



NEAR MEDIA

Google and the Visual Future of Local Search

**Why you need to pay more attention to images —
to improve ranking, branding and conversions.**

Mike Blumenthal
Co-founder, Near Media

© 2022 Near Media LLC. All rights reserved.

Learn more about how Google's latest releases are impacting search performance by subscribing to our 3x weekly newsletter and weekly podcast at nearmedia.co/subscribe.

About Near Media

Founded by three veterans of the local marketing and technology industry, Near Media offers thoughtful, unbiased analysis of the players and trends at the intersection of search, social, and commerce.

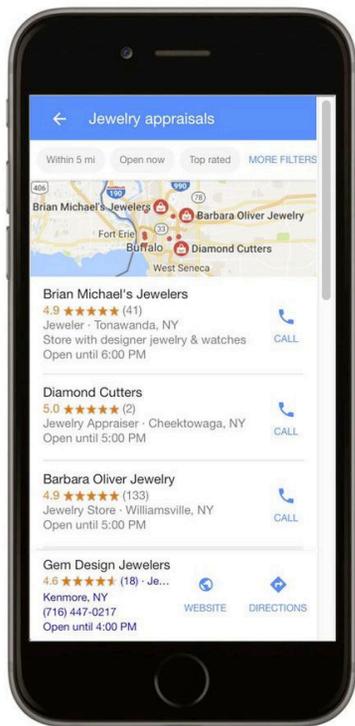
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 4 The evolving role of images in search
- 16 Google's increasing understanding of image content
- 23 Optimizing images for conversion and ranking

One of the big, obvious trends in Local over the past five years has been Google's increasing use of images in search results (SERP). Google has expanded the amount of space devoted to images, the number of images, increased their sizes and, with advanced image recognition capability, made the images more relevant to the searcher.

With Google's increasing understanding of image contents, the entities within, labels, logos, facial sentiments and more, marketers and businesses now need to be crafting images for both the user and for Google. Businesses need to lean in and take advantage of images to improve rankings, conversions, and branding.

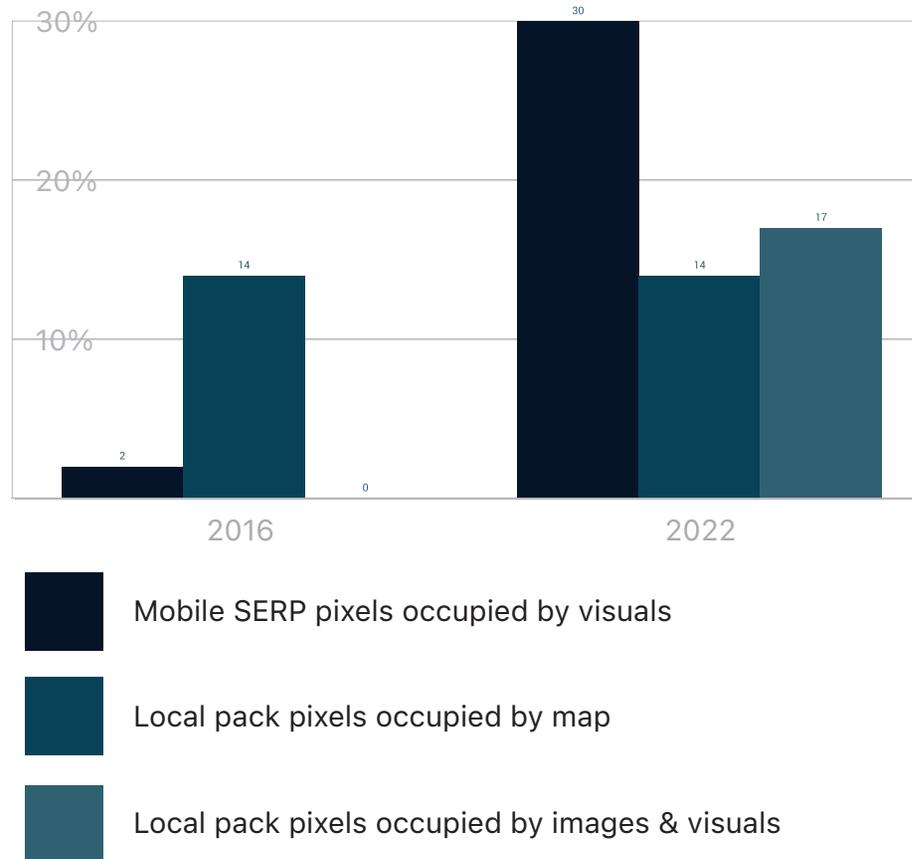


PART ONE

The evolving role of images in search

At left, a screenshot of the Local Pack in 2016. On the right, a screenshot of the Local Pack in 2022.

Growth in visual elements on Google mobile SERPs, 2016 - 2021



Google tests every change to search results with great care. The fact that images have taken up an increasing percentage of the SERP, indicates users are responding positively.

One way to get a sense of Google's priorities is to break down mobile search results by the area occupied by images, visuals (Maps, stars etc), text and white space. If you analyze the full length of a typical intent-driven mobile search result you will find as much as 30% of the page occupied by images plus visuals, as opposed to text and white space. This is up from just taking up 2% of the mobile SERP in late 2016. This overall number is similar to the amount of space occupied by images and visuals in the Local Pack alone. In its default view 31%, comprised of images plus visuals (14% images, 17% Map).

Dynamically-expanding images in the Local Pack

Scanlon Jewelers
4.9 ★★★★★ (87)
Jewelry store · 5735 Main St
Open · Closes 7PM
In-store shopping · In-store pickup



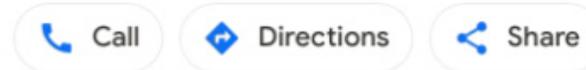
Barbara Oliver Jewelry
4.9 ★★★★★ (219)
Jeweler · 5820 Main St #311
Open · Closes 5PM
In-store shopping · Curbside pickup



Amy's Fine Jewelry
4.7 ★★★★★ (85)
Jewelry store · 5870 Main St
Open · Closes 5PM
Seen by shoppers: jewellery



Scanlon Jewelers
4.9 ★★★★★ (87)
Jewelry store · 5735 Main St
Open · Closes 7PM
In-store shopping · In-store pickup



When scrolled over and touched, the images in the Local Pack dynamically expand both in size and number.

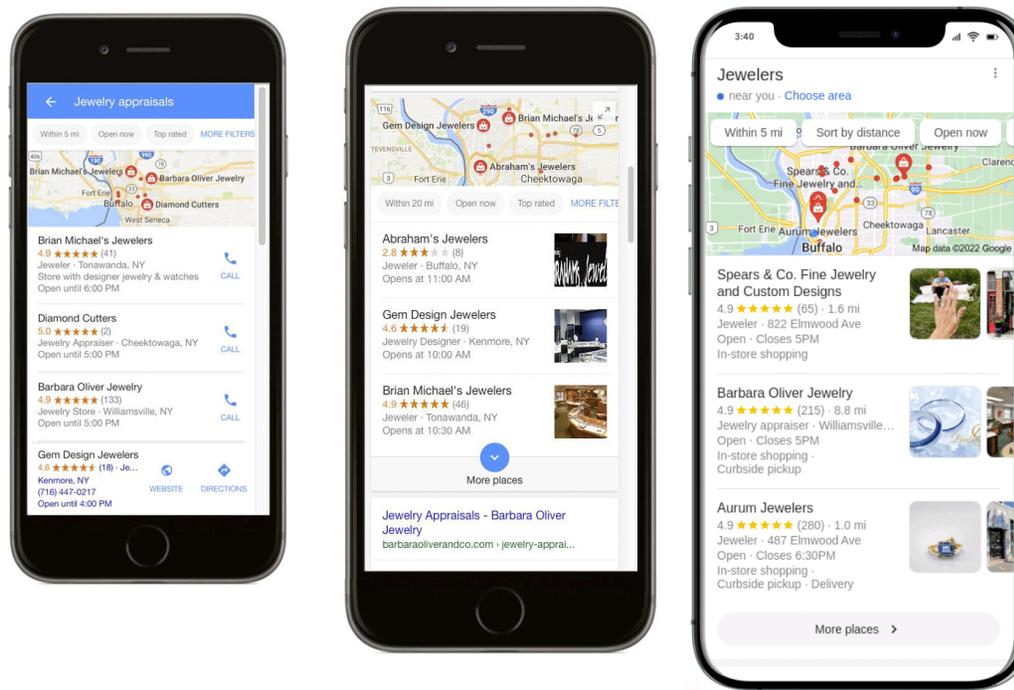
In the new Local Pack, introduced in December of 2021, when the images are scrolled over they dynamically expand. When doing so, images occupy, by themselves, a full 36% of the screen. That is up from 0% in 2016. This trend started

in mobile but has recently been pushed to the ever more visual SERPs on the desktop as well. It is likely that the desktop results will soon mirror the many mobile image features currently displaying.

Images in the local pack

The amount of space allocated to images in the Local Pack is increasing with every revolution of the train. Prior to March 2017 there were no images in the Local Pack. That month, Google rolled out a Pack upgrade where a single image was included in the results for shopping oriented categories. In December 2021 Google added a carousel of images. The default single image has been replaced with 1.5 larger images and, when the carousel is activated, images expand both in number and size. With this expansion, a single business's pack images now occupy almost 5X as much Pack area as they did throughout 2018 and 2019.

Evolution of the Local Pack, 2016-2022



The evolving Local Pack in 2016, 2017 and 2022 as images become more prominent.

Image thumbnails in organic results

 <https://barbaraoliverandco.com> › en...

Unique Engagement Rings - Barbara Oliver Jewelry - Buffalo NY



Barbara Oliver Jewelry specializes in unique engagement rings and wedding bands. Select from our showroom of

 <https://andrewsjewelers.com> › catalog

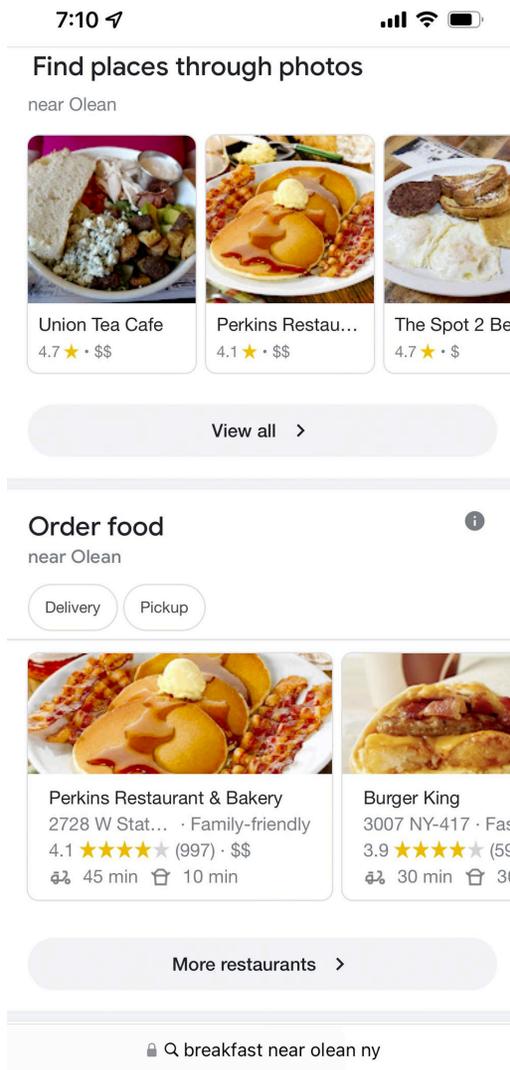
Engagement Rings For Sale in Buffalo NY - Andrews Jewelers



Images in organic search results

It isn't just the Local Pack getting the increased image treatment. Thumbnail images, first seen in mobile organic results in late 2017, have expanded in many situations from a single 208 x 208 pixel image (43,264 total pixels) to either 3 images or a much larger image that occupies an area of 368(w) x 164(h) pixels (60,352 total pixels). Just that change consumes 50% more space than before. Recently, thumbnails were added to the desktop search results as well.

New image-based SERP units



New image search results units

Find places through photos

Google continues to roll out and extensively test new universal image results embedded into the main search results. The "Find Places through photos" feature (previously known as Search by photos), was first seen in the fall of 2019.

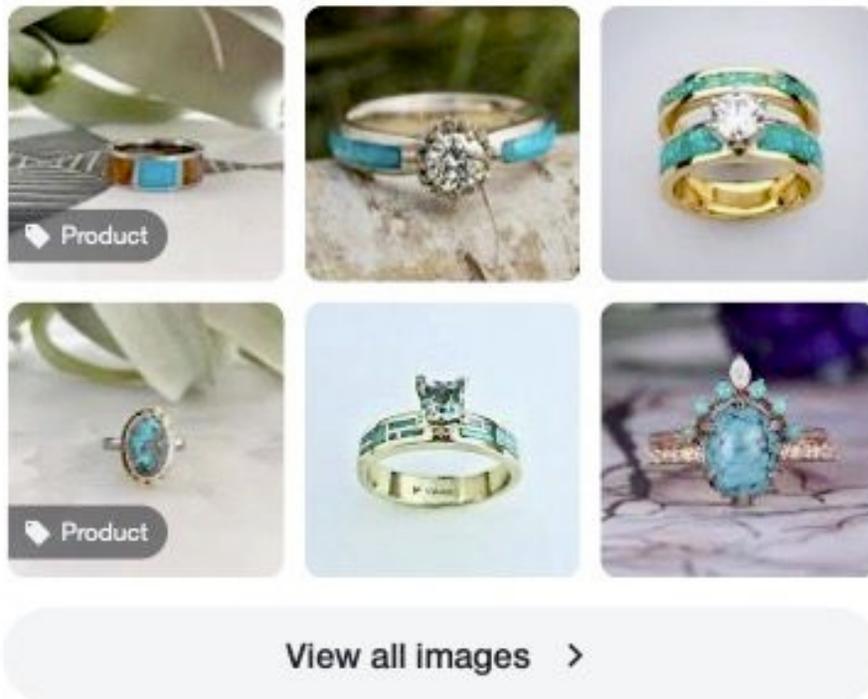
Order food

The newish, highly visual "Order food" unit sat just below it in a recent mobile search for breakfasts near me.

Find Places through photos (aka Search by photos) is a totally visual, image based local search paradigm that is very Pinterest-like. The view all option takes you to a larger panel of images before you get to the business profile.

Image-based product SERP units

Images



A different unit is composed of images from images.google.com. If they were scraped from a local e-commerce site and annotated with "product" they will take you to the local business website for purchase.

Local product images

The local product images panel that is e-commerce enabled, first seen in the spring of 2021, continues to gain ground for product focused intent-driven local searches. All of these new units move away from link based text results to a primarily image-based way of seeing your results and choosing a next step.

Local brand SERP images

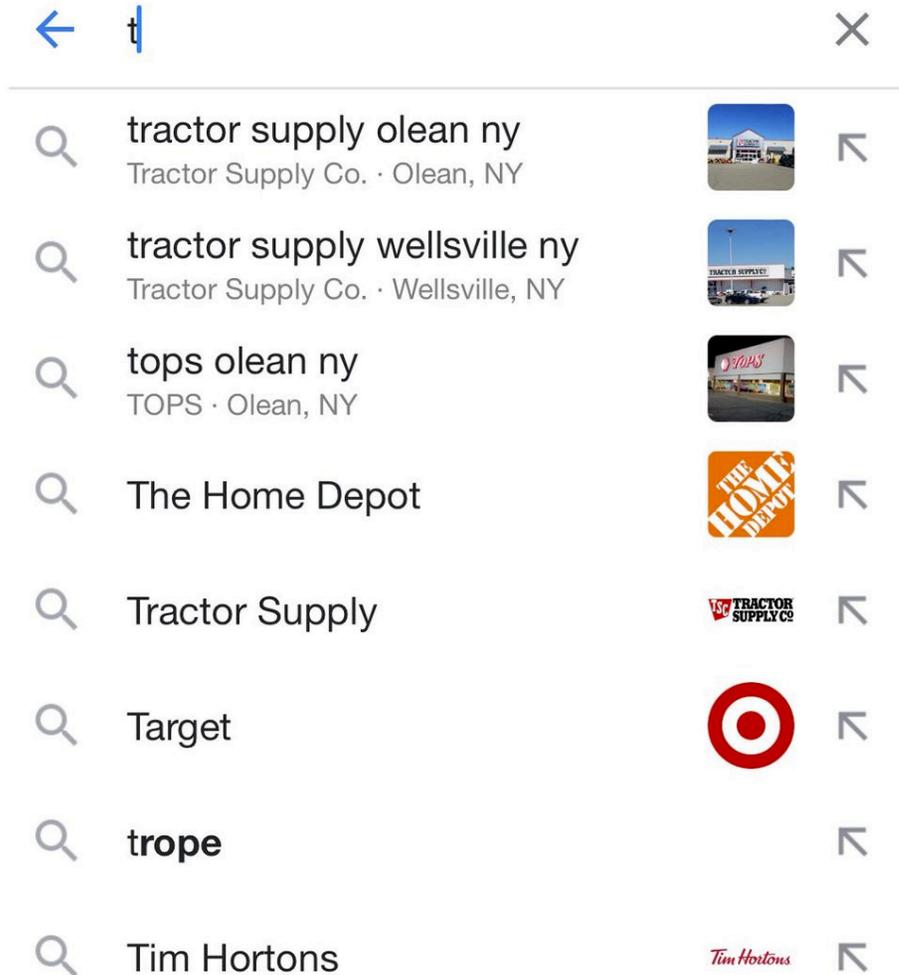
Google Business Profile images

For local brand searches Google has increased the visibility of photos in the main mobile search results by including a large carousel of recent images as well as images from products added through the Google Business Profile.

Carousel of Google Business Profile images

The screenshot displays the Google Business Profile for Barbara Oliver Jewelry. At the top, there are navigation tabs for Overview, Reviews, Photos, and Services. Below these is a status indicator: 'Usually responds in a day'. The 'About' section includes a 'Health & safety' notice: 'Mask required · Staff wear masks · More details'. The main content is a carousel of five images: 1) A woman and a man in a jewelry store. 2) The interior of a jewelry store. 3) A diamond ring. 4) A large, ornate gold necklace. 5) A gold bracelet with diamonds. Below the carousel is a 'Products' section with three product thumbnails and a search bar containing 'barbara oliver jewelry'.

Images and logos in search suggestions



Search suggestions

Brand images and logos are even present these days in search suggestions.

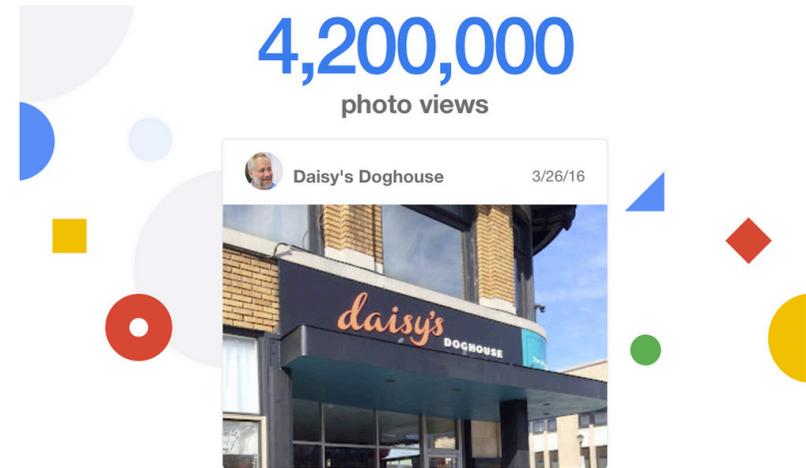
Your most visible images?

Google is capturing more user attention and generating more conversions directly within local search results. In some cases 90% of a business's high intent leads come directly from the Google local results and never make it to the business website. But even in situations where the searcher's questions can't be answered with the Google Business Profile, images are playing an ever-increasing role in driving website visits and from there onto website conversions.

Regardless of the consumer journey, images that the consumer sees on Google are some of the most widely seen images for your business.

Five years ago, I captured the storefront image of Daisy's Doghouse in Buffalo (pictured at right) and uploaded the image as part of Google's Local Guide program.

High-visibility consumer image example



It has remained the business's profile image and as of last month was seen over 4.2 million times. This is the image seen on a brand search, in the Local Finder, in People Also Search for results, search suggestions and Google Maps. Amazingly, this is a tiny dog spa in a secondary neighborhood, in a small(ish) city, and yet it is viewed almost a million times per year. It's unlikely that images on the Daisy's Doghouse website get viewed anywhere near that much.

High-visibility consumer image example



As a Local Guide, I uploaded this cockeyed image of Walgreens at the same time as the Daisy's Doghouse image and it too, despite its poor quality, has retained its position as Walgreens' (Hertel Avenue location) cover photo.

Walgreens actively manages its local listings with Covid updates, health & safety info, online ordering and integrated inventory and yet has not added any images in five years.

Google's multiple image sources

Google loves to triangulate data to fill its coffers and that is especially true with photos. But there is a darker side to Google's use of images. To satisfy their increasing desire for ever more local business photos, Google will take images wherever and whenever it can get them and will actively encourage searchers, reviewers and Local Guides to submit images for locations that they visit – or are even near.

Google also has a love for current images. The most recent images, regardless of quality or source, will often trump your old (and from Google's POV) stale images.

It is hard for a brand to control their images – and their image – on Google, given the company's willingness to accept just about any image from anybody and prioritize it based on recency. But it is downright impossible for a brand to control their image if they don't even bother to try.

PART ONE SUMMARY

Images have become increasingly prominent in Google's mobile SERPs -- going from just 2% of pixels in the typical mobile SERP in 2016 to 31% (and as high as 36%) by the end of 2021.

Google pulls images from a variety of sources: webpages, Image Search, Shopping results, Google Business Profiles, and of course from everyday users of Google and Local Guides.

In the next part of this report, we'll see how Google's increased understanding of images has paralleled their increased SERP visibility.

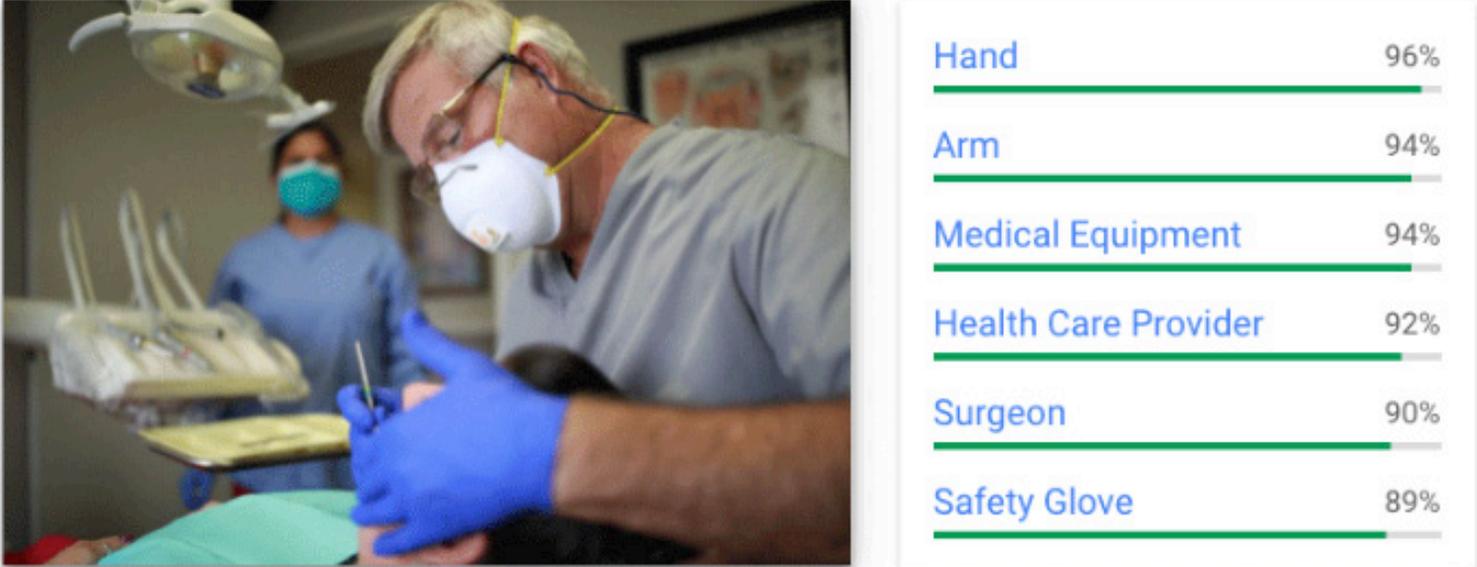


PART TWO

Google's increasing understanding of image content

Google Cloud Vision API image example

Faces Objects **Labels** Properties Safe Search



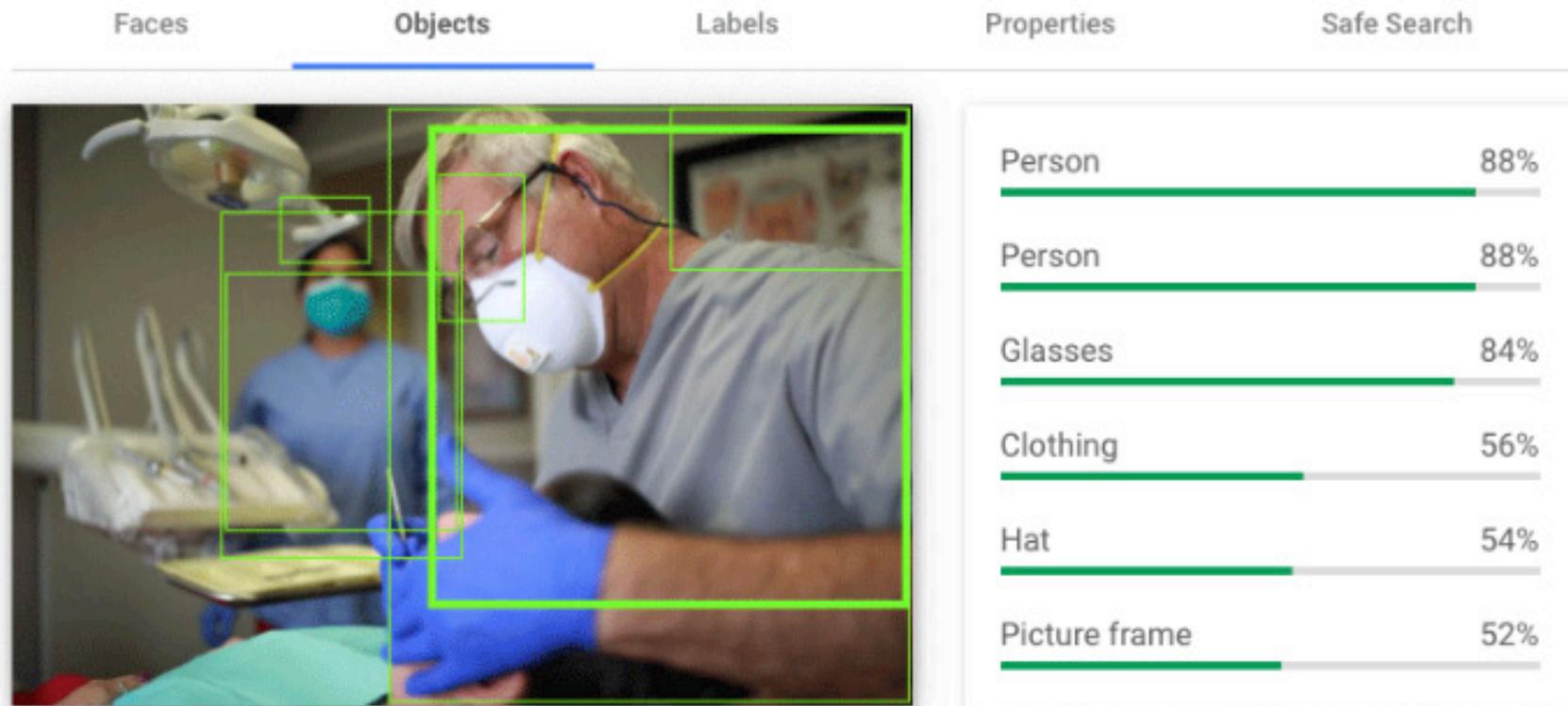
The image shows a surgeon in an operating room, wearing a white surgical mask, blue gloves, and glasses. The surgeon is focused on a patient. In the background, another person in blue scrubs and a teal mask is visible. The interface includes a navigation bar with tabs for 'Faces', 'Objects', 'Labels', 'Properties', and 'Safe Search'. The 'Labels' tab is selected, displaying a list of labels with their corresponding confidence scores and progress bars.

Hand	96%
Arm	94%
Medical Equipment	94%
Health Care Provider	92%
Surgeon	90%
Safety Glove	89%

The underpinnings of Google's photo AI were established as a feature within Google Plus. Google Photos was spun out of Plus and became a stand-alone product in May 2015, clearly demonstrating Google's increasing ability to understand image

content. The Google Cloud Vision API beta, making Google's sophisticated image ML/AI available to developers, was rolled out in late 2015. Google Lens, demonstrating Google's ability to search using an image, was announced 18 months later.

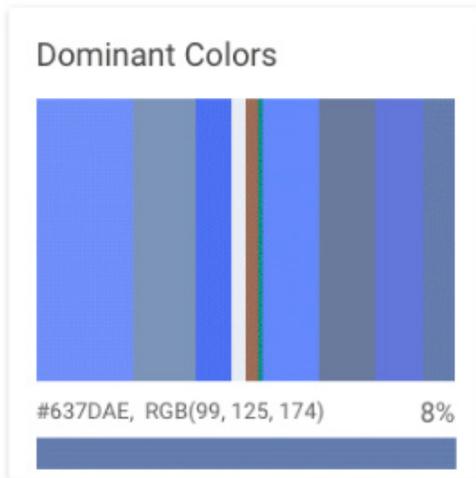
Google Cloud Vision API image example



In late 2020, Google announced that “more than 4 trillion photos are stored in Google Photos, and every week 28 billion new photos and videos are uploaded.” With an endless supply of new photos to feed to their ML, increasing use of Lens

to understand user queries and an active Cloud Vision AI developer community, Google can continue to train and refine image analysis to parse image content for ever greater detail.

Google Cloud Vision API image example

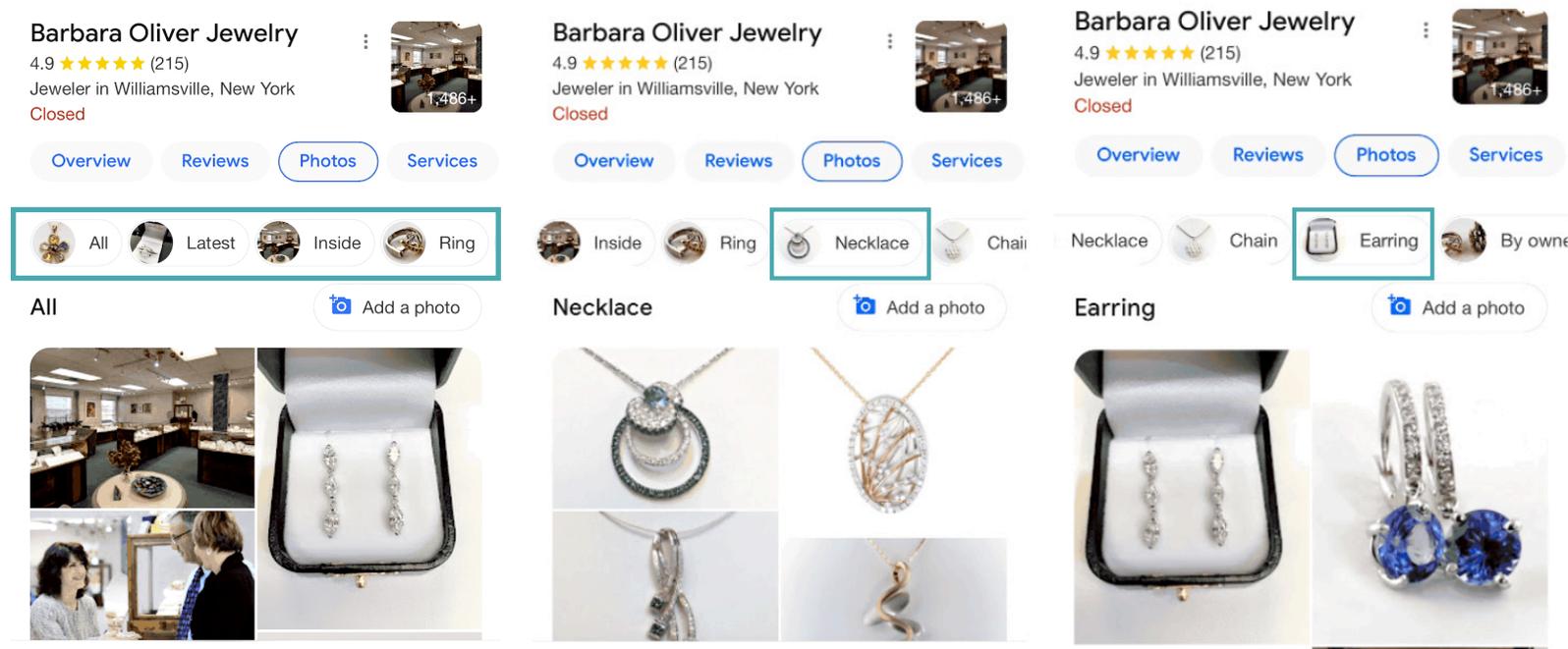


When you examine the results of an image analyzed by the Google Cloud Vision API, you get an idea of the depth of Google's "understanding" of photos. It can identify prominent natural or human-made landmarks, assess facial expressions, detect objects, identify entities, understand logos, colors and text as well as determine how likely the image is to be "inappropriate." Cloud Vision can not only recognize clothing in an image and label colors, patterns and garment types but evaluate the nuances of a person's clothing style.

It has long been said that an image is worth a thousand words, although there is a growing body of research indicating it can also be more emotive than words. Google seems to get that from an image and more. For Google an image is not only worth a thousand search phrases but also worth several hundred entities, multiple emotions and even a few semantic triples. This is all directed toward improving search results.

Segmenting images based on content

Example of image segmentation in Google Business Profiles



Google is increasingly leveraging AI/ML image analysis to improve its understanding of local entities. A small example of this is reflected in the classification of images by product type within the Google Business Profile (GBP).

This product segmentation allows the user to easily look at images in the category of their choosing. This feature seems to be based on the quantity of categorical level images, not the business's use of a product feed.

Google matching images to intent

Beyond categorization, more importantly, Google is matching images to search intent. While this is true throughout the SERP, it's particularly noticeable in local results.

If you search for *engagement rings Williamsville*, for example, Google will attempt to show local businesses' images of engagement rings. If you search for *pearl earring Williamsville NY*, Google will swap in earring images if the business or consumers have uploaded them. What shows infrequently at best, on these high intent searches, is the business profile image. So don't think your profile image will be the main image users see.

Example of image matching to query in Local Pack results

Pearl Earrings
near Williamsville · Choose area

Open now · Top rated

Amy's Fine Jewelry
Barbara Oliver Jewelry
Glen Park
Williamsville
Island Park

Map data ©2022

Jared The Galleria of Jewelry 4.6 ★★★★★ (86)
Ad · Jewelry store · 2009 Walden Ave.
Open · Closes 7PM
In stock: earrings

Amy's Fine Jewelry 4.7 ★★★★★ (75)
Jewelry store · 5870 Main St
Open · Closes 5PM
Their website mentions stud ea...

Barbara Oliver Jewelry 4.9 ★★★★★ (215)
Jeweler · 5820 Main St #311
Closed · Opens 10AM Tue
In-store shopping · Curbside pickup

Engagement Rings
near Williamsville · Choose area

In stock · Open now · Top rated

Winter Jewelry
Scanlon Jewelers
Barbara Oliver Jewelry

Map data ©2022

Scanlon Jewelers 4.9 ★★★★★ (85)
Jewelry store · 5735 Main St
Open · Closes 7PM
In-stock shopping · In-store pickup

Barbara Oliver Jewelry 4.9 ★★★★★ (215)
Jeweler · 5820 Main St #311
Closed · Opens 10AM Tue
Sold here: engagement rings

Winter Jewelry 5.0 ★★★★★ (2)
Jewelry store · 5500 Main St #210
Open · Closes 6PM
Sold here: engagement rings

PART TWO SUMMARY

WHY IS GOOGLE DOING THIS?

Google isn't stupid (ok, maybe a little). But, as noted, the company tests everything and uses what works.

Images are getting bigger, showing in more carousels, showing more frequently in mobile search results and now on the desktop as well. Images are playing an ever-increasing role in search results for a reason.

The reason is the same reason Google always gives: from their point of view, it is better for the user and the search experience. (So you don't think me wildly naive, I would point out it's also better for Google; it provides opportunities to keep users on Google to gather more data, show more ads or capture one more transaction.)

Google's own 2017 survey of 16,000 adults found:

- 90% of purchasers are more likely to use a business that has photos on a search/map results page
- For 74% of shoppers, seeing photos of the business on the results page indicates a more reputable business

In the final installment, I'll present two case studies, explore the ranking impact of images and "image SEO." I'll offer practical tips for business owners and marketers and discuss the future of visual search.



PART THREE

Optimizing images for conversion and ranking

Clearly Google sees images in the Local Business Profile as critical to add trust to the local search consumer experience. But the role of images in local search goes beyond consumer trust.

Increasing conversions

What is good for Google isn't always good for the business. In this case, however, images appear to be good for both.

These days, local search (and search in general) is about driving conversions, which can be even more important than improving rank. One way to increase conversions is to increase the quality and share of your images in search results. There is a growing body of evidence that argues relevant and authentic local photos increase local conversions.

Case study: replacing stock photos

Impact of replacing stock photos on GBP performance

Site traffic, calls, & appointments increase



Before and after analysis controlled for growth over time

Joel Headley, while at PatientPop¹, did some interesting research, replacing stock images on a dentist's website and Google Business Profile with professional photos. During the photo shoot, images were checked in real time against Google's Cloud Vision AI classification and evaluated for Google's understanding prior to uploading to the website and Business Profile.

Did it work? Joel noted that site traffic, calls and appointments all increased with the changeover of photos from stock images to locally shot, AI classified images.

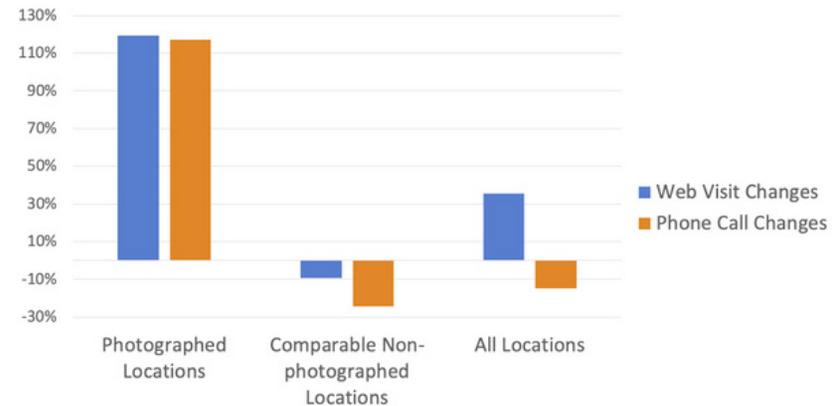
Case study: more visits, more calls

In a recent unpublished case study for employment law firm HKM Employment Attorneys² (23 locations), three locations were professionally shot by Aircam.ai photographers³, which used Google's Cloud Vision AI classification to grade images during the shoot. I did not anticipate these images would have much of an impact for a law firm. I was wrong.

To measure the impact of the photography, I looked at Google Business Profile Insights on a year over year basis. I tracked changes in Google Insights actions (web visits and phone calls) for photographed locations and compared them to locations not photographed.

When comparing the two months after the shoots to the prior year's data I saw increases in website visits of 119% and call increases of 117% for the three newly photographed locations (chart below). This compared to three similarly sized

Y/Y % Change in Google Business Profile Actions



While Google Business Profile Insights tends to undercount phone calls, phone calls and website visits are directionally accurate metrics

locations that saw year over year website visit decreases of 9.3% and call decreases of 24.4%. All 20 locations that did not get photographed saw total web visits increase by 35.4% but saw phone calls decrease almost 15%.

Do images impact rankings?

We know that Google has the ability to rank images, we can read it in their patents and see it every time they prioritize images for a Local Business Profile. They also have a patent to use images to assess regional brand penetration.

On its *How to improve your local ranking on Google* page in Business Profile Help, the company says that not only does adding images improve local rank and visibility but that it likely increases conversions as well.

As with all things in SEO, the answer to the question of whether images directly increase rank on the organic, non-Local Pack results is a more difficult question to answer. There is some conflicting data about images impacting rank.

Screenshot of Google guidance of photos' impact on local ranking

How to improve your local ranking on Google

Update your business info for better visibility

You may find that your business doesn't show up for relevant searches in your area. To maximize how often users find your business in local search results, ensure that your business information in Business Profile is accurate, complete, and engaging.

Tip: To edit business information for 10 or more locations at once, you can create [a bulk upload spreadsheet](#).

Add photos ^

To showcase your goods and services, and to tell the story of your business, add photos to your Business Profile. Accurate and appealing pictures may also show shoppers that your business offers what they're searching for. [Learn how to add photos or videos to your Business Profiles](#).

Case study: do images impact ranking?

In her *Do Images Impact Ranking on Google?* case study, Joy Hawkins saw organic ranking improvement for website results by using images that were similar to websites that already ranked. According to this case study:

1. Larger/better quality photos are better for ranking.
2. Having a photo that matches what Google is looking for can have a positive impact on ranking.
3. Having a photo that doesn't match can have a negative impact.

How much images improve ranking likely varies based on the query or industry.

Regardless of photos' impact on organic ranking, it is safe to conclude that consumer trust is increased, relevance to the query is improved and there are more conversions with relevant photos. In some situations, photos might provide enough of an extra boost to increase rank. Yet it's clear that relevant photographs speak to many other consumer needs. Given the many obvious benefits, the question of whether ranking improvements occur becomes much less relevant.

Image SEO: a new technical frontier

In the world of local SEO and marketing, we have long advocated that content needs to be targeted to two audiences: your user and Google. Thoughtfully creating title tags, H1 tags and well-organized content helps both the user and Google to fully understand your business, helps it rank and convert better.

What should also be clear is that Google understands the granular content of most images and can use that knowledge to improve local search results. As marketers have always done with website content, we need to appreciate Google's gains and provide the types of images Google wants, can "understand" and will use in the search results.

As Crystal Carter put it in her recent Moz article on the *Top Technical SEO Strategies for 2022 and Beyond*:

This means that SEOs might need to have more strategic conversations about what images look like, as well as how they're rendered on a site.

This is because... images that have clear composition will be better understood for visual search [by Google Image AI] than images that are cluttered, complex, or partially visible.

Simply put, cleaner images mean that your content is surfaced with more relevant search results and business outcomes.

It also means that SEOs and businesses need to understand how Google recognizes an image, in addition to how the user will respond to it. The ideal image, going forward, will be one that satisfies both the user and Google.

The photos you need

The two images below show how Google's Cloud Vision is both sophisticated and immature at the same time. Taken during an actual shoot at a dentist's office, both photos clearly appear to be shots of a dentist, with little visually to distinguish them.

Cloud Vision API: which photo is most likely understood as "dentist"?



Before looking at the results from the Cloud Vision API, decide for yourself which image is more likely to be tagged as "dentist" by Google. Photos courtesy of PatientPop and Aircam.ai.

Cloud Vision API: "Dentist" results

Try the API

Faces Objects **Labels** Properties Safe Search



29b0e4e5-afb1-4419-9986-a427c55befed_1920.jpeg

Glasses	97%
Medical Equipment	92%
Health Care Provider	90%
Safety Glove	90%
Vision Care	88%
Health Care	87%
Surgeon	87%
Dentist	86%

Try the API

Faces Objects **Labels** Properties Safe Search



b8032cfb-33c1-4387-bc8a-44b1480009a1_1920.jpeg

Dentist	97%
Dental Assistant	94%
Mouth	91%
Health Care Provider	89%
Medical Procedure	88%
Vision Care	87%
Health Care	87%
Ear	87%

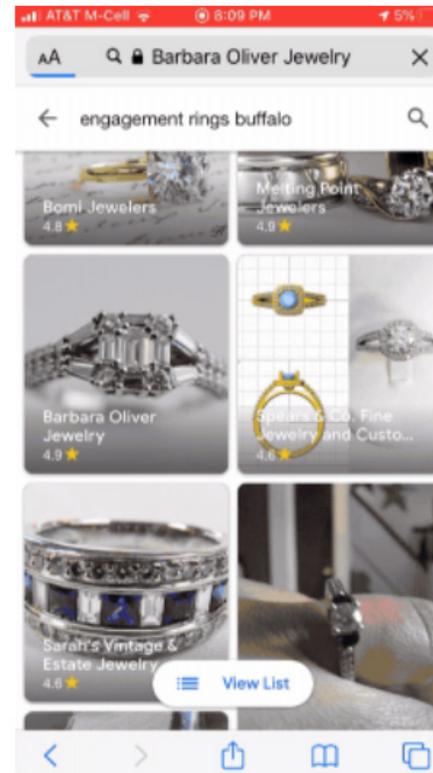
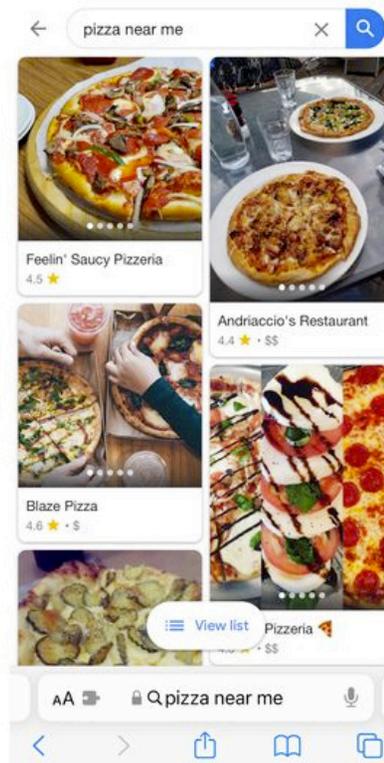
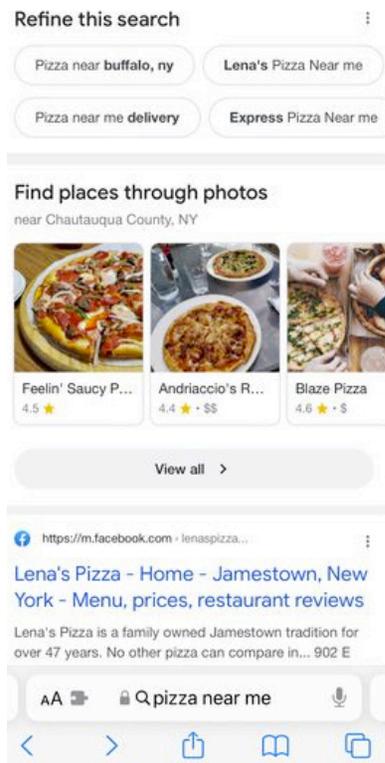
Yet when processed with Google's Cloud Vision AI tool, Google scores one image significantly more likely to be a dentist than the other. If your goal is to make sure that both the user and Google see "dentist" in the photo then it is obvious which photo makes the cut.

Why did Google's Cloud Vision identify one photo as likely to be about glasses, medical equipment, and safety gloves, while it assessed the second to be about dentists and dental assistants?

We can only speculate but the reality of ML is that the internal logic is not human logic. Regardless, it makes the job of picking between the two photos easier if you are looking for a photo of a dentist.

Where it's going

Google's Pinterest-like metaphor for local search



Images have long played a role in local search but their new prominence is indicative of their growing importance to Google and Google users.

Google's use of highly visual SERPs, such as "Find places through photos," point to a possible new Pinterest-like search metaphor for local. While the Local Pack is still vaguely similar to yellow pages listings, on which it was originally based, Search by Photo is more akin to a yearbook: highly visual, reflective of user search intent, and filled with images that match the query.

When you view the result in context and click through, you see an interface that is 98% image based. With "Find places through photos," a single visual impression that includes ratings functions to drive the user deeper within Google to see alternatives and then, after another click, to get to actionable information such as driving directions or a phone number.

Who knows if this type of Visual Search result will become the dominant metaphor

for local search. However the interface, which has been visible in the main search results for 2.5 years, does show how important Google thinks images are and how they can respond to user intent. The longevity of this visual SERP indicates consumers are in fact clicking.

Visual search - the next generation

What comes next? Google is saying images will play a vital role in forming the search query. Moving beyond the highly visual image heavy SERPs, driven by text queries, is true Visual Search. In Visual Search images are not only shown in results but can themselves form the basis of a query. We are seeing the early iterations of this with Google Lens and a pre-MUM feature called multisearch. Multisearch allows people to search with both images and text at the same

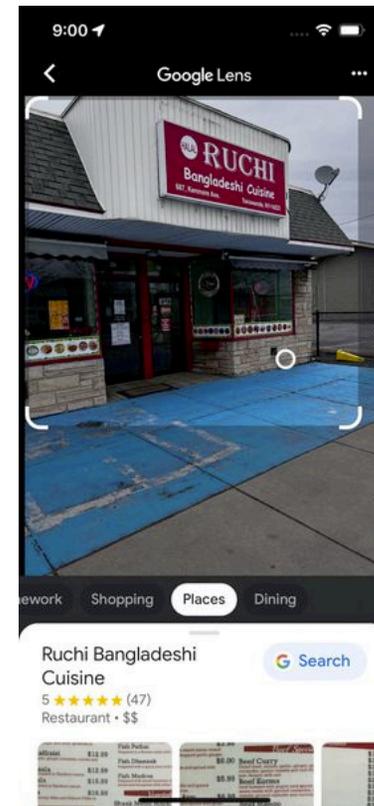
time so a user could, for example, search for ibuprofen and add the phrase “local availability.”

The following is from Google’s blog post about MUM and Visual Search:

MUM is multimodal, which means it can understand information from different formats like webpages, pictures and more, simultaneously. Eventually, you might be able to take a photo of your hiking boots and ask, “can I use these to hike Mt. Fuji?” MUM would understand the image and connect it with your question to let you know your boots would work just fine. It could then point you to a blog with a list of recommended gear.

Google thinks of Visual Search as a critical element going forward and their announcement of MUM details how text and image input will work together to get to a searcher’s answers more easily.

Google Lens shoppable results



Lens already has both a Local and a Shopping focus. Like with the Local Pack, Google is likely to leverage Lens for the purpose of local product search and transactions.

Obviously, Google has already made strong commitments to the increasing use of images; and search could soon move from images as output in the SERP to the query itself. If you are interested in understanding the fundamentals of Visual Search, see Claire Carlile's excellent *What is Visual Search? A Primer for Local Businesses*.

What it means for businesses

Every business location should make a plan to maximize the benefit of images for their listing(s). Part of this involves figuring out how to overcome potential stumbling blocks.

Maximize the benefit of photos for your local listing:

Every photo should be a great one - you never know which photo Google will show. There should be photos for every group of products or services that you provide to guarantee that one of your photos shows on high intent purchase queries.

There should be photos of branded products that you sell as well for the same reason.

There should be multiple images for obvious product categories to gain the advantage of the search segmentation feature.

Every image, prior to use, should be passed through Google's Cloud Vision API to be sure that it is understood by Google as representative of the category that you intended.

Track user contributed photos:

Monitor your listings for user contributed photos.

Report any to Google that do not reflect well on your business or are outdated via the Business Profile dashboard.

Add your own business photos to lower the visibility of photos that Google doesn't remove.

Make lemonade from user uploaded lemons:

If your business attracts an inordinate amount of user photos and you can't "beat them," consider joining them.

Create temporary or permanent spaces in your location that are attractive photo opportunities and will encourage users to highlight your most important or unusual features.

Encourage shoppers and employees, with incentives and rewards, to take and upload photos of the scenes you most want promoted.

Hire a professional:

Despite the ever-present reality of great cell phone cameras, most locations and location managers struggle to provide photos.

Professionals will 1) get the job done and 2) consistently take better photographs. The modest (\$250) cost of a single location shoot will provide enough photos for a year of maintaining your Google listing.

Post the images on a regular basis to keep Google from surfacing user photos as much. Quarterly or semi-annually will work for most businesses. If you suffer a lot of user posted images, consider posting more frequently.

These images can and should be repurposed on your website, social media and offline ads to maximize their value.

Work at scale:

Managing photo shoots of multiple locations is often beyond the capability of a national brand. Find a firm or professional that can handle that hassle of scheduling across multiple locations.

Maintain brand consistency by making sure that the look and feel of your photos is replicated across all locations.

Look for real time online preview during the shoot that allows remote managers to check for image quality and minimize the need for reshoots.

For ideas on scaling location photography see the PatientPop presentation.

Future-proofing for visual search

While the precise future of search is unknowable, we have clues in current experiences and technology. And images will play a big role in search regardless of other, future developments.

I don't think you can do very much to get ready for Visual Search, other than to do the same things you should be doing today to prepare images for Local Search:

- Take and use high quality images.
- Make sure that Google's Image AI "understands," with a high degree of certainty, that the image is directly related to the categories, goods and services you currently sell or service.

Starting now to create a body of "semantically informed" images is really the best way to future-proof your image-search optimization.

CONCLUSION

It should be obvious to all local businesses, from a single mom and pop location to multi-location chains, that photos now play a crucial role in search success.

It is past time to start treating images as one of the most important search and marketing assets in your toolkit. Stop using stock photographs and start focusing on user and Google-centric photographs.

Acknowledgments:

Claire Carlile for being a tremendous help as a reader and editor. And for her ability to plow through the many typos and grammatical errors.

David Mihm for his guidance, advice and help with the visuals.

Greg Sterling for his patient and persistent editing.

Endnotes

- 1 I consult for PatientPop, a company that provides full stack marketing to medical professionals, and have received some stock as a result.
- 2 HKM Employment Lawyers is also a current client of mine.
- 3 I also have a current consulting relationship with Aircam.ai, a company looking to solve the problem of providing semantically relevant images at scale to local business locations.

nearmedia.co/subscribe



NEAR MEDIA

© 2022 Near Media LLC. All rights reserved.