

## 8.5: Implementation

### SEO and keywords

How do you start building your keyword list? It requires a little thought and a fair amount of research and insight, using tools that are readily available to help you grow and refine your list of keywords.

#### Note

Keyword or key phrase? These are usually used interchangeably to refer to single or multiple words used for optimising websites. We largely use 'keyword' in this book, but they are essentially the same.

Keywords are the very foundation of search. When users enter a query on a search engine, they use the words they think are relevant to the search. The search engine then returns those pages it has calculated to be most relevant to the words the searchers used and, increasingly, the implied meaning of the search.

Developers of search engines have built a sophisticated understanding of semantics and the way in which we use language. So, if a user searches for 'car rental', the search engine will look for pages that are relevant to 'car rental' as well as synonyms like 'car hire', 'vehicle hire' and so forth. Search engines have also built up knowledge around common misspellings, typos, synonyms and related searches.

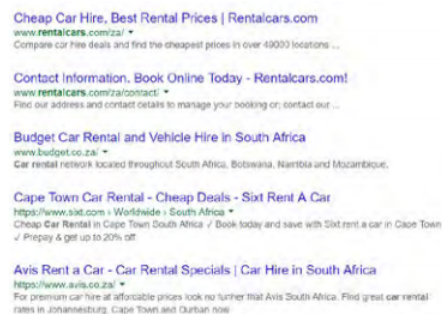


Figure 8.5.1: Google delivers search results for logical synonyms *Adapted From Screenshot, Google search 2017*

It is crucial that you implement keywords that are likely to be used by target audiences. Websites need to appear when potential customers are searching for them. A large part of keyword research is understanding search psychology. When we build our keyword lists, we are tapping into the mental process of searchers and putting together the right mix of keywords to target.

There are four things to consider when choosing a keyword.

#### 1. Search volume

How many searchers are using that phrase to find what they want? For example, there is an estimated monthly search volume of over 338 million for the keyword 'hotel', but an estimated 6 600 searches per month for a keyword such as 'Cape Town Waterfront hotel'.

If you're researching keywords using the Google AdWords Keyword Planner, note that it reports only on paid search volume, not on total volume and Google has made access more difficult for free accounts.

#### 2. Competition

How many other websites out there are targeting that same phrase? For example, Google finds over 2 900 000 000 results for 'hotel', but only 640 000 for 'Cape Town Waterfront Hotel'.

#### 3. Propensity to convert

What is the likelihood that the searcher using that keyword is going to convert on your site? A conversion is a desired action taken by the visitor to your website. Related to propensity to convert is the relevance of the selected term to what you are offering. If you are selling rooms at a hotel at the V&A Waterfront, which of the two terms, 'hotel' or 'Cape Town Waterfront hotel', do you think will lead to a higher rate of conversions?

#### 4. Value per lead

What is the average value per prospect attracted by the keyword? Depending on the nature of your website, the average value per lead varies. Using the hotel example again, consider these two terms:

‘Luxury Cape Town hotel’ and ‘budget Cape Town hotel’. Both are terms used by someone wanting to book a hotel in Cape Town, but it is expected that someone looking for a luxury hotel is intending to spend more. That means that this particular lead has a higher value, particularly if you have a hotel booking website that offers a range of accommodation.

#### Step-by-step keyword research

##### Step 1: Brainstorm

Think about the words you would use to describe your business and about the questions or needs of your customers that it fulfils. How would someone ask for what you are offering? Consider synonyms and misspellings as well.

Bear in mind that people may not ask for your services using the same words as you to describe them. You may sell ‘herbal infusions’, whereas people may ask for ‘herbal teas’ and some might even request a ‘tisane’.

Even common words are often misspelt and you may need to consider common misspellings and typos, for example, ‘jewelry’ or ‘morgage’.

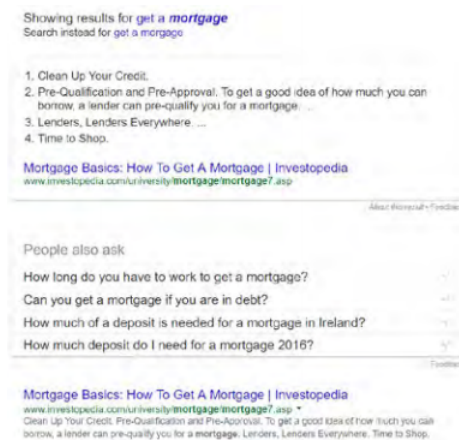


Figure 8.5.2: Google returns relevant results even for common misspellings *Adapted From Screenshot, Google search 2017*

Misspellings are important, but consider what these tell you about the traffic you’re getting and analyse this traffic to ensure that you’re getting quality visitors.

##### Step 2: Gather data

Two ways in which to gather accurate keyword data are to survey customers and to look at your website referral logs.

Look at what terms customers are already using to find you and add those to your list. If they are already sending you some traffic, it is worth trying to increase that traffic.

##### Step 3: Use keyword research tools

There are several tools available for keyword discovery and some of them are free. Some tools will scan your website and suggest keywords based on your current content. Most will let you enter keywords and will then return suggestions based on past research data, along with: \*

- Similar keywords
- Common keywords used with that keyword
- Common misspellings
- Frequency of the keywords in search queries
- Industry-related keywords
- Keywords that are sending traffic to your competitors
- How many sites are targeting your keywords?

## Note

Try it now: Pick one of the tools listed at the end of the chapter and try a little of your own keyword research. Can you discover any useful keywords that your favourite brand should be using?

See section 8.7 [Tools of the trade](#) for some tools that you can use.

Bearing in mind the factors that make a good keyword, you need to aim for the right mix of keywords. Low-volume terms with low levels of competition may be a good way to get traffic in the short term, but don't be scared off by bigger competition in the high-value, high-volume areas. It may take longer to get there, but once you do, the revenue can make it worthwhile.

It is a good idea to create a spreadsheet of the list of keywords, along with additional information about each one.

Keyword or phrase	Search volume	Competition	Propensity to Convert	Value of Lead
Hotel	3,870	90%	2%	\$18
Luxury hotels	345	80%	35%	\$35

Figure 8.5.3: Keep a spreadsheet of targeted keywords for reference *Adapted From Stokes, 2013*

This will help you to choose the right keywords to target. These lists should be created for the whole website and can then be broken down for each page you want to optimise.

## Optimising content for keywords

Once keywords and phrases are selected, we need to ensure the site contains content to target them. You must ensure that the content is properly structured and that it sends relevance signals. Content is the most important part of your website so create relevant, targeted content aimed at your selected keywords. Remember, search engines can recognise context and implied meaning, so synonyms are important.

Content has several roles to play on your site.

- It must provide information to visitors.
- It must engage with them.
- It must persuade them to do what you want. \*

Now it must also send signals of relevance to search engines. You need to use the keywords on the content page in a way that search engines will pick up and users will understand.

Each web page used to be optimised for a set number of keywords. With the increasing sophistication of search engines and their semantic awareness, however, pages are now optimised for themes instead – search engines have moved from keywords to concept and context. For example, one page might be optimised for car insurance, with relevant keywords used as required, while another page would be optimised for health insurance, or household insurance.

Search engines consider context in three ways:

1. **User intention** – Google tries to match your query to what you are asking rather than the individual words used. “Song about evil ducks” gives you “March of the Sinister Ducks” as a result, rather than a page with those specific keywords.
2. **Your content** – Google reads your pages’ keywords to find out what they are about, conceptually.
3. **Relating concepts** – Google relates concepts to each other, like showing Alan Moore as author of March of the Sinister Ducks and offering related results for his work.

While keywords are still useful, then, focus has shifted from repeatedly using keywords to ensuring that each page is about something specific. Even though you should be thinking customer first rather than exact keywords, keywords are still useful. Here are some guidelines.

1. **Title tag:** Use the keyword in the title and as close to the beginning as possible.
2. **H1 header tag:** Use the keyword in the header tag and as much as possible in the other H tags.
3. **Body content:** Use keywords as it makes sense in context. Remember to use synonyms rather than focusing on one specific version of a keyword. You should aim for about 350 words of content. But don't overdo it or it could look like spam to the search engines.
4. **Bold:** Use tags around the keyword at least once.
5. **URL:** Try to use the keyword in your page URL.

6. **Meta description:** Use it at least once in the meta description of the page, which should entice users to clickthrough to your site from the SERP.
7. **Link anchor text:** Try to ensure that the keyword is used in the anchor text of the pages linking to you.

### Optimising media

Images, video and other digital assets should also be optimised with the relevant keywords. Search engines cannot decipher multimedia content as well as text, so they rely on the way that media is described to determine what it is about. Screen readers also read out these descriptions, which can help visually impaired users make sense of a website. In addition, media such as images and video are often also shown on the SERPs. Proper optimisation can give a brand more ownership of the SERP real estate and can also be used effectively to target competitive terms.

#### Note

Read more about this in the [Video marketing](#) chapter.

Just as rich media can help emphasise the content on a page to a visitor, they can also help search engines to rank pages, provided they are labelled correctly.

Here are some ways to optimise images with keywords for SEO.

- Use descriptive, keyword-filled filenames.
- Use specific alt tags and title attributes.
- Add meta information to the image. Make sure this information is relevant.
- Use descriptive captions and keep relevant copy close to the corresponding media. For example, an image caption and neighbouring text will help to describe content of the image.
- Make sure that the header tags and images are relevant to each other.
- Think about what other digital assets you have and whether these can be optimised in line with your keyword strategy. For example, consider using app store optimisation (ASO) which is the process of optimising your mobile and web apps for the specific web stores in which they are distributed.

#### Note

Find out how to optimise your apps in the [Mobile channels and apps](#) chapter.



Figure 8.5.4: An example of a page targeting the theme 'handmade bags' Adapted From Stokes, 2013

#### Note

As search engines become ever more sophisticated and user focused, creating entertaining and readable copy will be much more important than simply including keywords in your text.

The best way to ensure results is to focus on writing quality content while sticking to a few guidelines on tags and URLs. Remember, you want search engines to rank you highly for your content, but you also want to ensure that the content is a pleasure to read.

Regularly adding fresh, valuable content will also encourage the search engines to crawl your site more frequently.

Use your website and its pages to establish and reinforce themes. Information can always be arranged in some kind of hierarchical structure. Just as a single page can have a heading and then be broken down into sub-headings, a large website can have main themes that are broken down into sub-themes. Search engines will see these themes and recognise your website as one with rich content.

## Link popularity

Links are a vital part of how the Internet works. The purpose of a link is to allow a user to go from one web page to another. Search engines, mimicking the behaviour of humans, also follow links.

Besides allowing search engine spiders to find websites, links are a way of validating relevance and indicating importance. When one page links to another, it is as if that page is voting or vouching for the destination page. Generally, the more votes a website receives, the more trusted it becomes, the more important it is deemed, and the better it will rank on search engines.

**Links help send signals of trust.** Signals of trust can come only from a third-party source. Few people will trust someone who says, “Don’t worry, you can trust me!” unless someone else, who is already trusted, says, “Don’t worry, I know him well. You can trust him.” It is the same with links and search engines. Trusted sites can transfer trust to unknown sites via links.

**Links help to validate relevance.** Text links, by their very nature, contain text (thank you, Captain Obvious). The text that makes up the link can help validate relevance. A link such as ‘Cape Town hotel’ sends the message that, “You can trust that the destination site is relevant to the term ‘Cape Town hotel’.” If the destination web page has already used content to send a signal of relevance, the link simply validates that signal.

## The parts of a link

Here is an example of the HTML code for a link:

```
<a href="www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm">Anchor Text</a>
```

`<a href>` and `</a>` are HTML tags that show where the link starts and ends.

`www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm` is the page that the link leads to. You should make sure that you are linking to a relevant page in your site, and not just to the home page.

**Anchor Text is the visible text that forms the link.** This is the text that should contain the keyword you are targeting.

The link sends a signal that the target URL is important for the subject used in the anchor text.

There can be a lot more information included in this anatomy, such as instructions telling the search engine not to follow the link, or instructions to the browser on whether the link should open in a new window or not.

```
<a href="www.targeturl.com/targetpage.htm" rel="nofollow">Anchor Text</a>
```

`rel="nofollow"` can be included in links when you don’t want to vouch for the target URL. Search engines do not count nofollow links for ranking purposes. This was introduced by Google to try to combat comment spam.

## Not all links are created equal

Of course, not all links are equal. While link volume is the number of links coming to a specific page of your site, link authority looks at the value of the links. Some sites are more trusted than others. Since they are more trusted links from those sites are worth more. Likewise, some sites are more relevant than others to specific terms. The more relevant a site, the more value is transferred by the link.

Well-known and established news sites, government sites (.gov) and university domains (.ac) are examples of sites from which links can carry more weighting.

Sites with higher authority carry more link weight.



Figure 8.5.5: Links from universities and government bodies carry more weight Adapted From Screenshot, Google search bar, 2017

## Note

Discussion: Why are government and university websites considered to have more authority? What sorts of websites would they be likely to link to?

Search algorithms also consider relationships between linked sites. By analysing various elements, search engines try to determine if the links are natural links, or if they are manipulative, artificial links created solely for ranking purposes.

Manipulated links are worth very little compared to natural links and may even lead to a drop in search engine rankings. The Google algorithm update focused on reducing spammy links, called Penguin, was released in 2012.

The search engine algorithm will also determine the relevancy of the referring website to the site being linked to. The more relevant the sites are to each other, the better.

Also keep in mind that linking to valuable, relevant external resources can help to improve the visibility of your own site.

### How does a website get more links?

With links playing such a vital role in search engine rankings and traffic for a website, everyone wants more of them. There are certainly dubious means of generating links, most of which can result in penalties from the search engines. However, here are some ways for ethical and honest website owners and marketers (that's what you are) to go about increasing links to their websites.

#### Create excellent, valuable content that others want to read

If people find your site useful, they are more likely to link to it. It is not necessary (or possible) to try to write content that will appeal to the whole of the Internet population. Focus on being the best in your industry and in providing value to the members of that community. Make sure that valuable content is themed around your keywords.



Figure 8.5.6: Ensure that you create remarkable, valuable content that people want to link to *Adapted From Stokes, 2013*

Infographics are visual and graphic representations of data, and are a popular type of content that is useful to users, and can encourage lots of traffic and inbound links.

#### Create tools and documents that others want to use

Interview experts in your field, and host those interviews on your website. Create useful PDF guides for your industry that people can download from your site. Think outside the box for quirky, relevant items that people will link to. Calculators are popular tools, and we don't just mean the ones that add two and two together. If you have a website selling diet books, for example, create a tool which helps users to calculate their body mass index (BMI) and target weight. Importantly, be unique!

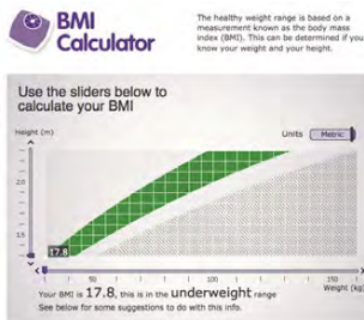


Figure 8.5.7: The BBC website has several interactive elements, such as this BMI calculator *Adapted From BBC, 2014*

## Create games

Creating a game that people want to play is a great way to generate links. Make sure that the theme of the game is based on the keywords for your website so that when others talk about and link to the game they are using your keywords.

## Capitalise on software and widgets

Widgets, browser extensions and other software that users love to use all help to generate links for a website. For example, the TripAdvisor widget enables hotels, attractions, restaurants, destination marketers, and bloggers to add TripAdvisor content such as reviews, awards, and local area attractions to their website.

Be creative! The best link-building strategies are those that provide value and automate the linking process as much as possible. The easier it is for someone to share your link, the more likely they are to do it.

## Competitor analysis

You can find out who is linking to your competitors, and which non-competing sites are ranking highly for your keywords. Use this information to identify sites to target for link requests.

Until January of 2017, using Google search along with the 'link:' command could be used to find these links and websites. Now, however, a better alternative is to use the data in your Google Search Console account, formerly known as Webmaster tools. Learn more here: [www.google.com/webmasters](http://www.google.com/webmasters)

You can also use paid tools that provide link index data, such as:

- majestic.com
- [www.linkresearchtools.com](http://www.linkresearchtools.com)
- ahrefs.com
- [www.opensiteexplorer.org](http://www.opensiteexplorer.org).

With all link-building tactics, make sure to use your keywords when communicating. You will be telling people how to link to you, and ensuring that search engines notice your authority.

## User insights

Search engines want their results to be highly relevant to web users, to make sure that web users keep returning to the search engine for future searches. And the best way to establish what is relevant to users? By looking at how they use websites, of course!

User data is the most effective way of judging the true relevance and value of a website. For example, if users arrive on a website and leave immediately, chances are it wasn't relevant to their query in the first place. However, if a user repeatedly visits a website and spends a long time there, it is probably extremely relevant. When it comes to search engines, relevant, valuable sites are promoted, and irrelevant sites are demoted.

## How do search engines access this data?

Search engines use cookies to maintain a history of a user's search activity. This will include keywords used, and websites visited from the search engine. Search engines gather data on the clickthrough and bounce rates of results.

Site speed, that is, the performance of your website, is one of the contributing factors to ranking in Google (Dean, 2016). In fact, this is becoming increasingly important. Check out Google's PageSpeed tool to help analyse your site's performance. It will recommend ways to improve your site's speed and mobile-friendliness: [https:// developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/](https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/)

Google's AMP project also underlines the importance of site speed for users and thus to Google themselves (and thus, of course, to your SEO). Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) essentially simplifies HTML, CSS, and JavaScript elements to serve stripped-down pages containing only the most essential elements to mobile users. This leads to anything from a 15% to an 85% improvement in site speed (Chung, 2015).

So, what does this mean for SEO? When it comes to a website, it must: \*

- Be valuable enough to attract both visitors and links naturally.
- Retain visitors and make sure they return to the website.
- Convert visitors.



## Social and search

Social information is playing an ever-increasing role in search. Social content, such as Twitter messages or YouTube videos, can appear in the SERPs and there is a growing indication of social influence on search rankings.

There are several social factors to consider for social and search.

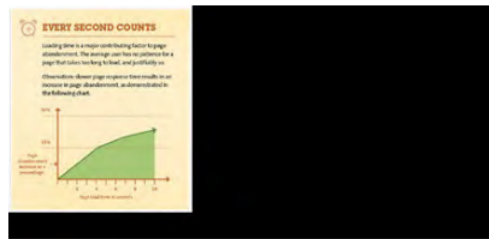


Figure 8.5.8: A Google search for Coca-Cola turns up several social media profiles *Adapted From Screenshot Google search, 2017*

### 1. Use social media properties to dominate brand SERPs.

When someone searches for your brand name, you can use your social media properties to ‘own’ more of the results on that page, reducing the likelihood that a user will end up on a competitor’s website instead. Use your brand name when naming Twitter and Flickr profiles and Facebook and YouTube pages.

### 2. Social links are used as signals of relevance.

Links from social sites such as Twitter include ‘rel=nofollow’. However, there is a strong indication that these links are in fact followed by search engines, and are used to determine relevance. If you focus on creating great content on your site and making sure that it is easy to share socially, you should see a result in your SEO efforts.

### 3. Personalised results are influenced by your online social network.

If you are logged in to a social network while searching such as Facebook for Bing, or your Gmail account for Google, you could see results from or influenced by your social circle. In Bing, for instance, results can include indications of what your friends have previously liked or shared via Facebook. On Google, you may be more likely to see a friend’s blog for relevant searches.

### 4. Optimise for social search engines.

Google is the biggest search engine worldwide, YouTube is the second biggest and Facebook is growing. Even within social properties, users still use search to find the content they are looking for. Content that is housed on these properties should be optimised for the relevant social search engine as well.

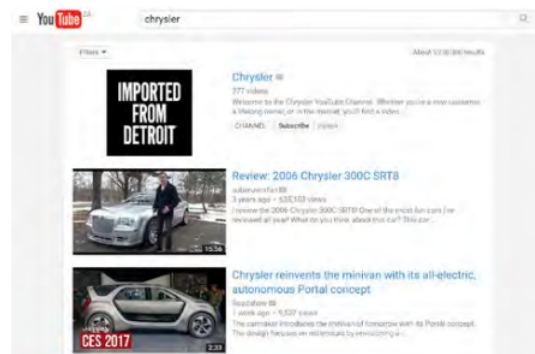


Figure 8.5.9: A YouTube search for ‘Chrysler’ turns up official branded videos in the top positions *Adapted From Screenshot, YouTube, 2017*

## Mobile search

As web-enabled mobile devices continue to grow in the market, and become easier to use, mobile search remains a key growth area. Mobile searches tend to be different to desktop searches. They are more navigational in nature as users tend to know where they want to end up, and users are often looking for concise, actionable answers.

The need for a website that performs well on mobile became crystal clear in 2015, when Google made what is called the mobilegeddon update, that is, sites that perform well on mobile are given higher rankings, while sites that do not perform well on



mobile are penalised.

You can find a good overview of mobile SEO and how to create a website easily accessible via mobile here, note that responsive design is Google's recommendation: <https://developers.google.com/webmasterguides/mobile-seo/>

Mobile search input can also be different from desktop search. As well as typing in search keywords, mobile users can search by voice, or by using images or scanning barcodes.

As with mobile web development, mobile SEO is a little different from desktop SEO, although the fundamental principles remain the same. Build usable and accessible sites with great content, and you've already come a long way.

#### Note

Read more about this in the [Web development and design](#) chapter.

Differences in approach for mobile SEO are largely because:

- Search engines have the ability to deliver precise location-based results to mobile users.
- Usability is critical in sites for mobile devices.
- Search engines have less data to work with compared to traditional web in terms of site history, traffic, and inbound links.

#### Note

Why is usability so important for mobile SEO?

The fundamentals of mobile SEO are not so different to those of desktop SEO.

#### **1. A usable, crawlable site is very important.**

Build mobile versions of your website that cater for mobile users having simple navigation and content stripped down to only what is required.

#### **2. Content is important, and should be formatted for mobile usage.**

Text and images should be optimised for the mobile experience, so no large file sizes! The meta data still matters and titles and descriptions are what users see in the SERPs.

#### **3. Links are important.**

You should link to your mobile site from your desktop site and vice versa. Submit your mobile site to relevant mobile directories.

#### **4. Submit a mobile XML sitemap.**

Mobile-specific sitemaps use the same protocols as standard XML sitemaps with the addition of a mobile tag.

#### **5. Use the word 'mobile' on the mobile website, or use mobile top-level domains.**

Make it explicit to search engines that this is the mobile version of your website and they are more likely to prioritise it as such.

### Local search

Local search refers to search behaviour and results where location matters. Either results returned are local in nature, or results returned can be map based.

With blended SERPs, map-based results can be returned together with other types of results, depending on the type of search. As search engines become more sophisticated, location can be inferred and influence the types of results.

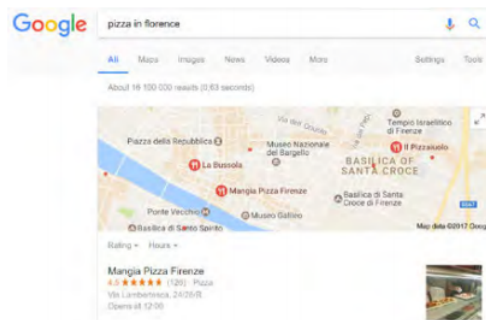


Figure 8.5.10: A Google search for 'pizza in Florence' turns up a range of location-based results, displayed on a map *Adapted From Screenshot, Google search, 2017*

A user may search for 'plumber london', for example, and the search will know to return results for London plumbers. These may even be returned on a map.

However, a user in London may search just for 'plumber'. The search can infer from the user's IP address that the user is in London, and still return results for London plumbers, since someone searching for this term is likely to be looking for a nearby service.

For search engines to return location-relevant results, they need to know the location of elements being searched. This is often determined from sites that include the name and address of a business. Note that this site may not be yours. Location results are often determined from various review sites, and the results can include some of those reviews.

#### Note

Find the Small Business Guide to Google My Business here: [www.simplybusiness.co.uk/microsites/google-mybusiness-guide/](http://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/microsites/google-mybusiness-guide/)

Search engines also allow businesses to 'claim' their locations. For example, Google's Google My Business function allows small businesses to enter their information, which will then populate into all Google services. A business can set up a local or a brand page on Google which, once completed, will give them access to various page management and optimisation tools as well as making them more visible on SERPs.

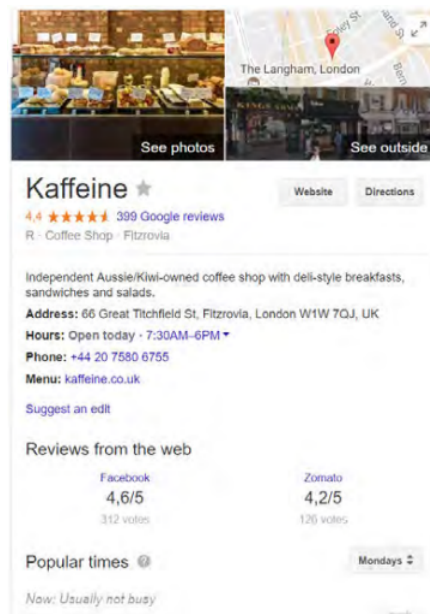


Figure 8.5.11: A Google search for a specific business reveals its Local page in the SERP *Adapted From Screenshot, Google search, 2017*

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