

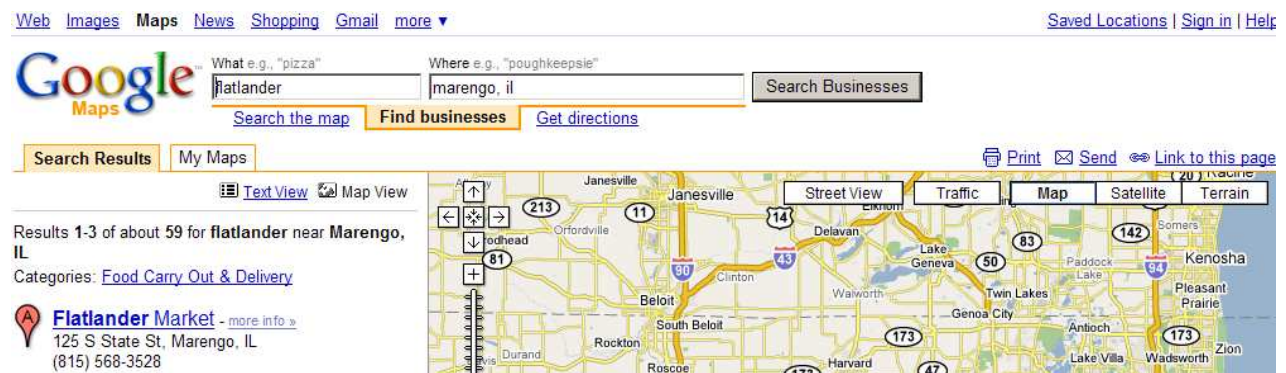
Google is more than the world's most popular search engine, a new verb, and the creation of two of the richest 30-somethings in the universe. Google is also your friend.

That's because, in 20 minutes or less (even if you barely know how to work a mouse) you can sign up for free advertising that will be seen by every person who goes to Google looking for a business like yours in your area.

This free advertising is called, "Building your business profile." You go to Google's site and put in your company's information, they will call you, or mail you a postcard as follow-up to confirm that you are who you say you are and you do business where you say you do, and you'll be set. That's all there is to it.

Step 1. Go to www.maps.google.com and click the button marked, "Find businesses."

Step 2. Look up your business by name and location. Like this:

A screenshot of the Google Maps website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Web', 'Images', 'Maps', 'News', 'Shopping', 'Gmail', and 'more'. On the right, there are links for 'Saved Locations', 'Sign in', and 'Help'. The main search area has the Google logo on the left, followed by two input fields: 'What e.g., "pizza"' containing 'flatlander' and 'Where e.g., "poughkeepsie"' containing 'marengo, il'. A 'Search Businesses' button is to the right. Below the input fields are three buttons: 'Search the map', 'Find businesses' (highlighted in orange), and 'Get directions'. Underneath, there are tabs for 'Search Results' and 'My Maps'. On the right side of the map area, there are links for 'Print', 'Send', and 'Link to this page'. The map itself shows a region around Marengo, IL, with various towns and roads labeled. On the left side of the map, there is a list of search results. The first result is 'Flatlander Market - more info »' with a red location pin icon. Below the name, it shows the address '125 S State St, Marengo, IL' and the phone number '(815) 568-3528'. The map also has a 'Text View' and 'Map View' option at the top left of the map area.

Step 3. Click on the "more info" link for your business (it's right after the name).

Step 4. In the new box that pops up, click "Edit." Another, smaller box will pop up and ask, "Are you the owner? Claim your business."

Step 5. Follow the instructions as they appear. You will need to create a Google account, but they won't bother you with unwanted email. I've been a Google account-holder for 5 years, and I think I've gotten two emails from them.

If you select the "phone number" option, they'll call you in about 15 seconds. You answer the phone and follow the prompts. You'll get an email with the codes you need to access your listing. If you prefer the postcard route, it'll take a few more days, but the outcome is the same.

You can add pictures, coupons, etc. **BE SURE TO POST AT LEAST YOUR HOURS** and, if you're a restaurant, your menu. Also, make sure your name, address, and phone number as they appear in the original listing, are correct.

What this process will do, is move you up the ranks toward the top of what are called *organic* search results. These are the unpaid results that you get when you use a search engine. Studies consistently show that people trust organic results more than paid. So, you get more respect from your customers by using this service, and it doesn't cost you anything!

And think about this: if you can get your site to the #1 spot on local searches for your type of business, you're talking about ad space that is the equivalent to first position in your local Yellow Pages—which can easily run you \$75K or more a year. How do you reach #1? By putting as much information into that profile as you can.

Why do they do this for free? Because they also know that bit about people trusting organic results more. So, even though they sell advertising space on their site, they also do whatever they have to do, to keep their customers happy (and coming back). What makes them happy, is search results that are relevant to what they're looking for. (Have you ever tried looking up a business in the online Yellow Pages? Do it some time. You'll get at least a dozen entries that are paid-for ads, for businesses 20 or 30 miles or more from where you're searching. You have to scroll down the page, or maybe even move on to page 2, before you can find what you want. That's why people don't trust paid ads—they aren't as accurate, and they make you chase all over creation.)

P.S. Yahoo offers this same service. You should complete your profile with them also. www.yahoo.com Click on the tab at the top marked "Local," enter your business name and location, then click on "Local Search," "Know something we're missing? Add it now," and "Additional information." Then fill in the boxes.

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