What is a Citation Campaign?

A citation does not need to link back to your website to be valuable. The value in a citation is the mention of your business. Google identifies that your business was mentioned through the presence of your NAP info, and you get credit for this mention. The more mentions of your business out on the web, the more prominent your business appears to Google, and this will help with your local rankings. The actual links from most business directories are usually nofollowed anyway. This is not to say that links aren't valuable. Links are valuable, and citations that include links are even better than citations that do not include links. The point to remember is that a citation does not need to have a link to be valuable to your local search efforts.

Types of Citations

Citations can be divided into two categories, structured or unstructured.

1. Structured Citations

A structured citation is your business information (NAP) on a business listing directory. When you see lists of citation sites, these are pretty much always business listing directories where you can submit your business and get a citation. Example sites for structured citations include:

- Yelp
- Yellowpages
- Facebook
- Superpages
- MapQuest

- Etc.

Here's an example of a structured citation for a restaurant on Yelp:
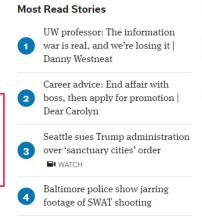
2. Unstructured Citations

Generally speaking, an unstructured citation is your business information (NAP) on any other site that's not specifically a business listing directory. Common examples where you'll find unstructured citations are blogs, magazine/newspaper sites, wikis, and so on.

Here's an unstructured citation example for the same restaurant on seattletimes.com:

The oysters aren't as cheap after 5 p.m. (50 to 75 cents off), but some good deals are available if you steer away from the mainstream favorites. Effingham Inlet oysters from British Columbia, plump and briny, are the best deal. Also good: sweet and musky Barron Point and some creamy Eagle Rock oysters.

The Walrus and the Carpenter, 4743 Ballard Ave. N.W., offers happy hour 4-6 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays with half-price oysters from 4-5 p.m., and 25 percent off oysters from 5-6 p.m. Also, $2 off on cocktails, $1 off on draft beer and on Muscadet (206-395-9227 or www.thewalrusbar.com).

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And here's an example of an unstructured citation right here in this article!

The Walrus and the Carpenter is a fantastic restaurant in Seattle located at 4743 Ballard Ave N.W. Their phone number is (206) 395-9227. The Whitespark team loves to eat here when we attend MozCon. Awesome seafood. Highly recommended!

Note that there is no link. As described above, a mention of the business without a link is still a valuable citation.

Why Citations Are Important for Local Search Rankings

1. Verification & Trust

Citations help search engines, like Google and Bing, verify that your business exists. When multiple credible sources have the same accurate information about your business, it signals to search engines that your business is legitimate.

Listing your business on the prominent national and local sites helps your business create authority, establish trust, and will improve your business' ability to rank in local search results.

2. Prominence

Local ranking algorithms used by both Google and Bing factor in citations when it comes to local search rankings. In the latest Local Search Ranking Factors survey, local search experts rated citation related factors as making up approximately 13.31% of the Top 50 factors. Other important factors include Google My Business (19.01%), links (17.31%), on-page (13.81%) and reviews (13.13%).

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The more places your business information appears online, the more prominent your business appears to Google. It makes sense. If the search engine algorithms see that your business is mentioned on hundreds of websites, compared to competition that is only listed on a few dozen, this can make you seem like a more popular business, and give you a boost in the rankings.

Not All Citations Are Created Equal

So what makes a citation great for a local business? There is huge variation in the value of different citations. A mention of your business' name, address, and phone number on whitehouse.gov is worth far more than a mention of your business on some spammy web directory that was created solely for low quality link building.

Since citations vary in their value, we've broken down our top recommended citation and data sources into different classifications by rank of importance, they are: Core Search Engines, Primary Sources, Tier 1, Tier 2 , Tier 3, and Tier 4. Below is a description of each category and some examples for businesses in the USA:

Core Search Engines

These search engines are receivers of business listing data, not distributors.

1. Google
2. Bing
3. Apple Maps

Primary Data Sources

These are the data aggregators that aggregate and validate data from a number of sources (government, telcos, utilities, web research, etc), and then distribute this business listing data to hundreds of other sites.

1. InfoGroup
2. Acxiom
3. Localeze
4. Factual

Tier 1

These sites are prominent on Google and are frequently used by people searching for businesses. In addition to generic sites that are used nationally, this tier also includes city/state and industry/niche citations that add significant value to your citation profile.

1. Generic
2. Yelp
3. Facebook
4. Yellowpages
5. BBB
6. etc.

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Hyper-Local & Niche

1. Lawyers.com
2. Avvo
3. City of Chicago.org
4. Denver.com
5. etc.

Tier 2

These are business listing sites that have some prominence on Google, decent domain authority, but may be lesser known.

1. Yellowbook
2. Merchant Circle
3. HotFrog
4. etc.

Tier 3

Even lesser known and lesser frequented business listing sites.

1. Yellowise
2. My Local Services
3. Local Database
4. etc.

Tier 4

Sites with low domain authority that you've probably never heard of. Examples:

1. IGotBiz.com
2. UnitedStatesSeek.com
3. etc.

There are many factors that determine citation quality. For further advice on sorting the gold from the sand, take a look at this post on determining citation quality.

Citation Consistency

If you've read any introductory posts about local SEO, you've likely heard about how important citation consistency is. Making sure your listings have the correct name, address, and phone number on the most important sites in the local search ecosystem IS important. You want to make sure that you have one, and only one, accurate and complete listing on each of the most important sites.

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With that said, some people worry about citation consistency more than they need to. When it comes to your local rankings and the impact incorrect citations can have, you really need to perfect your citation profile on the Core Search Engines, Primary Data Sources, and Tier 1 sites. This means making sure that you have searched for all NAP variations, all duplicates have been removed, all inconsistent citations have been updated, and you have one and only one, perfectly accurate and complete citation on each of these data sources and websites.

Your next priority would be to audit and cleanup your listings on the Tier 2 sites. There is value in getting these listings sorted as well.

If you want to keep going into the Tier 3 and Tier 4, enjoy yourself. It's not going to hurt, but it's also not going to make or break your SEO. A few incorrect listings on some of these less important sites are no big deal.

Another important element to remember is that Google and other Search Engines are intelligent enough to normalize business data for variations/abbreviations, so if it's not identical to the letter or format, you don't need to stress about it.

Oh, and if you'd rather not do all this work yourself, we would love to help you with citation audit and cleanup.

How to Build Citations for Local Businesses

Building citations is a time consuming process – it's important to invest the time to do it right, or outsource the work to a trust and credible service provider.

Tips for building citations:

1. To create listings you will need an email address – we strongly recommend that you use a business email that is associated with your company domain and not a generic Gmail or Yahoo address. Listing submissions will be more trusted and more likely to go live when you use a domain-based email.
2. Your Name, Address, and Phone Number (NAP) should be the same on every site. Consistency is important, but, don't worry about minor formatting differences that you'll see on different sites. Again, check out our guide to acceptable variations.
3. Category Selection – Try to keep your categories consistent on the sites and choose the category that best describes what your business does.
4. Add as much detail as possible – Add photos, your logo, a full business description, your operating hours, links to your social accounts, and so on.
5. Claim your listings – most sites will require you to verify your listing – this can be via email or for the bigger sites like Google My Business, Bing, Apple Maps and so on, through phone verification. The company will call your business and have you enter a pin number or give you a pin number to enter to claim your listing. This is very important, it's another trust signal and verified listings have more authority.
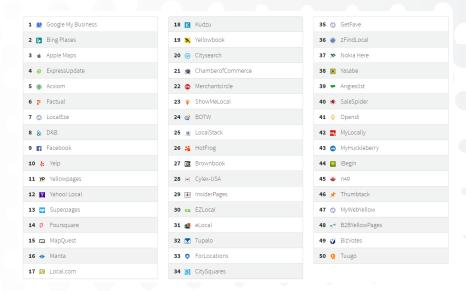
Strategies For Finding Citations Sources

Now that you know what citations are and why they are important for local businesses, how do you go about finding local citations for your business?

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1. Start with Whitespark's List of Top Citation Sources by Country (USA, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia). These lists were carefully curated by Nyagoslav Zhekov, one of the foremost experts in the world on citations. You can learn more about his methodology for determining the most valuable citations.

   Work your way through all of these listings based on your country. (Note, business directories are more plentiful in the USA so this is why you are seeing a Top 50 list).

1	Google My Business	18	Kudzu	35	GetFave
2	Bing Places	19	Yellowbook	36	2FindLocal
3	Apple Maps	20	Citysearch	37	Nokia Here
4	ExpressUpdate	21	ChamberofCommerce	38	Yasabe
5	Acxiom	22	Merchantcircle	39	Angieslist
6	Factual	23	ShowMeLocal	40	SaleSpider
7	LocalEze	24	BOTW	41	Opendi
8	D&B	25	LocalStack	42	MyLocally
9	Facebook	26	HotFrog	43	MyHuckleberry
10	Yelp	27	Brownbook	44	iBegin
11	Yellowpages	28	Cylex-USA	45	n49
12	Yahoo! Local	29	InsiderPages	46	Thumbtack
13	Superpages	30	EZLocal	47	MyWebYellow
14	Foursquare	31	eLocal	48	B2BYellowPages
15	MapQuest	32	Tupalo	49	BizVotes
16	Manta	33	ForLocations	50	Tuugo
17	Local.com	34	CitySquares		

2. Now look for citations based on your Industry/Business Category (think Accountant, Lawyer, Coffee Shop) and the City your business operates in. We've done hours of research, and searched hundreds of terms to find the best citation sources based on business category and location.

3. Find local citations based on your competitors citations.

   We have a handy tool called the Local Citation Finder that will complete a competitive analysis based on keyphrase search or business search. When you run a keyword search, the Local Citation Finder returns the top 3 businesses that are ranking locally for that term, then finds their citations, both structured and unstructured. By analyzing these results, you can understand the competition's citation building strategy, see where they are getting listings, try and get listed on the same sites too.

   If you are more interested in directly analyzing a specific competitors list of citations, then you can enter their business information into a business search, and look at all of their citation sources.

4. Find citations by completing searches of your own

   At the bare minimum, you most definitely should have the base citations that are in our Top lists, and we highly recommend the Local Citation Finder for additional discovery, but if you want to dig even further, you can complete some basic search queries based on your location and industry to find local citation opportunities.

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Searches to find city specific citation sources:

- (city) business listings

- (city) business directory

- (city) directory

Searches to find industry/niche specific citation sources:

- (keyword) business listings

- (keyword) business directory

- (keyword) directory

Summary

Having a strong citation profile is one of the simplest ways you can optimize for local SEO. Citations are considered part of the foundational basics when it comes to local search. Once you have completed your citations you can move on to other areas like link building, engagement, content creation, and reputation management. You shouldn't have to worry about your citation profile again, unless your business information changes – such as when you move locations, get a new phone number, change your name, and so on.

Source: Darren Shaw, Whitespark

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