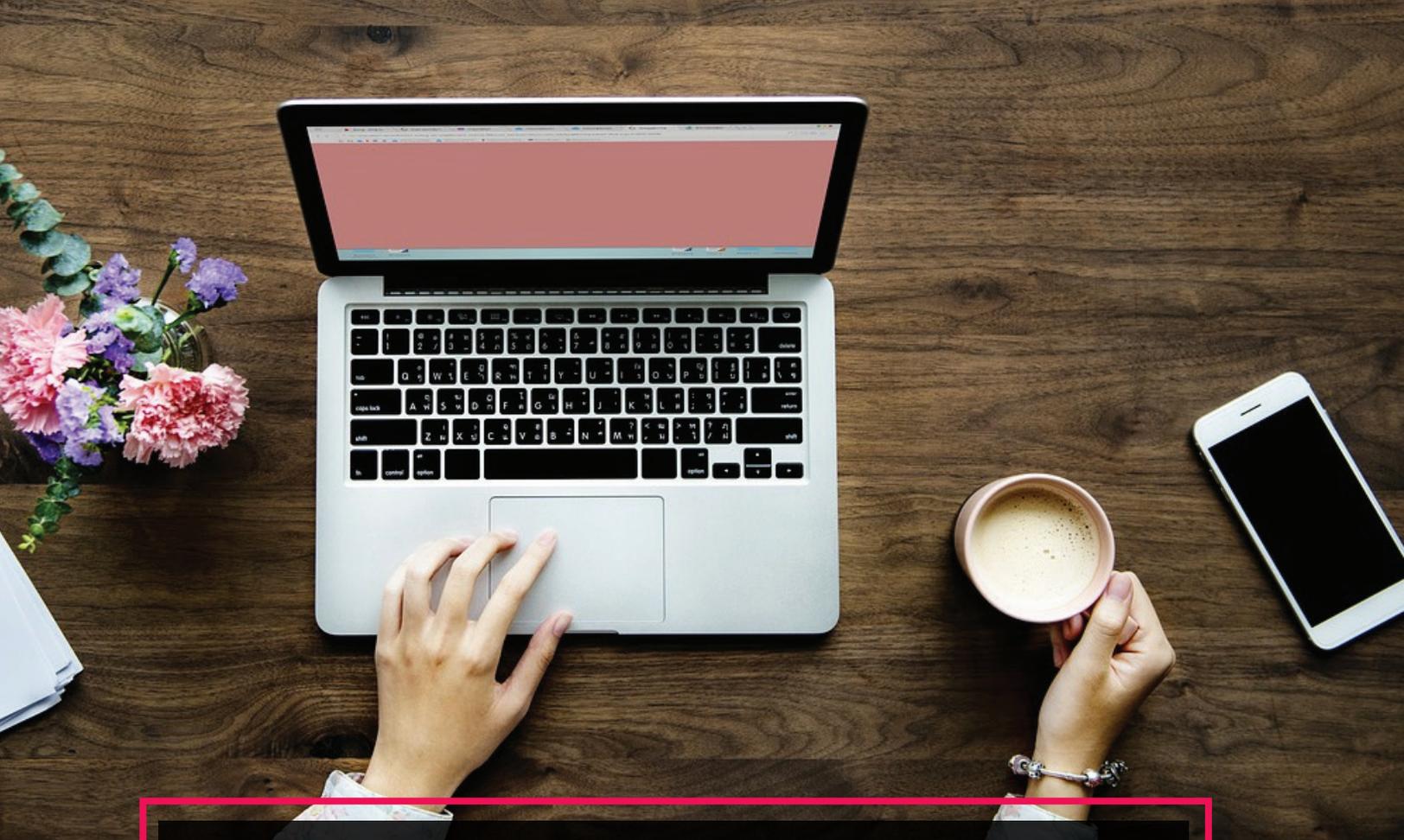# RANK & CONVERT

15 must-haves to ensure your local business website is worth the investment

97% OF PEOPLE START THE SEARCH FOR LOCAL SERVICES ONLINE

Every business website has two main goals; to show up when potential clients are looking for the services they represent, and to entice people to use the product or services they provide. Like everything is this world, when it comes to those two tasks, not all websites are built equally. A website may look nice, but may not necessarily rank well enough in search engines to be found by potential clients, or may have a ton of content, but not necessarily say the right things to encourage viewers to become leads and more importantly, customers.

In this guide, I'm going to go through some key website architecture elements, marketing tips and online presence tools that I have used over the years to help my client's websites rank well and entice people to want to take that next step.

#1 A SOLID HOSTING FIRM

Your web host is the company that holds and deploys your website in the world wide web. Ensuring that you are using a reliable host is key to making your website faster, more secure and most importantly, live when people are searching for it. There are a ton of well known and loved hosting companies out there, here are the top 5 recommended hosting companies for the best web experience as recommended by hostingfacts.com

1. Bluehost - www.bluehost.com
2. HostGator - www.hostgator.com
3. Hostinger -www.hostinger.com
4. Siteground - www.siteground.com
5. A2 Hosting - www.a2hosting.com

#2 A SOLID BUILDING PLATFORM

Like every building project, a strong foundation is key to ensuring your website can grow with your company when needed. Like hosting companies, there are many website building platforms to choose from. Personally I use WordPress, because it is the perfect system for both professionals and amateurs alike. This means clients can easily manage and make quick changes without my help, saving them time and money. Another reason WordPress is my preferred platform is that it has an awesome suite of plugins to help with e-commerce, security, and search engine optimization, ensuring that your site is ready to take advantage of online searches.

Some other well known and high quality website building systems that are easy to manage are:

• Squarespace (for non-blog based business websites)
• Shopify (for e-commerce websites)

#3 SECURED WITH AN SSL CERTIFICATE

In 2018 Google updated their algorithms to prioritize websites that are deemed 'secure'. SSL certificates secure communication to and from your website, to ensure that no-one can intercept the communication. You know a certificate is use on a website when there is a little padlock besides the URL (if there isn't one, it will state "Not secure"). Luckily, nowadays, most website hosts offer a free SSL certificate as part of their hosting plans.

When choosing a host, make sure to check to see if they offer a free basic SSL certificate, and if not, try another hosting company instead, you'll save a couple $$ each year!

If your current site is not secured, ask your host to install one ASAP to keep your online reputation in check.

#4 MOBILE RESPONSIVENESS

Mobile phone usage is growing every day and with it the need to search for products and services using mobile devices. Having a website that not only looks awesome but is easily readable no-matter the size of the screen is essential for every website, and once again, Google is leading the charge by prioritizing mobily responsive websites over those that are not. As a basic rule of thumb, if your site is more than 10 years old, it probably needs to be checked for mobile responsiveness.
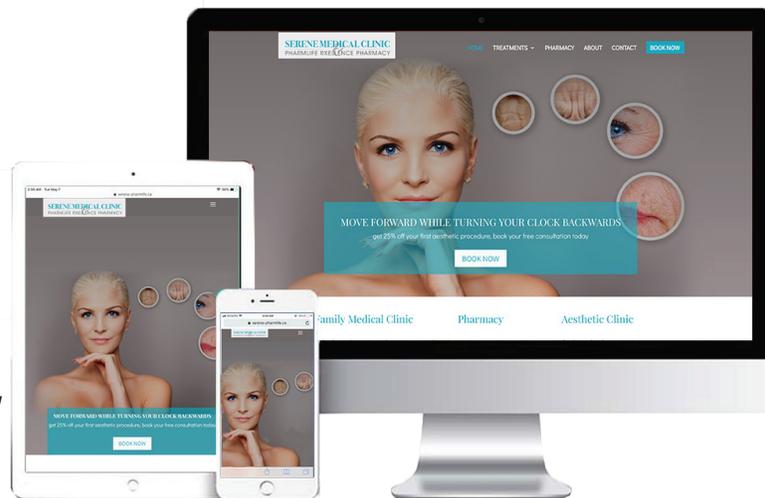
#5 THE RIGHT KEYWORDS KEYED IN

Your website needs to make ample use of the keywords that people are searching for in your area. The best way to do this is to use the Google Keyword Planner (you might need to sign up for Adwords to get access to this). It is an invaluable tool that will help you know which words to use for your website based on the phrases people are searching for in your area. When searching, use terms that include your type of business, services, and city.

Once you know which terms are most used in your service area, you can then use these words to create pages for each of the services you offer on your site. For instance, if Brooklyn hair cuts has more than 100 searches a month, have a page titled Brooklyn Hair Cuts on your website. If your salon specializes in one particular type of service, make sure your homepage is titled accordingly, for example: Brooklyn Hair Extensions - Salon Foxy Locs (ps, NEVER use "home" as the title for your homepage, use something that describes your business/services).

#6 SCHEMA MARKUP + MATA DATA

Schema markup and meta data are a little used but powerful tools that help search engines understand what your website content means. A website that communicates well with your potential client is one thing but one that's set up to communicate well with search engines is significantly more powerful. Meta data setup comprises of inputting keywords on significant pages of your website to take advantage of online search terms. Schema markup is a similar type of encoding that adds contact and location information to your website so that search engines can properly connect people looking within specific locations with your listing.

Depending on the website building system you are using, these elements can easily be added with the help of plugins that don't require any coding on your part.

#7 IMAGES DONE RIGHT

As much as possible, use, high quality, well optimized (ie, small file size) images on your website. Images don't help your site rise up search engine ranks, but they can be useful in searches if they have the proper names and tags, and they are awesome for social media posts. To make sure images are visible to people doing web searches, the first thing you have to do is ensure each image is properly named. If you're showing a haircut, title the image "haircut-yoursalon" instead of just the default camera name that all images come with. Also ask your web developer to ensure that all your website images have the right alt tags for the service that they represent, especially portfolio images for people using Google image searches.

If you don't have your own images to use for your website, here are some of my favorite stock image websites:
- Dreamstime.com (paid and a few free)
- Pixaby.com (free)
- Pexels.com (free)

#8 A GOOGLE MY BUSINESS LISTING

This feature is not on your website but is an important factor to helping it show up in search results, especially when your business is a locally based brick and mortar operation. A Google My Business listing lets Google provide searchers with listings based on their location. If your business has good reviews online (preferably on the Google Business Page system), the right keywords and high, quality tagged images, it's going to show up high in the rankings of anyone close by. If you don't already have one, get it now, it's free, takes a couple of minutes to set up and all you need to start is a Gmail account. If your business has been around for a while, search it to see if you have an unclaimed page before signing up for one, that way you can just claim your current listing. If not, sign up now at: https://www.google.com/business/.

See photos   See outside
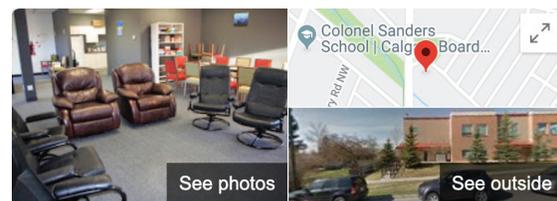
Peace of Mind Adult Day Program

| Website | Directions | Save |

Adult day care center in Calgary, Alberta

Address: 5440 4 St NW #26 2nd level Thorncliffe Professional Centre, Calgary, AB T2K 1A8

Hours: Closed · Opens 9 a.m. Wed. ▾

Phone: (587) 887-4900

Province: Alberta

#9 DIRECTORY LISTINGS & EXTERNAL LINKS

Just like people are more likely to flock to you if you seem popular, so are search engines. Having a link to your website from some of the top ranking websites in the world helps your site rank higher in Google searches, so make sure you have a listing or business page setup on these top online directories and high ranking websites:

- Facebook
- Apple Maps
- Google My Business
- LinkedIn Company Directory
- Bing
- Yelp

Along with these you should also make sure you have listings on prominent local websites (chamber of commerce, city business directories etc) as well directories specific to your industry. Having guest posts or ads on the blogs/websites of others who have a high online following is also a good idea if possible. You don't necessarily need to pay for top advanced packages on these sites, just make sure you have a profile, some images of your work, your main keywords and most importantly a link to your website. Having social media pages with a link to your website in the profile section as well as on any relevant posts is also a great idea as well.

Another thing that is important to note is when setting up your listings in these systems your N.A.P (name, address, phone number) should always be the same and written in the same format (ie. don't use Street in some and St. in others). Having a consistent online identity is key in digitized systems.

For an extensive list of the top online directories for SEO, click here:
https://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/10322/the-ultimate-list-50-local-business-directories

#10 AN ACTIONABLE CALL TO ACTION

Your website is not just a pretty online face, it needs to bring in clients to be worth the effort, and one of the most efficient ways to do so is to have a clear and bold call to action. Potential clients should be clearly directed to what they need to do to take the relationship with your business further. Clear buttons with wording like "call now" or "book now" or even "download now", helps them understand the next steps required from their end. The call to action is a key part of your marketing funnel, so make sure it's consistent throughout your website, both in design and location as some people might visit several pages before committing, thus it needs to be somewhere where they can easily spot and recognize it wherever they are on the website.

Book Now

Call Now

Get Started

#11 CONTACT INFO + A CONTACT FORM

Much like your call to action, your contact info should also be liberally added to your website. I like to add phone numbers in the header and/or footer as well as have dedicated contact page. Having a form on your contact page (as opposed to just your email address) is not only more convenient for those looking to send a message, it is also a great security feature for your site. Since forms don't show your email address, scalpers can't scan your site for email addresses to put on spam lists easily. If you do need to put your email on your website, use an encoder system to ensure that it is difficult for bots to harvest the info.

#12 THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Your website is a digital calling card but also a great reflection of your business and your brand. Show a bit of personality with images of your space, people involved to humanize your business. This is key to smaller, local businesses because people do business with people and want to have that personal touch even online. Have a descriptive and interesting "about" page on your website that talks a bit about the people behind the company.

#13 PROFESSIONAL CONTENT

Nothing puts a person off more than incoherent copy. Ensure that your content is both well written and captivating enough to draw in your ideal client and you'll have them eating out of your hands in no time!

To ensure it does well on search engines, your website's content should have the right keywords in key places, namely in page titles, and main page content. Also ensure your work is checked for grammatic and spelling errors so that it is as easy to read and comprehend as possible.

#14 CLIENT REVIEWS & TESTIMONIALS

Testimonials help with online searches if they are put on your Google Business Page, in Facebook or on Yelp, you can also include them your website, but it doesn't have the same impact on your search engine rankings. Many online systems like Yelp generally show the businesses with the most reviews more prominently than those without them. The fact is, people love knowing that other people have experienced the service and enjoyed it, and the more reviews you have, the more they'll feel like your business is tried, tested and more importantly, popular.

It is important to set up some kind of system on your website for getting testimonials and link them to your online business pages. This can be done with an email to clients a day or two after the service, asking them asking them to do a quick survey about the service they got, then leading them to a page with a link to your Google Business, Facebook or Yelp pages and ask them to please choose one of those platforms to write a quick review for your business.

#15 CLEAR SALES SEQUENCE

The concept of sales funnels has become popular in recent years as a way to lead people through a series of automated steps meant to lead them towards a specific buying decision. A funnel system is designed to bring in people through your advertising efforts, by offering them something of value (lead magnet), which is generally a discount/ free service upgrade/download of key info package, send them to an opt-in system where they sign-up for said offer after which you then nurture them with a series of informative emails designed to build a rapport that leads them towards being high value, long term clients.
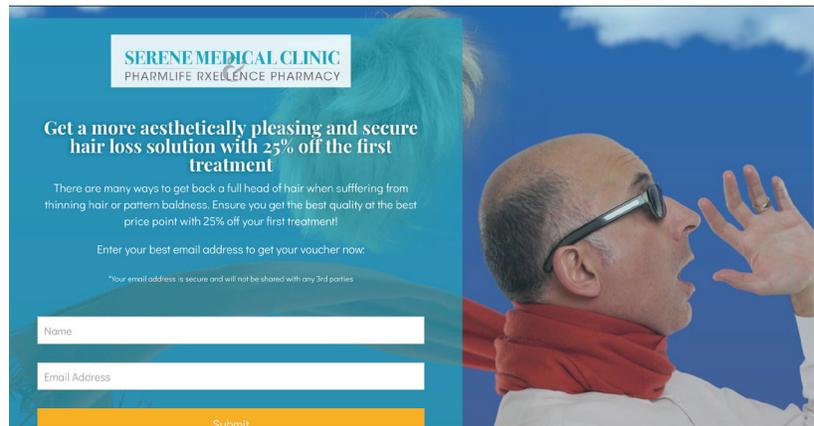
Having a clear automated system where you attract, engage and nurture potential clients instead of just selling services right off the bat is an excellent way to convert a cold audience into a warm one, making it more likely that they will be interested in doing business with your company.

A clear understanding of your sales process, both online and offline is an important factor when building your website as it will allow you to know what services to focus on when advertising, which pages to build and the calls to actions needed to get people to engage with your company. Typically when companies are sending paid traffic to a website I suggest having a number of these sales funnel pages that each cover a specific service and pain point your business service assists with to help stear leads into your sales system.

HI, I'M KEKELI

I am Kekeli Afewu, ower of Kreative Kekeli Design & Marketing and a multi-disciplined designer living in Airdrie, Alberta. I am a graduate of Design from Simon Fraser University's School of Interaction Design and Technology with a minor in Publishing. With my interaction design background, I am proficient in both web and print based design, with a key eye for usability, marketability and quality design.

Do you need help putting any of these elements into action?
Just contact me and I will be happy to help.

GOT QUESTIONS?

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