Local Citations: What They Are & How They Help SEO

Local search engine optimization (**SEO**) ranking factors differ slightly from traditional SEO ranking factors, which makes sense if you think about it. Individuals looking for nearby Jamaican restaurants, reputable plumbers, and hip hair salons need to know that businesses highlighted in search results are geographically relevant. Google and other search engines also try to rank local businesses by prominence and relevance.
So where do they get these ranking signals from?

One key part of the local rankings puzzle is citations.

What Are Local Citations & Why Are They Important?

A local citation, or a business citation, is a reference to your business's general contact information. This information is often called NAP, which stands for Name, Address, and Phone number. These citations may also feature a description, a website URL, directions to the business, photos, and user-generated reviews.

Local citations can appear all around the web, including business directories, social media platforms, maps, news sites, event platforms, and anywhere else where users could be seeking information about local businesses.

Local citations not only help users find local companies, but they can also play a vital role in SEO. They function like backlinks, can boost your business's credibility, and build trust with consumers. They also help Google and users understand where a business is located, the areas and people it serves, the services it provides, and sometimes even if it's well-regarded in its niche.

What Does a Local Citation Look Like?

Local citations don't have a fixed appearance and can vary depending on the website. The main feature, though, is generally a business's NAP.

Here's an example of a local citation for a beauty salon in Texas:

bbb local citation example
This citation is from the Better Business Bureau (BBB) website. An unaccredited BBB profile is free — and it's a great local citation from a reputable source.

The BBB showcases every listing in precisely the same way, with each of the following:

1. Business Name
2. Industry

3. BBB Rating
4. Phone Number
5. Address

Are There Different Types of Citations?

There are two types of citations that can help support your local SEO goals: Structured and unstructured.

Structured Citations
In SEO, a structured citation refers to the standardized representation of a business's name, address, and phone number across various online platforms. Structured citations appear on Yelp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Yellowpages.com, Local.com, and more. Google Business Profile (GBP) is also considered a structured citation.

Let's check out an example. Here's a New York City dentist's GBP:

gbp structured citation example
And here's a Yellow Pages listing for a New York City dentist:

yp local citation example
Both of these structured citations clearly indicate the practice's name, address, and phone number. They also include its website, hours, and reviews, though these aren't necessary for a citation to be considered "structured."

I'm not entirely sure whether these two listings are for the same dental practice. They have the same name, but the address and phone number are different. If it is the same dental practice, this mismatch could be problematic. Since Google and other search engines use structured citations to assess a business's trustworthiness, incorrect NAP could lead to lower rankings.

Unstructured Citations
An unstructured citation is an online mention of a business where its key data isn't grouped together. This can be in a news article, on a wiki, in a forum comment, or on a blog.

unstructured local citation example
The image above is a screenshot of an online article from a local Philadelphia newspaper. It mentions a yarn shop in the area and provides its address. These types of mentions are unstructured since the goal of the page or site itself isn't to share local business information, and they don't provide that information in a standardized way.

Despite this, it's still a useful mention.

What Types of Local Citations Are Valuable?

The most valuable citations are those that come from authoritative, trustworthy sources. Geo-specific and industry-specific citations help showcase your business's relevancy, while those with user-generated reviews highlight your prominence.

We recommend a mix of citations from reputable websites like some of the following.
Search Engines: Search engines are the bedrock of your online visibility, offering business profiles that are highly visible in local search results.

1. Google Business Profile (Follow our optimization guide here.)
2. Bing Places
3. Apple Business Connect
4. Social Media: Social media platforms provide dual benefits of community engagement and valuable citation opportunities.
5. Facebook
6. Instagram
7. Nextdoor
8. Local Business Directories: These directories offer your business broad exposure and a level of consumer trust.
9. Better Business Bureau (BBB)
10. Yelp
11. Angi
12. Foursquare
13. Yellow Pages
14. Local.com
15. SuperPages
16. Data Aggregators: Data aggregators ensure your business information is consistently distributed across a variety of platforms, enhancing your online footprint.
17. Neustar
18. Data Axle
19. Acxiom

Geo-Specific Directories: These hyper-local platforms offer citations with high local relevance and community focus.

- Local Chamber of Commerce
- Local Business Groups
- Neighborhood Groups
- Industry Directories: Industry-specific directories provide targeted citations that are highly relevant to your field, enhancing credibility and reach.
- HealthGrades (Doctors and dentists)
- FindLaw (Attorneys)
- Zocdoc (Doctors and dentists)
- Zillow (Realtors)

- Avvo (Attorneys)
- Professional Associations
- Recommended Reading

Consistent Data
Make sure your NAP is the same across your citations, and update your citations as needed so they're always accurate. Consistent NAP sends strong trust signals to Google. Some small inconsistencies (like using an abbreviation for Inc. sometimes and spelling out incorporated on other occasions) are ok.

Use All Available Fields
If the listing allows you to upload a logo or fill out additional information, such as an email address or a URL, do so. The richer the listing, the more authoritative you'll appear to Google and users alike.

If the listing site offers the ability to gather reviews, make it easy for customers to leave them. Focus first on Google Business Profile since it's the most prominent. Then, consider sending customers to industry-specific websites or Yelp, depending on your business. The goal is to make sure you have reviews on the sites potential customers are most likely to use to vet your business.

Citation Quality
Search engines and authoritative websites provide the highest quality citations. If you need to prioritize your citation building, start with your Google Business Profile and create a Better Business Bureau listing. From there, focus on the search engines your customers use most, followed by local listing sites, location-specific platforms, and industry directories.

Citation Quantity
There is no magic number of citations. Citation quality and accuracy are more important than quantity. However, it's important to be listed wherever potential customers might look. Start with the high-quality citations mentioned above and work your way down the list.

How Do You Build a Local Citation?

To build a local citation, start by preparing your business's NAP. Consistency is key, so this will ensure all information is uniform across platforms. This is the foundational data that you will include in every citation you build, so double-check for accuracy. You'll also want to have a contact email address, your website URL, and a logo file at the ready.

Next, identify the platforms where you want to build citations. Prioritize the platforms your target audience uses the most, then move down the list I've provided above. Search engines like Google Business Profile and Bing Places are a good starting point, given their influence on local search results. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram also offer citation

opportunities and allow you to engage with your local community. Don't overlook local business directories like the Better Business Bureau, Yelp, and Angi, as these sites are often trusted by consumers and can provide broad exposure.

Once you've identified the platforms, the next step is to claim and verify your business listings. This usually involves creating a business profile and going through a verification process, which may include providing your email, phone number, or even postcard verification. After claiming, optimize your listings by adding additional business details like hours of operation, services offered, and high-quality images.

Remember, building citations is not a one-time task. Regularly monitor your listings to ensure the information is accurate and up-to-date. Changes in phone numbers, addresses, or business hours should be promptly updated to maintain the integrity of your local SEO efforts.

Alternatively, an SEO agency can audit your local citations to pinpoint NAP inconsistencies and help you build additional local citations.

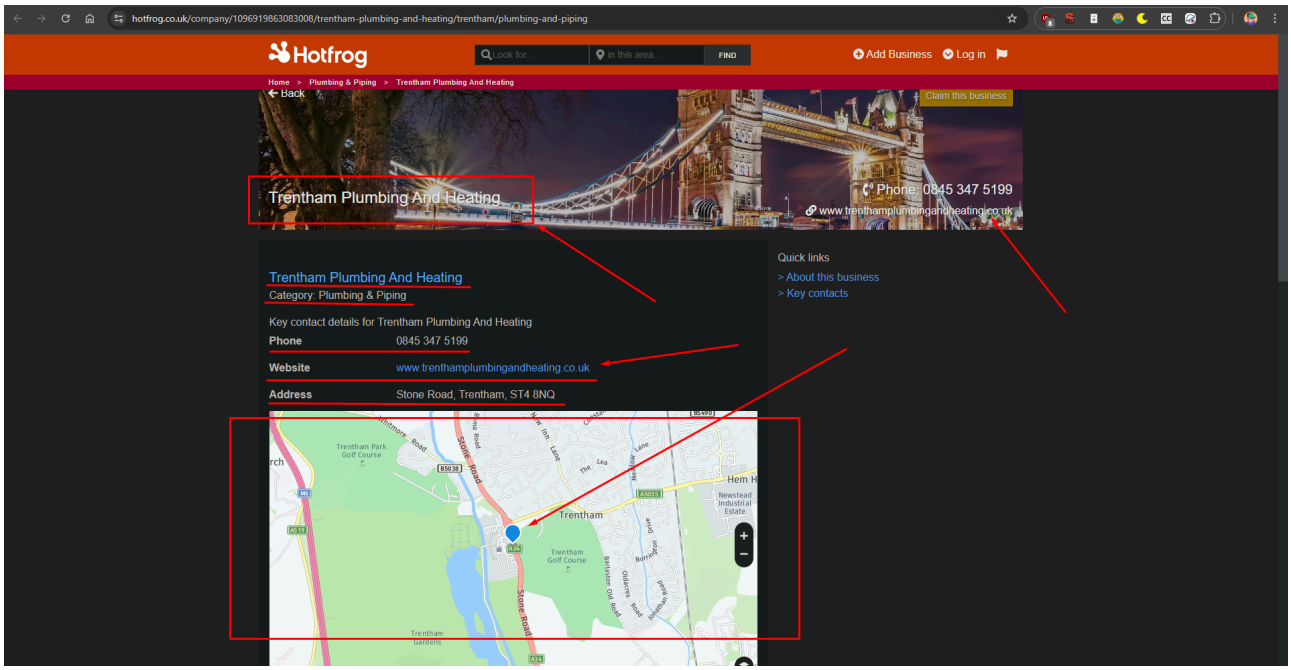
Power Up Your Local SEO

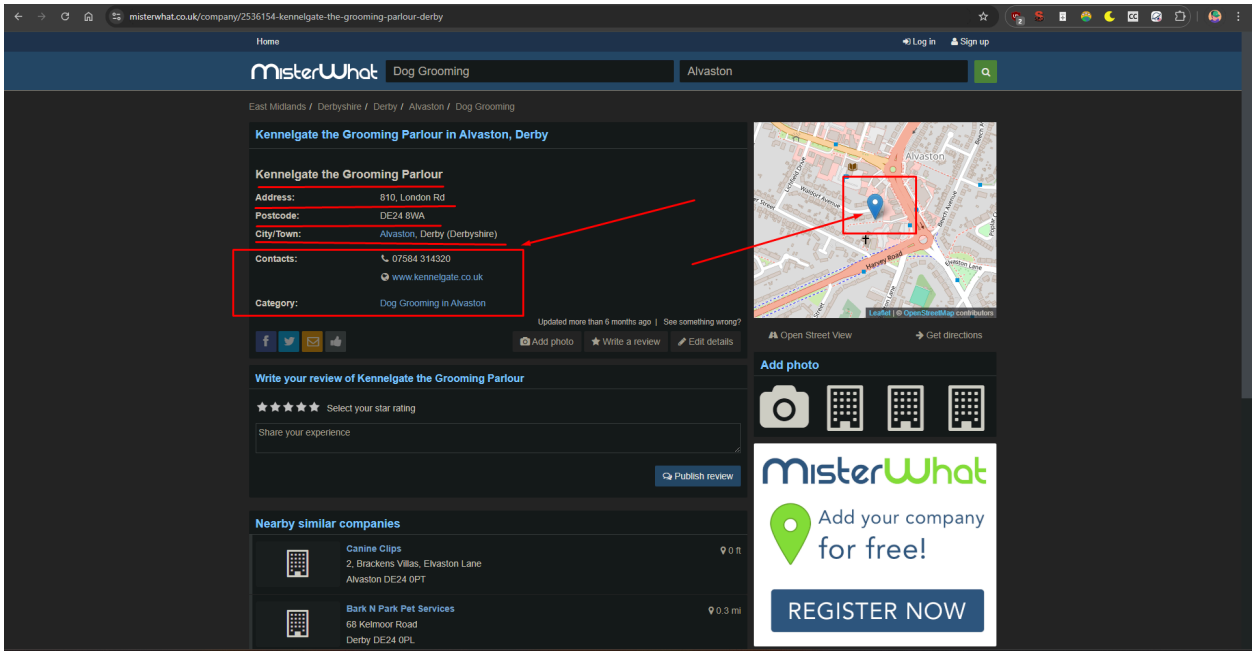
Give your visibility and credibility a boost. Our local SEO agency can help you build local citations with various relevant websites and ensure your business information is correct across the board. Plus, we offer Google Business Profile Optimization, SEO content writing services, and other local SEO services geared to help you connect with your target audience. Schedule a free consultation to learn more.

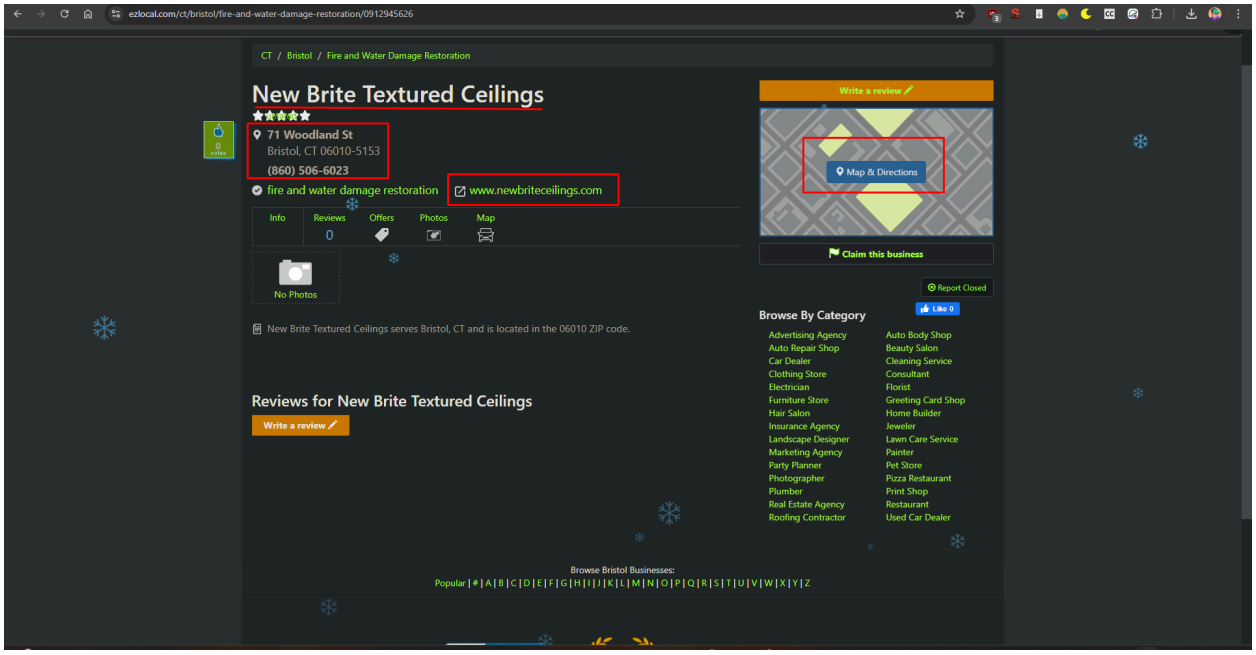
Since citations help provide the foundation for your SEO, it's important to ensure that they're correct. Be sure that the name of your business is always spelled correctly and doesn't include any additional keywords. Your physical address and phone number should be uniform across all sites, too. Incorrect, incomplete, or duplicate NAP data across different citation sites can be a red flag for Google's algorithm.

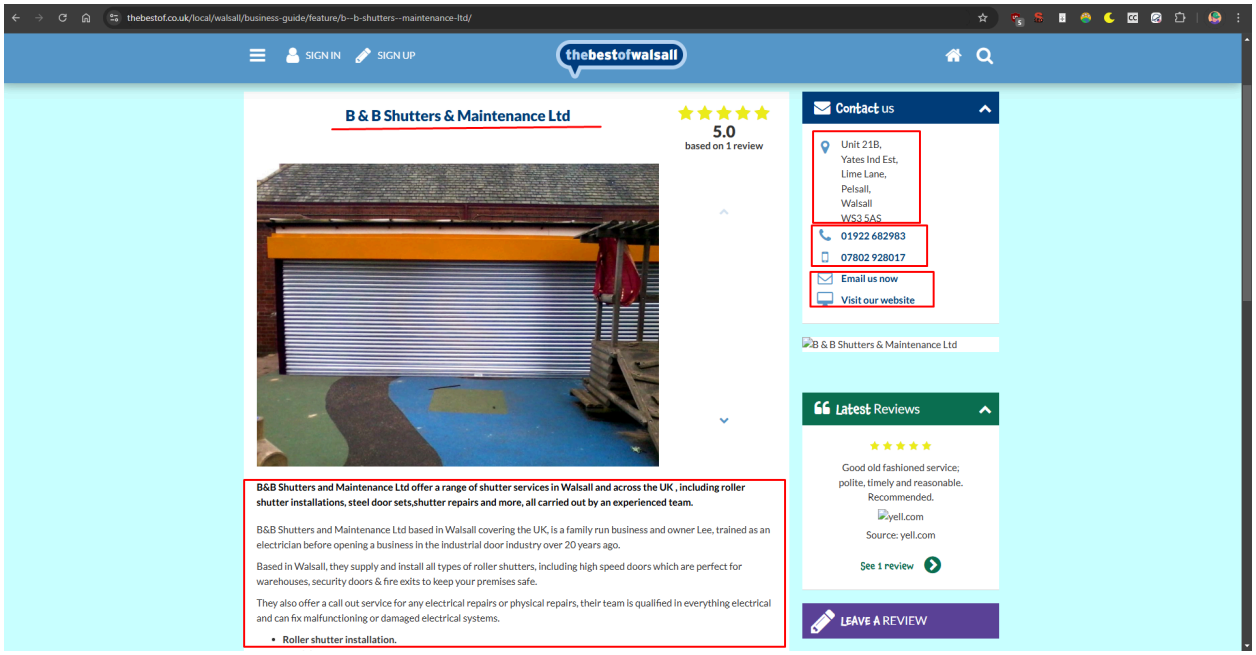
If you suspect that you've got problems with the consistency of your NAP data—as a result of moving to a new location or switching to a different call tracking provider, perhaps—you'll need to clean your citations by updating the incorrect information. This can be done manually with the help of citation auditing tools like those offered by Whitespark or BrightLocal—or you can pay one of those services to handle the whole process for you.

Samples of my previous work: (screenshot)









Thanks…

Best Regards :)
Gobindo