



Duplicate Suppression Improves Google Local Search Ranking

Introduction

For local businesses, SEOs, and brand marketers, Google's local search algorithm is a black box. To compound this issue, most attempts to identify the precise combination of factors that determine a business' local search ranking rely on individual experience as opposed to large-scale studies.

The consistency of a business' name, address, and phone (NAP) citations across the web is one well-known local ranking factor. Duplicate listings on directory sites can send mixed signals to web crawlers that have a negative impact on citation consistency. Yext's patented Duplicate Suppression process enables businesses to address duplicate listings at the publisher level across the PowerListings® Network.

Yext worked with Andrew Shotland and his team at [Local SEO Guide](#) to assess the effect that Duplicate Suppression would have on Google local search ranking. For 90 days from

December 2014 to March 2015, we conducted a Google local search rank-tracking study of relevant keywords for a casual dining restaurant brand across 1,256 locations.

With Duplicate Suppression, the restaurant brand saw a 20% increase in the presence of its locations in Google local results. This is the first large-scale study of its kind to demonstrate a direct correlation between the elimination of duplicate listings on non-Google sites and an improvement in Google local search ranking.

The following report provides an overview of Google local results, an explanation of duplicate listings and their impact on local search, and a detailed analysis of the study findings.

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What Are Google Local Results?

Google local results are organic search results that have a location component (e.g. “virginia beach restaurants”). In the search engine results page pictured below (taken during the study period) local results are highlighted in blue. Local results, which typically display data from

relevant Google My Business pages, appear below and to the left of paid ads (red), and above organic results (green). Because of this favorable positioning and the high level of intent associated with local search, local results are highly valued and competitive.

Google search results for "virginia beach restaurants". The page shows a search bar with the query, navigation tabs (Web, Maps, Shopping, Images, Videos, More), and search tools. Below the search bar, there are several result blocks:

- Local Result (Blue Highlighted):** Virginia Beach Dining - Browse Options for Coastal Cuisine. Includes a link to www.visitvirginiabeach.com/ and phone number (855) 458-6504. It also lists "Dining" and "Events in Virginia Beach" as categories.
- Ad (Red Highlighted):** Bahama Breeze®. Includes the website bahamabreeze.com/Pembroke-Mall-VA and phone number (757) 276-3887. The ad text says: "Try A Taste Of The Islands. Join Us For Authentic Caribbean Cuisine. Virginia Beach Blvd, Virginia Beach".
- Local Result (Blue Highlighted):** Restaurants near virginia beach. Lists several restaurants:
 - Tautog's Restaurant:** 4.4 stars, 107 reviews, \$\$ Seafood, 23rd St - Local go-to for seafood in a beach house, Opens at 5:30 pm.
 - Il Giardino Ristorante:** 4.3 stars, 56 reviews, \$\$ Italian, Atlantic Ave - Clubby Italian dining since 1985, Opens at 5:00 pm.
 - Doc Taylor's Restaurant:** 4.5 stars, 66 reviews, \$ American, 23rd St - Southern breakfasts & Bloody Marys, Closed now.
- Ad (Red Highlighted):** Aldos Ristorante VA Beach. Includes the website www.aldosvb.com/. The ad text says: "Award Winning Fine Italian Dining Wine Spectator Award Since 1995".
- Local Result (Blue Highlighted):** Virginia Beach Dining Guide. Includes the website guide.webcrawler.com/. The ad text says: "Search for Virginia Beach Dining Guide With 100's of Results at WebCrawler".
- Ad (Red Highlighted):** Steinhiber's Restaurant. Includes the website www.steinys.com/. The ad text says: "Virginia Beach legend serving seafood and steaks since 1939".
- Local Result (Blue Highlighted):** Virginia Beach Dining Guide. Includes the website www.com/Virginia+Beach+Dining+Guide. The ad text says: "Search for Virginia Beach Dining Guide Look Up Quick Results Now!".
- Local Result (Green Highlighted):** 30 Best Virginia Beach Restaurants on TripAdvisor - See ... Includes the website www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurants-g58277-Virginia_Be... and TripAdvisor LLC. The ad text says: "Best Dining in Virginia Beach, Virginia: See 35227 TripAdvisor traveler reviews of 1268 Virginia Beach restaurants and search by cuisine, price, location, and ... Blue Seafood and Spirits - The Landing - FireBrew - Dough Joe's".

Since the conclusion of the study, Google has eliminated “right rail” adds in favor of showing more ads at the top of search results, further increasing the importance of local results. For more on the impact of this change, see our report: [“Goodbye Right Rail.”](#)

Google local search engine results page for “virginia beach restaurants” query taken during the study period.



The Impact of Duplicate Listings on Local Search

Google local search ranking takes into account the consistency of a business' name, address, and phone (NAP) data across the web. Google uses business listing information from a variety of sources such as online yellow pages publishers and business listings data aggregators as part of its local ranking algorithm. Data quality

issues create inconsistencies across sources that may impact a business' ability to rank well for relevant local searches.

“A simple way to think about this,” said Local SEO Guide's Andrew Shotland, “is that Google looks for a business' NAP from many different sources in an attempt to algorithmically decide all of the

details about that business: what type of business it is, where it is located, what its phone number is, etc. So if the phone numbers or other data from different sources don't match each other, then this can cause confusion for Google and possibly hurt the business' rankings.”

Yext's patented Duplicate Suppression process detects 3 potential duplicate listings **for one Trinity Sports location, with identical address info but different phone numbers.**

Remove Duplicate Listings from ShowMeLocal

Select From Matches Submit URL

Below are results on ShowMeLocal that may be duplicates of your location. Select any duplicates that you want to suppress.

<p>Your listing</p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;">  <p>Trinity Sports: The Triathlon Experts ShowMeLocal 3602 Castle Rock Way Tucker, GA 30084 (770) 222-2222</p> </div> 	<p>3 POSSIBLE DUPLICATES</p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>1 Trinity Sports 3602 Castle Rock Way Tucker, GA 30084 (770) 555-5555</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suppress this Listing</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>2 Trinity Sports 3602 Castle Rock Way Tucker, GA 30084 (770) 555-5555</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Suppress this Listing</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p>3 Trinity Sports: The Triathlon Experts 3603 Castle Rock Ave</p> </div>
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Cancel Submit

Duplicate listings are one of the most common data quality issues that businesses face. A duplicate listing occurs when a single location appears multiple times in a directory or database. The name “duplicate” is somewhat of a misnomer because they are actually produced by slight variations in business listing information that cause an algorithm or matching process to fail to recognize the listing as already in existence, thus creating an additional record. In the image on the previous page, you can see how the address of each duplicate listing is the same, but the phone numbers vary — a common inconsistency that confuses search engines.

Duplicate Suppression leverages Yext’s proprietary publisher API integrations to automatically identify potential duplicate listings, notify businesses of duplicates for review, and allow businesses to permanently suppress duplicates at the publisher database level.

“We had consistently seen positive local SEO results from eliminating duplicate business listings from the web,” said Shotland. “But until Yext’s Duplicate Suppression process, we had never had the ability to test this at a large scale with near real-time updates. The goal of this test was to provide us and the rest of the SEO community with the data that would support, or not support, the idea that it is worth spending resources to solve duplicate listings issues.

“Besides scale, one of the challenges of doing these kinds of studies using manual duplicate suppression techniques is that due to inherent instability of local business data on the Web, it is often out of our control to keep the duplicates from popping up, even after we have manually fixed the issues. Yext’s process allowed us to quickly identify and take care of stray dupes that came up during the study so we could keep the listings clean throughout.”

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-Andrew Shotland

Duplicate Suppression Study



Duplicate Suppression instantly and permanently suppressed **8,115** duplicate listings across **37** publishers.

The 90-day study tracked Google local search results for 1,256 of the restaurant brand's U.S. locations before and after Duplicate Suppression, across 50 relevant non-branded keyword phrases (e.g. "virginia beach restaurants"). Yext tracked 55,000+ searches each week to assess the presence of the restaurant brand's locations in Google local results for each keyword phrase.

Baseline data was recorded prior to Duplicate Suppression and for 90 days after. Over two rounds of Duplicate Suppression, Yext suppressed a total of 8,115 duplicate listings across 37 publishers. The first round was conducted at the start of the study to suppress existing duplicates and a second round was conducted at the halfway point to suppress new duplicates that appeared during the study.

No other changes or updates were made to the restaurant brand's listings or local search strategy.

Duplicates Suppressed

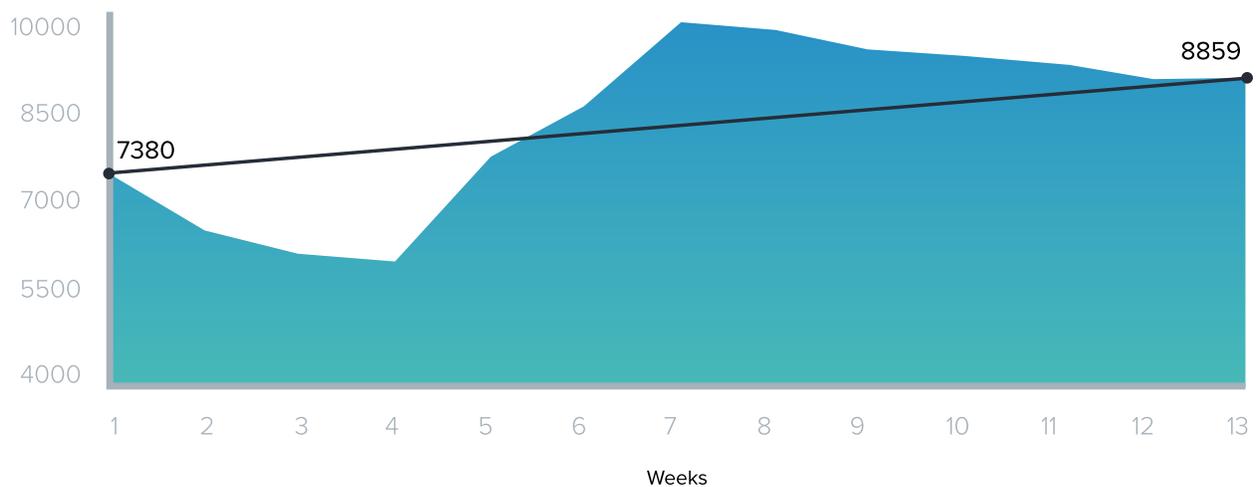


Results

In the baseline data, the restaurant brand's locations appeared in Google local results for 7,380 relevant non-branded keyword phrases. Following Duplicate Suppression, the restaurant brand's locations appeared in Google local results for 8,859 keyword phrases—an absolute increase of 1,479. This amounts to a 20% increase in the presence of the restaurant brand's locations in Google local results over the pre-suppression baseline.



Local Result Appearances After Duplicate Suppression





Conclusion



Due to the opacity of Google's local search algorithm, the exact mechanism for the improvement in local search ranking is unknown. However, the suppression of duplicate listings is clearly tied to a significant, measurable increase in search rankings for relevant non-branded keyword phrases.

It's worth noting that duplicate listings were not suppressed on Google itself, but on 37 publishers within the PowerListings Network — which Google crawls when determining results.

The improvement in search ranking that resulted from Duplicate Suppression illustrates the importance of consistent NAP citations as a factor in Google local search ranking, whether or not the inconsistencies are a product of duplicate listings or other data quality issues.

“One of the first things we noticed was that Duplicate Suppression seemed critical to

getting a business into Google's local pack results,” said Dan Leibson, VP of Local Search for Local SEO Guide. “Since Google is looking for authoritative businesses to show in their search results, controlling your business data seems like a good, quick win.”

For any business with a physical location, non-branded Google local results represent the “holy grail” of search performance. For competitive verticals (e.g. restaurants, retail, or hospitality), the cost of a similarly placed Google ad for a non-branded keyword carries a significant cost-per-click. Businesses typically expend significant effort and SEO dollars to achieve the type of gain that resulted from Duplicate Suppression. Given the results of this study, businesses should move aggressively to remove duplicates from their local digital presence to improve their Google local search ranking.