Local SEO Checklist
by Tim Capper

A comprehensive guide for local SEO specialists
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Introduction

No matter how many “common rules” and “universal laws” of SEO have been invented over the years, certain tasks require a unique approach.

At SEMrush, we use your feedback as the main source of insights and ideas for our future tools. We thoroughly analyse our customers’ workflow so that the tools we build are of maximum value to their users.

These days, as SERP features are gaining more and more traction and starting to dominate search results, local SEOs are facing a new challenge: how to get into the Local Pack. In order to help them to do this and to help the marketers that are new to local SEO, we have teamed up with a great expert from the UK, Tim Capper, to create a solution that will help local SEOs succeed.

**Tim Capper** is a local SEO specialist and Google My Business Top Contributor. Tim is the owner of Online Ownership, a UK-based marketing agency which offers bespoke local SEO services tailored to businesses’ needs.

When Tim is not working, you can find him in the Google My Business forums giving advice to business owners and marketers and in the SEMrushChat, where he regularly participates.

Tim didn’t just inspire us to develop new features, he also helped us to write this comprehensive guide on the principles of local SEO, and specifically about getting into the Local Pack. While his ideas are bright, they are also based on his extensive experience in promoting local businesses across the UK.
Who is this guide for

This guide is for local SEO specialists and other online marketers who dream about conquering Local SEO, winning the Local Packs, and getting as many local traffic as it gets.

What is this guide about?

With Tim Caper’s help, we have gathered all the information about Local Pack, a Google SERP feature that grants local businesses unique online visibility, and we provide instant tips on how to get a business featured in top positions there.

Don’t expect it to be a quick hack: any search optimisation requires time and a lot of effort to bring about substantial results. But with the help of this guide and SEMrush tools you won’t be shooting in the dark.

You will learn:

- What are Local Packs and why you should get into it
- What are local citations, why they are important, and how to manage them
- How to optimize your website for local customers
- How to track your results in your exact location
What is local pack and why bother?
What is local pack and why bother?

Search engines use location to provide a better user experience. Gone are the days when you searched for “Emergency Plumber” and got a selection of results ranging across the country. Now, search engines use location based data (IP addresses and geo location) to provide a better search result.

By optimising for local you can take advantage of search engines’ local intent for better visibility for the business within the search results.

Searching for a specific business or service in a location triggers what is called a Local Pack. This is a list of businesses that provide a service or product within the local area and adds an additional layer to the search results.

There are several types of local pack, but they mostly contain the same blocks of information and do not differ substantially. We’ll be talking about two types: Local Teaser and Local Pack (or Local Finder). Their main difference is that Local Teaser does not have links, which complicates tracking your presence in them. We’ll discuss tracking your results in the last chapter.

Work on all of the SERP elements together!

By combining local SEO with your search marketing mix and bringing all the elements together you can dominate the search result landscape.
Types of local packs

Local Teaser (sometimes also referred to as Local Snack Pack)

This is a local 3-pack for dining, hospitality, and entertainment businesses. Results have a photo, no phone number, and no links to the website, but if you click on one of the results, you will see a map featuring more businesses and an extended card of the selected business, with a link to their site.

Local Pack (or Local Finder)

This is the most commonly used type of Local Pack: a list of three (can be also two or four) businesses with their contact details and other valuable information.

Beneath or beside the map, which is displayed on the Google search page, is the Name of Business, Address of Business, Phone Number of Business (NAP), unless marked as a Service Area Business (SAB), in which case only town and county (state) are displayed. Other information may be included, such as business hours, star rating, etc.
How to get into the Local Pack

In Local Packs, Google shows business listings, not websites, so to be featured in a Local Pack, you need to get a Google My Business page.

Also, it is assumed by many SEO pros that to get into the Local Pack you should be ranked within the top 10 results for your local search query, which implies a good share of website optimisation.

Here is what you should do to get your business featured in the Local Pack:

1. Manage your business listings
   - Create your Google My Business page
   - Claim your Google My Business listing
   - Verify your listing
   - Optimise your listing
     - Fill in business info
     - Select correct category
     - Add pictures
   - Manage citations

2. Optimize your website
   - Perform site audit
   - Optimise for local
     - Integrate NAP into the website
     - Obtain locally relevant backlinks
     - Add structured data markup

3. Track your results
   - Create a rank tracking campaign
   - Track for keywords with local modifiers
   - Add local areas and different devices
   - Track locally for keywords with no local modifiers
Creating and managing your business listings
Create, claim and verify your Google My Business listing

The Google business page is what appears within the Local Pack in organic searches and in Google Maps. Without a Google My Business page your business will not have a presence in Local Pack or Local Maps results.

Check to see if you have an unclaimed business listing. If you do, then claim it and verify it.

If you do not have a Google Business listing, then create a Google Business page — [https://www.google.com/business/](https://www.google.com/business/)

If you are a service area business, then make sure you select “I serve customers at their location”. Then select your service area and/or a service area radius.

In both cases make sure that your NAP (Name of Business, Address of Business, Phone number of Business) are correct. It will be crucial when you start optimising for local search.

**TOP TIP:** Use the same Google account that has your website’s Google Analytic and Google Search Console.
Optimise your business listing

Once your business listing is verified, you can optimise it and start taking advantage of its benefits.

Log into your Dashboard here: https://business.google.com/manage/

Select the Business and click Manage Location.

Business info

A proper and detailed business description is key to being a match to the relevant user search queries.

**TOP TIP:** Don’t skip fields. Try adding as much valuable information about your business as possible. Be thorough. Wrong business hours or fake pictures can harm your business’s reputation.

**Category**

Refine the category if available. This is one of the most important business descriptions, and allows Google to match your business to a search query.

**Reviews**

View and respond to reviews. Some businesses have a special review management policy, which allows them to control their online reputation.

**Business Hours**

Add business hours, making sure that these match the hours listed on your website. Pay special attention if you have several locations with different working hours.

**URLs**

Depending on the type of business you have selected, there will either be a single element for your website’s URL or multiple offerings such as Menu URL, Order ahead URL and Reservation URL.
Photos
A picture is worth a thousand words and images play a very important part in the decision-making process by customers. Again this section needs to be monitored as users are able to add images to your listing via Maps.

Insights
The Insights section provides some information on where customers found your listing and what action they took.

Business Attributes
These may not be immediately available to you, but as data is built up about your business they will become available. You should regularly check these, as they are crowd sourced via Google Maps and do have the tendency to be incorrect.

Posts
Creating a post allows you to publish events, products and services directly and instantly in search and Maps.
Managing Business Citations

A citation is essentially a business profile of some description on a website other than your own. Typically you will find citations on business directory type websites, such listings as Yelp or Localeze, but your business info can also be present in maps, apps, search engines, voice assistants, and other intelligent services.

They may be paid citations or free ones. Each citation will consist of, at a minimum, the business name, address, contact details and, more often than not, a link to the official business website. Some directories will allow a short business description, additional information like business hours, and some of the better ones have calling functionality.

Important When Building Citations

Citations are a local search ranking factor, so it is critical that you keep your citations correct and up-to-date across all business listings. To rank well, it is crucial that you have your NAP consistent across all citations (Name of Business, Address of Business, Phone Number of Business).

Many of the maps, apps, and directories are constantly crawling for the most up-to-date information, which means you might find the listings you’ve just updated have changed back to incorrect information.

Since citations are external links pointing to your website, they fall within Google webmaster guidelines. Concentrate on relevant high authority sites rather than several of low quality citations which could harm your site.
Business Listing Management

As stated before, you have to regularly check if your business info stays correct and updated. Checking this manually can be tricky, especially if your business has more than one location.

For the US based businesses, SEMrush offers a solution that can save countless hours checking and updating your business details. All you have to do is input the data and find the location:

How SEMrush helps
- Listing Management tool

Check your business data

The Listing Management tool covers 50+ directories including Yelp, Foursquare, TripAdvisor, Facebook, Apple Maps, Yahoo, Bing, Alexa, and more:
To distribute your info and correct all issues you need to have a paid SEMrush subscription, and purchase a location for $20 a month. This will get you an extended list of business directories, and will automate the whole citation management for you.

If you want to put in some additional information (e.g. special offers, business hours, etc.) or if your business relocates to a new address or changes phone number, you will be able to edit your data through a simple dashboard:
Optimising your website for local search
After you make sure your business listings are in order, the next big step is to optimise your website for local search queries.

To do that, you need to understand how Google ranks websites in the local SERPs (and listings in the Local Pack).

### Google Local Ranking Factors

Google states that the main factors that influence a site’s position in the Local Pack are:

- **Relevance**, or how well a local listing matches what someone is searching for. Adding complete and detailed business information can help the user better understand your business and will match your website to relevant search results.

  A large part of this cannot be influenced because Google knows where your business is located (as you’ve stated your address in the listing), but this can be overcome with properly optimised service area pages or business location within the website and structured data markup.

- **Distance**, or, just like it sounds, how far each potential search result is from the location term used in a search. If you don’t specify a location in your search, Google will calculate the distance based on what they know about your location.

- **Prominence**, or how well-known or prominent a business is. This is based on the information Google has about a business from across the web (like links, articles, and directories). Some places are more prominent in the offline world, and Google tries to reflect this online as well.
For example, famous museums, landmark hotels, or well-known store brands that are familiar to many people are also likely to be more prominent in search results. We can certainly influence this, initially with business citations and then over time with relevant inbound links and online references to the business site.

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Basically, what Google says is that in order to rank high on the local SERP (and possibly get featured in the Local Pack), your website should be highly relevant to the search query, your business should be in direct proximity to the searcher and it should have authority both online and offline.

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However, when chasing local ranks don’t forget about the general SEO requirements: the website’s health, optimised content, and quality backlinks.

In this chapter, we collected the essential steps that you should take to optimise your website for local search.
Ensuring your website’s health

You have to perform a site audit to find and fix site issues, some of which are particularly serious for local websites.

SEMrush Site Audit has 120+ checks to your website’s health, sorted by severity (errors, warnings and notices), and grouped in thematic reports. We provide them in a prioritised list, putting the most crucial ones first.

These are the issues that require your attention first.

1. Crawlability

Nothing drives the search engines’ bots and users away from a website like broken links and 404 pages. Needless to say, a broken home page can cost you a good share of your profits.

The list of crawlability checks includes:

- 4xx errors
- 5xx errors
- Broken internal links
- Redirect chain and loops
- Broken external links
- Temporary redirects
- Internal links with no-follow attributes
- Too many on-page links
- www domain configured incorrectly
- External links with no-follow attributes

2. Page Speed

Local searches have better conversions because users that search locally generally have more interest in making a purchase or using a service. One could even say that local searchers are more impatient about getting a result. Spending extra time waiting while the website is loading is not what they want.
These are the checks that you should pay attention to as the issues they notify you of influence the page load speed:

- Large HTML size
- Slow page load speed
- Flash content used
- Frames used

Also, if you connect your Google Analytics account to Site Audit, you can prioritise the pages with the most page views per day and optimise them before others.

3. Images

Local searchers are very keen on images of a business. In fact, recent, high-quality images of a business or a product quite often sway a user’s opinion, even when another place may have more in its favour.

Watch out for the following notifications:

- Broken internal images
- Broken external images
- Missing alt attributes

If you are optimising for mobile devices, checking that all your pages have viewport tags and can scale for various screen sizes is imperative. If a page does not have a viewport meta tag, mobile browsers will not be able to find the optimised version of the page and will show the desktop version, with the font too small or too big for the mobile screen and the images jumbled. This will scare away your visitors and will worsen your rankings, especially considering Google’s concept of mobile-first indexing.

So, ensure you don’t have the following notification:

- Missing viewport tag
4. Internal and External links

Broken links are annoying, and they can also harm your site rankings. Watch out for the following issues:

- Broken internal links
- Broken external links
- Links with no-follow attributes
- Too many on-page links

5. Duplicate titles and descriptions

Remember relevancy? Duplicate titles and descriptions tell Google that two or more of your website’s pages are not unique, that is, they provide no additional value to the user. The following checks will notify you in case you have any duplications on your website:

- Duplicate content
- Duplicate title tags
- Duplicate h1 and title tags
- Duplicate meta descriptions

6. Security issues

If your clients can make purchases on your website, having an HTTPS version of your website is crucial.

Watch out for the following notifications:

- Non-secure page
- No redirects or canonicals to HTTPS URLs
- SSL certificate registered to an incorrect domain name
- Expiring or expired SSL certificate
- HTTPS pages lead to HTTP page
- Homepage does not use HTTPS encryption
Fixing errors that are making your site unusable is the most urgent thing. Once this is done, you can start thinking about optimising it specifically for local search.

Relevance, distance and prominence – remember? This is what we are going to be working on.

City and County in Landing Page Title

The City and County (State in US) should be in the landing page that you want to position in the search results. By including your city and county in your landing page title tag, you will be letting both search engines and human visitors know that your business serves and is located in a specific geographic location.

Quality and Authority of Inbound Links to Domain

We have already touched on this regarding citations. The quality and authority of a link pointing to your domain plays a part in your visibility in search results. The old adage ‘quality over quantity’ is very relevant in earning links that point to your domain.

A local business can earn links from a variety of sources: local and national media, local charity sites, local business citations, business associations, chambers of commerce, local high profile bloggers.

Our Backlink Audit tool allows you to check the toxicity of a group of backlinks. This is very convenient as you can take a look at a particular page’s backlinks, not just the whole domain, and analyse different parameters of the page backlink portfolio: the domains that refer to it, how many backlinks were lost and gained etc.
Physical Address in City of Search

A physical address in an area, city or county will greatly boost the relevance of that page for a search query.

Add the address to page or site and mark up with LocalBusiness schema markup (See Structured Data section). Local citations will also be using the address, creating a strong signal for that business and its locality.

For a single location business we recommend having all the contact details within the footer; this can include up to two locations. For a brand with nationwide stores you would have your locations page in the top navigation line and a footer link to the locations page.

Product and Service Keywords in Website URL

The URL for the product and service landing page should contain keywords (e.g. www.yoursite.com/your-keywords-here). Try to be consistent with the structure of your URLs.

City and County in Landing Page H1/H2 Tags

Ideally your main page H1 should include your name and overall service and the H2 would include your town and county. On a product-specific page the H1 would be the actual product / service and the H2 would ideally contain the area again.

City and County in Most/All Website Title Tags

By including your city and county (state) in your landing page title tag, you will be letting both search engines and human visitors know that your business serves and is located in a specific geographic location.
You can reinforce your location in Google and other search engines, and make it easy for customers to find your location by adding your Business Details sitewide. By adding the business details to a page, you can also mark up the details with structured data.

Check to see if your business type is supported, if it is not supported then use the LocalBusiness as default.

Using Local Business structured data markup

**Single Local Business Location:**

```html
<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "http://schema.org",
  "@type": "LocalBusiness",
  "image": "Image URL",
  "priceRange": "Price Range",
  "address": {
    "@type": "PostalAddress",
    "streetAddress": "First Line Address",
    "addressLocality": "Town",
    "addressRegion": "State",
    "postalCode": "Post Code"
  },
  "description": "Brief Description of Business",
  "name": "Name of Business",
  "openingHours": "Mo-Fr 09:00-17:00",
  "telephone": "0800 000 000",
  "email": "info@yourdomain",
  "url": "https://www.yourdomain.co.uk",
  "hasMap": "Short link direct from your GMB listing",
  "sameAs": [
    "Social media channel",
    "Social media channel"
  ]
}
</script>
```

You can find other examples of the structured data markup in the Appendix.
Tracking your results
Tracking your results

Local packs, just like other Google SERP features (and Google SERPs in general) are highly volatile. Ranking algorithms change, ranks drop, positions get lost, so it is important to monitor your website (and listing!) performance regularly in order to take action when necessary.

How to do it in SEMrush:

Position Tracking
Track your positions

In countrywide tracking, you would look at keywords that include the location modifier, as in ‘event venues London’, and in your region-specific query you would just be tracking ‘event venues’.

TIP: In SEMrush Positions Tracking, you can track locations by ZIP code.

In local SEO, organic and Local Pack positions are equally important and work hand in hand for a local business. If you are a hyperlocal business you can select to track in a specific area by ZIP code or track both nationally and locally.
Remember: a local user would not generally search with location modifier. Google also recently stated that search queries using local modifiers only equate to 52% of local search queries currently. This means that more and more users are realising that local results are returned based on IP and geo location and they don’t have to use it.

To see what keywords from your target keywords list have Local Packs on their SERPs and how you rank for them, you can apply the SERP Features filter and select Local Pack.

To check your ranks in Local Teaser, a type of Local Pack that doesn’t include a website, we’ve added the possibility of adding your business name to Position Tracking settings.

Tracking updates are by default displayed over 7 days but you can select different periods. You can also see all the Google Updates on your timeline, so that you can see how they influenced the rankings.
APPENDIX
Appendix

Brand with Two Local Business Locations

<script type='application/ld+json'>
{
  '@context': {
    '@vocab': "http://schema.org/"
  },
  '@graph': [
  {
    '@id': "https://yourwebsite.co.uk",
    '@type': "Organization",
    'name': "Your Organization",
    'url': "https://yourwebsite.co.uk",
    'logo': "https://yourwebsite.co.uk/wp-content/themes/yourwebsite-theme-v2.0/assets/gfx/logo-clean.svg",
    'sameAs': [
      "https://twitter.com/YourOrganization",
      "https://www.youtube.com/channel/YourOrganization",
      "https://www.facebook.com/YourOrganization"
    ],
  },
  {
    '@type': "RealEstateAgent",
    'parentOrganization': {
      'name': "Your Organization"
    },
    'name': "Your Organization Leeds",
    'description': "Your Organization Operating in Leeds",
    'image': "https://yourwebsite.co.uk/wp-content/themes/yourwebsite-theme-v2.0/assets/gfx/logo-clean.svg",
    'priceRange': "Monthly - Weekly Rental",
    'address': {
      '@type': "PostalAddress",
      'streetAddress': "3rd Floor Big House, 155 Big Street",
      'addressLocality': "Leeds",
      'addressRegion': "West Yorkshire",
      'postalCode': "LS1 5XX"
    }
  }
]
</script>
Service Area Local Business Structured Data

<script type="application/ld+json">
{
    "@context": "http://schema.org/",
    "@type": "TaxiService",
    "provider": {
        "@type": "LocalBusiness",
        "name": "Awesome Taxi",
        "telephone": "01244 421024",
        "email": "book@awesometaxi.co.uk",
        "url": "https://www.awesometaxi.co.uk/",
        "hasMap": "https://goo.gl/maps/YoUrTaXiSeRvIce",
        "priceRange": "Book Online or Request Quote",
        "address": {
            "@type": "PostalAddress",
            "streetAddress": "125 Greenish Drive",
            "addressLocality": "Chester",
            "addressRegion": "Cheshire",
            "postalCode": "CH4 8XX",
            "sameAs": [
                "https://plus.google.com/12534645756878010101",
                "https://twitter.com/AwesomeTaxi",
                "https://www.facebook.com/AwesomeTaxi",
                "https://www.linkedin.com/company/awesome-taxi-service",
                "https://www.primelocation.com/to-rent/branch/your-organization-bradford-32633/"
            ]
        }
    }
}
</script>
Hotel Structured Data + Star Rating

<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "http://schema.org",
  "@type": "Hotel",
  "starRating": { "@type": "Rating",
    "ratingValue": "5"},
  "priceRange": "Best Rate Available When Booking Direct",
  "address": {
    "@type": "PostalAddress",
    "streetAddress": "11 Street 5, Town, City",
    "addressLocality": "Province",
    "addressRegion": "Island name",
    "postalCode": "11111",
    "addressCountry": "Country"
  }
}</script>
Hotel Structured Data + Reviews + Reservations

<script type="application/ld+json">
{
   "@context": "http://schema.org",
   "@type": "Hotel",
   "starRating": { "@type": "Rating",
      "ratingValue": "5"},
   "priceRange": "Best Rate Available When Booking Direct",
   "address": {
      "@type": "PostalAddress",
      "streetAddress": "11 Street 5, Town, City",
      "addressLocality": "Province",
      "addressRegion": "Island name",
      "postalCode": "11111",
      "addressCountry": "Country"
   }
}
</script>
"aggregateRating": {
  "@type": "AggregateRating",
  "ratingValue": "4.4",
  "bestRating": "5",
  "ratingCount": "53"
},

"description": "Great Hotel on the beach",
"name": "Your Hotel Resort & Spa",
"alternateName": "Your Hotel Resort and Spa",
"alternateName": "Your Hotel City",
"alternateName": "Hotel Island",
"telephone": "+111 (0) 75 555 555",
"email": "mailus@yourhotel.com",
"url": "http://www.yourhotel.com/island/",
"sameAs": [ "https://plus.google.com/+yourhotelisland",
            "https://www.facebook.com/your.hotel",
            "https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g1151155-d115115-Reviews-Your_Hotel_Resort_Spa_Island_Town_City_Province.html"
        ],
  "hasMap": "https://goo.gl/maps/YoUrHoTEl"
},

"potentialAction":{
  "@type":"ReserveAction",
  "target":{
    "@type":"EntryPoint",
yourhoteldirect","actionPlatform":[
    "http://schema.org/IOSPlatform",
    "http://schema.org/AndroidPlatform"
  ]
  },
  "result":{
    "@type":"LodgingReservation",
    "name":"Book Now"
  }
}
</script>
Restaurant within a Hotel or Brand

<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "http://schema.org",
  "@type": "Restaurant",
  "servesCuisine": [
    "Thai",
    "Western"
  ],
  "priceRange": "Menu Items: USD 10 - USD 100",
  "address": {
    "@type": "PostalAddress",
    "streetAddress": "11 Street 5, Town, City",
    "addressLocality": "Province",
    "addressRegion": "Island name",
    "postalCode": "11111",
    "addressCountry": "Country"
  },
  "name": "Restaurant Name",
  "alternateName": "Restaurant",
  "telephone": "+111 (0) 75 555 556",
  "email": "mailus@yourhotel.com",
  "url": "http://www.yourhotel.com/island/restaurants/name/",
  "hasMenu": "http://www.yourhotel.com/island/restaurants/name/menu/",
  "hasMap": "https://goo.gl/maps/YoURrEsTaRAunT"
}

"branchOf":
{
  "@type": "Hotel",
  "url": "http://www.yourhotel.com/island/",
  "name": "Your Hotel Resort & Spa",
  "sameAs": [ "https://plus.google.com/+yourhotel",
    "https://www.facebook.com/hotel.island",
    "https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g1151155-d115115-Reviews-Your_Hotel_Resort_Spa_Island_Town_City_Province.html"
  ]
}
}
</script>
Using Event Markup for Visibility in Knowledge Panel

A business can take advantage of having their Events (multiple) displayed in the knowledge panel over and above their Google Posts.

The Festival of Summer
2017 ★
43 ★★★★★ 24 Google reviews
The Largest Festival in the UK

Address: Summer street, City, Country, XX1 2XX
Suggest an edit

Events
Fri 29 Sep
10:00
The Festival of Summer 2017

Event Schema is then broken down into more specific event types. Event markup is always being updated and added to:

- Business Event
- Children’s Event
- Comedy Event
- Dance Event
- Delivery Event
- Education Event
- Exhibition Event
- Festival
- Literary Event
- Food Event
- Music Event
- Publication Event
- Sale Event
- Screening Event
- Social Event
- Sports Event
- Theater Event
- Visual Arts Event
Basic Event Structured Data Markup

<script type="application/ld+json">
{
  "@context": "http://schema.org",
  "@type": "Event",
  "name": "The Festival of Summer 2017",
  "image": "http://www.festivalofsummer.co.uk/wp-content/themes/alt-fruity/dist/images/logo.png",
  "url": "http://www.festivalofsummer.co.uk/",
  "description": "The Largest Festival in the UK",
  "startDate": "2017-09-29T10:00",
  "endDate": "2017-09-29T16:30",
  "location": {
    "@type": "Place",
    "name": "The Festival of Summer 2017",
    "address": {
      "@type": "PostalAddress",
      "streetAddress": "Summer street",
      "addressLocality": "City",
      "addressRegion": "County",
      "postalCode": "XX1 2XX"
    }
  },
  "offers": {
    "@type": "Offer",
    "url": "http://www.festivalofsummer.co.uk/fairs/friday-29th-august-saturday-30th-august-2017/"
  }
}
</script>
We love your feedback — it helps us create amazing tools!

Recently, we've added a new tool to help local SEOs with the citations — Listing Management. Did you get a chance to check it out? What do you think? If you have any comments or ideas about the tool’s functionality, drop us a line at lm-feedback@semrush.com and we’ll use it to make the tool even better.