



Google Adds a Personal Touch to Promote Madison Businesses

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Guest post by SMB member Doug Tangwall

Venture capitalist John Doerr coined the term *SoLoMo* to sum up the convergence of three forces that are rapidly redefining success for businesses: *social, local and mobile*. This trend is especially relevant for businesses that depend on location-based searches to generate sales from new customers.

At the forefront of many of these changes is a company called Google, and this week attendees of Social Media Breakfast-Madison were treated to a presentation from two Google representatives.

Innovative Products for Small Business

Google is investing in Madison. The search-engine giant selected Madison as its third test city, following Portland, Oregon, and Austin, Texas, and Google is offering up some human capital as well.

Rich Hankison and Alison Dodge, both Google business specialists dedicated to serving Madison businesses, offered advice to a full house. Hankison says, "We are a local presence, part of Google's community outreach division. Our mission is to help small and mid-sized businesses take advantage of platforms like Google Places to improve visibility, image, target marketing, product development, operations, customer satisfaction and reviews."



Google is testing the waters for new products in Madison.

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Capitalizing on Opportunity: 20% of Searches Are Location-Based

Dodge, who is also co-owner of a local small business, says, "Online search engines are the number-one way people find out about local businesses."

You may have seen the pin points of local businesses on a Google map, those little icons that resemble red balloons with a letter or dot in the middle. What is local search? Type "Baby classes madison wi" into Google's search engine, and you'll see the Google Places pin point for Happy Bambino. Click on the pin point, star rating or "Google reviews" and you'll see the Google Places page Dodge claimed for her business.

What advice do these two have for local businesses seeking to improve their presence and performance on Google Places?

- **Claim ownership of your Google Places page.** By claiming the associated pages for your business locations you have control over much of the content that appears on the page. Take control of your Places page, and create a rich listing. Rich listings encourage potential customers to choose your business, by featuring a description, photos, business hours and a link to your website. This extra information also helps Google match your listing to more searches, which increases the number of views your Google Places page gets. Dodge and Hankison also recommend promoting your Google listing to current and potential customers. Remind them that they can use Google Maps to find your phone number and address, get driving directions to your store, find the latest [coupons](#), [review](#) or get [updates](#).
- **Use Google Places page analytics as a tool to gain insights and optimize search terms.** For example, one local Canoe rental business found his customers were searching in roughly equal proportions for “canoe rental” and “kayak rental.” After gaining a better understanding of the location-based demand, the business owner changed his product mix (to include more kayaks) and included more information about kayaks on his page.
- **Interact with your Place page by posting status updates and coupon offers.** The platform offers the ability to post multiple 160-character status updates. A free-to-use coupon feature can also be used to entice customers to visit your business.
- **Use personal invitations and tools like signage and business cards to encourage your customers to review your business.** For printed applications, a Google URL shortener is available at “<http://goo.gl>” (or directly from the link icon on your Place page). Another neat trick is to generate a Quick Response (or QR) code by adding “.qr” to the end of the URL for your Place page in the address bar, and hit “enter.” A ready-to-use QR code for the page will be auto-generated.” (For a description of what QR Codes are, see the write-up from the [May Breakfast](#).)
- **Try to get at least five reviews.** Places pages with five or more reviews have their average star ratings appear in searches; however, Dodge cautions business owners not to try to construct their own positive reviews by using friends and family. “Searchers are savvy and can smell reviews that are not 100% authentic.” She also said they are willing to help top-rated businesses with at least 3.5 stars to get listed on Madison’s new Google city page: Google.com/Madison
- **Use photos and video to bring your Places page to life.** The two Google employees cited [Fromagination](#) as an example of best-practice page development, with the business garnering 10 times more impressions following the redesign.
- **Respond directly to negative reviews.** Google Places page owners can respond directly to individual reviews. Dodge says, “Business owners get really stressed out by online criticism, but people often find a business owner’s response to a negative review to be more valuable than a glowing review. It says a lot about the type of person they are and how they treat their customers.”
- **Use Google’s free analytics to measure and refine impact.**

Other tips generated from audience questions: All businesses, including business-to-business companies, can increase visibility by garnering reviews on Google Places. Home-based businesses that are not open to the public can get a circle rather than a pinpoint to appear in location-based business searches without a specific address.

<http://socialmediabreakfastmadison.com/google-adds-a-personal-touch-to-promote-madison-businesses-recap-smb-madison-sep-2011/>

Keeping Up with the Mobiles

Dodge also revealed several mobile-based products currently being offered in the Madison-area marketplace.

One example is “Recommended on Google” window stickers. Businesses that have claimed their Google Places page are eligible to receive an NFC (near field communication)-encoded window sticker. NFC-enabled smart phones can then read the chip and automatically pull up the Places page of the business to list such things as hours of business and to encourage real-time reviews.

Want to know more? Local business owners interested in Google Places are encouraged to contact the Google representatives for a complimentary consultation:

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