



USING LOCAL SEO TO DRIVE NEW BUSINESS IN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

Drive customers to your brick-and-mortar financial branches with local search engine optimization



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BENEFITS OF LOCAL SEO FOR FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

With an increasing number of folks seeking financial advice online, it's more critical than ever for brick-and-mortar financial institutions to compete for the attention of search customers. For one thing, organic results have evolved to greatly depend on your search location, so the results for financial institution queries vary across the country. Plus, these highly localized organic results are joined by a very prominent Google SERP offering: the local three-pack. Factor in the dominance of mobile devices for location-based search and there's no denying that local SEO is a necessity for financial institutions to drive awareness and traffic to their individual physical locations.

HOW DOES LOCAL SEO APPLY TO THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY?

For financial institutions, the overarching goal of any local SEO strategy is to ensure that every branch and ATM is easily accessible to consumers. Moreover, since the industry is inherently trust-based, incomplete or inaccurate listings can make it difficult for potential customers to feel confident in your business practices, ultimately driving them away. With customers relying on you to protect and grow their assets, the accuracy and continuity of your website and your local listings across all sources only helps to improve brand perception and trust.

CASE STUDY: SEACOAST BANK

A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH TO LOCAL SEO FOR THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

Seacoast Bank is passionate about providing a community-focused banking experience, with each of its locations frequently participating in local events, performing charity work, and getting involved in community gatherings alongside customers and neighbors. Their unique community commitment necessitated dual, complementary local search-focused campaigns: individual branch page optimization to showcase hyper-local content, and expert listings management.



1. INDIVIDUAL BRANCH PAGE OPTIMIZATION

Having separate branch location pages is a great start for any financial institution, but there are certain key elements to help boost visibility and outperform the competition.

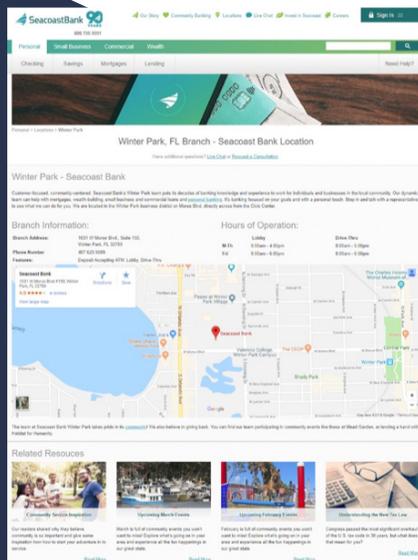
META DATA & ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION

- Optimizing your **title tag and H1** with location-specific keywords helps inform Google that the page is tied to a certain geographic location.
- Naturally referencing the term and its variations throughout the **page copy** improves the chances of the page appearing in the SERPs for searches that include the targeted term, as well as searches that occur from devices in that geographic area.
- Although they no longer hold SEO value, **meta descriptions** are still an important tool in getting current and potential customers to click through to your site from the SERPs, so be sure they're enticing, relevant and focused on promoting your brand.
- Semantic search improves search accuracy by paying attention to search intent. **Structured data markup** adds clarity for search engines and can improve organic CTR by enhancing your SERP appearance. Location markup in particular helps Google understand more information about your business, such as address and hours of operation.
- **Review collection** is another way to pack your location pages with unique, user-generated content specific to

HYPER-LOCAL CONTENT

Far too many financial institutions with multiple locations tend to utilize the same boilerplate content for all individual branch pages. We made Seacoast's pages unique by developing relevant and engaging neighborhood-specific content with the help of each branch manager:

- BFO created a **simple questionnaire** that encouraged branch managers to show off the authentic aspects of their location and team.
- We took these high-level bullet points and created **original, optimized copy** that would capture the offerings of each location while reflecting the page's targeted keywords and meta data.



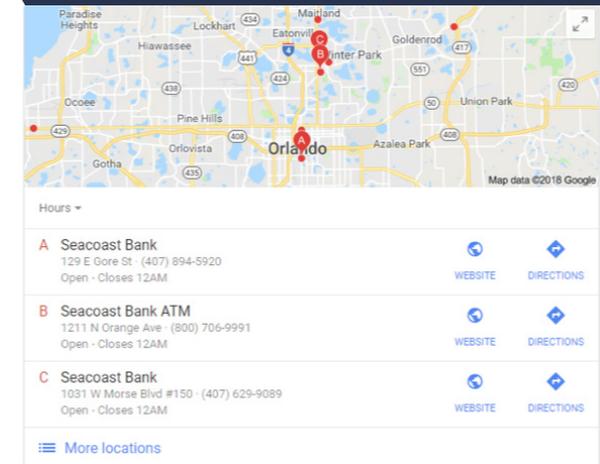
The optimized content was then added to each page along with a relevant header and internal linking to other applicable blog posts, products or services

2. LOCAL LISTINGS MANAGEMENT FOR FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Optimized business listings can improve your organic presence not only by showing enhanced location information for directory users, but also by improving your chances of appearing in Google's local three-pack at the top of the SERPs, even if your financial institution doesn't appear on page one.

A few tips for improving your local acquisition efforts include:

1. Get started with a **citation audit** to see how your business is referenced across local business directories, review sites, search engines and any other applicable sites that may mention the individual branches of your financial institution. Ensure that your NAP (name, address and local phone number) in particular is consistent across the board to reinforce to customers that your institution is accurate and reliable.
2. Fully optimize your **Google My Business** listing in order to capitalize on the immense exposure your business receives if it's lucky enough to be featured in the local three-pack.
3. Be sure to **list all your branches separately** to make it as easy as possible for potential customers to find the location most convenient for them.
4. Don't forget that **freestanding ATMs** are legitimate business listings, too!
5. Local listing management also involves a large amount of monitoring to be sure inaccurate information doesn't creep back into your listings and affect your clients. Financial companies with many individual branches should consider hiring a **third-party agency** to alleviate the burden of optimization and serve as a single point of contact between all potential directories.



RESULTS & SUCCESSES

SERP RANKINGS

At the start of the location search engine optimization initiative in August 2017, Seacoast's tracked location-based terms had an average rank of 13.4 according to Linkdex using a Google US ranking configuration. In the beginning of February 2018, we reexamined these same tracked terms with location qualifiers and found that they now have an average rank of 5.4, **a nearly 60% improvement** over the course of six months. In addition, 15 of these 45 terms jumped at least 10 SERP positions, while six of them improved by a minimum of 20 SERP positions.

TRAFFIC & ENGAGEMENT

Google Analytics also shows great gains during the same six-month time period versus the previous year, including an increase in organic sessions (+20.59%), new organic users (+22.64%) and average **organic session duration (+23.13%),** plus a 8.41% decrease in the organic bounce rate.

In an increasingly competitive organic landscape, a strong local search engine optimization strategy is key for financial institutions to grow their businesses and improve the satisfaction of their customers. Through the development of unique, hyper-local content and the creation of robust online listings, financial institutions can paint an accurate image of their business online, capture more real estate on the SERPs, increase brand awareness and trust, and ultimately drive traffic

HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

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