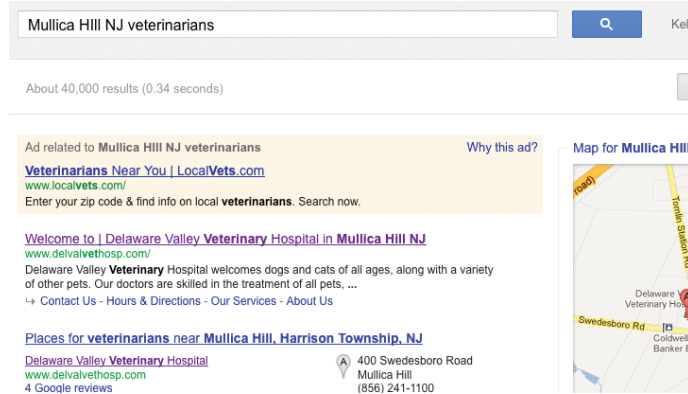
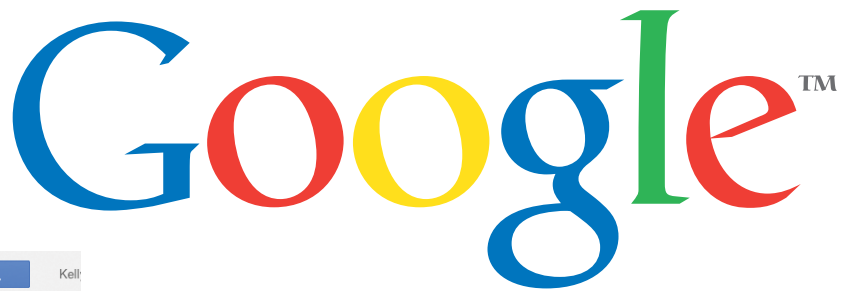


Fasten Your Seatbelts —Google Has Changed Again!



Article by Kelly Baltzell, MA

Just as we were enjoying our Memorial Day weekend, Google went quietly about making some significant changes to its algorithm that heavily impacts local businesses. If you want to understand how to keep being “seen” in Google, these new changes must be adapted in your practice’s online marketing program.



3. Plentiful (five or more) positive online reviews help maintain good positioning in Google Local Search. Google purchased the Zagat review site and is now incorporating these reviews into Google local listings. Reviews are becoming increasingly important. Having reviews associated with your business listing is yet another key ranking factor and one of the many signals Google looks for.

Second Change: Google Changed Mobile Search

Estimates indicate that by 2014–2015, more searches for information will be conducted on mobile devices than on a computer. Google has already started to adapt to this change by integrating online reviews with local search results for mobile devices. To see how this works, pick up a smart phone and search for your town, state, and veterinarians (example: Maple Grove MN veterinarians). Google shows a list of search results for this query. When a searcher clicks on one of the businesses listed, Google sends the searcher to information that is from the Google+ Local pages, including associated reviews for this business listing.

Many veterinary hospitals I have seen are struggling with online reviews, claiming their Google+ Local page, and actively monitoring and engaging with people in this format. However, Google just forced your hand from reluctance to action. If your business doesn’t take control of its local listing page, encourage positive reviews, and interact with your customers in this arena, then searchers will see whatever Google happens to display on this page. Whether it is accurate, positive, engaging, or not — searchers will make their decision on credibility based on what they view. What does your listing say about you? The first step is to claim your business listing at www.google.com/placesforbusiness.

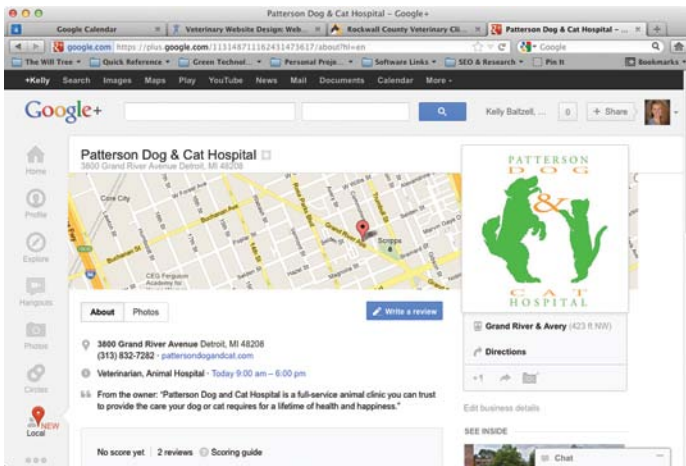
Third Change: Google Merged Google Places, Google+, and Zagat

Google recently began changing Google Local listings to Google+ Local, meaning it’s in the process of merging the Google+ interface with Google Places/local search listings. In addition, Google has now integrated Zagat and its way of rating businesses. Reviews on Google formerly used a star rating from 1 to 5 stars. The rating system has now changed to Zagat’s method, which is based on a number system of 0 to 3 for individual reviews. Google takes these ratings, averages them, and then multiplies by 10 to arrive at an overall score.

First Change: Google Search Results Went Hybrid

This past year, when we used Google for an online search, the results would show paid advertising at the top or far right (which only 25% of people click on), with local search results shown next — listed in packs of 7 or 10 and accompanied by corresponding map markers starting with the letter “A,” followed by organic (non-local) results. Google has now integrated organic and local search results together, which currently display on the search results page in varying ways — in packs of 3, 5 or 7 for example, depending on the search query. Search results are still formatted with paid advertising at the top or right under the map on the results page, but you’ll now see organic results listed BEFORE, and blended with, local search results. How does a business become listed in this new hybrid format and at the top of local search results? What we have learned is to focus on the following:

1. It is crucial to have a custom-designed website that can be optimized (coded) down to the page with local search terms, specific relevant industry keywords (veterinarian, pet cancer, etc.), and appropriate geographic regional terms.
2. When choosing location keywords, check how close your business is to the center of the city. To do this, go to Google Maps (maps.google.com) and type in your city and state; e.g., Minneapolis MN. Google will then display a marker on the map with the letter “A” — where it considers the center of the city to be located. This letter “A” is what Google calls the “centroid.” The closer your business is to this centroid, the more “votes” your local business listing receives toward being near the top of local search results for that city. With this approach, Google is attempting to make the search experience most relevant to the searcher’s query.



Please join one of our webinars every Wednesday from 12:00–12:30 CST. If you can't make it, still register, and we will send you the link to access the recording so you can watch when you have time. Our topics for July are:

- July 11: Review of Google+ Local Pages Changes
- July 17-20th: The Social Vet Series: Online Reviews, Blogs, YouTube, and Pinterest
- July 25: Understanding Local Hybrid Search

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These major changes are all happening at the same time. What does it mean for your business?

1. Take the time to set up your Google+ page, since it also affects your Google+ Local area. Keep an eye on this area, as Google will continue making modifications as it rolls out the integration of these three platforms.
2. Make sure you've chosen the most relevant category for your business listing, add any appropriate information as well as photos, encourage positive reviews, and respond in a professional, educational fashion to negative reviews.

Finally, remember that your online marketing program is like driving a car. You need to know how to drive the car and fill it with gas, as well as know when to take it in for an oil change — but you're not expected to build the car. We are here to help you through these Google changes.



Kelly Baltzell, MA is President and CEO of the Beyond Indigo family of companies, which she founded in 1997. Under her leadership, Beyond Indigo companies have developed all types of veterinary websites (small animal, exotic, specialty, equine, mixed animal) that now reach millions of people a year. Kelly's depth of experience, passion and visionary approach to the industry have made her an unparalleled leader in Internet marketing.

A true relationship builder who works to promote her clients and broadcast their stories to the world, Kelly speaks frequently about marketing trends and website design at national conventions and private functions. Before creating Beyond Indigo, she served as Site Manager for Online Psych, the mental health community of America Online, and designed customized mental health programming for the AOL Health Channel. Online Psych had up to 4 million page views per day and attained placement on AOL's Welcome Screen. After Online Psych merged with iVillage.com, Kelly became Director of Interactive Health and was later promoted to Executive Director of Health. She helped generate more than 18 million page views a month for iVillage.com.

Kelly was graduated from George Washington University with a degree in International Affairs & Economics and received her Master's degree in Counseling & Psychology from St. Mary's. Kelly is a proud parent, currently living with her family in Minnesota.