

Transcript: If you're not on Google, you don't exist

Welcome to another series of our digital master class: the importance of going digital in a post-COVID world. For today's topic we're going to go through Google: if you're not on Google you don't exist.

For today's agenda I will go through: what is Google; consumers and how they're changing behaviour in a post-COVID world; why Google is so important; and then we'll go to an interactive session with some Google searches. For the last part of the session, I'll go through Google My Business, which is a free toolkit that Google offers for business owners. And, I'll give you some practical steps on things that you can do today, that are free to help market your business. Today's learning objectives: we'll learn about Google and what you can do to get immediate results for your business for free.

Let's look at consumer behaviour for a moment. The impact of COVID lockdowns has changed the way that some people behave. Some possible reactions are that some people are happy to be out, and happy to be carefree. Others may be cautious. Some may want to do the right thing and follow safety guidelines; and some may do a bit more research than they did before they go out. You might be thinking: how does this translate to Google? Did you know that, among people who search on Google before they go out, 88 per cent of searches for local businesses on a mobile device result in some sort of action within 24 hours. Action might be that they visit the actual retailer, or they may order online. Or, they may do a little bit more research after they've done their initial search.

The term "near me" or "close by" searches have grown by more than 900 per cent over the past two years. That was some research done by a marketing platform called Hubspot. The vice-president of marketing for Google recently said: "near me" is no longer just about finding a specific place, it's about finding a specific thing, in a specific area, in a specific period of time".

People may not necessarily search, for example, "coffee near me", but they may search for a specific thing about coffee, maybe "ground coffee beans near me". Or, in this example, a search term that's dress-related: "homecoming dresses near me" (it's like a graduation dress). "Wedding dresses near me". "Evening dresses near me", as opposed to "dress shops near me".

Real-time search has also evolved, especially during the pandemic. Google has implemented a number of functionalities, and they'll continue to do so, as people use the search function more. Recently, they rolled out live visit analytics. During COVID outbreaks, this has become a popular function for people to plan and avoid crowds.

I've used an example here: this is Woolworth's Bently. The blue bars show ordinarily how much traffic, or how many visitors go to that particular store. But the red bar shows what the live traffic is. Whether you know it or not, if you have a phone and you've been using Google search, it is actually tracking that data in the background.

This is particularly helpful, as mentioned, where people are trying to avoid crowds, and planning visits. This may not be relevant to your store, but if you're a small shop, it has an effect on whether people are coming to your neighbourhood. It also creates some sort of habit for people to continue to use for research.

Let's get googling: I did a search recently, looking at: "birthday flower deliveries in Murrumbena". This is what came up: the two search results are actually advertisements. You can see that it's an ad – the word "Ad" is next to it – but the third one is an organic search result. I actually searched for "birthday flowers delivery" but what Google has done is this: although this particular store has not used those keywords, somebody did a review of that store. The keyword "delivery" is being picked up. What I'm saying is: the more reviews you get done for your business on Google, the better it is for keywords to pop up.

Now I'm going to go on to the My Business functions that are available on Google. This is a free tool that's available for any businesses. Once you set up a My Business account on Google, you are then able to get a listing on Google Maps. You're also in control of what's on your listing, so all you need to do is put in the search term "My Business" on Google, and you will come to a page like this. It's free to set up, and once you set it up you can manage your profile. Then you have the functionality of being able to take messages directly from your customers. You can have a click to call. Once you've got your phone number in, if someone searches for your business and your phone number's there, it's very easy for them, on their mobile phone, to just click "call". With the phone number there, you know they'll be able to call your business. Also, it makes it easy for your customers, whether you know them or not, to leave a review about your business.

Once you set up your account, you get access to free analytics. You can see analytics, as for example, how many people have called your business using that functionality. Links to your website, if you have a website. You can see how many people have used the directions to get to your store; and how many people have taken action. If you have a button for taking bookings or orders, this is very rich analytics data that you don't necessarily get with just a website. This can also give you some idea of perhaps some future marketing activities. For example, if people are clicking onto calls, you may want to take note of why are people calling. Is it because there's insufficient information on your listing? Is there a way that you can move those calls into an interaction that they can do online? Now I'm going to go through how you set up your My Business account. Method number one (there are actually two methods): the first method is probably the easiest, especially if you've got an established business, is to go and Google search your business. First step is you need to set up a Gmail account. You need to set up a Google email account, which is fairly easy for you to do. You can do that almost immediately once you've Googled your business. If you see that the term "own this business" is still there, just click on it, and you can request to manage the business, which is on the right hand screen. Google will send you a postcard with a verification code.

Note that the verification code postcard can take a few days to arrive, but once you get it, you then enter the verification code on the same Google page. It'll have full instructions on what to do, and you can then start populating your site.

The other method is to visit [Google.com/business](https://www.google.com/business) and type in your business name. I recommend you take the former method first, because someone, whether you know it or not, may have already listed your business as a customer. Google is very good at asking regular Google search users to provide information. Someone may have already set up a Google location for your business, without you even knowing.

I would do the first method, and if you can't find your business, then go on to the second method. This avoids the possibility that you could replicate an existing map listing for your business. The other tip I have is that once you claim your business, start updating your listing with keywords. Keywords are what people type in when they search.

As mentioned earlier, here are some example keywords: if you have outdoor dining, I would put that in. If you're a baker, and you sell birthday cakes, or anniversary cakes, or baby shower cakes, I would put those sorts of keywords in. I'd put gift cards in if you also sell gift cards.

The second thing I would do is: put some recent photos on your listing. I would include external photos of your storefront. The reason is to allow anyone physically searching for your store for the first time, to be able to see a physical photo of the outside of your business. It's important for them to know, oh okay, I'm at the right place. They may be driving in their car at the time, and then they can see, this is what your business looks like.

The third and most important thing, to round it off, is to ask your customers for reviews. This can be as easy as putting up some signage at your cash register, to ask people you know: "please review us". I'll put an example there on the right. Customer reviews will add keywords to your listing for future searches. It's a very easy thing to do and it doesn't cost you anything. In fact, that's something that you may want to encourage your customers to do if you have a social media account like Facebook or Instagram. That's a great gift that your customers can give you, especially happy customers. It doesn't cost them anything except a little bit of time, and it doesn't cost you anything. It's free marketing that helps you bubble up on searches, when someone does a search for your business.

Lastly, here are a few extra steps I recommend for you, once you've put up your listing. I would update your listing regularly, especially the trading hours. If you use Google search yourself, you may notice that during holiday periods and public holidays, that it's really important that people know what time you're opening and closing. Google also really likes things that get updated regularly. It knows then that the listing is not dormant and forgotten. It actually rewards regular behaviour. I would also explore the Google My Business functionalities. There are call to action functions, such as "book now", "order now", or "delivery". Explore those functionalities and see what you can do, so that you you're not forcing the customer to physically call you, or physically come in, if they can order in advance.

Ask your loyal customers to add a review: if you send out, for example, newsletters, or you have little leaflets in your store, just add something at the end of that to say that "I'd love a review". The last extra step I recommend is, whether you know it or not, Glen Eira City Council also have a business directory. It's free for you to register on this business directory, and I'll put the link here on the slide. You could, even if you don't have a website, list your business there, and it will automatically link to the Google listing.

Thank you very much for joining today's masterclass, I hope you got something out of it. If you have any questions, you can email us directly, otherwise good luck and thank you.