

5 Ways To Freshen Up Your Online Brand's 'Curb Appeal'

Prospective home-buyers everywhere play their part in the courtship dance. They take one look at a house and make a quick judgment call from the curb: "Should we go inside?" Sure, it's contrived, but it's the same reason we dress up for our first dates and interviews. You can't deny the power of a strong first impression.

The same is true, of course, for business owners. **If buyers don't like what they see online, they'll never contact you in the first place.**

So how do you make sure you're not turning customers away in frustration? How do you freshen up your brand's curb appeal and give your business that competitive edge? (New MTV show, anyone? I like the snappiness of "Fix My Brand," but I'm open to ideas.)

It's not that hard if you know what to look for. Here are 5 simple improvements you can make to take control of that first impression and convince customers to contact you.

Launch A Google Adwords Campaign For Your Keyword

Even Google isn't immune to Google Adwords competition.

For many, ads are an important part of finding the right info online. And Google does such a good job seamlessly integrating its ads into the search experience that some consumers don't even know the difference between an advertisement and an organic result.

The traditional way to use Google Adwords is to rank for competitive keywords that target searchers who have commercial intent. But for the purposes of first impressions and curb appeal, I suggest launching an Adwords campaign for your business' keyword. There are two main reasons to do this:

An ad gives you further control of the narrative. **With an ad ranking at the top of your search results, your consumers are much less likely to be distracted by negative or irrelevant search results that may be ranking for your keyword lower in results.** And with sitelink extensions (the links below the main ad), you get to influence what pages your customers see first.

Without a branded ad, you put your business at risk. If you don't have a Google Ad ranking for your business' keyword, you run the risk of having a competitor take that spot instead. **And given the likelihood for consumer distraction online, that's not a risk you'll likely want to take.** **As you can see below, even Google isn't immune from this problem.**

Fill Out Your Knowledge Graph

Have you ever searched a company and seen that summary box with quick links on the right-hand side? That's the Knowledge Graph. It's critical to have accurate information here. Not only can the wrong info lose you business -- "Oh it looks like they're closed!" -- but the Knowledge Graph often ranks above all organic results on mobile devices.

You don't have complete control over what shows up in your company's Knowledge Graph but you *can* influence it in a few distinct ways.

1. **Google Listing** - By claiming and verifying your business with Google, you get to update

Comment [Office1]: I must intrigue the individual and make a great first impression that will bring the customer back to the website. I need to think of ways to make myself unique.

Comment [Office2]: This will allow me to target my market and exactly who I want to see the ad. It will help grow the business and spread awareness about it.

Comment [Office3]: Customers usually look at the first ads and never go to the other pages. It is important to reserve the spot so the money in advertising is being put to the best use.

your website, address, and hours of operation. A verified Google listing also gives your business the opportunity to appear across Google Search, Maps, and other Google applications.

2. **Wikipedia** -- You can see in the above image that Google pulls the two-sentence description about Forbes from Wikipedia. Since Google often showcases info from Wikipedia here, you're much less likely to see a Knowledge Graph ranking for your business if you don't have a Wikipedia page in the first place.
3. **Google+ Page** -- It should come as no surprise that Google offers perks for brands that live on its own social network. In the case of the Knowledge Graph, Google often pulls the company logo from the brand's Google+ Page, as it did above for Forbes.

Comment [Office4]: This is important so that people know how to get to the location and have accurate information about what they are seeing about a business online.

Comment [Office5]: If I make a business, I should create a business page for it.

Improve Your Reviews

Without a review management strategy in place, you may find a few random complaints on your Yelp profile that doesn't at all represent how the majority of your clients feel.

Given that 88% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, that's not something you want to ignore.

An outreach strategy can make all the difference. It may seem obvious, but in order for people to review your business, you need to make it possible for that to happen. And it needs to be as easy as possible. You need to take all the effort out of it.

Here's what a 5-star review management strategy looks like.

Comment [Office6]: I must read the comments to understand the problems with the business and solve them immediately. If I wait then more people could experience the problem and lower the rating for the company.

Spruce Up Your Meta Title And Meta Description

The meta title and meta description are just fancy terms that refer to what shows up for your website in search results. The blue title? Your meta title. The sentence below the website? That's your meta description.

This metadata is like the driveway to your house -- it can make your website more inviting, or not. A better meta title also improves the ranking potential of your site. And while Google doesn't directly consider the meta description for ranking purposes, people certainly do when they're deciding what to click. (And Google considers traffic and click-through rate, so there you go.)

Above is an example of a meta description that could really use some help. It looks like Delta never specifically chose one, so Google is automatically pulling from content on their site. The description is unhelpful -- I have no idea what ongoing improvement they're referencing -- and this oversight becomes even more important for those who aren't searching for "Delta" specifically.

Comment [Office7]: Must make sure that the metadata is truly about the company so that people do not get confused or pushed away by confusing titles.

Clean Up Your Search Results

The reality is that we live in a search-happy world. Before anyone decides to do business with you, they first look you up online. And what they find can have a huge impact, for better or for worse.

That number increases to 44% lost business with two negative articles, and 59% with three negative articles.

Don't wait until you have a problem before you decide to improve your search results.

Comment [Office8]: Online appearance is a large factor in whether one gets business or deters business. Articles can influence one's opinion about a business which can have negative or positive effects for one's company.