

**entrata**

# **Google My Business** *The Free Listing*

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# Google My Business

## *The Free Listing*

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's apartment marketers are primarily interested in one universal goal: to appear at the forefront of a prospect's Google search. In the past, that goal may have been measured by simply mimicking a prospective renter's search on an office computer, but changes to Google's platform mean this is no longer effective.

Entrata's research shows clicks by prospects on organic blue links are diminishing while local search results are driving more traffic to property websites than ever before. Google is challenging conventional wisdom by pouring extensive resources into making search progressively more intuitive, personalized and local. Using knowledge graphs, maps, and key information from Google My Business, Google serves up results that go far beyond the traditional search ranking system - and searchers are responding!

Entrata compiled year-over-year data from 400+ apartment communities across the United States in this study to help apartment marketers better understand how to measure the success of SEO efforts and suggest cost effective ways to optimize search listings for better results.

## FOCUSING ON THE BLUE?

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

Increasingly, GMB experiences are the primary way in which prospects are finding rental communities online. Marketers should prioritize optimizing their GMB listings to attract clicks over search rankings based on OBL results. (See tips on page 07.)

As Google focuses on more local search results, it's important to understand how those results are being displayed to its users. Entrata tracked the number of website sessions resulting from clicks on a traditional organic blue link (OBL) format vs. those that were created in a Google My Business (GMB) experience format (see figure 1.1).

### ORGANIC BLUE LINKS VS. GOOGLE MY BUSINESS EXPERIENCES

## 2017

#### ORGANIC BLUE LINKS



#### GOOGLE MY BUSINESS EXPERIENCES



## 2018

#### ORGANIC BLUE LINKS



#### GOOGLE MY BUSINESS EXPERIENCES

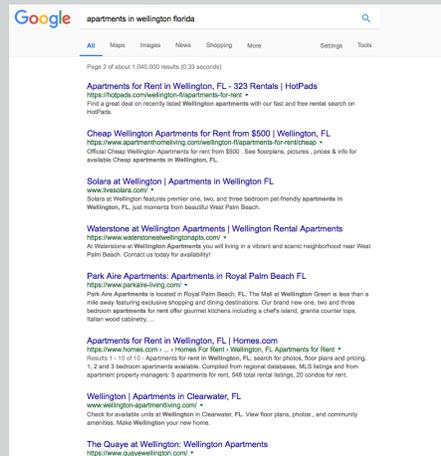


FIGURE 1.1

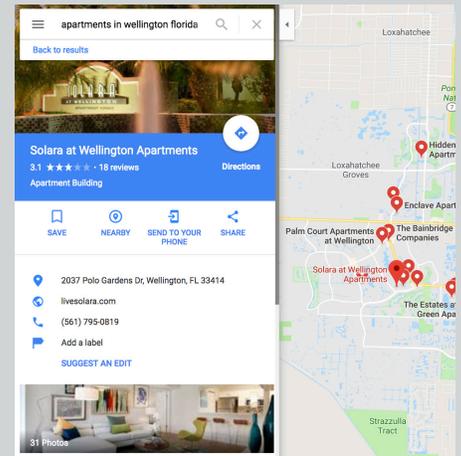
How are search results displayed when someone searches for an apartment on Google?

GOOGLE MY BUSINESS EXPERIENCES

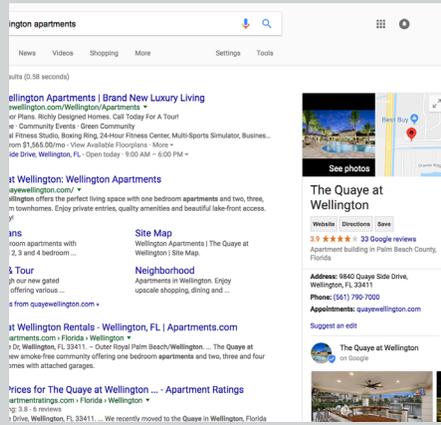
ORGANIC BLUE LINK FORMAT (NO GMB EXPERIENCE INCLUDED)



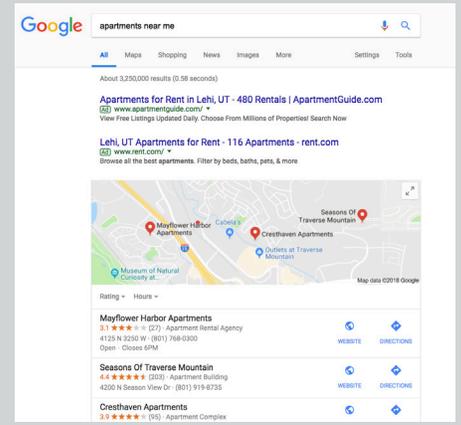
GOOGLE MAPS FORMAT



KNOWLEDGE PANEL FORMAT



LOCAL PACK



## “OK GOOGLE, FIND APARTMENTS IN CITY, STATE”

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

Prospects are more likely to search for a new apartment community using a discovery search like “apartments in city, state” than by typing in a community name. Optimizing a GMB listing means approximately two-thirds of those searching for apartments in your area are shown your community.

### FAREWELL TO THE ILS?

Google is doing a terrific job at offering extremely relevant search results to prospects who use discovery search terms. The increase in discovery search in GMB insights suggests that an ILS is no longer needed to aggregate local properties for apartment hunters. Google already provides the information a typical user requires: a view of nearby apartments, the commute distance to a job, reviews, and even a ratings filter! As more prospects research apartments within a GMB experience (as the discovery search suggests), Google is funneling those prospects directly to apartment community websites, rather than letting ILSs do the job.

Now that we know how Google is displaying search information to users, we turn our attention to the keywords most used to search for apartments. While GMB does not reveal exact search queries, they do provide information about whether users include community names in their search. Entrata compared the number of times a community was found in Google using a discovery search (e.g., using keywords like “apartments in city, state”) vs. direct searches using the community name.

### DISCOVERY SEARCH CLICKS VS. DIRECT SEARCH CLICKS

## 2016

#### DISCOVERY SEARCH



#### DIRECT SEARCH



## 2017

#### DISCOVERY SEARCH



#### DIRECT SEARCH



## 2018

#### DISCOVERY SEARCH



#### DIRECT SEARCH



## THE INCREASING POPULARITY OF GOOGLE MAPS

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

Prospects are more likely to use the functionality in Google Maps to find an apartment than the traditional Google.com search environment.

### ARE KEYWORDS AND RANKINGS OBSOLETE?

Today Google personalizes search results based on factors such as search history, location, the context around the search, and a barrage of unique factors tracked and measured in their system. This personalization of search results means that traditional keywords and rankings may be fun to monitor, but should not be used as key indicators of performance. It's increasingly important that, instead, marketers are paying attention to the specific path prospects are taking to land on a page and track conversions. Don't perform self searches of a community on a desktop in the office; rather, focus on prospects' search behavior and associated KPIs, the changing nature of search results, and the tools that can help improve the metrics that really matter.

In addition to examining how users search for apartments on Google, we studied which search experiences were most effective. Entrata analyzed the number of apartment community views in Map views as compared to Search views (the traditional search results displayed by Google.com).

### MAP VIEWS VS. SEARCH VIEWS

## 2016

#### MAP VIEWS



#### SEARCH VIEWS



## 2017

#### MAP VIEWS



#### SEARCH VIEWS



## 2018

#### MAP VIEWS



#### SEARCH VIEWS



## IF YOU GOOGLE, THEY WILL COME

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

Google My Business is a significant driver of interactions with your community online. Conversion rates for website sessions resulting from GMB are nearly identical to sessions from OBL, but the total conversion count is nearly two times higher for GMB sessions.

## EARN MORE. SPEND LESS. FOCUS ON GOOGLE MY BUSINESS.

These days, prospects are engaging with your community through GMB experiences. The true measure of any successful digital marketing campaign is conversions, so Entrata studied how users acted once a GMB experience occurred.

### GOOGLE MY BUSINESS ACTIONS

# 15.87%

**of GMB Experiences  
Resulted in an Action**



Finally, Entrata measured how many conversions (i.e., calls to the property, scheduled tours, submitted guest cards, or applications completed) occurred once a user landed on a website through a GMB experience compared to conversion rates of OBL sessions.

### WEBSITE CONVERSIONS



Entrata's findings conclude that GMB Experiences are the primary driver of sessions to individual apartment websites - supplanting the traditional OBL results. Nearly two thirds of organic Google sessions are taking place in a format where rankings fluctuate wildly depending on distance - and if a geo qualifier (e.g., city or state) isn't present in the search, Google makes an assumption based on what is known about a user's location. However, fluctuating rankings are no longer a cause for alarm, since 73 percent of searches triggering a GMB experience are discovery searches where location ("apartments in City ST" or even "apartments nearby") significantly impacts relevance. It's counterproductive to chase rankings in OBL searches where competition remains high even though prospect behavior is shifting. Instead, we recommend a focus on GMB for increased conversions.

## TOP 10 WAYS TO OPTIMIZE GOOGLE MY BUSINESS

Over the last year, a significant number of updates to Google Local and its GMB platform have been released. Additional features such as availability and amenities (like in the hotel space) and floorplans availability are likely in the near future, which will give Google all of the functionalities offered by most Internet Listing Services. GMB performance and improvement must become a priority to apartment marketers. The good news? It's all free and relatively easy to optimize.

To get the most out of search, take advantage of all the resources offered within your GMB listing.

1. **Create or verify your listing** - Request ownership and verify your GMB listing. Monitor your listing regularly for duplicates and report them to Google support if found. Do not create a duplicate page for your listing.
2. **Ensure your listing is up-to-date and accurate** - Verify your business name, address, phone number, and URL. Add a complete business description as well as listing frequently asked questions in the Q&A section. Use keywords in descriptions and include tracking phone numbers and UTM codes in all applicable areas. PRO TIP: If you have a dedicated cell phone number for your community, add it - texting is now supported within a GMB experience.
3. **Update your page categories** - Select five or more categories that apply but make "Apartment Building" or "Apartment Complex" your primary category.
4. **Add, organize and categorize photos** - Update your page with refreshed photos on a quarterly basis. Use keywords that describe your community in the photo file name before uploading them.
5. **Encourage reviews and feedback, and respond** - You can design an optimized link to your review page and add it to emails and other marketing collateral by using Google's placeID finder, reviews link builder, and URL shortener. Monitor incoming reviews, ratings, and questions and respond to all of them. Be excited and thankful for positive reviews and stay neutral/non-confrontational and solution-minded with negative reviews.
6. **Test and interact with your page as a Google user** - Upload photos of your property, ask and answer FAQs in the Q&A section and write reviews. Use keywords in all instances. Confirm your GMB place marker by looking at your personal Google timeline to see if it recognizes your visits to the property.
7. **Enrich your page by creating branded posts** - Improve your organic click-through rates by posting about new promotions and specials, amenity updates, community events or photos taken at your community. PRO TIP: Use UTM codes for each call to action to track the types of posts that lead to the most engagement.
8. **Connect your page with AdWords** - Sync your GMB data within AdWords' Location Extension Manager via the label method. Ensure your phone number is the same as the Call Extension phone number set up in GMB AdWords info.
9. **Create a place marker** - Look at your place marker within settings to ensure your community's physical address and business address are the same. The place marker should be set to the location you want your prospects to arrive at after requesting directions.
10. **Measure your GMB Actions** - Calls, requests for directions, text messages and website clicks are all ways prospects can interact with you through GMB experiences, and all are measured in GMB insights. Monitor these on a monthly basis and make adjustments as appropriate.

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

Entrata analyzed the search and conversion data of 400+ property websites and GMB accounts across the U.S. Websites analyzed were Entrata's ProspectPortal websites using digital marketing services in quarter three of 2016, 2017 and 2018.

### ABOUT ENTRATA

Founded in 2003, Entrata® is multifamily real estate's fastest-growing technology company. It provides the only comprehensive property management software provider with a single-login, open-access Platform as a Service (PaaS) system. Offering a wide variety of online tools including websites, mobile apps, payments, lease signing, accounting, and resident management, Entrata® PaaS currently serves more than 20,000 apartment communities nationwide. Entrata's open API and superior selection of third-party integrations offer management companies the freedom to choose the technology and software that best fit their needs.