

## Features

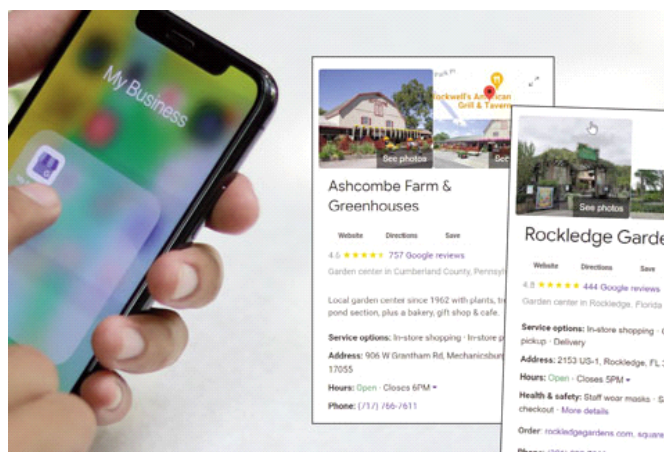
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## Search: Local Garden Center Near Me

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You've heard about it in workshops and your marketing consultant may be begging you to start a Google My Business profile. Now's the time to go to Google Business and claim your spot on the map.

A Google Business profile is free for companies of every kind and stripe. And Google makes it simple to set up. At the very least, you need to provide the address of your business. You don't have to include your website or phone number—but why wouldn't you? You want people to visit your brick-and-mortar store, don't you?



### Why You Need Google Business

While you have a fan base that you can count on during the growing season, you still want to let others know that you exist, and can meet their garden and lawn care needs. For example, if a new family moves into your area, the gardener in the family will search for a “garden center near me.” And you want your store to pop up on the map with other IGCs in the area.

“How does one incorporate Google My Business into their business plan? They fill it out,” says Steve Kendall of The Design Works in Baltimore, Maryland. “It’s that simple. The whole search ecosystem is built on consistency of name, address and phone. Regarding local directories, all local guides would also include Google My Business.”

Steve adds that the primary directories you would use are Google, Facebook, Yelp and other websites like these three major ones. But your goal should be to stay consistent across all of these platforms that direct people back to your website.

Remember what Sam Walton said? “There is only one boss. The customer.” However, Liz Lark-Riley of Rockledge Gardens in Rockledge, Florida, heard Rob Sproule speak at a Garden Center event a few years back where he said, “Google is the boss.”

Rob Sproule’s phrase stayed with Liz over the years as she set up Rockledge Gardens’ Google Business page. She says, “I know from my own life, if I’m looking up a business, I’m going to be doing it on Google. I’m going to be learning things about the [business] like their hours.”

## Google My Business Benefits

If you turn on the notifications on your Google My Business page, it'll send you reminders, such as changing your store hours during the winter holidays. Liz says that she recently got a reminder notification from Google to change her store hours during the last two weeks in December for the Christmas and New Year holidays. According to Liz, updating your Google Business page doesn't take a lot of time, either. She wants her Google Business page to accurately reflect her business hours, the garden center's location and the reviews.

Cassie Debrosse, marketing director at Ashcombe Farm and Greenhouses, located in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, loves her company's Google Business page because it's simple to use. How does Cassie incorporate Google My Business as part of her overall social media plan, digital marketing plan, etc.?

"Well, it's not so much social media, as [Google My Business] does link to the photo [on Instagram or Facebook]. [Google My Business] can grab up Instagram and Facebook and everything because if you go on Google, you'll see previews of everything or photos people have taken [at your garden center].

"You do have the option of uploading your photos and things like that to Google My Business," Cassie explains, adding once you set up your Google Business page, "it's pretty self-sufficient in terms of getting information to people. You can work it with Google ads as well."

How do you manage your customers' photos they upload to your Google Business page?

Both garden centers felt that customers' photos positively reflected their business page. And while you can't delete photos, you can add more photos of your business to keep people focused on what you have to offer.

"I would say customers go in and add a collection of photos to our Google My Business page," says Liz. "Maybe once a quarter I see that happen like every three months. And if they're bad photos, and I feel like it's not representative of our business, I'll go in and add some [more photos], more recent stuff that's representative of our business."

## How to Respond to Google Reviews

Customers can also leave feedback regarding their experience with your staff and store. Most of the time, you'll receive a good to neutral review. And then there are times when you get a negative review.

Steve has some encouraging words when it comes to negative reviews: "So, if you have 300 reviews and you're probably between a 3.8 to 4.3-star review, that's realistic. I think we've all reached a point where we take the negative reviews with a grain of salt and we judge them based on that."

He notes that Google users can judge whether it's a rational complaint and they can see how often a business responds.

"If the business responds negatively on top of a negative review, then that doesn't work," Steve says. Instead, he says a garden center marketing director should respond professionally rather than in anger. You address the customer's complaint and then offer a way to solve the issue.

Liz stays positive with all of Rockledge Gardens' reviews. She answers each negative review with the option of the customer emailing the garden center to go into more detail about the complaint.

"I get notified when somebody reviewed the business on Google. I go in and respond to every review, both positive and negative. I try to be positive," she said.

Sometimes Liz reads generic reviews, and she responds by thanking that person and inserting their first name to make it more personal. If Rockledge Gardens gets a positive Google review where the customer puts time into

writing their review, Liz will respond by saying she'll share the positive thinking with the rest of her team. But what does Liz do if her garden center gets a negative review?

"I also try to keep it positive. Something along the lines of 'I'm sorry you had that experience. That sounds frustrating. I'd love to talk to you more about it. We're always trying to do better and here's my email address,'" Liz says.

She also reads Google reviews when she's looking up a business for herself and has learned that it's essential to keep your Google Business page current. Your Google Business page doesn't go away; instead, it looks dated.

"Taking control of your page allows you to control the message and allows you to respond to any reviews that perhaps aren't flattering or perhaps caught you on a bad day. For me, it's another piece of our overall marketing strategy."

She continues, "I think it humanizes us as a local business. I respond to a review and I'm the manager of this small family business that my in-laws own. I have a specific voice and I'm allowed to know I have the license to say whatever I'm going to say in my voice—it's a human voice."

## Buy Ads to Drive Traffic

In the early days of analytics and Google ads, more businesses needed their web designer or marketing consultant to handle the clunky setup of Google Adwords. Google has now made it easier for small businesses to take control of their ad spend. According to Google, your Google ad word campaign helps customers find your garden center on Google maps and searches. You only pay for the clicks you get that take the customer back to your website or any calls you receive from your Google My Business page.

You also have control when you send out those ads. Cassie Debrosse says, "It's a time-consuming process to build your Google ads so that they will be successful for you. In my previous positions, I've used Google ads and they have generated thousands of interactions—not only online, but phone calls and in-person."

What are you waiting for? Get your free Google Business page set up today so your customers can find you on Google Search and Google Maps. **GP**

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