

# Local SEO Platforms Buyer's Guide

ENTERPRISE EDITION

*Considerations  
for enterprise  
companies with  
large regional,  
national, or  
global footprints  
of locations*

# The Definitive Local SEO Tools Buyer's Guide

*will help any company with a large regional, national, or global footprint assess local SEO platforms. With this guide, you will be prepared to make sense of the crowded marketplace of available tools, define your goals for selecting a platform, and understand the benefits these tools will deliver, such as simplifying your local search efforts and boosting customer acquisition. We break down the selection process into four steps that will make tool assessment more understandable. By selecting the right local SEO platform, you are well on your way to unleashing more value from local SEO than you ever thought possible. Read on and maximize the long-term value of local SEO platforms.*

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# What Is a Local SEO Platform?

*Local search engine optimization (SEO) helps marketers capture leads from consumers who seek services and products in their local area – and who are ready to purchase.*

Local SEO is an extremely complex process, especially for businesses that want to scale the results of their SEO efforts across multiple markets instead of just a few locations. Fortunately, many tools and technologies are available to help brands succeed. Some vendors offer very specific services that might be used in tandem with different local tools. Other larger, holistic platforms address broader local SEO needs.

Local SEO platforms not only scale your efforts but also reduce the stress on your resources. When implemented correctly, local SEO tools can help both business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) marketers grow the sales pipeline with qualified local customers and buyers who are ready to purchase your services and products. Before you start evaluating how local SEO platforms can help you achieve such benefits, you should get comfortable with naming conventions for the technologies and tools that are often associated with an SEO platform:

## **Local SEO tools**

### **Listing management tools**

### **Locator tools**

### **Location based marketing platforms**

### **Local marketing automation software**

### **Local software-as-a-service (SaaS) platforms**

### **Local content management system (CMS) tools**

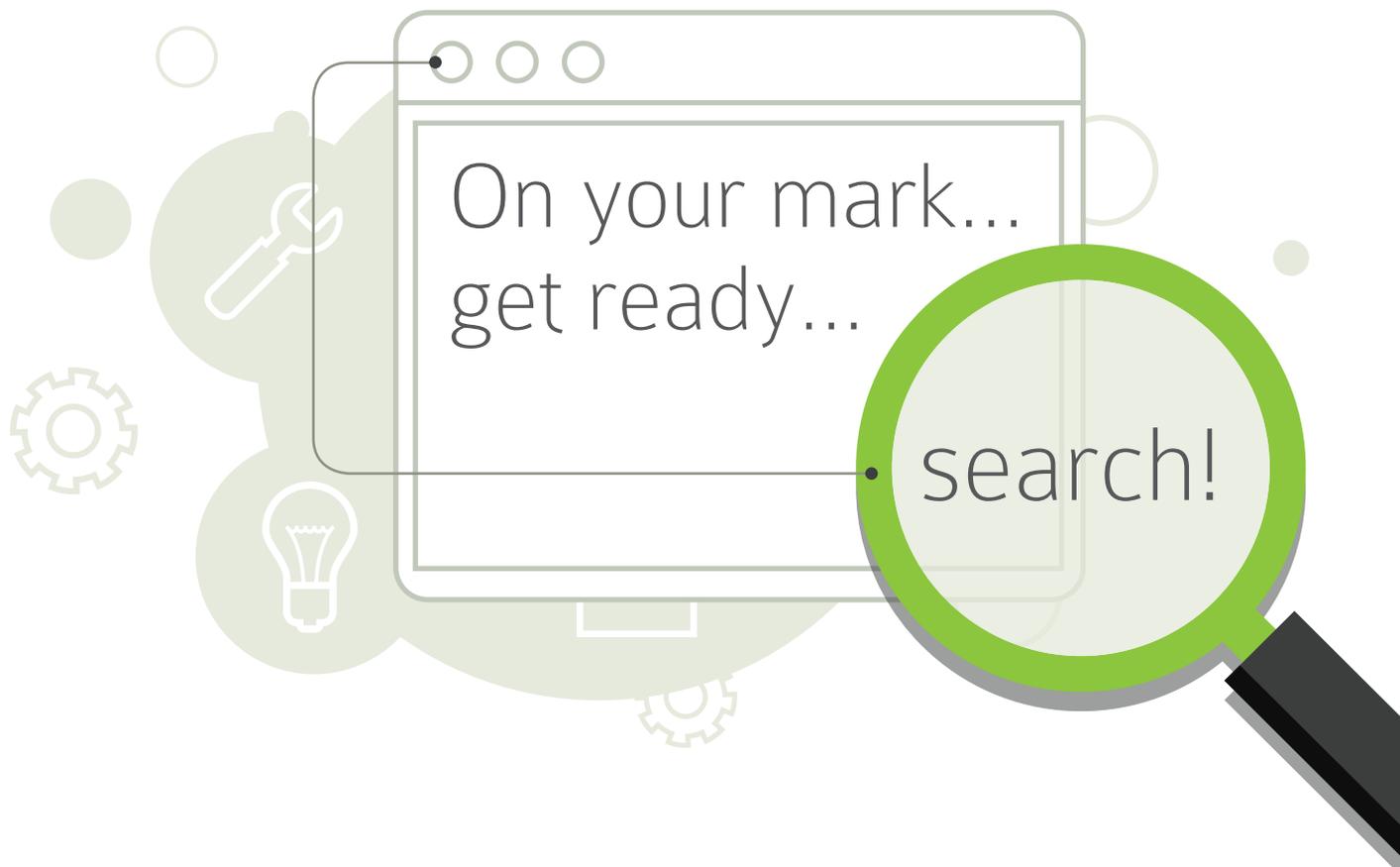
Some of these tools may seem basic in nature, while others are much more robust in their offerings.

A robust local SEO platform will contain all of these tools, offering the power to promote your brand and its physical locations through local search; to control local content; and to generate local leads. These leads can be directed to your website, a local address, or a phone number. Local lead generation provides a positive return on investment (ROI), and a large percentage of customers use local search to find

products and services (ListedLocally; BIA/Kelsey). Local search technologies can map against the way consumers look for products and services and adapt quickly to changing algorithms in search engines like Google.

Many enterprise brands have hundreds or thousands of locations to support as part of their local SEO efforts. The amount of business data and information about each one of these locations currently on the Web is staggering. One exact match search for a phone number on Google can easily yield more than 500,000 results. Ensuring that data are consistent and accurate is the deciding factor in where you rank locally and whether local consumers can find you at the local level (*Aggregate Study: SIM Partners*). But who is controlling that data? Brands using a local SEO platform can proudly proclaim, "I am!"

The best approach for choosing a technology that is right for your brand is to establish key performance indicators (KPIs) by department and choose the platform that is best suited to help you achieve those results. This guide is intended to help you evaluate what each provider actually offers, so that you can accurately compare each and assess which tool will best meet your brand's needs and KPIs by department.



# What Should I Expect from a Local SEO Platform?



As part of the evaluation process, you should have a strong grasp of the kind of benefits a local SEO platform can and should provide your business. Let's dive into the three most significant benefits of a local SEO platform.

## Scale Local Efforts

A robust local platform can help you scale your efforts, control the information that consumers interact with, and leverage that data consistency to be more visible in search queries. When you consolidate your efforts, not only is your overall spend more manageable, but the components of your local SEO platform work in tandem to increase overall effectiveness. Instead of building your own rocket ship, you get a well-oiled machine right out of the box.

## Increase Your ROI

When you push strong local content to the places where consumers look for products and services, you earn better-quality leads. Since local consumers searching for businesses in their neighborhood are likely to make a purchase, companies owning this online real estate will likely earn more leads. These companies see a larger flow of qualified local leads, and at lower cost per lead (CPL).

## Protect Brand Integrity

If you've ever had someone go rogue with logos, taglines, or information, you know what a nightmare it can be to lose control of your brand assets. With a direct submission, corporate controlled channel to local directories, search engines, and social and mobile databases, you circumnavigate this problem. You can even provide end users with a selection of pre-approved brand content to use, so they don't have to come up with anything; it's already there! Everything is stored in a content management system; so it's easy to replace your old logo with your new one, not only on every location page, but across the Web as well, with a single click.

# When Should I Implement?

*If you need a way to scale your efforts and feel like you're missing out on the local opportunity, the answer is:*

act  
now!

More companies with large regional and national footprints have begun adopting local SEO strategies to scale their local digital efforts. It's possible that your competitors have already begun to apply local SEO strategies. If they have, it's time to start regaining local footing. However, 25 percent of online business listings are inaccurate, making it harder for consumers to find and contact them (ListedLocally). If your competitors haven't implemented local SEO strategy, you will have a significant advantage in local markets once you do.

When you implement a local SEO platform, your data must be cleansed and claimed wherever possible. It can take 90 days to cleanse the Web of old/bad/outdated data, which means the typical ramp-up period for a local SEO platform is at least three months. You don't have any time to waste.

Still, companies cite many reasons to delay implementing a local SEO platform. Let's look at some of the factors that marketers often cite for hitting the pause button on their search for a local SEO platform. In fact, these very factors may motivate you to act now.

*"We're redesigning our website."*

**Perfect:** this is a great time to implement a local SEO platform. A local CMS can be planned into the infrastructure of the new website and built in tandem to roll out with the new look and feel, while providing all the functionality needed for local efforts. You'll get the best of both worlds.



“It’s on our road map for next year...  
or the year after that.”

**Awesome:** You know local SEO is something you need to implement. Meanwhile, customers are searching for you, potentially not finding your locations, and spending their money elsewhere. Can you afford to lose that business for the next year or two or three?

If your organization is still on the fence about when to kick off a search for the right platform, you may want to conduct a lost-opportunity cost analysis. Consider the value of a lead, your current CPL, and ROI of current programs against the potential lead growth and ROI of hyper-local programs. Doing so will provide insight into whether waiting will actually cost more than implementation.

“We’re pretty sure we can build this in house.”

**True: kind of.** You can develop relationships with data aggregators; claim each of your Google My Business listings; manually optimize each one; build a CMS for local data and connect it with custom location pages; write unique content for each location; optimize that content to meet local search best practices; and establish vendor relationships with some of the larger listing sites to update and own your data there. Truly, with enough manpower, you can rule the local world.

But for most marketers, just thinking about the workload requirement for managing a local SEO effort is overwhelming. Local SEO platforms can accomplish all the steps in the preceding paragraph with the single click of a submit button. There are little-to-no internal resources required, and the cost is fairly equivalent to hiring a local marketing task force (and is often less). Users of local SEO platforms can also hit the ground running and typically see results within three months. How long would it take to build this type of technology in house, and how much market share might you lose if it takes more than three months to launch?

# Four Steps to Selecting Your Perfect Local Solution

*Implementing a local SEO platform can drive new leads, provide insight into your local markets and increase the performance of other digital campaigns. So where do you start?*

Selecting a local SEO platform can seem like an overwhelming task because the variety of solutions present in the marketplace is daunting. The platform you select will determine the type of conversation you can have with your future local customers -- which, of course, is the reason it is so important to properly research the solutions present in the local ecosystem.

The next four sections will help you navigate the local vendor landscape, identify your internal stakeholders, figure out what questions to ask, and frame the opportunity each vendor offers so that you can find the right solution for your company. We've organized the sections around these four steps:

- **1. Assess your local efforts**
- **2. Understand your internal ecosystem**
- **3. Develop goals**
- **4. Evaluate vendors**

It is best to start by evaluating your current local marketing strategy. Assessing data consistency across the Web, evaluating the percentage of claimed or optimized Google My Business listings, looking at local content on your website, and local SEO are good places to start. We will walk you through this evaluation in Step 1.

Because digital efforts are often owned by multiple departments (ranging from Marketing to Information Technology), understanding which department owns or oversees each local component (data distribution, Google My Business optimization, website, store locators, etc.) is also important. Step 2 will help you determine how siloed your current digital efforts might be, whether there is an opportunity to consolidate resources, and if a single-solution option would free up dollars for additional projects.

Next, in Step 3, you will identify develop near- and long-term goals for your local marketing efforts and rank them based on importance, as well as begin thinking through expected returns on the investment in a local SEO tool. Finally, in Step 4, we get into specifics around how to assess the differences and similarities of local SEO platforms as well as provide a checklist for you to use in the demo and request for proposal (RFP) process.

# Step 1: Assess Your Local Efforts

*Understanding which components of local marketing have been implemented will help you determine the areas that can be improved by automating local SEO.*

Answer the following questions about your local efforts to begin evaluating your current local marketing strategy:

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## What local marketing strategies have you implemented?

- Listing management
- Google My Business optimization
- Localized search engine optimization
- Location pages
- Optimized store locator
- Review generation
- Localized social media campaigns

## Listing Management

Do you regularly distribute local data (NAP: name, address, phone number) through a distribution partner?

- Y  N  I don't know

How often is your data being distributed?

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Is the distribution automatic, or do you have to trigger it?

- Automatic  Triggered

To how many sites do you send your information?

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## Google My Business

Is there a Google My Business strategy in place?

- Y  N  I don't know

Have your Google My Business listings been claimed?

- Y  N  I don't know

Have your Google My Business listings been optimized?

- Y  N  I don't know

## Organic Local Optimization

Can local customers find you when searching for your products and services (non-branded queries)?

- Y  N  I don't know

Do you have landing pages for each location?

- Y  N  I don't know

Is the content on these location pages unique to each location?

- Yes: It is unique
- No: We use the same content for all pages
- We include only the NAP on local pages
- We do not have local pages

# Step 1: Local Assessment

## Local Content Management System

Do you have a local CMS to manage local content?

- Y  N  I don't know

If No: How do you update local content on your website?

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Is your website mobile friendly?

- Y  N  I don't know

Do you have responsive design in place on your location pages?

- Y  N  I don't know

## Social Marketing for Your Locations

Do you have a local social media marketing strategy?

- Y  N  I don't know

Do your locations have their own social media pages or do you leverage only a brand social media presence?

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## Local Analytics

How do you measure success at the corporate, region or location level?

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Are you happy with your ability to track local leads to conversion?

- Y  N

Are you currently integrating with third-party programs through API? (e.g., Salesforce, NetSuite)

- Y  N

If No: Do you have the capabilities to integrate through third-party APIs if desired?

- Y  N

# Step 2: Understand Your Internal Ecosystem

*The next step is to get a full-scale view of your internal ecosystem, including who will play a part in the purchase decision and implementation. During Step 2, you will also want to understand the spend and success metrics you use.*

In preparation for the evaluation phase, it is important to bring stakeholders into the local SEO platform discussion. Their input will help you define requirements and address any potential roadblocks before they become problems. Framing your current budget and success metrics will round out the view.

Of the local marketing strategies currently in place (if any), who takes ownership of them? Who uses them?

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Who in your company will use the local SEO platform? Who will need to be involved in implementation? Who will take ownership?

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List the stakeholders, their roles, and the part you believe they would play in implementation and/or operations.

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Do you plan to manage local content solely at a corporate level? At a location level? Will you need different user access levels in order to allow for locations to update content on the platform?

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Are international markets important?

Y    N

What potential roadblocks do you see?

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What is your current CPL?

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What ratio of online search traffic contributes to online or offline (store/phone) transactions? What information would you need to make this connection?

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Are you currently using your website for local lead generation? If so, what existing limitations hinder the effectiveness of these efforts?

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What are your current digital KPIs? How do you attribute local actions to your digital spend?

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# Step 3: Develop Goals

*Once you have insight into which components of local marketing are currently utilized and what implementation success might look like, it is time to develop goals for your local efforts.*

The following questions can help you map how a local SEO platform will help you meet your goals and assist you in building a case for a consolidated local platform.

What are some short-term goals you would like to achieve with a local SEO platform?

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What are some long-term goals you would like to achieve with a local SEO platform?

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Rank your top three-to-five goals.

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Which components of local SEO are most important to you? Why?

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What is your target ROI for a local SEO program?

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How will budget allocation occur? Incrementally?  
By re-allocating other budgets? Creating a new budget?

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What do you want to accomplish NOW with this technology?

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What do you want to be able to accomplish with this technology in a year or two?

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# Step 4: Evaluate Vendors

*Now that you've done some primary research, completed an internal review of current local digital efforts and established goals for implementing a local SEO platform, it's time to demo some local solutions!*

Assessing the differences and similarities of local SEO platforms can help you understand what you'll be able to accomplish with each and what ROI to expect from your efforts. You'll want to ask some general questions about vendors, including how long they have been in business or who they consider their competitors. For a more robust comparison, keep the following questions in mind when you review local solutions with sale representatives:

## Do they offer a live demo?

Will the vendor rely on screenshots to demonstrate its product, or will the vendor take you into the user interface (UI)? While many vendors will use screenshots to simplify an initial conversation, a live demo can tell you more about the platform's capabilities and functionality. Relying on screenshots to do demo – or citing an example of only one client instead of showing you how the product works – could be an indication that the product freezes or does not perform well.

## What types of standard functionality do they offer?

As you explore the local SEO platform vendors, you'll begin to see variations and differences in their offerings; however, all local SEO platforms provide some combination of these basic capabilities. In each of your conversations you will gain the most insight by evaluating these standard features:

- Data management**
- Listing management**
- Local pages/local CMS**
- Mobile capabilities**
- Group pages**
- Store locator and location hierarchy**
- Reporting**
- Workflow and moderation**
- Third-party compliance**
- Security**
- API capabilities**
- Service package**

## *What's the difference between data management and listing management?*

**DATA MANAGEMENT:**  
The process through which a vendor accepts, manages, and updates your locations data in their internal systems

**LISTING MANAGEMENT:**  
How the vendor leverages your location data to update listings across the Web

# Step 4: Vendor Evaluation

## Do they offer advanced features?

Not all vendors offer additional features or services, but some do. It can be useful to understand what local SEO tools they have to complement their basic offering. Beyond the basics, more advanced features may include:

- Local search optimization**
- Social offerings**
- Review technology**

## How do they package their offering?

Determining if the vendors provide tiered packages or a one-size-fits all offering can help you determine how willing they are to tailor their solution to your needs. Some vendors may offer the primary solution (local pages/CMS) at a competitive price, with a long list of add-on features that other companies would consider standard (e.g., listing management). An awareness of how the solution is packaged will better help you compare apples to apples and get the biggest local ROI for your hard-earned marketing dollars.

*The questions on the following pages can help guide you through understanding the variations of each of these basic features and finding out what you need to know to make an informed decision. You may not use every question, or you may choose to use them as a checklist, returning later to address anything the vendors failed to cover. Remember that sales reps tend to gear their demos toward needs they believe you have expressed; so if a feature doesn't seem to be present, just ask.*



- **Local Content**

How is the local content created and where is it stored?  
Who writes the content for these pages?

What tools exist to help localize existing content?

Can we update the data that lives on those pages?

- **Local CMS**

Is the UI a “what you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) interface?

Does (VENDOR NAME) provide data storage?

What internal IT resources does the CMS require?

Can we integrate the local CMS with our internal database?

How does the local CMS interact with our enterprise website CMS?

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- **SEO/Site Architecture**

How are the locations pages optimized for search engine performance?

What tools and processes does (VENDOR NAME) have to mitigate duplicate content penalties when it comes to location pages?

What is the average page load time for the location pages?

Do these pages utilize microformatting? If so which formats?

Is there a clearly defined hierarchy to the location pages?

Are the location pages easily found and indexed by the search engines via crawlable directory pages?

Are the directory pages designed to pass PageRank through to the location pages efficiently? How?

Are the directory pages customizable?

Are there different hierarchy structures that can be created other than geographic?

Does (VENDOR NAME) create an XML sitemap? How is that sitemap optimized and kept up to date?

What are five differentiators that (VENDOR NAME) provides as it relates to SEO performance?

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## • Mobile Capabilities

How will our pages be optimized for a mobile experience?

Are (VENDOR NAME)'s local pages enabled with responsive design? Will the pages be responsive to all types of operating systems and devices?

Will the pages show up in mobile search results?

Will we now have a presence in Apple and Android apps, like AroundMe?

Will our location information be sent to GPS and car navigation sites?

Will our local pages be optimized with touch screen capabilities for tablet and smartphone users?

## • Group Pages

Does (VENDOR NAME) offer group pages?

Can they be customized based on one or many database fields?

Can locations be automatically added or removed as they are updated, added or removed from the CMS?

How are locations added or removed from group pages?

How do we ensure that locations that are no longer in business are removed from group pages? How do we ensure that new ones are added when appropriate?

What options exist to vary how locations are ordered and displayed in any given group?

Can the group pages be managed from within the CMS?

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## • Reporting

- How much insight can (VENDOR NAME) give us on local activity? What metrics does (VENDOR NAME) use?
- Does corporate have access to dashboards and reporting?
- Can locations or regions access dashboards and reports?
- Is (VENDOR NAME) able to automate reports?
- Can reports be automated and sent to field locations?
- Does the UI allow for customizable KPIs?
- What metrics for local search optimization does (VENDOR NAME) show in reporting?
- How does (VENDOR NAME) report on citation accuracy?
- What type of reporting for social media does (VENDOR NAME) offer?
- How does (VENDOR NAME)'s reporting integrate with existing reporting we may use?
- From what other tools (Web analytics, CRMs, etc.) can (VENDOR NAME) import reporting metrics?
- Can we include our own website analytics code on (VENDOR NAME)'s pages?
- Can (VENDOR NAME) import local relevant data into its interface from our website analytics provider?
- Does (VENDOR NAME) reporting breakdown easily to view results by location, region or brand?
- Can (VENDOR NAME) offer customizable reports for individual users? How are those reports configured?
- What is (VENDOR NAME)'s point of view as it relates to call tracking and local search optimization?

### NOTES

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## • Workflow and Moderation

Does (VENDOR NAME) provide various permission levels for different users to login (corporate, regional, divisional, local)?

Can we add our own user accounts?

Are customizable configurations available for each user?  
How are the configurations created?

Does (VENDOR NAME)'s platform allow for multiple divisions of a brand to login into the system? Can we segment what each division sees?

What workflow management and moderation tools does (VENDOR NAME) offer?

How do we approve content updates from regional or local users?

What tools does (VENDOR NAME) offer to encourage locations to update their pages?

## • Third-Party Compliance

Please describe how (VENDOR NAME)'s platform enables compliance for any industry regulations with which we must comply (*examples include FINRA, SEC, SOC-2, HIPPA, IROC, and FSA*).

What tools does (VENDOR NAME) offer to enable brand guideline compliance?

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## • Security

Describe the security protocols in place to ensure all confidential data is being protected.

Can (VENDOR NAME) provide results from intrusion detection system (IDS) monitoring from the past 90 days?

Can (VENDOR NAME) provide a copy of a penetration test and vulnerability assessment of systems that process, store or transmit data that was conducted by a disinterested third-party in the past 12 months?

Please describe (VENDOR NAME)'s hosting infrastructure.

What data redundancy does (VENDOR NAME) have in place?

What has been the uptime for (VENDOR NAME)'s CMS for the past 24 months?

What has been the uptime for the location pages (VENDOR NAME)'s platform powers for the past 24 months?

What service level agreements (SLAs) come with the platform?

## • API Capabilities

Which platforms and technologies does (VENDOR NAME) currently interface with through an API?

Does (VENDOR NAME) have an API we can connect with? If yes, please provide documentation.

What features are we able to manage via API?

What security and protection does (VENDOR NAME)'s API have?

Can we integrate our proprietary forms onto the location and directory pages? What about forms from Salesforce or other customer relationship management (CRM) platforms?

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## ● Service Package

Describe (VENDOR NAME)'s onboarding process.

What can you tell me about the service side of (VENDOR NAME)'s platform?

What is the structure of the team that will be working with us?

Do we have a dedicated account manager?

Are there SLAs in place for response times of reported issues?

How would we report issues at corporate? What about individual locations?

What are all the different ways we can interact with (VENDOR NAME)'s support team?

Can (VENDOR NAME) offer a custom service package?

Would we be responsible for resolving location issues or does (VENDOR NAME)'s team handle them?

## ● Local Search Optimization

What search engines does (VENDOR NAME) provide optimization for?

Describe (VENDOR NAME)'s philosophy as it relates to local search optimization.

Describe (VENDOR NAME)'s philosophy as it relates to organic local search optimization.

What information does (VENDOR NAME) recommend pushing to the search engines?

Are there additional components and tactics (VENDOR NAME) can recommend that can increase my performance on the search engines?

How do we report issues with information being listed on search engines like Google, Yahoo! and Bing?

How can (VENDOR NAME) show the effectiveness of our local search optimization efforts?

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# Ensuring Local SEO Platform Success

*When you have found the perfect vendor for your needs, you still need to take a few steps in order to prepare yourself to realize local SEO platform success.*

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First things first; take a moment to sit back and enjoy the best decision you'll make all year! You're about to massively simplify your local marketing experience. Before you can get things running like clockwork though, make sure that you prepare for implementation by doing the following:

## Get Your Data Organized

You'll need a single spreadsheet with all your basic business location information prepped for your vendor. Common types of data you'll need include NAP and other relevant business information that local customers might find useful, including hours of operation. It's likely vendors will require a comma-separated values (CSV) file with all that data in order to get started; so having it ready to hit the road from the day you sign will speed your time to market. Beyond the first submission, you'll want to start planning a strategy around how you will submit data moving forward because data submission will be an ongoing process.

## Refine Your KPIs

You're close now to seeing local leads filling your pipeline, but before potential customers start banging down your doors, this is a good time to establish concrete metrics for success. Deciding how you plan to measure against the data your platform will provide (and identifying any gaps) means you won't have to scramble when your boss wants to see how the new platform you've implemented is performing. Remember, local SEO will drive local leads, but you'll need to do a little bit of internal work to close the loop and get the insight you'll need to make your brand shine.

## Implement Effectively

You've already identified stakeholders and team members who are important in the implementation process. Put time on their calendars for key implementation steps as soon as possible. If you didn't connect the correct implementation leads with your selected vendor during the evaluation process, get the ball rolling now with introductions to ensure smooth sailing.

## Finally, ask your vendor to set up a training schedule

to get your team up to speed. Having buy-in from everyone involved will simplify your onboarding experience exponentially and make you a happy and successful local marketer.

**Selecting a local SEO platform is not an easy process. Should you have more questions after you read this guide, please contact us at [info@simparters.com](mailto:info@simparters.com).**

## About SIM Partners & Velocity

SIM Partners' Velocity technology is a SaaS-based local marketing automation platform that helps brands – with hundreds to thousands of locations – drive customer acquisition everywhere. Through local data management to drive listing visibility, a local CMS to fuel location-based publishing, and a social CRM to manage local communities, Velocity enables multi-location enterprise brands to create visibility, relevance and engagement at scale. SIM Partners has offices in Chicago and San Francisco and authorized resellers in Australia, Germany and Italy.

Visit [www.simpartners.com](http://www.simpartners.com) to learn more or follow SIM Partners on Twitter (@SIMPartners).

