

2020 DIGITAL MARKETING
GUIDE FOR

CONTRACTORS

ONLINE MARKETING GUIDE
FOR SERVICE BUSINESSES:
MASTERING SEARCH AND SOCIAL

Do you know how to market your service business? The days where fliers and a phonebook listing are over; the modern service industry is online-first. Customers rely on Google, Yelp, local search results, and social media, not the poster board at the corner store. If you haven't updated your marketing strategies to match, you're behind the times.


A strong online presence is critical to bringing in new customers. You need to make sure your online footprint will attract and convert leads consistently, effectively, and affordably. You need a professional website, a tailored ad strategy, and a strong understanding of social media to survive online. Can you scale your business without trying new marketing techniques? \

In this guide we'll cover the foundations of online marketing, and show you how to build a strategy that's right for your customers by tracking their journey from the moment their problem starts to when they pick up the phone and call you instead of the competition. We'll talk about how to create an optimized website that ranks well in local Google searches (SEO and PPC), social media, and advanced tactics like using content marketing to increase customer lifetime value.

We've written this guide under the assumption that you run some kind of service business. Whether you're an electrician, plumbing, or HVAC business doesn't matter; as long as you provide skilled onsite services to consumer or commercial clients inside a local service area, this is the guide for you.

Want to take your service business to the next level? Read on.





Your Website is the Key

In 2020, a quality website is **still** key. Sure, there are social media pages and business indexes, but they come and go with popularity. There are tons of popular platforms out there that can help you market your service business, but you should always build a core web presence that's under your own control. This ensures the integrity of your online presence, and it will give your customers a definitive point of reference for your contact information and current services. We'll talk about how you can use other sites and indexes to supplement your core presence, but it will always come back to your website.

It's also important to remember that your website is also the end point for your customer's online journey. It doesn't matter if they start out with a Google search or a link on social media, they'll ultimately end up on your site. There is also the topic of appearance. Think about it - a customer is much more likely to go with the contractor who has quality social media and even more information on a quality website, than a sole Facebook page or sole Yelp listing. This makes building a professional website incredibly important, as trying to rely on social media or a poorly made website will make you look less professional (and therefore less capable) than your competition.

As such, it's important to make sure that their end point, the place they're in when they make that decision to pick up the phone and schedule a visit, is one that's as convincing and powerful as possible. That's where the conversion happens, where you'll be in the best position to collect metrics, and where you'll always be able to improve.

Without a website, your customer journeys will have to rely on third party service providers like Yelp, Angie's List, or Google Business Listings. Sites that might change later on, or even shut down. Your website lets you control the content and message; it's the best tool in your arsenal.

Building a Website

There are thousands of options for building websites, but just a handful of effective ones. For many, the most cost-effective solution is to use services like Squarespace to build a simple "drag and drop" website. This will let you setup a relatively good looking website fairly quickly, but you'll be limited when it comes to aesthetics and features.

For more customized solutions, hire a freelance developer to build your website. This is an affordable way to create a site that's more unique than what you'll get from Squarespace. There are many freelancers out there who will only charge a few hundred dollars for a custom website design, letting you manage it yourself and pay the hosting fees once the design work is done.

And, finally, for larger and more advanced businesses that have either less time or more demanding needs online, there are "full service" design agencies. They'll build, maintain, and update your website for you, giving you the a great combination of professional features and easy use. These kinds of agencies aren't cheap, but they can deliver amazing results on both the design side and in getting leads with optimized websites for search engines.

Turnkey Website Solutions

Building a website today is fairly easy. It doesn't require any technical knowledge, and you can get a site up and running in under a day. While you may be familiar with the common drag and drop style website creators, FieldPulse offers a go-to solution that manages the whole website process for you. In 2018, FieldPulse released [FieldPulse Websites](#), which is a turnkey solution for contractors who need a professional website. FieldPulse handles it all from start to finish. You simply answer a few questions and within a few days you have access to a hosted, secure website on its own domain. FieldPulse Websites are also designed to capture leads. So not only do they look professional, but they come with a purpose - to bring in new customers. FieldPulse Websites has a first month cost of \$149, but then it's only \$49 a month. You can see [an example site here](#).

FieldPulse Websites

—○—

Get a turnkey web presence for your business

- Professional website
- Custom domain
- Hosting

\$149 the first month, then only \$49/month

GET STARTED LEARN MORE

GET STARTED

See an Example Site

Self-Service Managed Website but Professionally Built

If you're looking for a site that's more customized to your needs than one from a drag and drop page (ie. Squarespace), but one that's still simple enough that you can maintain it yourself, look into hiring a freelancer to design a self-service website for you. You'll still have to maintain it yourself after it's built (or pay a minimal fee for support when you need it) but it'll be a design unique to your business.

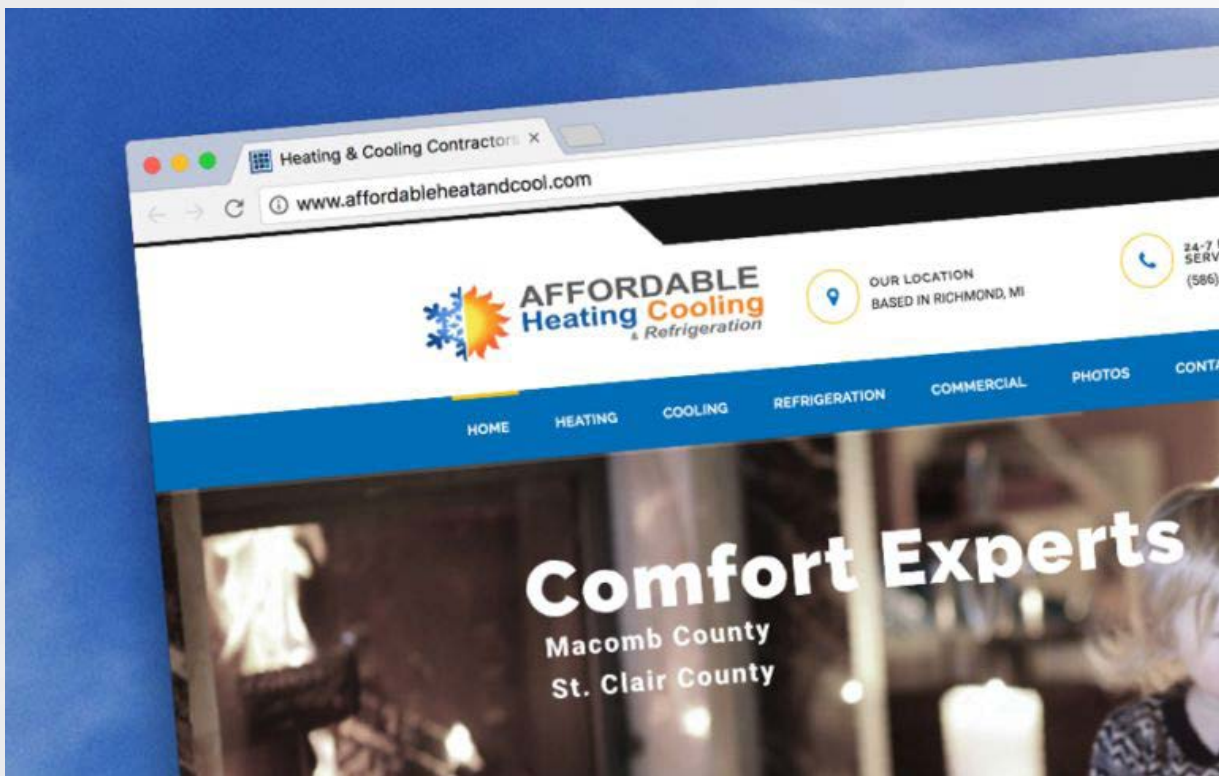
Websites like these use content management systems like Wordpress or Joomla, which have been used for everything from simple one-page website to famous news portals. The important thing to remember with these websites is that maintaining it (making sure it's up to date, has the right information, etc) and modifying it is your responsibility. There's a lot of documentation out there, but becoming fully proficient can take time.

Professionally Built and Managed Website

The most expensive, and most complete, option is to work with a "full service" web agency that handles the entire website, from design to metrics and maintenance.

Different agencies offer different packages, but many development and management packages include SEO/PPC management as well. This is great for businesses that want to expand their web presence, but lack the time to develop their online strategy internally.

This can be a costly approach, but it comes with the benefits of including professional support for your entire online strategy. Read our guest post on 'Why You Need a Professionally Managed Website' to see if it's the right choice for you.



What should be on my website?

Your website should do two things: Tell your customers about your business, and present convincing information about why you're the best fit.

The exact wording and approach you use will depend on the kind of business you run and your customer demographics. The way you'd sell an urgent service to a young customer is different from how you'd sell a repeating service to an elderly customer; it's all about matching your presentation to the customer personas you most commonly deal with. If you want to learn more about customer personas, make sure to check out our article [here](#).

As a general rule, though, the amount of information you provide depends on your sales cycle. If you're focusing on large projects with long sales cycles (services that are expensive and have a long contract or a low frequency), you should put your effort into educating potential customers about your services and how it's tailored to their needs.

For small contracts, or "in and out" jobs where you're providing standardized services that are relatively affordable, it's important to make sure that all of the critical information (like pricing) is laid out clearly. Don't bury a simple choice, like power washing someone's driveway, under volumes of information and explanation; make it easy for your customers.

If you're ever stuck trying to figure out what to put on your website, talk to your existing customers. Long-term clients can provide powerful insights into what influenced their decision-making process, which can, in turn, help you refine your online presence. Don't be afraid to reach out, especially when you can promise improved services in exchange for their feedback.

Basic Information Every Contractor Website Needs

A well-made website offers enough information that customers know what they're buying, but not so much that they feel lost or overwhelmed. As a rule, customers don't like searching for information; if you bury your services or your contact information deep inside your website, they'll leave instead of looking for it.

This means that, at the most basic level, you should make sure these three things are immediately apparent on your website:



Areas You Service



Contact Method



Services You Offer

Letting your customers know what you do and where you do it is fairly straightforward; it's an elevator pitch. Keep it short, keep it simple, and keep it interesting. You can't trick customers into liking you.

Unique Value Proposition

A 'value proposition' is what you brag about to your customers. It's a slogan or phrase that communicates the value you provide as a business, and it's typically centered on something that's unique about your methods, approach, or philosophy. It's the message that encourages them to contact you instead of the competition.

(Psst: Want to know more about building awesome value propositions? Check out our article [Finding Your Value Proposition](#) to learn all about it)

In a sea of competitors, why should your customers choose you over the competition.? Perhaps you're the first one they found that fits the criteria they're looking for, but what if they keep looking? Your website should communicate a clear and unique value proposition that answers why you're different from your competition and why they should choose you.

If you're struggling to come up with a value proposition, ask yourself: How would your ideal customer describe your services to a friend? Would they recommend you because you're fast? Affordable? More experienced? Do you do a good job because you approach the problem differently, or is it because you're grounded in effective tradition? A value proposition doesn't need to be radical; it just needs to be unique to your business.

Service Offering Landing Pages

If you offer multiple different services, you should create a page on your website for each service. This will help you with SEO and PPC (we'll talk more about this later), and it'll make it easier for your customers to find the information they're looking for.

Customers care about relevancy. If they have to scroll through pages of information about services they don't care about, they aren't going to call you; they'll call the guy with the website that focuses on their needs. If you offer both commercial and residential services, for example, creating separate landing pages for each service type will ensure that your customers engage with the right information.

Each page should consist of details regarding your offering, sample work, and any other relevant information. Keep it simple, and make sure your website navigation (your menu, sidebar, etc) is easy to use. Don't make customers dig through sub-menus just to find the page they need.

Showcasing Your Work

Customers don't like buying things they can't see. Showcasing service businesses can be hard, but giving your customers a look at how your business can help them is incredibly valuable. Would you hire someone you've never seen or met?

It's critical to find a good method of showcasing your work, from case studies to photo galleries. Don't be afraid to get creative. Show your customers flattering behind the scenes photos, "before and after" comparisons, community service events you've participated in; anything that will leave a positive impression.

When customers search for service businesses online, they're looking to find a business that feels "legitimate." They're afraid of scams, they're afraid of businesses that charge too much, they're afraid of being taken advantage of. Professional photos of you, your employees, and the best examples of your work will help alleviate all of those fears. Good photography is almost always a good idea.

A strong showcase will reinforce your customer journeys, too. The more 'case studies' you have, the better, but even one outstanding case study will make a big difference. The transparency sets comforting expectations for your customers, so they know exactly what they'll get if they choose you.

Additional Resources:

- [FieldPulse Websites](#)
- [Finding Your Value Proposition](#)
- [Learn to Attract Good Customers and Avoid Bad Customers Using Customer Profiles](#)

Customer Journey

Understanding how customers find service businesses is key when developing an online footprint. Customer journeys are stories, based on advertising metrics and demographic data, that help businesses refine their online presence in order to put their best foot forward for potential customers.

Every customer journey is unique. It's influenced by what search terms they use, the length of sales cycle, and their unique needs. The journey of a customer looking for an urgent AC repair in the middle of summer is different than the journey of someone looking to upgrade their working AC system to something more efficient. Every journey is different, but most follow a similar pattern of discovery, investigation, and call to action.

As you work on your online footprint, look at what you're doing through the eyes of a customer. If you're stuck trying to make decisions on what to include in your website or how to build your marketing plan, walk through the process in a customer's shoes. Figure out where their journey starts, what decisions they make as they search online for the right service business, and how you can present yourself as the best solution to their problem.

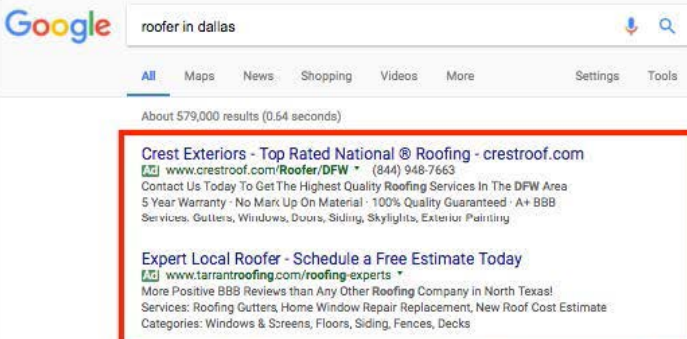
Journey 1: Google Searches

Most journeys start with Google. A customer might have a problem, a goal, or a question, and they'll turn to the internet to search for a solution before anything else. [74% of Americans use the internet](#) , [64% own a smartphone](#) , and [58% report that they'll check online for information before looking anywhere else](#) . And that's where your online presence comes in.

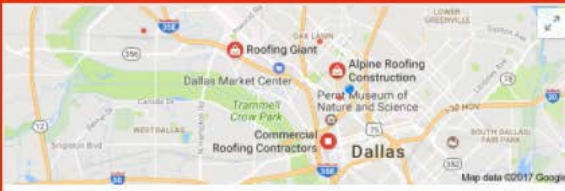
A typical search will turn up a variety of search results. Depending on how their search query is written, customers will see a mixture of Google Paid Search Ads, Google Listings, and Organic Search Results, all on the same page. You have the option to position your business within all of these categories, with the right strategy.

When a customer searches "HVAC Dallas," they'll be presented with all of these results, with each result being the potential start for your customer's interaction with you. This is what we mean when we say almost every customer journey starts with Google.

Check out this infographic, which shows how the different kinds of results are sorted in Google. We'll break these all down for you, so you can use them all to your advantage.



Google PPC Ads



Google Listings

Rating - Hours - Sort by -

<p>Roofing Giant 4.5 ★★★★★ (17) · Roofing Contractor 2.7 mi · 2730 N Stemmons Fwy #415 · (214) 444-9552 Open until 8:00 PM</p> <p>Alpine Roofing Construction 4.4 ★★★★★ (17) · Roofing Contractor 0.5 mi · 2929 Carlisle St #190 · (214) 628-9897 Open until 7:00 PM</p> <p>Commercial Roofing Contractors No reviews · Roofing Contractor 1.3 mi · Elm St #406 · (972) 863-1367 Open until 5:00 PM</p> <p>More places</p>	<p>WEBSITE DIRECTIONS</p> <p>WEBSITE DIRECTIONS</p> <p>WEBSITE DIRECTIONS</p>
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Matching Services (Organic)

Contractor Websites (Organic)

Google Paid Search Ads

The results at the very top of the page are typically paid ads from Google Adwords. These results show up whenever a business has set up an ad campaign based on the keywords used in the search query. More popular search terms are under greater demand and, in turn, cost more.

For these ads, however, the advertiser is charged each time the ad is clicked, not for each time the ad is displayed. The cost per click is determined by the term's popularity, but the rate at which the ad's budget is spent depends on how well-written the ad is.

Google Paid Search Ads can be incredibly effective, as they only connect you to customers who are already interested in the kinds of services you provide. They can be a cost-effective way to advertise, but only if the website that the customers are taken to is well-made. A poorly-built ad campaign, or an ad campaign that leads to a poorly-built website, can waste a lot of money.

If a searcher clicks a Google Paid Ad, they'll be immediately taken to the landing page linked to the ad. Most of the time this will take them to the business's website, although in advanced Pay Per Click setups, the website will have multiple landing pages setup to match the specific ad.

Google Paid Search Ads are a great way to bring additional traffic to your website, but they still rely on your website to close the deal. This is why it's important to approach online marketing from a website-first perspective, as you'll want to focus on the part of the process where the majority of the sales take place.

Google Listings Results

Just like Yelp and Yellowpages, google has its own listing service. When customers search for relevant businesses on Google, these listing results are displayed in a block alongside other search results. Google will display their listing results related to the search along with an area map. These results are typically sorted by relevance to the search query and your reviews.

If a searcher opens Google Listings Results to view local service businesses, they are presented with basic information about the business, any reviews, contact information, and a link to their website. Although the searcher is presented with contact information, most will instinctively first visit the website to collect more information before reaching out, making your website a critical touchpoint in different customer search journeys.

The great part about Google Listings, though, is that it's integrated with Google Maps. This means that customers who access the internet through their phones and rely on Google services will typically see your business before businesses that aren't in Google Listings, and they'll be able to read reviews that have been aggregated from other review sites on the same page.

Organic Search Results

Google isn't just for ads and business listings; most searchers use Google because it's one of the most effective organic search engines out there.

This means that, outside of the paid ads and whatnot, the rest of the page is dedicated to results that are indexed and displayed based on their organic search algorithm, which is a patented bit of math that's so overwhelmingly complex that it represents the single largest repository of computer code on the planet.

On the most basic levels, this algorithm combines text strings, popularity rankings, web traffic, backlinks, and information retrieved by small programs called "web crawlers" to build a rank for every search result. This involves indexing over [130 trillion individual web pages](#), all to make sure that the right people are connected with the right results.

Thankfully, there's a lot that you can do to make yourself stand out from the competition and the noise. Google has listed guidelines at various points in time which describe how websites can put their best foot forward in the search world, which has given rise to an entire industry of search-optimizers. Google tries to match the organic results with what they believe best matches the search, provides the best information/service, and is most trustworthy. All of these factors are lumped into a practice of boosting your website's search ranking called 'Search Engine Optimization' (SEO).

After the first few franchised and national service businesses in the search results, you'll begin to see local service business websites listed that Google determined are the best match to serve the searcher. Getting your website listed organically here is important for growing your business. While the initial work to begin ranking high in search results can take time and/or money, visitors clicking your website are completely free. Later in this guide, we'll dive further into 'SEO' to teach you how to get your website ranking in these results.

Journey 2: Social Media

Most customers don't start searching for service businesses on social media, but many customers look at social media pages before engaging with a business. They'll do a search, they'll visit your website, and, if you have social media accounts for your business, they'll check those to see how your customers interact with you and how you present yourself. Social media pages often rank well on search too, and customers are comfortable on social sites, so it's natural to pay attention to your social profile.

The primary role that social media pages play is as a place for customers to vet and verify potential service businesses. It's easy to build a professional website, but an active social media account that shows a history of positive customer interactions and project showcases is a lot harder to fake.

Customer journeys that heavily feature social media are typically journeys where the customer is looking for more than what's on your website; they want to get to know you and your business and see how you interact with your customers. These journeys can often include preliminary contact through social media as well, which can be a great way for you to field initial questions and upsell your services.

Don't pass up the opportunity to showcase your work, and don't underestimate the power of a good review. Customers tend to trust the opinions of their friends and family, and being able to feature the endorsements of their friends and family is an easy way to get them onto your website and scheduled for a visit.

Journey 3: Contractor Matching Services

Although many customers come across the service business indexes such as Angie's List, Home Advisor, and Thumbtack via Google searches, many go directly to those websites when looking for a contractor. Are you listed on them?

They operate in different ways, but ultimately, most of them cost money. They either cost money to be listed directly on the service or they charge you per lead that they pass to you that meets your criteria. But the customer journey typically doesn't end on these matching service websites. After the customer has narrowed their choices to a few candidates, they will typically try to find more information about the service business before making their decision.

Naturally, they look for customer reviews, social media profiles, and service business website to get a better sense of the company before pulling the trigger. Even though the main journey might rely on a matching service, having a full online presence for your company still assists the customer in making a purchasing decision.

Additional Resources:

- [Local Google Search Ads Can Grow Your Small Service Business – Step by Step Guide](#)
- [Is AdWords Worth it for Contractors?](#)

Search Engine Optimization



Outside of paid advertising channels, search engine optimization is the best way to establish a sustainable online presence. By making your website easy to find, you'll gain leads online without having to pay for ads. It isn't easy, and it can take some time, but it pays off in the long run.

Search engine optimization is a general term that refers to a wide variety of website development and marketing tactics to make your website appear in relevant search results. The algorithms behind how search results rank are incredibly complex, but there are four key factors you can control to get the best rank possible.

By using SEO title tags, strategic website content, citations, and backlinks, you can improve where and when your website and services are found online. In this section, we'll break down how these elements work and how you can build an SEO strategy that's best for your business.

SEO Tags

Every website page has designated SEO titles and descriptions that are used to indicate to Google the overall topic/content of the website. These SEO titles are displayed as the website topic in search results, and they are also used to match search queries to websites. The closer your SEO title for that page matches the search query, the more likely it is to appear higher in organic search results. Adjusting your SEO title tags is the easiest way to get an SEO boost, but of course, this is not the only factor in ranking for that search result.

If you use a self-service website maker like Squarespace, Wordpress, or Wix, you should have access to set the SEO title and description for each page. If you have a professionally managed website, your website developer should already have SEO titles in place, but work with him or her to make sure the best possible title tags are set.

So how should you set it?

For your main website, try to find the overarching service you offer that a user would search, add your service location, and then add your company name. Your service and area must be listed first for SEO purposes. For example, an HVAC business based in Dallas might do many different types of

work, but the overall service is 'HVAC.' As a result, a Dallas HVAC company might use one of the following SEO titles for their main website homepage:

Dallas HVAC | [Your Company Name]

HVAC Dallas| [Your Company Name]

But it shouldn't end at just your main homepage. If you can further breakdown your services into multiple categories (seeding, planting, stump removal, etc.), you should create a page on your website for each one and then match the SEO title to the search query someone may actually use who is looking for this specific service. An HVAC company based in Dallas that offers AC Tune-Ups should have a landing page with the following SEO title:

AC Tune-Up Dallas | [Your Company Name]

Dallas AC Tune-Up| [Your Company Name]

Don't start your SEO tag with your company name or slogan. Customers are looking for what you do, not your specific business. Matching the SEO title to your most relevant customer search queries will increase the chances of ranking well in organic search results. This is another situation where it's important to approach things from a customer's perspective because you're ultimately trying to anticipate how your customers will search for you online.

Website Content

You can't sell products without a label, and you can't rank well in search without unique and interesting content. One of Google's most significant factors in determining a website's value and trustworthiness is the amount and quality of content the website contains. The term 'content' is pretty broad, but it mostly applies to unique, relevant text that's valuable for your audience, which mostly comes in the form of information relevant to your service offering and a helpful blog.

Google uses the way customers interact with a website to influence its rank. You need more than pages of text; you need content that customers will read, re-read, and share. The more users engage with your content and spend time on your site, the more valuable it is.

As an example, imagine you have a page set specifically for your "AC Tune-Up" service. On that page, you have a description of the services you provide, and additional information about how your unit deteriorates and what customers should do to mitigate the risks. This relevant content that connects with both your services and user search behaviors can have a large influence on how well your website performs in organic search.

In many cases, it's a good idea to add fresh content as time goes on. Sites that are updated frequently rank better than sites that never change, which means that creating some kind of blog or information resource is good for business. Make a point to research your target demographics and get a feeling for what they might want to learn or read about. If the content you provide helps your customers along their buying journey or subtly promotes your services, that's even better, but the primary goal is to create content that provides its own value.

Here are some things you should consider adding to your website:

- Full customer case studies
- Sample work
- How you perform certain services
- Educating the customer on their different options (and why your offering is the right one)
- Showing examples of bad work for the customer to avoid
- DIY instructions to help them resolve issues on their own

While most of these topics assist the buyer in their buying journey, some of the topics are aimed at helping them directly without conversion. Things like DIY guides can create a high level of engagement, leading to customers coming back multiple times and developing a sense of brand loyalty.

Citation Building

Your site is the most important asset, but it needs to be correctly properly to rank well on Google. If you ignore doing anything off-site, odds are you won't get anywhere. You need to fill out your local profiles on Google, Yahoo, Bing, and other relevant indexes.

These profiles are called 'Local Citations.' They help customers find you when they look in the right places, and they influence your overall search ranking in Google and other engines, as discussed in the Customer Journey section. Search engines cross-reference each other, and taking the time to make sure you're in as many relevant listings as possible will have a positive influence on your overall rank. This is something that many people ignore, which means it'll give you a leg up on your direct competition.

There are many automated services (such as Yext) that automatically create these 'citations' for you, but most of them are overpriced. Worse yet, if you cancel your monthly service with them, all of your citations go away, effectively tanking your website and map rankings on Google. Your best bet is to enter them manually, either by hiring an SEO agency or by doing them yourself. To manually create citations for your business, here's a [list of best citations](#) to get you started.

Google Business Listings

Start out by completing your Google Business Listings and Google+ profiles. Google looks at its own listings first, and it's an easy way to create local citations for an SEO boost.

The listings are geared more toward retail and restaurants than service businesses, but they're still useful in this case. If you have an address, it's important to setup your Google Business Listing as a business with a location. Google will send you a verification code to your address in the mail that you will need to enter online to verify your address. You will want to make sure that your address on the site matches the one on your Google My Business Profile. You'll want all other citations that you manually build to mirror completely or as closely as possible to the Google My Business profile.

If you don't have an address, you will set up your account with a service area instead of an address. This is commonly used for service businesses.

Here's a great guide on [setting up Google Business Listings](#) for service contractors, if you want to know more.

Backlink Building

Think of backlinks as peer verification; if other people like you enough to mention you, Google assumes your website is worthy of a higher rating. You get more out of backlinks from popular sites than you do from unpopular sites, and paying sketchy or spammy sites to give you backlinks is a good way to end up as a digital pariah. Quality matters.

Backlinks, if you aren't familiar, are links to your website URL posted on other peoples' websites. Links from websites with stronger [Domain Authority](#) carry more weight than those with less authority, but you'll need both quality and quantity to significantly improve your search ranking.

Links from relevant websites help you rank better in searches related to those backlinks. There was a time when backlinks were the primary ranking measurement for websites. However, Google's algorithm has changed in recent years in response to people trying to cheat the system. As a rule, buying backlinks or using "black hat" techniques to gain backlinks from other sites will have a negative effect on your ranking.

So how do you get good, relevant, and trustworthy backlinks? It isn't easy. Taking the natural method, websites will link back to your site if they find value in the page/content they're linking to. For example, I linked to Moz's article on 'Domain Authority' above as it's a good resource on the topic. This is considered a backlink for Moz.com. But realistically, it won't come that easy.

Actively getting backlinks is difficult and time-consuming as you need to convince a website to link to your site in some authentic and relevant capacity. One common method is to offer your expertise as a 'Guest Post' on their blog that includes a backlink to your site. Your backlink can be embedded within the article as a relevant link, or sometimes added as a footnote at the bottom to indicate the guest poster and source of the content.

Figuring out what kinds of guest posts you can create as a service business owner can be hard, but there are more options out there than you'd think. In addition to writing articles about relevant technologies or explaining the decision-making process behind your particular services, you can also take a broader approach. Local business groups and professional organizations always value the opinions of local business owners, and you can often leverage your experience in your industry into high-profile content about entrepreneurship as a whole.

Hint: This site, FieldPulse Academy, is an example of a service business and contractor resource website that accepts guest posts. Send us a message with a proposed topic that adds value to service businesses and contractors, and if accepted, we'll feature you as a guest post on our blog (with a backlink).

While working on SEO to boost your organic search rankings can take a lot of time and effort, it becomes the cheapest method of customer acquisition once you begin to rank well. Rather than paying money to Google for each paid search advertisement that is clicked, customers will find your organic search listing and your website visits will be free. In addition to cost, savvy searchers that distinguish between ads and organic results are more likely to trust the organic listings over the paid advertisements. But the catch is that it does take time, effort, and money to achieve results. For instant results, consider pay per click advertising.

“Time and time again, I’ve seen that in order to really take off quickly in SEO and take more real estate on the first page from your competitors, you need to focus on building local citations correctly. They’re fast, easily scalable, and Google will reward you with higher keyword rankings in addition to consistent maps listings for your target keywords.”

-Local SEO Expert, Ben Rahlf, *Mountain Web Marketing*

Additional Resources:

- [SEO for Contractors](#)
- [5 SEO Backlink Strategies for Contractors](#)
- [7 Things Your Website is Missing for Great SEO](#)



Pay Per Click Advertising (PPC)

Pay Per Click advertising (PPC) is a term to describe any type of online advertisement that charges you per click of your ad. There are many different types of PPC ads, including Google Search, Google Display, Facebook, LinkedIn, and more. But the most effective ads for service businesses are Google Search Ads that appear at the top and bottom of Google search results when a user searches for a relevant query.

Why Are Google Search Ads The Best PPC For Service Businesses?

Google Search Ads let you access customers who are already interested in your services, instead of customers who are most likely interested. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn heavily advertise their advertising features as “the best in the business,” but the kinds of audiences and demographic targeting they offer are oriented more towards shops and retailers than the service industry.

Google Search ads show up for someone who is directly searching for the service you offer and is ready to buy. Someone who searched in Google for ‘24 Hour Locksmith in Dallas’ is much more likely to need a key cut from a business in Dallas right now than a demographically targeted Facebook user. Quite simply, the kinds of leads generated by Google Search Ads are the kinds of leads that pay off the best for your kind of business.

Should I Do Pay Per Click Advertising?

Before getting started, it’s critical that you evaluate the economics of PPC advertising. Using estimated ‘conversion rates’ of each step of the journey and click cost data, you can calculate how much a paying customer will ultimately cost you, and then figure out if it’s worth it to you.

Use a tool like this [PPC Bid Calculator](#) to find the balance between your monthly advertising budget and your customer lifetime value. Depending on how aggressively you want to pursue customer acquisition and how much each new customer is worth, the amount you’ll want to pay per click will vary wildly.

In order to figure out a reasonable ballpark, you need to look at three things:

- Keyword Competition
- Customer Lifetime Value
- Customer Lifespan

If you're offering a popular service in a large area, you may be in a position where the keywords you're trying to rank on are highly competitive. A service business in Chicago will face more search competition than a service business in Oshkosh, and that'll be reflected in how much you'll pay per click for certain location-based keywords.

The more a customer is worth, the more you should be willing to pay. No one but you knows how much your customer is worth, which means that finding a concrete value for how much you should pay for each click is pointless. A business with an average customer LTC of \$50 will target a CPC significantly lower than a business that earns \$2,000 from a customer across their lifetime.

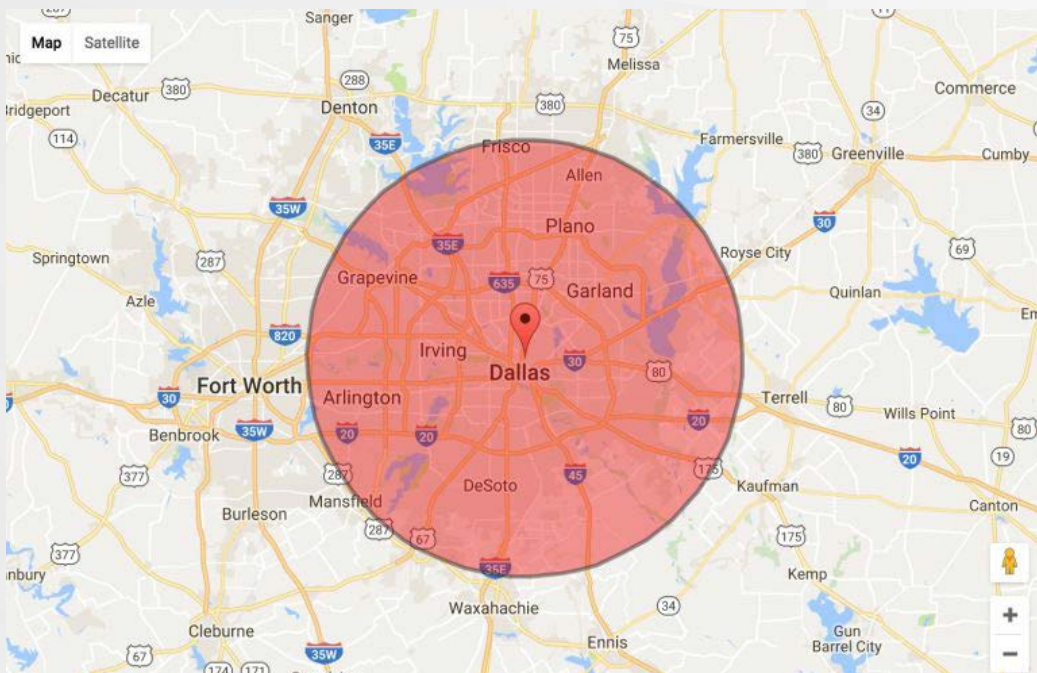
This is moderated, however, by how long the average customer relationship lasts. If your customer LTV is high, but you only see those customers once or twice before they disappear, you need to invest enough into your marketing strategy to make sure your total customer count stays consistently high. If that means placing a higher bid for a keyword set to maintain your market position, then you need to account for that in your budgeting.

As always, don't forget that an expensive ad campaign isn't necessarily an effective one. You can bid on the most expensive keywords around, spend thousands per month on PPC search ads, and still get nowhere. If your ad campaign isn't connected to a good website that presents valuable services, those leads you're paying for won't convert.

How Do I Set Up Google Search PPC Ads?

PPC ads can be tricky, so it's probably a good idea to talk to a professional to build a PPC campaign that's right for you. If you want to learn about how it works, though, you can set up a [Google Adwords](#) account yourself and experiment with PPC advertising.

As a local service business, it's important to focus your PPC to your service areas only. Here's a step by step guide to help you set up local radius PPC ads: [Local Google Search Ads Can Grow Your Small Service Business – Step-by-Step Guide](#).



"Google Local Search Advertising is, in my opinion, the #1 missed opportunity with local business marketing. Stop spending money on newspaper columns and junk mail. You're wasting time. If you're a small business with a very limited budget, move all the marketing dollars you can scrape up into radius targeting."

-Expert PPC Marketer, Roger Parent, DigitalPosition



Social Media

Social Media is not often the beginning of a customer journey, but it's still an important part of your online presence. Social media profiles can be used to interact with potential customers and build a stronger "online community," but they aren't the best for developing new leads. Instead, use profiles such as Facebook as a platform to supplement your website with reviews, updates, and more human-feeling content.

Facebook

Facebook continues to build out its business page offerings to make it more and more like a structured website. For those not ready for a website, a Facebook profile can operate as a temporary substitute as you can still fill out important details such as:

- About the Company
- Contact Information
- Contact Hours/Availability
- Address
- Call to Action
- Photo Galleries

To learn how to correctly set up a Facebook page for your business, read this [step-by-step guide](#).

Instagram

Instagram is an interesting platform for service businesses, as its business features are a recent addition. Depending on your niche, Instagram can either be a great tool to showcase your work or a complete waste of time. As mentioned before, many people love looking, following, and engaging with beautiful homes and designs. If you're a business that specializes in work that can be visually showcased, you can use Instagram to gain a following and utilize it to showcase your work. However, not too many people are interested in looking at a freshly installed AC unit.

With the recent additions of business metrics, contact buttons, and professional advertising features, Instagram is a more viable platform than it was in previous years. It's still built around a mobile-first interface, however, which can be frustrating for businesses that want to run things from their office instead of their pocket.

Twitter

In our opinion, Twitter is no longer a viable option and would likely be a waste of time for service businesses. There's very little genuine engagement from potential customers, and there's not much room to furnish a full profile to showcase your business. We believe your time is better spent on other marketing activities.

Most of the businesses that are successful on Twitter are media companies; their products are digital, easily shared, and easily digested. Local businesses often struggle on Twitter as it's an overcrowded platform that doesn't allow for the kind of content sharing that's most beneficial for these businesses. As a service business owner, you're better off giving this platform a pass.

Pinterest

In some ways, Pinterest is similar to Instagram; it's a visually-oriented social platform that's great for businesses with strong showcases. Interestingly enough, however, is that Pinterest drives more consumer sales than any other social media platform; the way its demographics and sharing features intersect seems perfect for some businesses.

If you own a service business that is visually appealing, consider Pinterest. It has high engagement rates, a surprising tolerance for "corporate content," and a user base that loves to use professional content for personal inspiration. It might take some research and experimentation to fit it into your current strategy, but it has the potential to pay off.

Online Business Indexes

There are tons of different business indexes available, ranging from the yellow pages to industry-specific matching services. Most people are familiar with sites like Yelp, which cover everything from plumbers to restaurants, and sites like Angie's List, which is geared more toward service businesses and contractors.

You'll find that most of the websites that focus on "customer matching" cost money. Each service will vary greatly in cost structure and offering. While some of the services offer the customer the ability to compare customer reviews and ratings for service businesses to decide which businesses to contact, other services will take the customer's requirements and sell them as a lead to matching, qualified businesses signed up for their service.

Angie's List

[Angie's List](#) is one of the oldest and well-known matching services. Until recently, Angie's List charged the customer to be a member, but have since opened it up to everyone, expanding the reach. However, there are still fees for members with many options for add-ons to boost your visibility in the marketplace. While we know that you have the option of paying for additional exposure, many have accused Angie's List of being a pure 'pay to play' scheme where the amount you pay may be the only thing that impacts your visibility.

Home Advisor

[Home Advisor](#) works differently than Angie's List in that you pay per lead that Home Advisor gives you. It's designed more for contractors and remodelers than service businesses, but it still caters to lawn, pool, and repair businesses.

The price of the lead varies depending on the size of the job, making some leads quite costly at over \$50 per lead. While not all leads are created equally, it's important to make the most of your lead by following up as quickly as possible, as many customers simply go with the first option. Over time, review the quality of your leads and their source to determine which lead criteria works best for your business. If managed properly, Home Advisor's paid leads can be a valuable tool for filling your schedule.

Thumbtack

While [Thumbtack](#) also has a pay per lead type of arrangement, it works differently than Home Advisor. Customers come to Thumbtack and they fill out a form that helps answer what they're looking for. The customer request is then sent out to businesses that match the criteria to see if they are interested in the opportunity. If you are interested, you submit a quote through Thumbtack, which is relayed to the customer along with a personal message and background info on your business. With Thumbtack, you pay per quote you submit rather than per lead you receive.

Content Marketing

It's hard to believe that a little over 10 years ago, iPads and [contractor mobile apps](#) didn't exist. In addition, mobile sites were still part of the unknown. So much has changed within a decade, and so has content marketing for contractors.

Every year, marketers ask if content marketing is dead. Well, it's 2020, and content marketing is still alive and well—but, it is now with a focus on high-quality content marketing that provides value to the intended audience.

For instance, during the initial stages of online content, content marketers were focused on quantity and posting as much content as possible. Today, successful content marketing is geared toward the types of pieces that offer value to targeted audiences — in this regard, content marketing is thriving. And, the sky is the limit.

So, why should service contractors care? Well, we are living in a consumer-driven and a “we want it now” market. And, the “we want it now” market spends a lot of their time online — searching for products and services. As a result, your business should engage in content marketing to ensure you get noticed by your target audience.

In 2016, [over 90% of businesses utilized content marketing](#). Service contractors can no longer rely on word-of-mouth or referrals to keep sales churning. Every successful business today uses content marketing to expand their reach.

So, what is content marketing? It is a form of marketing where the focus is on distributing high quality content consistently to help gain and retain customers. It is also a strategic form of marketing to develop long-term profits.

To produce valuable content, you must think of these key consumer factors:

- Their Needs
- Wants
- Interests
- Concerns
- Questions

Then, what form of expertise do you have that would benefit your ideal customer? What type of content do your prospects and customers want? And, can you be consistent and relevant with your content?

Why is consistency important? Because, with content marketing, "one and done" just doesn't cut it. Your competition publishes content regularly, and you should too. Remember this: out of sight, out of mind. And relevancy simply means that your content aligns with the interests, wants, and needs of your customers. Furthermore, the objective is to establish your company as a trusted expert.

Keep Your Business Top of Mind

Many service contractors fall behind when it comes to planning. For example, electrical contractors can be fully product-oriented. Yet, with today's fast-changing and digital markets, that strategy no longer works. Instead, it is crucial to adopt a customer-focused marketing strategy, which includes producing valuable content.

The last thing you need is to be left in the dust by your ever-evolving competitors. Sure, sticking to a strategy established by earlier generations seems to be the way of the industry—but that must change. Customers are more sophisticated, and the competition is embracing new ways to reach their market.

Stop falling for the old idea of, "if it's not broke, don't fix it." It's time to get out of stagnation and into operating on all cylinders. One way to do that is with content marketing — tailored for your target audience.

Since the modern consumer is online, you must go where your customers are. If they can't find your business on the web, producing content regularly, they will go elsewhere.

When people are ready to make a purchase, your business must be where they can find you. Producing valuable content will help your business reach the top of the search engine rankings for your category. And, customers will see that your organization is ready to do business.

The Internet Is Bursting With Information

As you well know, you can find anything online. Since this is the case, consumers are becoming a lot more picky about sorting out the good information. Put yourself in the shoes of your customer, imagine the journey they take before making a purchase.

Think of how they might read reviews, look at prices, and compare services. If your company has good content, the customer feels that they can then make a more informed decision. Instead of feeling as if they have been "sold" by advertising, they can read through your high-quality content to determine their final response.

In fact, 92% of [consumers trust user-generated content over traditional advertising](#).

The Search Engines Want Good Content

Landing on the first page of a search engine query is critical for any business. Most consumers won't even go to the second page. In addition, search engines are in the business of offering more relevant results to search queries. Therefore, they continue to update their algorithms. This is why it is important to create the best content for your market.

Produce content that is unlike anything else out there in your industry. And, it doesn't take a massive budget either. Start by hiring one seasoned writer to publish consistent and relevant content, then watch as the leads and traffic start to pour in.

Content Marketing Positions You as a Leader in Your Industry

Content marketing is blog posts, but it is also emails, infographics, videos, and social media posts. It is a way of engaging with your customers before, during, and after they make a purchase. You are keeping in touch while providing informational content.

Do this consistently, and soon you'll establish your business as a leader and the go-to expert in your industry. To illustrate, if you provide pool maintenance, you can write posts on how people can take care of their pools in each season.

In addition, content marketing lets you keep warm relationships with your customers. They are more ready and willing to buy when they see that you know your stuff. And, you can easily [use your CRM system to find upsell](#) opportunities for these warm leads.

Additional Resources:

- [Blogging for Contractor Businesses](#)
- [The Importance of Content Marketing](#)

Putting It All Together

Online marketing can feel intimidating, but building a professional online footprint for your business is more a matter of diligence than anything else. There are thousands of professionals out there who can help you with the hard stuff, and taking the time to do the easy stuff can still give you a series lead over the competition.


The strategies we've outlined here are all website-first, which is great for business owners who are just getting started online. By building your online presence around your website, you'll be able to control all of the important variables without burdening yourself with too much work. With a good website, a simple ad strategy, and consistent SEO, you'll be able to stay on top of your marketing plan without losing sleep.

Your overall strategy should be built around the ideal customer journey, from the moment their problem occurs to the moment they contact you to schedule an appointment. Taking this approach requires an understanding of how your customers think, what language they use to describe their problems, and what they imagine the best solution looks like. It can sometimes feel like an acting exercise, but it's the best way to create a marketing plan that works.

There's no way to market your business online without at least considering how user search patterns come into play, and Google Search Ads are a great way to attract the attention of customers who are interested in the services you offer. Taking the time to figure out how users search and how you can take advantage of that to get the lowest bids is guaranteed to pay off.

And, on the longer-term scale, content marketing and SEO optimization will ensure that your website and your business is visible without active ad campaigns. Building a strong content marketing repository and improving your page rank can take time, but the long-term payoff is consistent and reliable traffic that will make your business easier to run. The entry cost here is nothing but your time and a bit of creativity.

This guide has all of the basics you'll need to develop a killer online marketing strategy for your service business. How you use the building blocks we've covered here is up to you, but making the jump to modern marketing techniques is critical for every business looking to scale. And if you work hard and do it right, the next case study might be about you.



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