Google is about to revolutionize the way consumers find real estate agents

Clear your cookies. Delete your browsing history. Switch to Incognito. Google is poised to bring the power of aggregation to real estate.

First, a little history.

If you've worked in digital marketing since 2016, you remember when Google used to sell Sidebar Ads on the side of search results. These ads didn't perform nearly as well as the ads at the top of the search results, and for good reason: the ads at the top of the page came before the organic results and had a fighting chance; the ads on the side competed directly with organic search results, and they were off-center, so they lost most of the time.

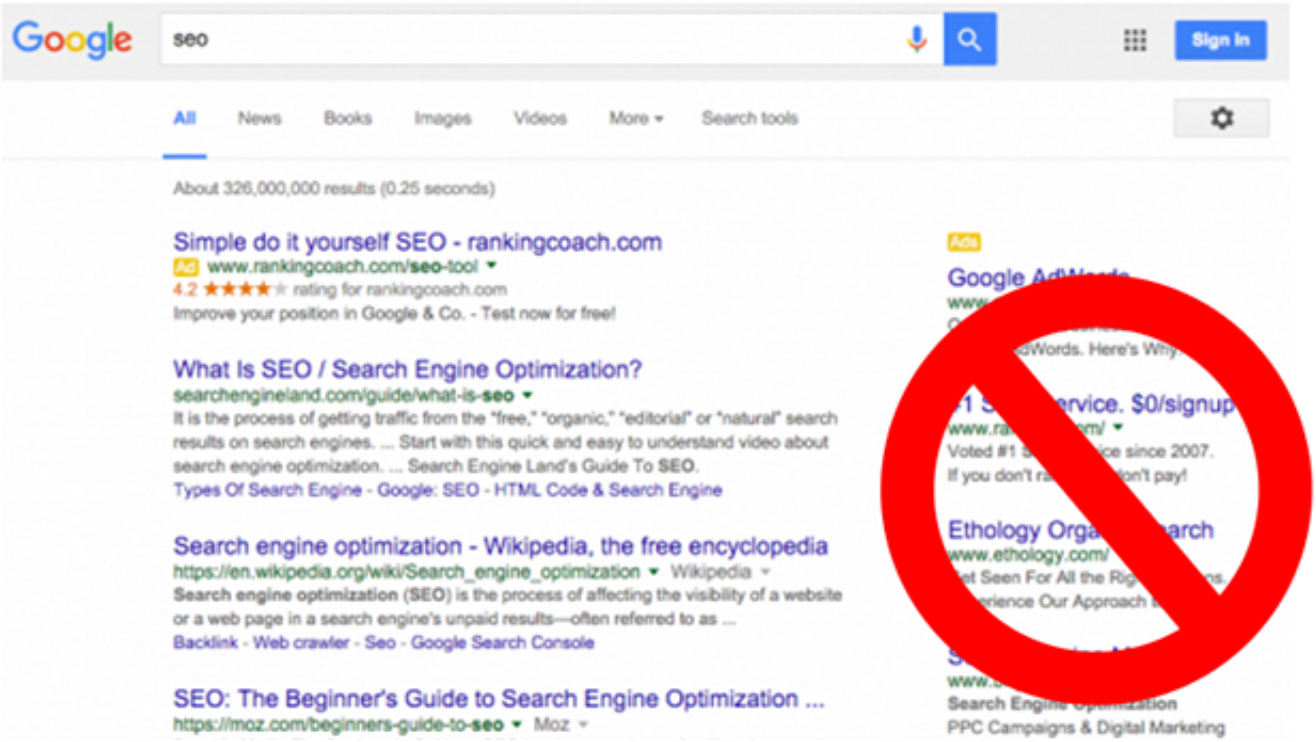
Google had a decision to make: what to do with the side of the page? White space, after all, represents a surfeit of opportunity.

If Google were one of those companies that sought to bilk consumers and advertisers out of every last ounce of trust and penny to boot, it would have stayed the course. Advertisers would have continued to buy ads — that's what advertisers do. But at some point, some Silicon Valley David would have challenged Googliath, and won.

Google is and always has been a purpose-driven brand, though — even before it was fashionable to be so. Its purpose: to connect consumers to accurate, relevant information as quickly as possible. This isn't some altruistic sentiment. It's good for business.

Every data point Google had, along with some plain old-fashioned intuition, suggested 'relevant' was becoming more and more synonymous with 'local.' For example, mobile searches including 'near me' grew 900% from 2015 to 2017. At the same time, big box brands and large corporations had the budgets to afford SEM and SEO teams that could out-bid, out-optimize, out-backlink, and out-metadata local businesses, thereby securing all the most prominent positions in search results.

Bye bye Sidebar Adwords. *Enter stage right:* Google My Business.



Pizza and real estate (stick with me)

You know what Google My Business is, even if the name is unfamiliar. Two to three years from now internet scholars (yes, they exist) will cite it as the most significant innovation to the search engine since… the search engine. Marketers everywhere will herald Google My Business as more integral than websites, business cards, and social media. (Side bet: Bing will soon copy GMB if it hasn't already).

Google My Business gives local businesses a free, large spread on the right-hand side of the page when a consumer searches for them directly.

This ensures that when I enter Pizza Paradiso into the search bar while taking a break from my book in my Georgetown flat, I find Pizza Paradiso easily, expediting my Friday night reservation rather than being intercepted by Domino's or Papa John's or getting frustrated by not finding Pizza Paradiso's website because it's buried in the organic results far down the page.

Problem solved: If someone wants to find your business, she'll find your business. Thanks, Google.

Google allows businesses to load their profile with contact information (address, website, phone number, etc), photos, Tweet-like content posts, FAQs, and more. Profiles appear as pins on Google Maps and gather consumer reviews because online reviews are now the number one source for inspiring consumer trust. Google has quietly become the most trusted review source on the internet.

On top of direct searches, Google My Business has enormous ramifications on broader consumer searches. When I search for 'best pizza near me,' Google knows I don't want Papa John's. I want Pizza Paradiso or Two Sisters or Paisano's. That's why Google introduced the humbly-named Google Three-Pack, and thus we come to that aggregation I mentioned at the beginning.

Using algorithmic magic — including review frequency and rating, geography, popularity, content frequency, and a bunch of factors we're not privy to — Google computes and presents the three most relevant businesses to me in a map-based search with listings underneath, effectively creating a local marketplace. I find Pizza Paradiso, &Pizza, and Paisano's in the Three-Pack. I can expand my options by tapping 'More Places' to discover Curry & Pie and iL Canale. I can compare reviews, business hours, cost, and proximity to my location in a single view. Adios, Papa Juan!

And here is why this matters. While restaurants are a relatable use case, Google intends to do this for all small businesses, including real estate.

It’s a virtuous circle: consumers get to the information they want faster, small businesses get greater exposure, and Google gets access to small businesses and can then sell them ads. Oh yeah, Google also sells ads in the Three-Pack. (Side bet #2: this will soon be Google’s top performing ad unit.)

To date, mainly brokerages have taken advantage of Google My Business for the real estate vertical, as opposed to agents. But that’s about to change, and fast, because Google knows that when I work with an agent to buy or sell a home, my experience isn’t defined by Keller Williams or Long & Foster or Coldwell Banker, even if they have local offices. The majority of my experience is defined by the agent herself.

Real estate is also one of the few verticals uniquely positioned to take on Google My Business at the individual level since real estate agents are independent contractors as opposed to employees.

Agents should be less concerned about their websites, Facebook, Twitter, and all the other social accoutrement that encompasses the status quo of an online presence. Throw out the playbook, burn it, recycle it if that’s your thing — Google My Business will soon be the single most important piece of content for the real estate agent’s digital footprint.

It will also take a huge bite out of word-of-mouth referrals. Since 2016, Google observed 92% growth in searches for “best real estate agent,” (Source: Google Data, US, 2018 vs. 2017) and a 61% increase in searches for “homes for sale near me.” (Source: Google Internal Data 2018 vs 2017)

Agents should rejoice that Google has committed to digitizing the real estate agent marketplace. It means more traffic and leads directly to your businesses and less stolen traffic from the Zillows of the world. If you’re an agent, you need to claim your profile… right now. If you’re a broker, urge your agents to do this today.

Now let’s get pizza.

Source: click here