

JOURNAL OF ACCOUNTANCY

TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOP / PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Put Your Business on the Map With Google Maps

BY TODD WEBBER AND BOB WEINS

JUNE 2009



Every firm's dream should be to have a free listing on a major search engine at the top of its first results page, allowing prospective clients to find the firm when they're searching for accounting, tax or financial planning services. Imagine if this free listing also included the firm's phone number, a description of its professional services, a map to the office and a link to its Web site (see Exhibit 1). It may sound too good to be true, but it isn't a dream. Your firm can take advantage of all this through Google Maps (officially called the Google Local Business Center.)

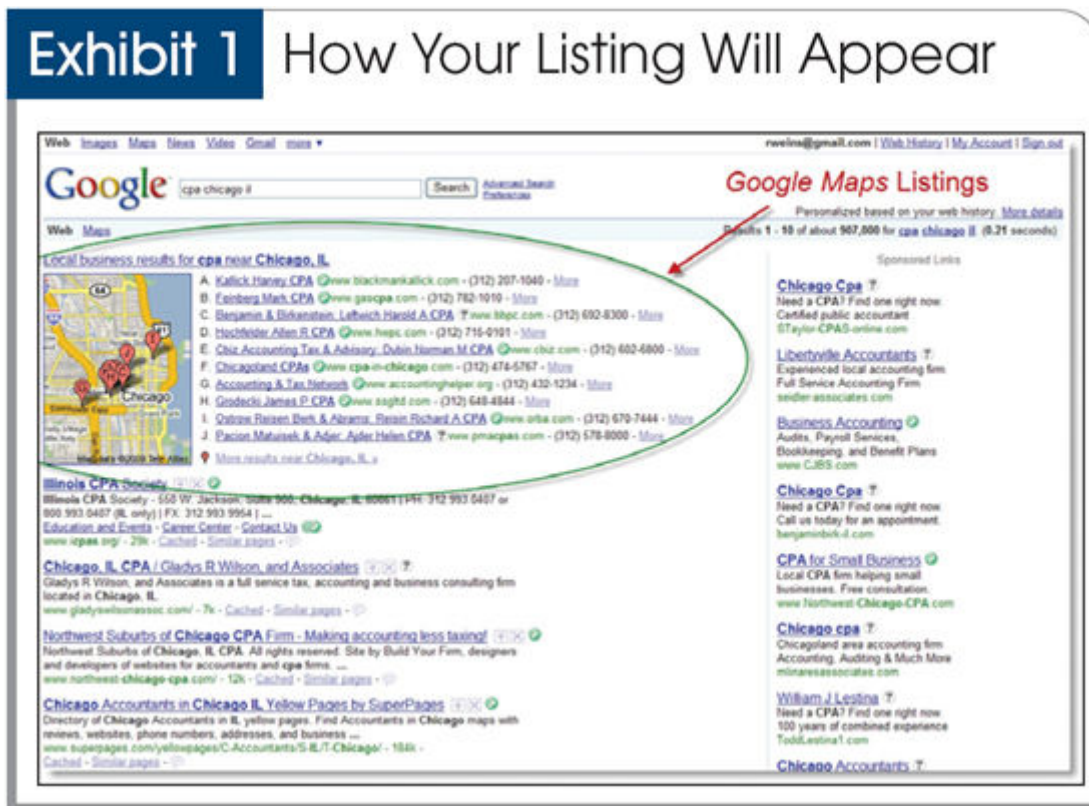
Why should you get listed on Google Maps? Consider these numbers:

Web fact no. 1. Sixty percent of your prospective clients search for products and services on the Web (Pew Internet Survey, September 2007, tinyurl.com/dko89w).

Web fact no. 2. Ninety percent of these searchers won't look beyond the first page of a search result (Enquisite Search Analytics study, tinyurl.com/djbsvj). This means that if you're not on the first page of the search result, you probably won't be seen.

In today's market you need to be on the Web, but you also may need to do this cheaply in a slow economy. Google Maps helps you do both. This article reviews what you must do before creating a Google Maps listing, how to register with Google Maps, and how to edit your listing. You need to do two things before registering with Google Maps:

- Create a Gmail account.
- Purchase a "tracking" phone number. (This is optional but extremely valuable.)



CREATE A GMAIL ACCOUNT

To create a Gmail account, go to www.gmail.com and click on “Create an account.” Follow the instructions.

(**Note:** When you register for a Gmail account, the confirmation page will display a link, “Show me my account.” Click this link to log in to your new account.)

Forwarding Gmail. To make life easier, you can set up Gmail to automatically forward messages to your office e-mail. To forward Gmail:

1. Log in to your Gmail account.
2. Click on “Settings” in the top navigation bar, then select the “Forwarding and POP/IMAP” option.
3. In the “Forwarding” section of the new screen, click on the “Forward a copy of incoming mail to” button and type the e-mail address to which you want your Gmail forwarded. (**Tip:** Leave the default on “keep Gmail’s copy in the Inbox.” Google has lots of space—more than 7 gigabytes per user and growing—so there’s no need to delete your e-mail history.)
4. Click “Save Changes.”

PURCHASE A “TRACKING” PHONE NUMBER

A “tracking” phone number is a separate telephone number that forwards to your main business line but tracks and optionally can record each call. Using tracking numbers allows you to see how many calls your listing is generating. Use a tracking phone number as your main number in your Google Maps registration. The tracking number won’t interfere with or require reprogramming your current phone system.

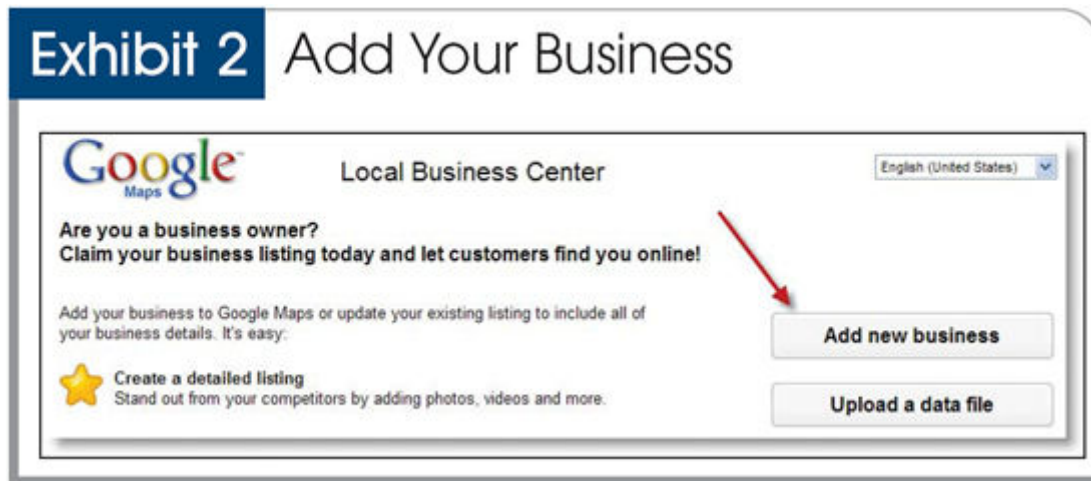
Tracking numbers cost \$20 to \$70 per month depending upon the depth of reporting you select. To choose a vendor, do an online search and make your selection based upon who has the easiest-to-read reports and who can provide a tracking number with the same area code and local exchange as your main business line.

REGISTERING WITH GOOGLE MAPS

Step 1: Go to www.google.com/local/add

- Log in using the information for the Gmail account you just created.


- Click on the “Add new business” button (see Exhibit 2).



Step 2: Enter your firm's profile on the basic information page

- **Main phone.** Insert your new tracking phone number (see Exhibit 3).
- **Additional phone numbers.** Click on “Add more phone numbers” to list all alternate telephone numbers (fax, cell phone, etc.) you want prospective clients to use.
- **E-mail address.** List the primary e-mail address where prospective clients can contact you.
- **Web site.** Include your firm's Web address to link your Maps listing to your Web site.
- **Description.** This text field is important because it is what your prospective clients will see when your listing appears. Focus the “Description” on the services you want to promote, such as higher margin services. For example: *“Small business specialists in tax, financial services, accounting, auditing and consulting. Our clients rely upon us for financial guidance. We are committed to meeting your needs on time and at a reasonable cost.”*
- **Fix incorrect marker location.** Make sure the map shows your correct location. Google sometimes gets the wrong address. If this occurs, click on “Fix incorrect marker location” and drag the marker to the correct location on the map, then select “Save Changes.” After reviewing your basic information, click on “Next.”

Exhibit 3 Enter Your Firm's Information


McBrideCPA@gmail.com | [Settings](#) | [Help](#) | [Sign out](#) | English (United States)

Basic Information

Please note that changing your address or business name will require additional verification via mail or phone.

Country:

Company/Organization:

Street Address:

City/Town:

State:

ZIP:

Main phone:
Example: (810) 555-4300

Alternate phone: Mobile phone:

Fax: TTY/TDD:

Email address:
Example: myname@example.com

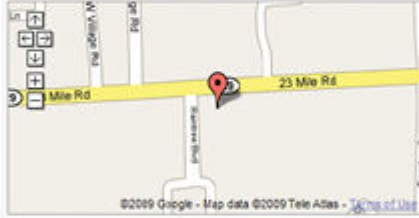
Website:
Example: http://www.example.com

Description:
255 characters max, 200 characters left

McBride, Manley and Miller CPAs

30100 Twenty Three Mile Rd.
Chesterfield MI 48047
United States

(586) 838-2228
<http://www.mcbriedcpa.com>



[Fix incorrect marker location](#)

Step 3: Categories, business hours, photos and additional details

Categories. On the following page you *must* complete the “Categories” section (see Exhibit 4). Google refers to your categories to determine if your firm’s listing should appear. If you list “Tax and Estate Planning” as one of your categories, your firm might appear when a person searches for “tax planning,” “estate planning” and similar services in your community. You can only list up to five categories, so focus on services your firm wants to promote.

Exhibit 4 Categorize Your Listing

Google

Local Business Center

McBrideCPA@gmail.com | [Settings](#) | [Help](#) | [Sign out](#) | English (United States)

Categories

Please enter in a few categories related to your business e.g. Restaurant, Dentist

Category:

Category:

Category:

Category:

Category:

[Add another category](#)

McBride, Manley and Miller CPAs

30100 Twenty Three Mile Rd.
Chestersfield MI 48047
United States

(588) 838-2228
<http://www.mcbridecpa.com>

©2009 Google - Map data ©2009 Tele Atlas - [Get help](#) | [Use](#)

Hours of operations

Make sure your customers know when you're open!

I prefer not to specify operating hours.

My operating hours are:

Mon:	<input type="text" value="9:00 AM"/>	<input type="text" value="5:00 PM"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Closed	Apply to all
Tue:	<input type="text" value="9:00 AM"/>	<input type="text" value="5:00 PM"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Closed	
Wed:	<input type="text" value="9:00 AM"/>	<input type="text" value="5:00 PM"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Closed	
Thu:	<input type="text" value="9:00 AM"/>	<input type="text" value="5:00 PM"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Closed	
Fri:	<input type="text" value="9:00 AM"/>	<input type="text" value="5:00 PM"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Closed	
Sat:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed			
Sun:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed			

Are your hours split during a single day, such as 9-11am and 7-10pm?
 I'd like to enter two sets of hours for a single day.

[Fix incorrect marker location](#)

Email address: McBrideCPA@comcast.net

Description: Small business specialists in tax, financial, accounting, auditing and consulting. Our client's rely on us for financial guidance. Meeting their needs, on-time and at a reasonable cost.

Hours:
Monday: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Tuesday: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Wednesday: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Thursday: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Friday: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm
Saturday: Closed
Sunday: Closed

Categories:
Business Consulting and Valuations
Tax and Estate Planning
Certified Public Accountant
Audit, Reviews and Compilations
Litigation Support

Photos. You can add as many as 10 images to your listing. Each image must be smaller than 1 megabyte and must be a JPG, GIF, PNG, TIFF or BMP. It is suggested that you upload your firm's logo and, for smaller firms, a professionally shot staff photo. This creates a professional appearance and allows prospective customers to see the faces behind your firm's name. Larger firms should consider a photo collage portraying the services offered.

Additional details. List each service and firm attribute you want to promote (see Exhibit 5). Unlike the categories, you aren't restricted to five. Remember to focus on attributes that distinguish your firm (multilingual, free initial consultation, etc.) and prioritize the list according to profitability and growth potential. When you've completed this screen, click on "Submit," and you're almost done.

Exhibit 5 Add Details

Additional Details

Please enter in any other details you want customers to know about your business, for example:

Parking available : Yes.
Brands carried : Sony, Panasonic and Toshiba.

Free Initial Consultation	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business & Personal Tax Planning	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tax Preparation	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
IRS Representation	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Estate & Trust Tax Preparation	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Audit, Review & Compilation	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Succession Planning	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Municipal Audit & Consulting	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Management Advisory Services	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Valuations	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mergers & Acquisitions	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Software Selection & Implementation	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book Services & Training	:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Add another](#)

Step 4: Validate your Google Maps listing

To prevent bogus business listings, Google won't post your listing until it has been validated. You can validate your listing by phone or mail (see Exhibit 6). Phone validation is recommended because it only takes a few minutes compared with mail validation, which takes two to three weeks.

If you validate by phone, a four-digit PIN will appear on your screen. Google will then place an automated call to the main phone number listed in your registration. When you receive this call, enter the PIN to verify your registration. You are done.

Exhibit 6 Validate Your Listing

The screenshot shows the Google Local Business Center interface for validating a listing. The page title is 'McBride, Manley and Miller CPAs'. The user is logged in as 'McBrideCPA@gmail.com'. The page asks 'How would you like to validate your listing?' and offers two options: 'By phone' (selected) and 'By postcard (2-3 weeks)'. A red arrow points to the 'By phone' option. The business address is '30100 Twenty Three Mile Rd., Chesterfield MI 48047, United States'. The contact name is 'Richard Miller'. The business description is 'Small business specialists in tax, financial, accounting, auditing and consulting. Our client's rely on us for financial guidance. Meeting their needs, on-time and at a reasonable cost.' The business hours are listed for Monday through Friday, and Saturday and Sunday are closed. The categories are 'Business Consulting and Valuations Audit, Reviews and Compilations Certified Public Accountant, Litigation Support Tax and Estate Planning'.

EDITING YOUR GOOGLE MAPS LISTING

You can edit your listing to add/change photos, services, business hours, etc. (You can even add a coupon.) To do this, go to the Google Local Business Center at www.google.com/local/add. Log in using your Gmail address and password. Click on "Edit" and make your changes.

MAP LISTINGS ON OTHER SEARCH ENGINES

Yahoo, MSN and other leading search engines offer similar free business listing services. We recommend starting with Google Maps because Google controls more than 70% of North American searches. After you're a Google Maps expert, expand your horizons to Yahoo and MSN (they are No. 2 and No. 3 in North American searches). The registration links for Yahoo and MSN, respectively, are tinyurl.com/4s9pq3 and tinyurl.com/6h6c95.

Todd Webber, J.D., is the founder and president, and **Bob Weins, CPA, J.D.**, is the operations manager, both of LocalBizNOW, a local search marketing company based in Birmingham, Mich. Their e-mail addresses, respectively, are todd@localbiznow.com and rweins@localbiznow.com.

Copyright © 2008 American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. All rights reserved.