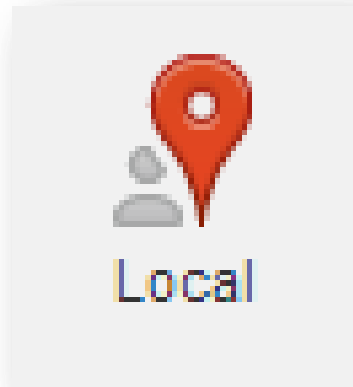


Google+ Places Pages

For small town businesses



Advance copy released to Small Biz Survival and Tourism Currents readers as a bonus.

Send ideas or suggestions to becky@smallbizsurvival.com

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If yours is a bricks-and-mortar local business, don't ignore Google Places also called Google+ pages. Google's terminology can be confusing, but we'll walk through an actual example to make it clear. We'll use my own liquor store as an example.

Your local business page should already exist, moved over from your old Google listing. Don't create a new Page in Google+. There are two ways you can find it.

Find your page by finding your business in a Google search result.

Go to <http://www.google.com> and search for your business type and your town. To find my store, I enter "liquor store Alva, OK" and search.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "liquor store alva". The search bar at the top contains the text "liquor store alva" and a search button. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for "Web", "Images", "Maps", "Shopping", "More", and "Search tools". The search results show "About 1,440,000 results (0.53 seconds)".

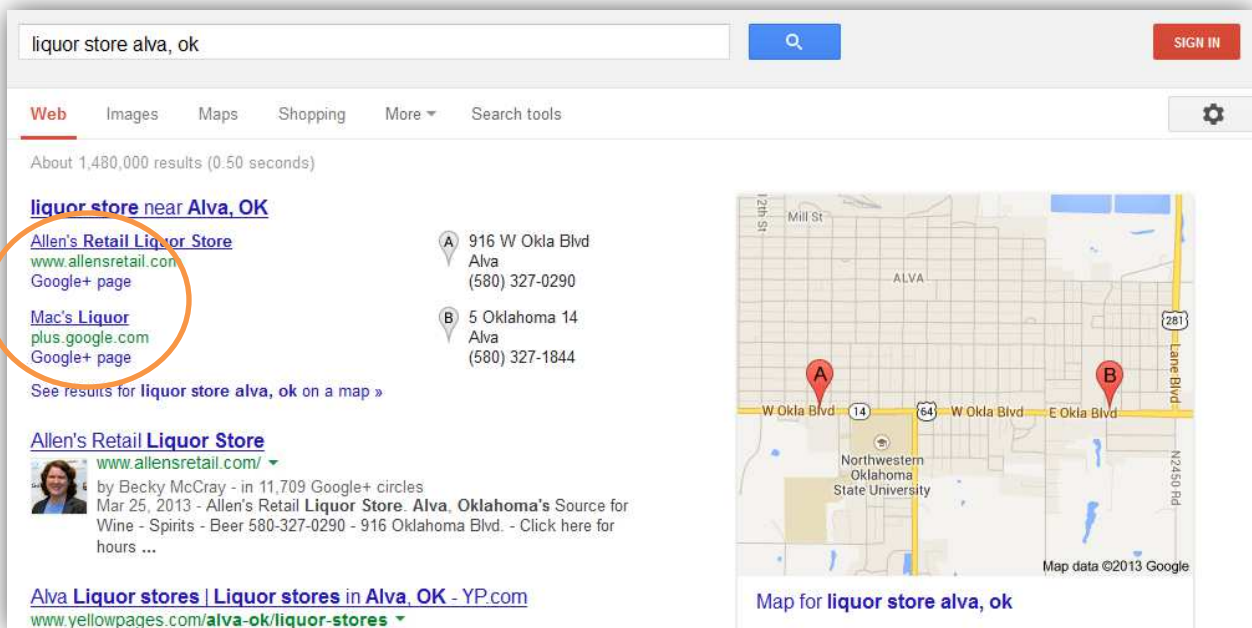
The first result is "Allen's Retail Liquor Store" with a small profile picture of a woman and the website "www.allensretail.com". It includes a snippet of text: "by Becky McCray - in 11,039 Google+ circles Mar 25, 2013 - Allen's Retail Liquor Store. Alva, Oklahoma's Source for Wine - Spirits - Beer 580-327-0290 - 916 Oklahoma Blvd. - Click here for hours ... Google+ page · Be the first to review". Below this is a location pin icon and the address "916 W Okla Blvd Alva, OK 73717 (580) 327-0290".

To the right of the text is a large featured box for "Allen's Retail Liquor Store". It contains a photograph of the store building, a "See photos" button, and a map showing the store's location on W Okla Blvd. Below the map are buttons for "Directions" and "Be the first to review". The box also lists the "Address: 916 W Okla Blvd, Alva, OK 73717", "Phone: (580) 327-0290", and "Hours: Closed on Sunday. - See all". A "Feedback" link is at the bottom right of the featured box.

Below the featured box are three more search results from Yellow Pages and Yelp, each with a link to the business page and a brief description.

See that huge box on the right? That's my store's Google+ Places page. Since I'm signed in to my Google account and I'm the only liquor store in town with a completed Google+ Places page, my store is featured.

If you have more local competitors, you probably won't get a big feature box like my example. You may see a map and list of businesses instead. When I'm not logged in, here's what the local listings look like:

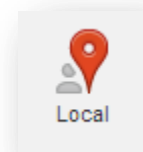


Do you see how those two listings say “Google+ page”? That’s what you’re looking for! Find your business, and click on the “Google+ page” link under it.

The other way to find your page: Log in to Google Plus first.

Your other option is to log in to Google Plus first, then find your business.

Go to <http://plus.google.com>. You can sign in with any Google account, including your Gmail, YouTube or Android account.



You can find the Local icon in your main left-hand vertical menu. Click on it to go to Local pages.

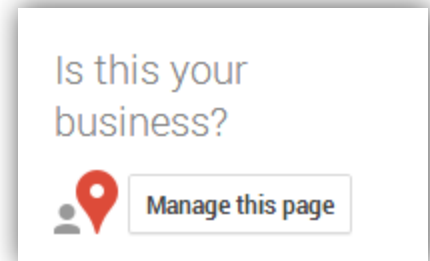
To find your page, put in your town name, and where it says "Search for restaurants, hotels, and more", put your business type in the search box.



Claiming and Managing your Page

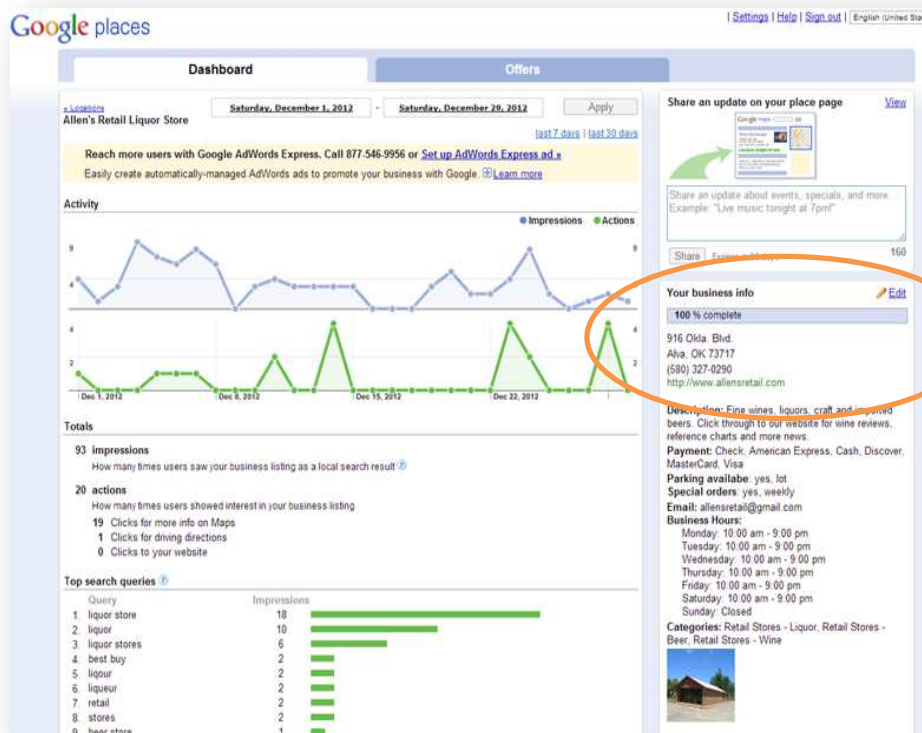
Your main strategy will be uploading photos and updating the business data for your "Place" and including a link URL to your website or other landing page.

To do that, you need to get permission to edit your page. Look for the "Manage This Page" link at the bottom right of your page. If Google recognizes your account as connected to this business, you may get in immediately. (YAY!) If Google isn't sure about your connection, they may send you a postcard in the mail to verify you are connected to this business. That means you'll have to wait until that postcard arrives to get access. (DRAT!)

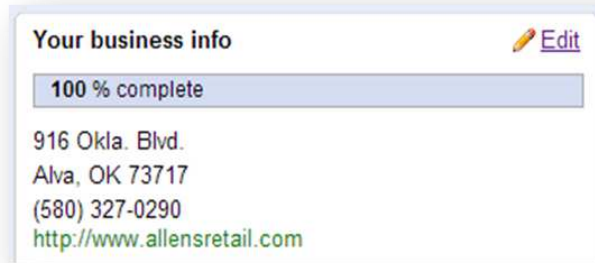


Note: Even before you have access to manage your page, you can still upload photos, the same way a customer would.

Once you have access to manage your page, you'll arrive at your dashboard.



On your Dashboard, look for "Your business info" on the right.



Click Edit, and you can start making your listing better.

1. Check the location of your map pin.

Is it accurate? If not, click the link for "Fix incorrect marker location."

2. Fill in your basic data.

Make sure your basic business data is filled in: hours, payment types, a short description, and any specialties. Add any extra categories your business fits into; you can include up to five. My store is listed under liquor stores, wine stores and beer stores.

3. Add pictures and video.

A picture of your storefront is helpful for people who are driving to find you. Pictures of your interior can give a sense of what you are like before customers ever visit. Have great video? If you post it on YouTube, you can associate up to five videos with your page.

4. Add extra info.

You can include information like brands you carry, whether you deliver, or other special info. We frequently get asked about special orders, so I included that in our listing. Think about what customers ask, and answer that question right here for them.

Getting Reviews

This is a tricky subject. Google says it doesn't want you soliciting customer reviews. One Google employee said it this way in a Google Groups post:

“In our ideas, the “ideal” review is by a customer who writes a review of a place completely by his or her own accord, on mobile [phone] during the experience or at home after. This would mimic the regular flow of the business.”

So can you put up a sign or mention reviews to customers? Maybe. Use caution if you do. And don’t go asking a whole bunch of people all at once to get yourself a flood of reviews. That’s likely to trigger the deletion of those reviews.

Besides, in a small town, just having a completed profile is a big advantage. Don’t worry about not having any reviews.

Success!

This is what will vault you to the top of your town’s Google Plus Local listings for your business type: A completed Local profile that includes the keywords you want, including your town name.

