

How Directories & Search Engines Impact Your Visibility Online

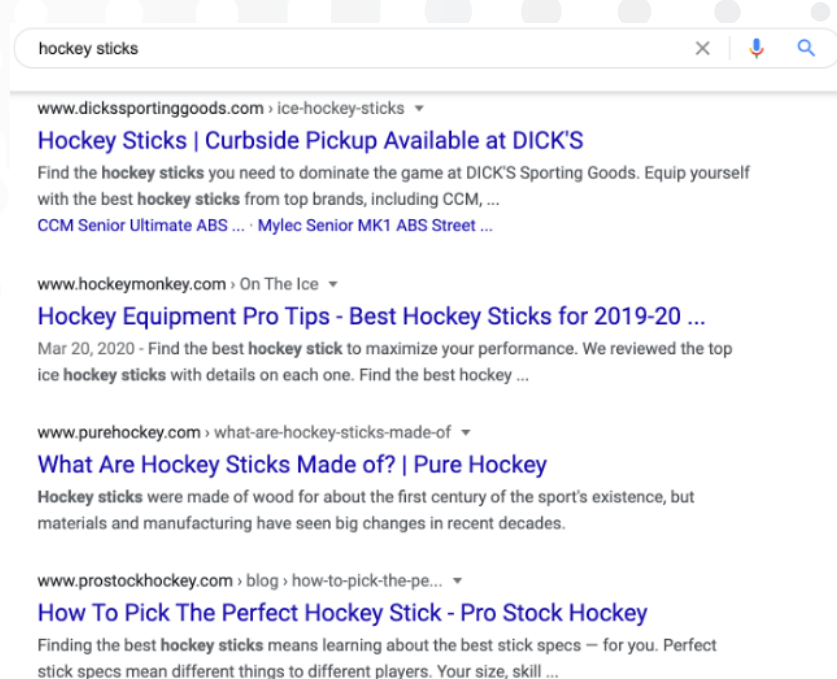
We get asked all the time the difference between a Search Engine and a Directory. The short answer is a search engine is a website where users can search for answers, information, and content online. Trying to rank higher at Search Engines (such as Google) is often referred to as SEO, or search engine optimization.

What a directory is has evolved over time, but these days, a directory is an organized collection of businesses, organizations, or websites, often with a connecting theme such as geography or industry. Trying to rank higher for local searches by getting into specific directories is often referred to as Local SEO.

While the strategies for improving your visibility in both search engines and directories are similar, both are needed for a sound SEO strategy. Let's take a look at what will help your business rank higher in both search engines and directories.

What is a Search Engine?

As mentioned above, people use search engines like Google or Bing to find internet content. To do this, users enter a search term (query) into the search field, such as "hockey sticks." The search engine then looks through its index (database) for relevant websites and displays them in the form of a list.



A common question: "do all search engines return the same results", and the answer is no. Bing and Google, the two major search engines, may look very similar on the surface but both search engines have very different algorithms. Algorithms are the formulas search engines use to rank the most relevant results at the top; different algorithms mean different results, even if the query is the same.

Understanding SERPs

In order to get your website to rank on the first page of Google, you have to uncover what kind of pages are ranking well. The first two to three pages of results on Google can have many different types of content: Ads, Organic Results, Photos, YouTube Videos, News Articles, Featured Snippets, and Google's Map Pack just to name some. Different keywords can spur different results.

For example, a client has a podcast and all she wanted was the name of her podcast to appear on Google's first page. The problem was that in her show name she had the word "cast." Anytime you search a string of words +

“cast,” you’re going to get a knowledge panel, IMDB, and Wikipedia results of the cast of a certain tv, movie, or documentary, because Google assumes your intent is to know more about the cast of that particular movie, play, or show.

As we continued brainstorming, we found other ways for her to get her podcast and her episodes to rank. We came to the conclusion that we wanted new listeners, and we didn’t care if people were searching for her podcast’s brand name.

Just by doing twenty minutes of research, we were able to understand what Google is looking for and how to create a content strategy that helps her episodes rank well on Google, Bing, and other search engines.

Your takeaway? Spend twenty minutes (after you’ve finished reading this article!) and type in some of your business’ keywords into Google and Bing.

- What type of results are you finding?
- Is Google serving up blog posts or product pages to fulfill your “intent”?
- Who’s your digital competition? Does the same company come up for multiple searches? Do they have both pages and videos in the results?

Search Intent on the Search Engines

Search intent is the “why” behind a search query. Why did the user conduct this search? Do they want to learn something? Are they looking to make a purchase? Or, are they looking for a particular website?

Google’s recent algorithm changes are designed to provide users with the most relevant information based on their search query.

Four Types of User Intent

- Informational – searcher is strictly looking for information. Most of these search queries will be in the form of a question
- Navigational – searcher is looking for a specific website, company, or branded
- Commercial – searcher has yet to make a final decision on which solution is right for them. They’re most likely looking for reviews and comparisons. They’re still weighing their options. They are often using comparison keywords such as best, top, or review)
- Transactional – searcher is looking to make a purchase but unsure where to buy and from whom (buying keywords)

Now that you’ve done some research at the search engines and you have a basic understanding of what the intent around that search term is, the next question to answer is what type of content should you be creating to get to the first page of the search engines?

There are 4 C’s that you should follow to uncover that answer:

- Content Style (e., text or video)
- Content Type (blog post, product page, landing page,)
- Content Format (how-to, step-by-step, review, comparison, etc.)
- Content Angle (what is your unique approach to or perspective on the content?)

What is a Directory?

Online directories are searchable databases that display a business' name, address, phone number, and additional information. Local directories dominate the first page of many local search results.

There are main "local directories" that your website should be on; Google, Facebook, Apple Maps, Bing Places. There are plenty of other local directories that you can place your business information on, but you'll want to choose them wisely.

Just like keyword research, you'll want to choose what best fits your strategy. If you're a restaurant, you would want to place your business information on OpenTable, Yelp, and if you want to get hyper-local look for city-specific websites (i.e. Portland Food Map). If you're a home remodeler, you'll want to make sure to be listed on Houzz and Angie's List.

Google My Business is the Ultimate Local Directory

Whether they like to admit it or not, Google has been housing their own local directory for years. The map pack has been seen at almost every local search you've ever done on Google. If you're trying to rank, Google My Business (GMB) is where you want to start. This is because there are many other local directories out there that get their information from Google My Business.

There are three objectives that you need to consider when trying to rank well within Google's Local Pack.

- **Relevance:** How relevant are your services to the user's query?
Does your GMB listing and website list all of your products and services in a detailed manner? If so, this will increase your website's chances for ranking well locally.
- **Prominence:** What are customers saying about your business online?
Search engines view customer reviews as a top ranking factor, so make getting them a priority. The more positive reviews your business has, the more likely Google will recognize you as a top solution in the given area.
- **Proximity:** Where is the user is searching from?
Sometime ranking locally is out of your hands no matter how well you've optimized your directory listings and website. Google will often serve up the businesses that are closest to where the searcher is searching from unless they add a city+state keyword modifier.

Multiple Locations? Multiple Pages!

If you have more than one place you do business, I can't stress enough the importance of creating a page for each of your locations. This may seem like a lot of unnecessary work, but having these "location pages" on your website definitely pays off!

Creating location pages can be easy if you follow the criteria from setting up your Google My Business location. These location pages on your website can act as a doorway for the exact location a user is looking for. Many users are using "near me" in their searches. However, you don't want to include "(business service) near me" in your copy. Google's not so easily fooled.

By having individual location pages, you will help those "near me" searchers to find the exact location that is closest to them. Here's what should be included on each location page:

- Business Info – Address, business hours, and phone number.
- Embedded Map – By claiming all of your locations on Google, you can embed a specific map on each one of these pages that has the address, hours, and review total. (Google loves when you embed their map on your site.)
- SEO Elements – With any page on your website, you'll want to make sure you have a strong title, meta description, headers, and ALT text. Remember to use those local keywords within these SEO elements, such as "Portland dentist" or "southern maine hardware store."
- Photos – Give people the experience of actually seeing your location with interior and exterior photos. If appropriate, include photos of staff, products, and anything else that helps paint a fuller picture of your business.
- Business Location Description – Talk about streets that you're near or a landmark that is near one of your locations that people can quickly associate with. It will not only help users but it will solidify where your location is to Google.
- Directions – There are hundreds of ways to get to any business. But how do most of your customers get to each of your branches? I-95 or certain main streets in the city? My suggestion would be to create directions for users coming from every major direction.
- Testimonials – Do you have testimonials that are specific to a location? Maybe talking about one of your employees or services? Use those testimonials throughout the page to show authority in the area.

The Final Word on Search Engines vs. Directories

In the ancient past, when Yahoo was a major driver of website traffic, and Google was just a twinkle in eyes of Larry Page and Sergey Brin, the difference between search engines and directories was blurry. The biggest difference is that directories were human-driven and search engines were machine-driven.

These days, business owners and marketers need to recognize the value both of these services and how they fit into your business's need to get in front of your ideal customers.

Through search engine optimization you can rank at the top of page one. By getting into appropriate directories and maxing out your profile, you have another opportunity to get found in both the directory in question as well as in today's leading search engines.

By understanding your business and your customers' needs, you'll better know how much time and energy you need to put into each endeavor.

Source: Take Flyte