation.