

# Google Search: What Works For Lawyers

A Practical Guide for  
Smaller Practices

by Robert Cooper

**WHAT  
WORKS**  
MARKETING



**WHAT  
WORKS**  
ACADEMY

# Better Search Results for Lawyers

Curious about all the elements of Google Search and where your best opportunities are?

Google's search engine changes literally monthly and it's near impossible to get a handle on all the different areas.

With that in mind, we've created a guide for lawyers so you can understand and address your best opportunities in Google.

Here's a glimpse of a typical legal search result:

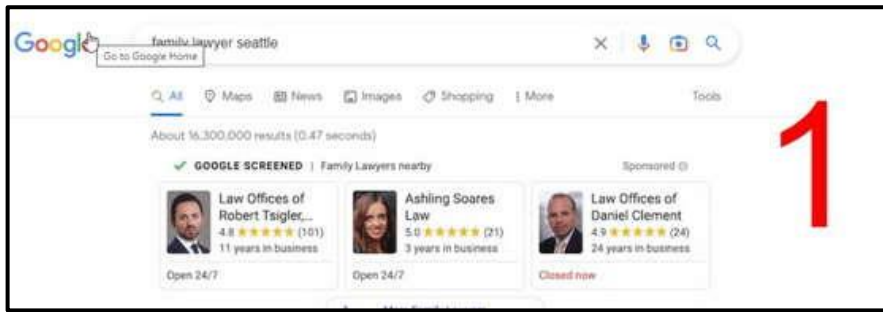


1. Google Local Service Ads
2. Google Search Ads
3. Google Local "3 Pack"
4. Google Map
5. "People Also Ask"
6. Organic Search Results
7. Google Search Ads
8. Not shown: images, videos, related searches

Read on for descriptions and advice for each section.

To see a larger version of the search results image, visit <https://whatworks.training/google7>

# 1 - Google Local Services Ads



## Background

A relatively new phenomenon, these ads are not always displayed in search results but, depending on your market, they can be quite powerful when they do.

They are managed independently of other Google ads and are quite straightforward to set up.

Note that these ads are available for most types of lawyers in the US, but are not yet available for lawyers in Canada.

## Cost

These ads are priced on a cost per lead basis.

When a user clicks on a Local Services Ad, they are taken to a unique landing page that displays information about the business, including their ratings and reviews. The user can then contact the business directly through the ad by phone, email, or text message (this is considered a lead).

The cost per lead varies market to market and is based largely on the amount of competition in your area (which inflates the market).

The number of leads you receive is determined by your weekly budget. Your ads will run until the cost of your leads in a given week adds up to your weekly budget, after which they will shut off.

## Advantages

- Google Local Services ads are very prominent, appearing right at the top of Google Search results.
- As part of the setup, you get verified and receive a "Google Guaranteed" badge, which adds to your online credibility.
- They work quite well - you are guaranteed to receive leads.
- You can set your service area.

- They are quite easy to manage.

## Challenges

- Not all leads are good quality, although you can dispute leads that aren't valid.
- They can be quite competitive. Because they are very easy to set up there are few barriers to entry so there are lots of people using them.
- In particularly competitive markets they can get very expensive.
- There is not a lot of optimization or experimentation you can do with ads to improve your results (especially compared to regular Google Search Ads).

## Recommendations

Try them! The only way to know if they will work well for you is to try them and it's well worth it to try them out, especially in less competitive markets.

## DIY or Get Help?

These are one of the easiest areas of Google Search to work with, so there's no reason not to try them in-house, as long as you have a bit of time or someone internally who can set them up, monitor them (monthly at least) and dispute invalid leads.

Alternatively, if you have an agency already managing Google Search Ads and/or your Google Business Profile, this should be a relatively low-cost addition to your monthly service package.

If you are running Google Search Ads, you'll definitely want to monitor the relative cost per lead between the two platforms and allocate your budget accordingly.

## Links

- Get more info or sign up at <https://ads.google.com/local-services-ads/>

## 2 - Google Search Ads



Ad · <https://www.lawyers.com/> ·  
**Seattle Family Lawyers - Over 1 Million Lawyer Reviews**  
Find the right **lawyer** for your legal issue. Get legal information. Get Exclusive Ratings and Reviews of More than 1 Million **Lawyers**. Expert **Lawyers**. Over 1M...  
Find a Lawyer Near You · Ask A Lawyer · Understand Your Issue · About Lawyers.com

Ad · <https://www.duboislaw.net/> ·  
**DuBois Levias Law Group - Family law**  
We Understand That Parenting Plans Are As Complicated As People's Lives. Let Us Help You with Your Child **Custody** Plan. Call Us to Learn More. Tech Professionals.  
Our Home Page · Child Custody · Practice Areas · Contact Us · Alimony

Ad · <https://www.cookroberts.bc.ca/family/lawyers> ·  
**Family Law Office - Parental Responsibilities**  
Our **Lawyers** Are Able To Assist You With A Full Range Of **Family Law** Services. Call Us Now! At Cook Roberts Lp, Our **Lawyers** Will Assist You With A Full Range Of **Family Law**...

### Background

Google Search Ads have been around for decades and can be extremely powerful if set up strategically.

Search ads are text ads (sometimes showing a small related image) that appear alongside search results and look very similar to the regular Search results.

They are quite complex (and can be expensive) although can also be an extremely effective way of winning new business.

### Cost

Google Search Ads are often referred to as PPC ads, which stands for “pay per click,” a concept introduced as Google’s payment model back in 2002, two years after the launch of Google Ads.

With PPC, you place a bid on how much you’re willing to pay “per click” and if your bid is high enough then your ad appears in the “auction.”

These bids are placed on specific “keywords” that you select based on them being highly relevant to your practice. For instance, a family lawyer might bid on “family lawyer near me” and then have their ads show when someone in their targeted geographic area types in those keywords in Google Search.

In practice there are many payment models (and it’s way more complicated than that) but, in short, the “bid” you need to place for your ad to appear is a combination of what you’re willing to pay, multiplied by your performance.

This “multiplied by performance” is possibly the most critical element of the platform. If you place highly relevant ads and get a high rate of response, you’re rewarded with lower cost clicks. This ensures the maximum relevance for searchers (and the maximum financial yield for Google!).

This performance-based model has also made it critical to be very good at the skills required to run and optimize your campaigns (which is why so many lawyers outsource their ads work).

Like Local Services Ads, Google Search Ads run within a set budget and stop running if your budget is exhausted.

Unlike Local Services Ads, Google Search Ads utilize a daily/monthly hybrid budget model. You set a “daily” budget that Google then equalizes over a 30 day period. The amount you spend per day might go above your daily budget or fall below it, but Google manages your spend so that your monthly spend is not more than 30 times your daily budget.

## Advantages

- You can get new clients immediately. Unlike marketing channels like SEO or traditional Brand advertising, there’s near-zero lag for getting results as your ads can immediately show up in front of people who are actively searching for your services.
- You can control your traffic flow by increasing your budget when you need new clients or reducing or pausing your budget when you’re too busy.
- You can track your results (and leads) back to individual campaigns and keywords.
- There’s huge potential to optimize campaigns and improve your results over time, leading to a steady source of profitable clients.

## Challenges

- In some markets, these ads can get extremely expensive and competitive to the point where they might not be profitable.
- The ads are competitive and experienced advertisers have an upper hand. This means it can be rather challenging to break into a market through Search ads if you’re not very experienced with ads.
- They are challenging to set up and manage. Google offers some campaign options that are easy to set up, but in competitive markets these “automatic” campaigns typically perform poorly.

## Recommendations:

If you need to grow your practice faster than you can manage through means like referrals and networking, Google Search Ads are a great way to accelerate your growth.

Before starting, you’ll want to make sure you’ve got your Google Analytics set up so you can record all “conversion goals” like submitted inquiry forms, appointment bookings and “clicks to call” (when people click to phone your office). Having these conversions in place also helps “train” Google’s algorithm and improves the quality of your ads traffic.

To start, you may want to start with a small campaign focused on your most profitable services, leveraging “high intent” keywords. High intent keywords are search queries that make it clear that someone is shopping for services vs simply researching a topic.

For instance, the “near me” in the keyword “family lawyer near me” is a great indicator that someone needs your service versus simply researching family law, because it matters to them where you are located.

Also, going “all in” with multiple campaigns and a huge budget is not typically a good idea until you learn a bit about your market and whether you can compete effectively.

## DIY or Get Help?

We are huge fans of the DIY approach, but Google Search ads are one are you’ll probably want to outsource as in most markets you’ll be competing against firms using professional advertisers and your costs are based on your relative performance. In short, you’ll typically lose your shirt while you’re getting started and it will take hundreds of hours of work & learning to attempt to bridge the skills gap.

That said, if you love data, are up for a challenge and are ready to commit to some training and learning, it’s a very fun area to work in!

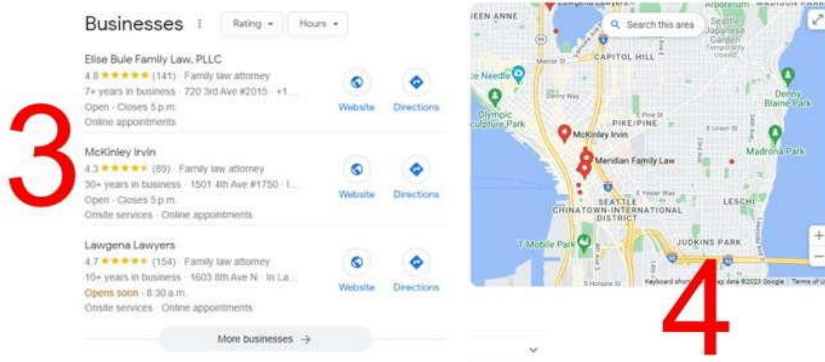
## Links

- If you want to learn Google Ads, a great first step is the Google Ads Certification at [https://skillshop.exceedlms.com/student/catalog/list?category\\_ids=2844-google-ads-certifications](https://skillshop.exceedlms.com/student/catalog/list?category_ids=2844-google-ads-certifications)

You’ll want to complete the Measurement Certification class, the Creative Certification (focusing on the Search creative) and the Google Ads Certification.

- Google Analytics Setup: <https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/9304153?hl=en>
- Google Analytics Conversion Goal Setup: <https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/9267568?hl=en>

# 3 & 4 - The Google Local 3 Pack + Google Maps



## Background

This “3 Pack” is powered by your **Google Business Profile** plus Google Maps.

There are numerous factors regarding if and where you show up, but fortunately the biggest factor is proximity: the closer your address is to the searcher’s location, the more likely you are to show up.

Having a reasonable number of legitimate reviews on your Google Business Profile is also critical for helping your Profile gain prominence.

**IMPORTANT:** If you are marketing and selling your products or services locally, properly setting up your Google Business Profile is the most important low cost thing you can possibly do to improve your prominence in Google Search.

As well, Google Business Profile is still important if you’re selling nationally or internationally as it’s critical for Brand Search and to ensure Google properly recognizes your business.

To claim your business profile, first search for your business to see if Google has automatically created a profile for you.

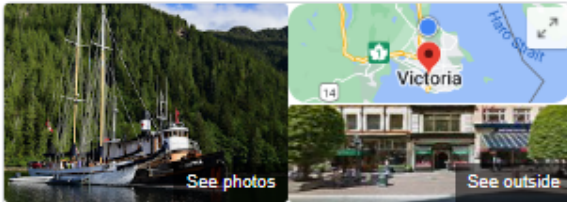
If Google has automatically created a profile, you’ll see an “Own this business?” link on the Profile. Simply click on it and follow the steps to create your business.

If you don’t find any results when you search your business, instead go <https://www.google.com/business/> and follow the steps to create your account.

For a complete breakdown on the different elements of a fully fleshed out Google Business Profile, see the link to the free Guide in the links below.

Here’s an example of a great Google Business Profile:





## Maple Leaf Adventures

[Website](#) [Directions](#) [Save](#) [Call](#)

4.8 ★★★★★ 17 Google reviews

Tour operator in Victoria, British Columbia

A 2-min walk from the Bay Centre

**Address:** 1110 Government St #209, Victoria, BC V8W 1Y2

✓ You visited 4 years ago

**Hours:** Open - Closes 5 p.m. ▾

Updated by this business 2 weeks ago

**Phone:** (250) 388-7245

**Province:** British Columbia

[Suggest an edit](#) · [Own this business?](#)

**Know this place?** [Share the latest info](#)

### Questions and answers

[See all questions \(2\)](#)

[Ask a question](#)

### Popular times

MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

👤 2 p.m.: Usually not too busy






📱 [Send to your phone](#)

[Send](#)

### Reviews

[Write a review](#)

[Add a photo](#)

-  "I am thrilled to work for a company with such a big heart!"  
★★★★★
-  "So grateful for the experience."  
★★★★★
-  "Its staff and crew are caring and passionate in what they do."  
★★★★★

[View all Google reviews](#)

### Profiles



## Cost and/or Commitment

Fortunately, you don't pay anything for Google Business Profile unless you choose to pay for a Search ad which can appear in the "3 pack," Google Business Profile is completely free to use.

Also, the setup is fairly quick and intuitive. You'll ideally want some photos of your location and your logos on hand and, if you have those, the setup doesn't take more than 10 or 15 minutes.

A couple of quick notes:

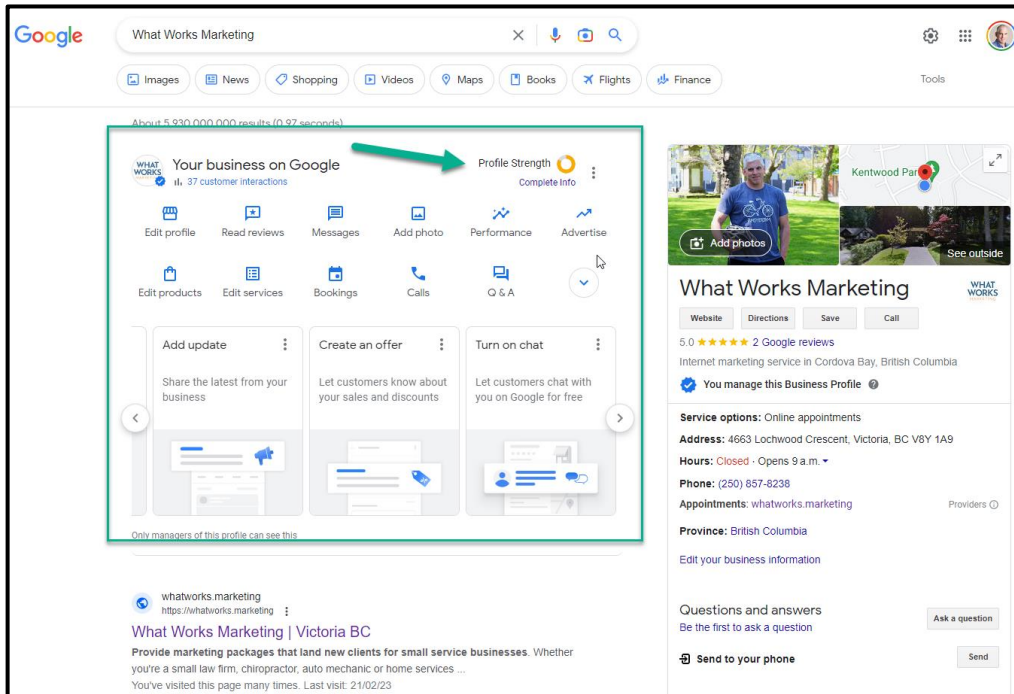
- When you set things up, make absolutely sure to use your proper business name, written how you use it across all properties on the internet (for instance, we'd pick one of these 3 variations and stick with it everywhere: What Works Marketing Inc, What Works Marketing or What Works). Having your business consistently named helps Google fully identify all references and listings for your business, which makes you more prominent in Search.
- Make sure to pick your correct business category and be consistent with it in all possible locations on the web.

In terms of ongoing commitment to maintaining your profile, you'll want to allocate at least an hour a month to:

- Encourage clients to leave reviews.
- Update hours as needed.
- Create short posts.
- Upload photos.

In recent news (February 2023), Google has added a Profile Strength Indicator.

This Indicator (and information about editing your Profile) appears when you are logged into Google with the email you use to manage your Google Business Profile and you search your business name so that your Google Business Profile appears on the right hand side:



This profile indicator is essentially a reflection of the percentage of Google Business Profile features you are using for your own Profile.

Clicking on it will simply take you to a walkthrough for the setup of any features you are not using.

## Advantages of Google Business Profile:

- Free to use.
- Ridiculously helpful for appearing in Search for people close to you.
- Based on relevance and proximity, so it works great even if your company is small.

## Challenges:

- Significant changes like your name or location can be very frustrating and time consuming (see below).
- Very little in the way of support and things don't always work properly.
- Transferring ownership or admin rights can be very challenging (especially if you can't access the email address that created the account).

## Recommendations:

- Do it. Today. Setting up your Google Business Profile is the lowest cost thing you can do that can have a significant impact on your Google Search presence.
- Use as many of its features as possible/practical (with Reviews being the top priority).
- Keep it current.
- Make sure it's set up with whichever Gmail (or Google Workspace email) that you use for all your Google properties (Analytics, Search Console, etc). If you get someone else to set it up, make sure they give you "owner" access immediately upon setup.

## DIY or Get Help?

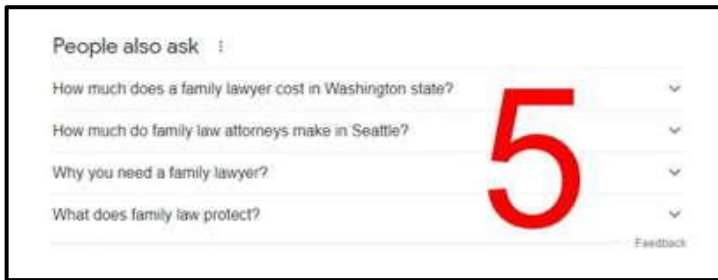
If things go smoothly there's no reason not to set up your own Google Business Profile.

If you have an outside person or company doing your marketing, they can certainly set it up for you but if you're not working with someone already it's probably quicker to set it up on your own than it is to find someone to do it for you.

## Links

- Log into Google Business Profile or create a new profile at:  
<https://www.google.com/business/>
- The What Works Google Business Profile Guide:  
<https://whatworks.marketing/show-up-in-search/>

## 5 - “People also ask”



### Background

Rather than search on general topics people often type questions or very specific queries right into Google.

Interestingly, this is a feature that will probably change dramatically in the near future as AI technology is further embraced within Search. The reason for this is that you can often get a better answer to a question by using ChatGPT than you can get in Google (and Google is certain to be aware of this gap!).

If you have an FAQ section on your site or otherwise answer questions on your pages you may be eligible to show up in this section.

### Cost and/or Commitment

Fortunately, there is no charge for Q&A - you just need to pick questions you can succeed with and do all the necessary work.

That said, it can be time consuming and you may want help from a professional to research potential high-traffic topics and help do the technical setup on your website.

### Advantages

Showing up in the Q&A section can get you exposure and clicks, as well as helping you appear as an authority or “thought leader” on the topics you’re showing up for.

### Disadvantages

There are no particular disadvantages of showing up. The only slightly annoying part of the Q&A is that the searcher might get enough information right in the Search results that they don’t need to click through to your site. That said, there is still value in having your company show up as the provider of the answer when that happens.

### Challenges

- The structured data (schema) can be challenging to set up and might be impossible on some website platforms.
- This is a difficult area to “win” in. If you do it, you need to do a really good job of it to have a chance of appearing, and you still might not appear if there are more authoritative sites you’re competing with.

## Recommendations

If you have the time and resources it may well be worth trying out a Q&A strategy.

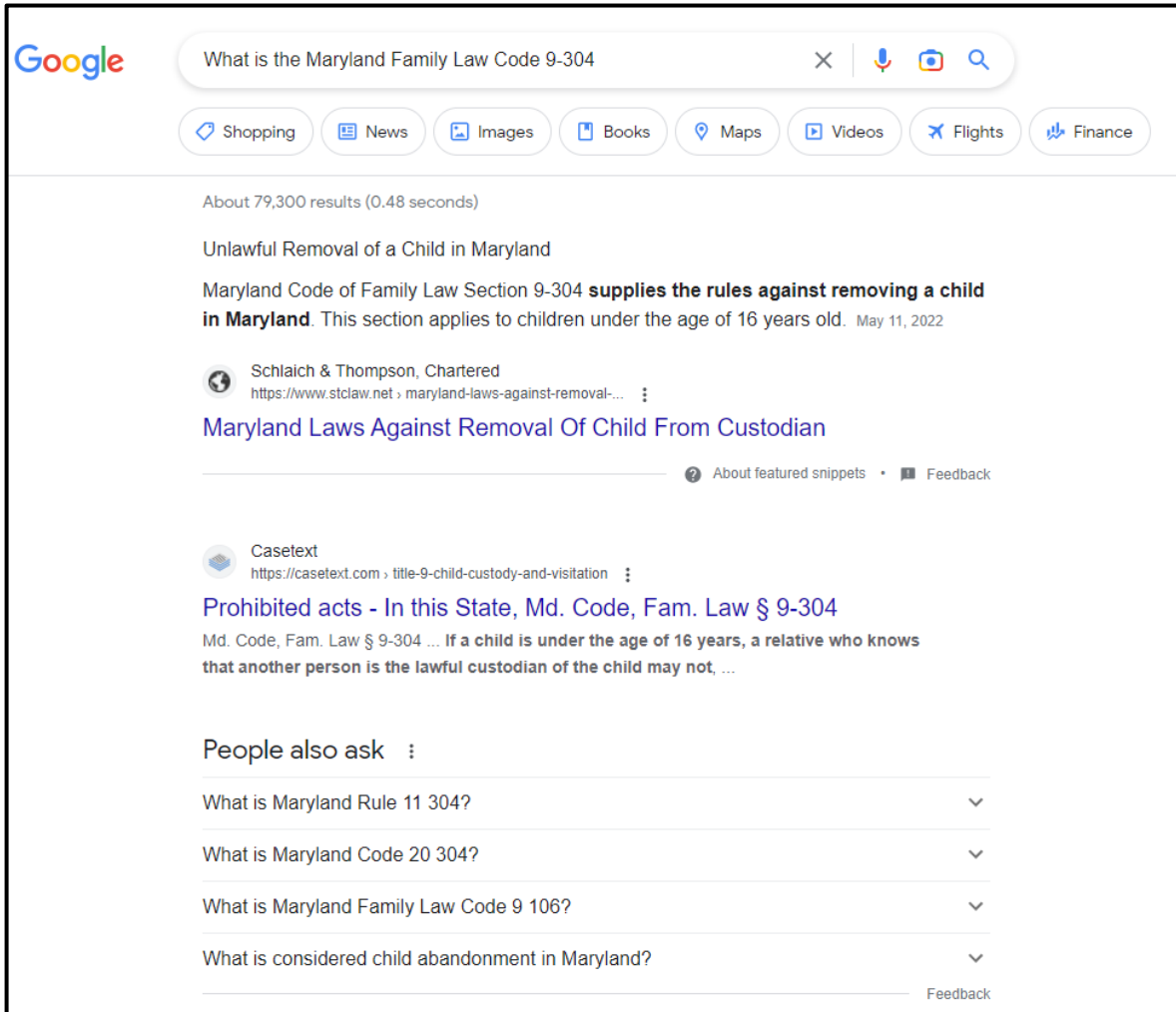
If you do so, we'd recommend starting with a small experiment where you add a small Q&A section on your site where you do a great job of answering a small number of questions (before going all in and spending a ton of time on it).

Of course, if this information will be of great value to your visitors, it may be worth creating such a section even if you don't end up showing up in search with it (especially as part of a thought leadership strategy).

Some key points to showing up in the Q&A:

- Be sure to write your questions and answers on your site very clearly, in a Q&A/FAQ format (include the question, ideally in an H2 or H3 tag, followed by the answer).
- Dig up your sleeves and get ready to get technical as you'll want to add structured data tags to your FAQ to dramatically increase your chances of showing up (see links below).
- Be strategic with your Questions. Make sure to ask questions that:
  - People are searching for (do keyword research or start with some general searches and note the other topics that come up as possible ideas.
  - Try to incorporate a local element to increase your chances (see example below) and be specific.
- Very important: if other sites are already showing up in Google Search Q&A for questions you are going to answer, be sure to provide a better answer than the other sites!

Here's an example of a specific and location-specific search that resulted in some very prominent results:



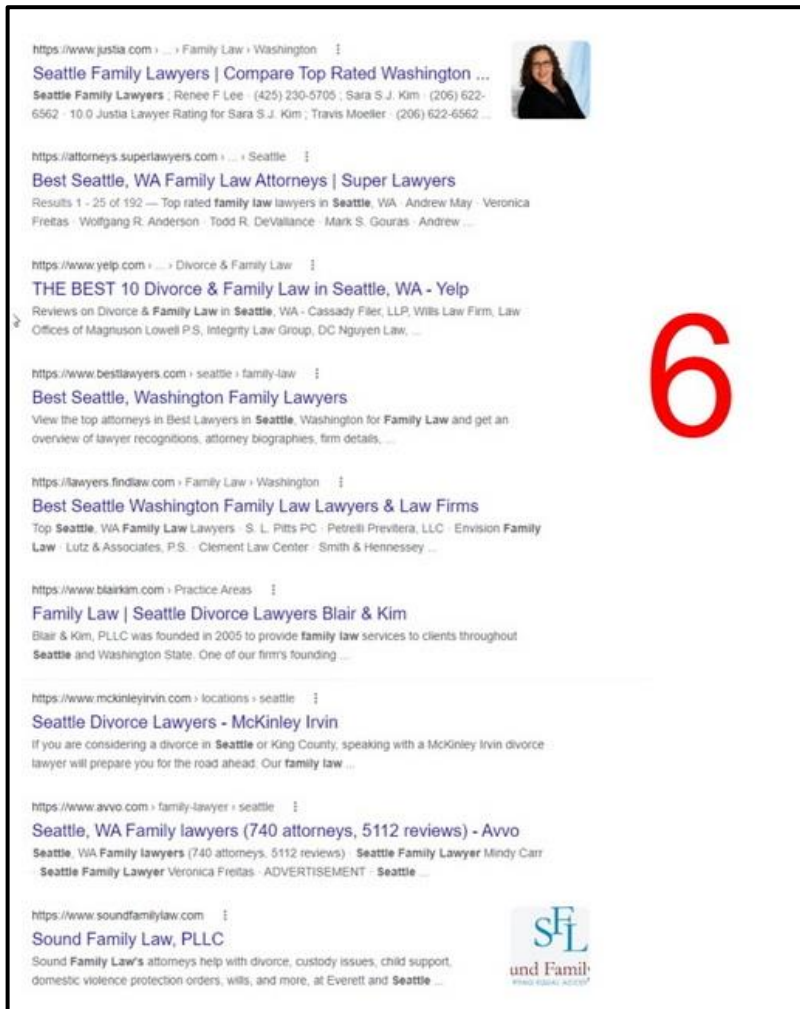
## DIY or Get Help?

- As the expert, you'll definitely want to write your own Questions and Answers.
- That said, you may want some professional help with:
  - Keyword research to help identify relevant questions that people are searching for.
  - Page creation and structured data setup.

## Links

- Google's instructions for adding structured data to your FAQs:  
<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/structured-data/qapage>
- For WordPress Users - a simple way to add structured data to your FAQ using the Yoast SEO plugin:  
<https://yoast.com/how-to-build-an-faq-page/>

# 6 - "Organic" Search Results



## Background

When people speak of "Search Engine Optimization" (SEO), they are usually talking about ranking highly in this area of the page.

By optimizing your site and following other SEO best practices you can dramatically affect your rankings in this area, particularly for niche topics and services.

This area can be ridiculously complex, so we'll share some of the top concepts here and link to more resources to help you with each area.

The critical thing to keep in mind with Organic SEO is that there are at least two levels of SEO:

- Basic SEO (sometimes called Baseline SEO). This involves making sure all basic SEO best practices are applied to both your Technical SEO, On-Site SEO and your Off-site SEO:
  - Technical SEO refers to things like website speed, site structure, SSL settings, index settings, etc.



- On-Site SEO refers to making sure that your pages are optimized so that Google recognizes the topics that are your focus on each page. It also includes elements like on-site linking.
- Off-Site SEO refers to properly setting up all relevant Social and business listings as well as proactively seeking citations (references) and links from other relevant websites.

In short, if you don't do your Basic SEO, you're likely losing traffic that otherwise would find your site.

- Competitive SEO. As the name suggests, this is SEO work that you do where you are competing against other sites to appear in Search. Ideally this involves:
  - Doing a competitor evaluation in order to determine if it will be possible to "win" against your competitors. If you're in a large and competitive market this might not be possible if your competitors are already well established and doing a lot of work to maintain their status. In this case, doing SEO work might be a waste of time and money.
  - Developing a competitive strategy that includes:
    - A content or thought leadership plan.
    - Technical and Onsite SEO.
    - Social Media engagement and promotion.
    - Networking and outreach.

## Cost and/or Commitment

If you want to learn SEO yourself, technically there's no cost.

However, if you get help there's a real range of prices you can pay:

- Companies that provide ongoing SEO services charge literally anywhere from \$300-\$10,000 per month (buyer beware).
- Practical companies can complete your Basic SEO for you will typically charge somewhere between \$2000-\$5000, depending on the level of detail they go to.

## Advantages

- Showing up in regularly in Search gives your company instant credibility and more traffic to your site.
- Your investment increases in value over time and you don't have pay for your traffic (unlike Search Ads that stop running as soon as you stop spending).

## Challenges

- SEO is quite complex and it can be hard to know how to prioritize the different activities.
- If you're in a large & competitive market, it may be prohibitively expensive and/or near-impossible to rank.

## Recommendations

- At minimum, do your Basic SEO.
- After your Basic SEO is complete, do a competitive evaluation to understand if it makes sense to make an ongoing investment in SEO.
- Get help in areas where you don't want to invest the time to learn (doing it badly can be worse than not doing it at all).

## DIY or Get Help?

From a practical perspective:

- It might make sense to get help with the challenging "one off" tasks as there's not much point in spending a lot of time learning something you'll only do once.
- If you're going to engage in Competitive SEO, there can be big advantages to learning skills to do this part internally (especially if you are pursuing a Thought Leadership strategy).
- Be careful if you outsource. Unfortunately, the SEO industry has a lot of rather corrupt companies with high pressure sales - these companies often make big promises up front but deliver nothing in return.

## Links

- Google's SEO Starter Guide:  
<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/seo-starter-guide>
- Baseline Search Engine Optimization (Free DIY guidance from What Works):  
<https://whatworks.marketing/academy/baseline-seo/>
- Advanced / Competitive SEO Assessment (Free DIY resource from What Works):  
<https://whatworks.marketing/academy/advanced-seo/>

## 7 - Lower Page Google Search Ads



More ads may appear in this location at the bottom of the page.

See the Search Ads information earlier in the document as these lower page ads are part of that area.

You can't select a lower page placement. Appearing in this location is a product of your bid, budget and optimization.

Also, it's not necessarily a bad thing to be appearing lower on the page. Clicks from lower on the page typically cost less, so appearing here may help you get the absolute most traffic for your set budget.

## 8 - Images, Videos and Related Searches

These are 3 additional results types that appear in Google Search. They are not hugely relevant, but might worth exploring if you have worked on the areas noted above.

### Image Search

Images that show up in Search are powered by “alt tags” that are applied to the photos on your website.

Alt tags help with site accessibility and are part of your on-site SEO. A good rule of thumb is to only use Alt tags on images you’d want to show up in search.

Images that you want to show up in search will include your logo (so have it alt-tagged with your business name) and any lawyers and partners in your firm (so tag their images with their names).

### Videos

If you are creating video content as part of your content or thought leadership strategy, be sure to optimize them and the pages they sit on so that they are more likely to appear in Search.

Also, while it’s great to optimize videos if you have them, it’s generally not a good idea to create them ONLY for SEO purposes (make sure they have other value to your clients or potential clients).

Videos do not typically show up in services-related searches but can absolutely show up for topic-specific searches.

### Related Searches

While you can’t optimize to appear in related searches, looking through the related searches on various topics might give you some ideas on potential keywords to target or Q&A topics.

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## Looking for Assistance?

If you want professional help in any or all of these areas, we’re here for you!

Simply contact us at <https://whatworks.marketing/contact/> and we’ll:

- Do a quick assessment of how your site stacks up in the above areas and identify opportunities.
- Book a short call with you.
- Present our findings in an educational manner with zero sales pitch.

We guarantee you’ll find huge value in our call - if you don’t, coffee is on us in the form of a \$20 Starbucks Gift Card (nobody has claimed one so far!).