

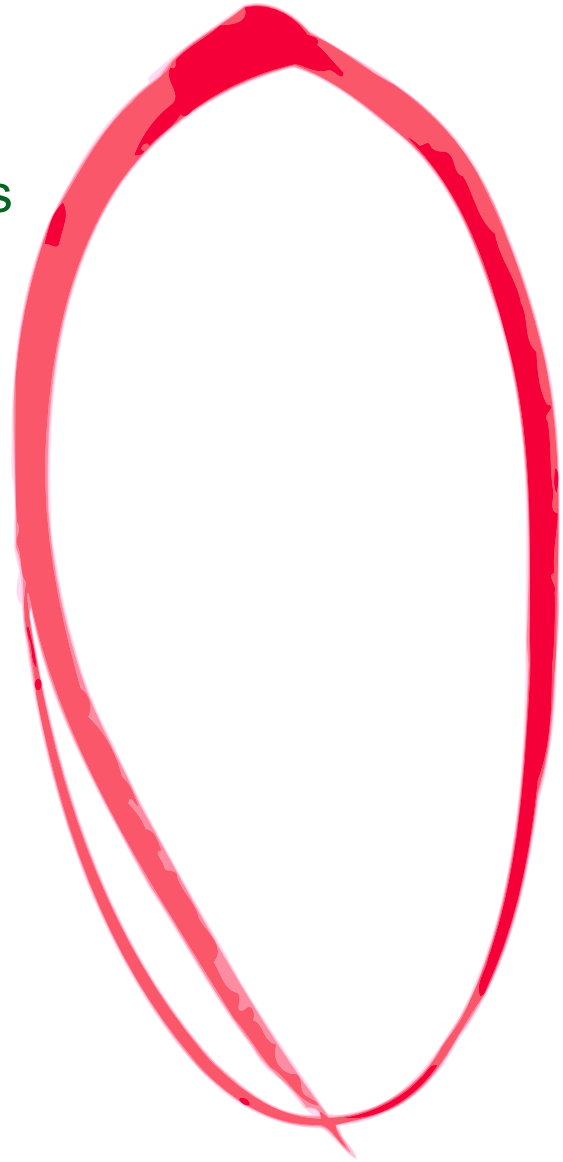


About 16,100,000 results (0.47 seconds)

# Goodbye Right Rail

## What Google Paid Search Changes Mean for Local Marketers

Ten leading local search experts share their insights on the biggest change to **Paid Search** in years.



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# Introduction

## **Goodbye Right Rail:**

### **What Google paid search changes mean for local marketers**

When discussing the world's economy, it's often said that "If the U.S. sneezes, the whole world catches a cold."

That quote came to mind as I reflected on what Google's removal of right-rail, paid search ads on desktops means to digital marketers as a whole. On one hand, it is the business decision of a single company. On the other, however, it is a change that impacts millions of advertisers, agencies, experts, and SEOs alike.

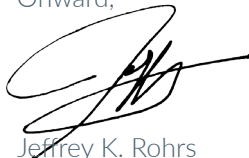
Indeed, it could be said that when Google sneezes, the whole of digital marketing gets a fever. This time out, it's a fever to determine what the loss of right rail paid ads means to advertisers—especially those focused on turning local searches into immediate business.

To answer that very question, we assembled a stellar group of experts from across the local search landscape. Our contributors include:

- **Steve Beatty**, iProspect
- **Adam Edwards**, Reprise Media
- **Erin Everhart**, The Home Depot
- **Damon Gochneur**, Aspiro Agency
- **Beth Kahlich**, Search Engine Academy Texas
- **Casey Meraz**, Juris Digital
- **Lenny Pham**, Yext
- **Laura Rich**, Street Fight
- **Andrew Shotland**, Local SEO Guide
- **Christian Ward**, Yext

We hope their insights prove beneficial, reduce any residual "Google fever," and ultimately, help drive more consumers to the front door of all your locations.

Onward,



Jeffrey K. Rohrs



**Jeffrey K. Rohrs**  
Chief Marketing Officer  
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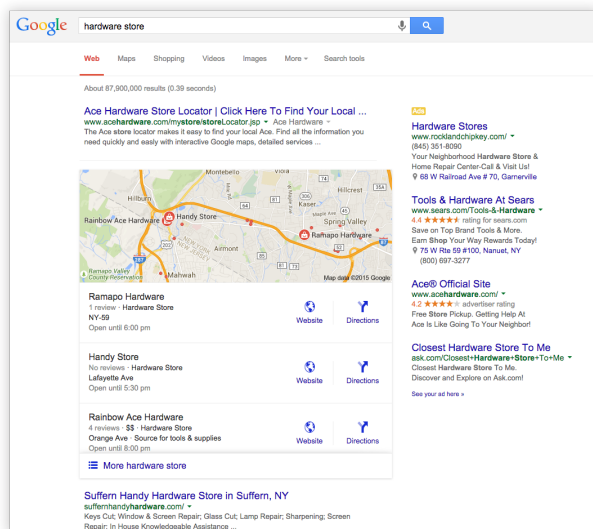
# Google removes ads from the Right Rail: why the local pack is more important than ever for businesses



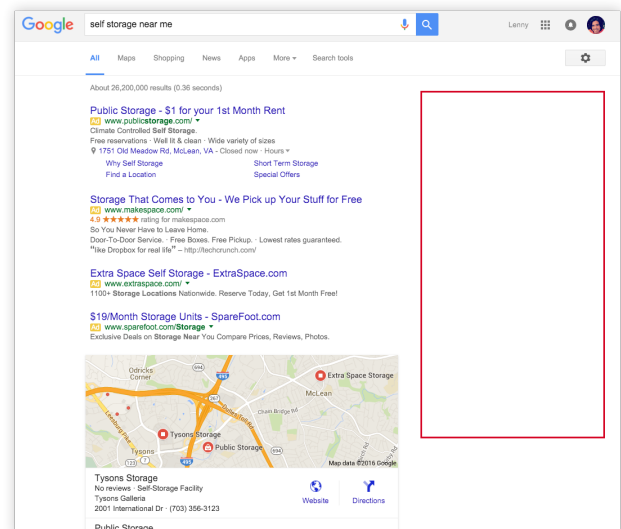
**Lenny Pham**  
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By now you've noticed that Google removed ads from its "right rail" on desktop search. Months in the making, this change to Google's Search Engine Results Page (SERP) has significant implications. Now more than ever, ranking in the local pack is critical for businesses.

Although Google has removed ads from the "right rail", additional ads are being moved in-line with the search results. Users should regularly expect to see 3-4 ad blocks at the top of the page and 3-4 ad blocks at the bottom.



OLD LAYOUT



NEW LAYOUT

Google confirmed that they are trying to provide a more consistent desktop search experience to mobile/tablet in order to maximize the effectiveness of its desktop ads.

“Ultimately, we are making this update to improve the user experience on Google Search and to make that experience consistent across desktop, tablet and mobile.” – Matt Lawson Director of Performance Ads Marketing at Google

But as Google Ads move in-line with organic search results, the importance of appearing in local pack results becomes critical important for businesses.

Here’s why:

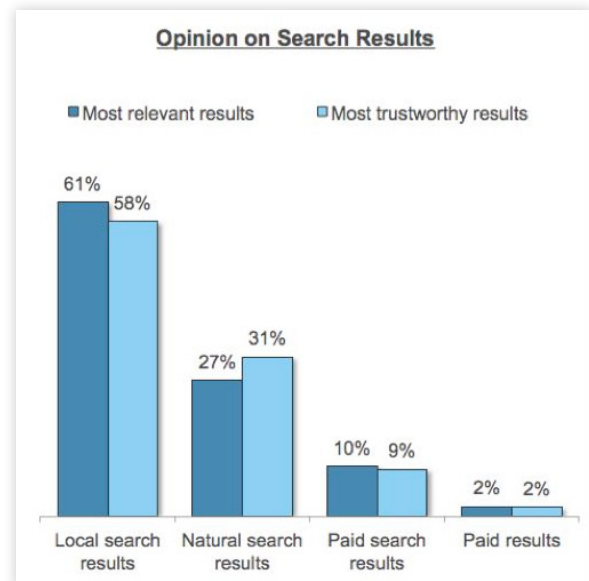
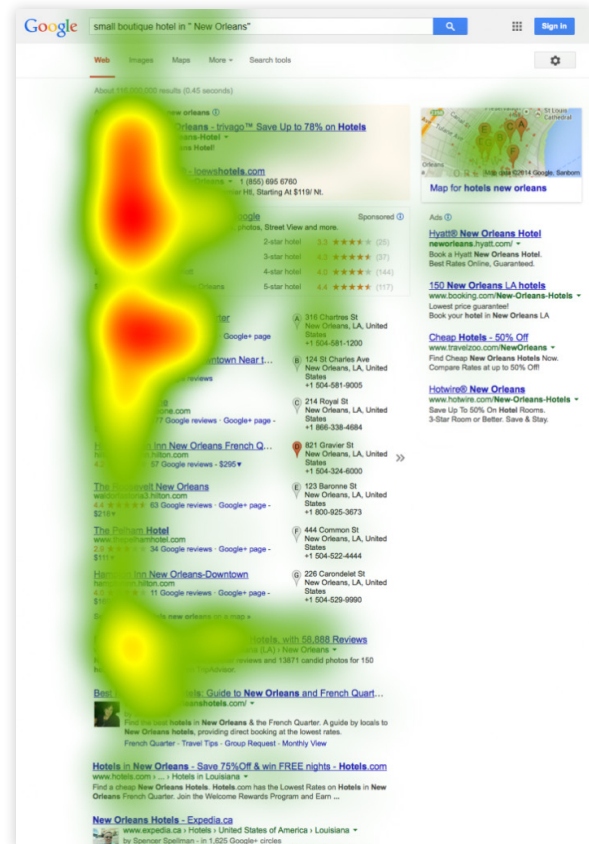
In 2014, Mediative conducted an eye-tracking research to study where users look on Google’s SERP.

Not surprisingly, the study showed that users tend to focus their attention in three areas:

1. Near the top of the page,
2. Local search results,
3. The first organic search result.

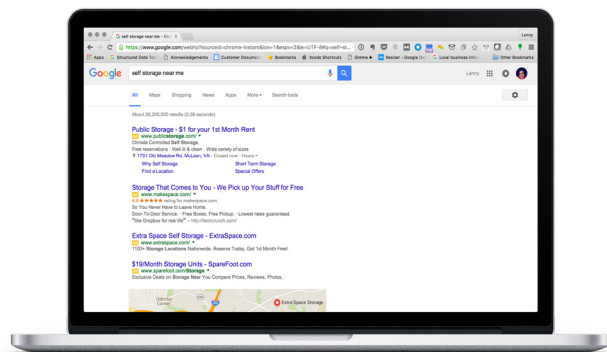
In terms of where users click on Google’s SERP, several studies have concluded that organic search listings receive more than 90% of the clicks with users favoring local search results the most.

The key takeaway is that Google’s new Desktop SERP layout – on most screen resolutions – pushes organic search results well BELOW the the visible page fold, leaving only the Ad blocks and local pack visible to the user.



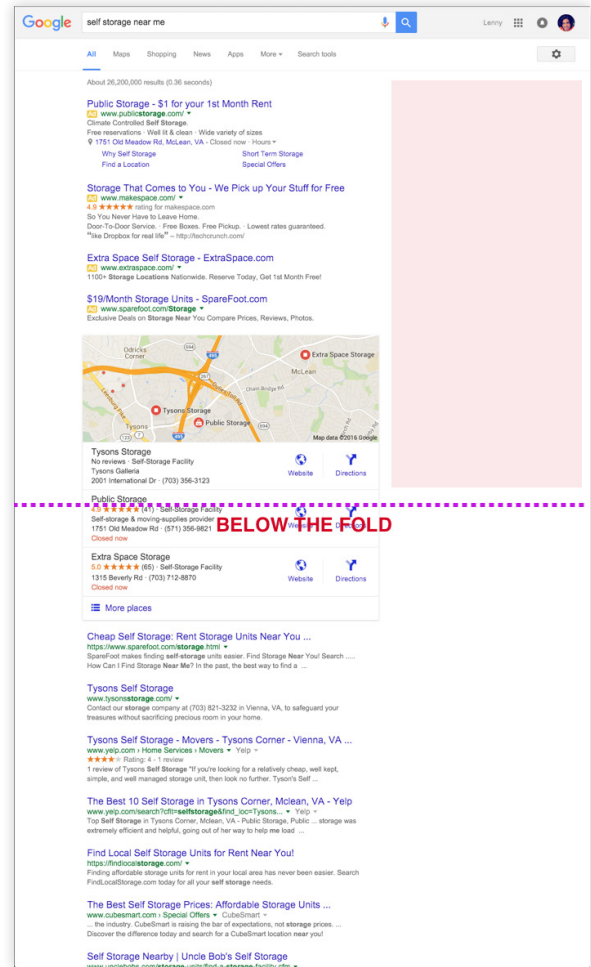
As a baseline, if we use a desktop monitor (with a resolution 1920 x 1200), here's approximately what users will now see in the new SERP layout.

The problem with organic results positioning is further exacerbated on retina laptop displays:



### Conclusion

In order to maintain relevancy in local search, businesses need to focus on appearing in local pack results.



# Navigating an organic ship in a sea of paid advertising

Google began 2016 by firing a proverbial shot across the bow of the desktop SEO ship. But never fear, the organic search ship is not sunk yet. It may need a few repairs and enhancements, but it's still a seaworthy vessel.

For a long time, the crew of the SEO ship has had clear visibility that made it easy for them to navigate into port and deliver their cargo to the customers waiting for them there. Google's recent changes have obscured the path, making it more challenging for brands to find their way to end customers. But "mobile" and "local" serve as beacons that can help you reach the port so your customers can find you.

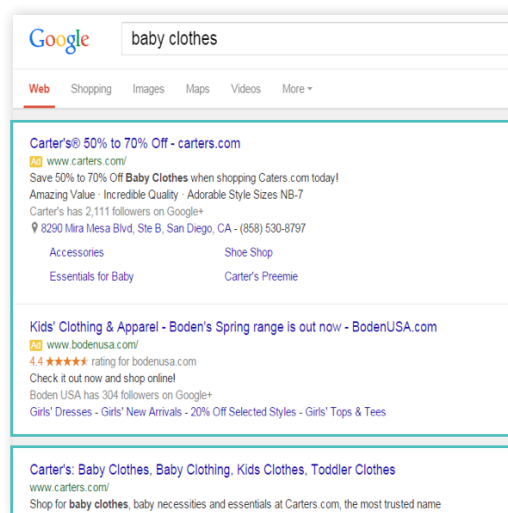
## What's Changed?

As the Search results below illustrate, the recent four-pack ad listings from Google (previously limited to only two to three Paid Ads), pushes desktop organic further and further down the page. In the 2015 search result example, organic search results were able to at least maintain a place above the fold, just below the paid ads. In the 2016 example, the organic result has been pushed below the fold, however local results are still visible via the map that is positioned directly following the paid results.

Paid dominates above fold and local is the next result with Organic no longer visible.



**Steve Beatty**  
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2015 Search Result Example

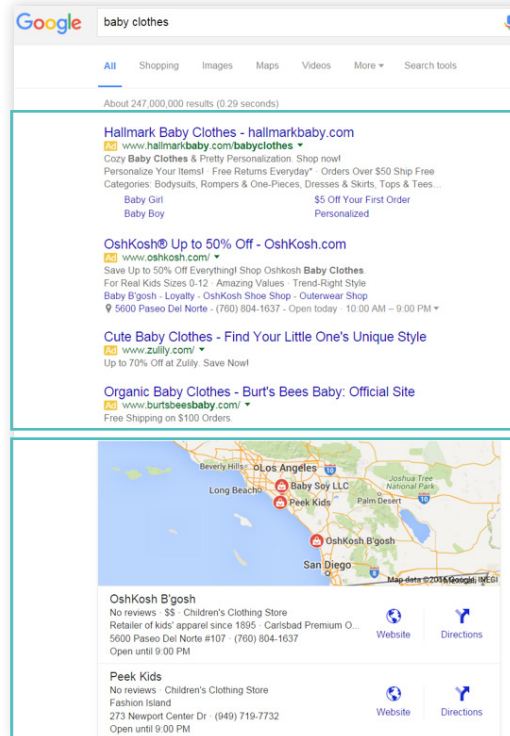


### iProspect Data Insights

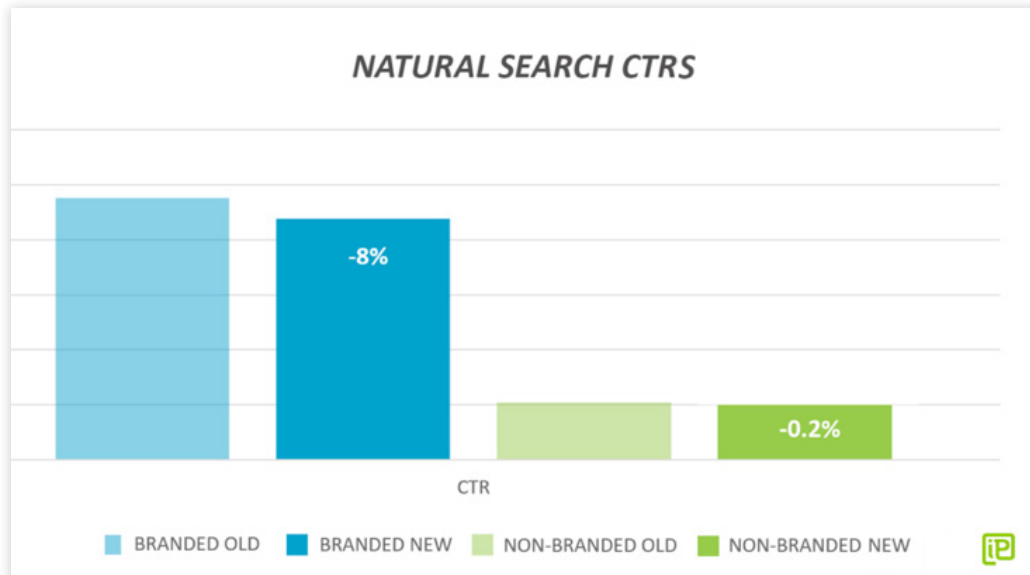
In a recent analysis of 100 clients, the iProspect team saw an 8 percent drop in organic branded queries after the launch of this Google update. And, in some key categories such as travel, we saw a drop as high as 11 percent in non-branded queries. The graph below shows the overall trend iProspect has seen thus far following the launch of the four-pack ad.

### All Is Not Lost

Despite these declines in performance, all is not lost for organic search in the sea of ads. As the 2016 search results example shows, e-commerce brands like Osh-Kosh that have implemented strategies and technology to support local listings, data aggregation, and relevant local landing pages, have ensured themselves a relevant local seat at the table. Clearly, for a massive volume



2016 Search Result Example





keyword like “baby clothes” (90,000 monthly searches), paid sits atop the results, however local results still inhabit an important piece of SERP real estate. This demonstrates the importance Google places on the intent of the user for searching a keyword without a location (buy online or go to a store).

E-commerce brands that have physical locations but have not yet created strong local strategies and ensured that relevant data is used to deliver the best local experience (name, address, phone), data aggregation, and local content, have work to do.

### **Final Thoughts**

E-Marketer predicts there will be 141 billion mobile local searches by 2019, Brands should have this as an essential go to market strategy. As we become an even more mobile-centric society, a local search strategy should be a key part of any e-commerce business whether it has real world locations or not.

Local content should be developed to support local users engaging with your business and local infrastructure should be in place to support digital presence and scale. If brands fail to recognize these needs, they risk getting lost in a sea of paid ads and never finding their customers.

# The key SEO success: diversification

These SERP changes are highlighting the need to better diversify “search skills” to include organic, paid and local. A No. 1 ranking today isn’t nearly as valuable as a No. 1 ranking this time last year because of how far down the fold organic listings are thanks to 4-Packs Ads and the Local 3-Pack. For now (although we know this could change at literally any given moment), the combo of 4-Pack Ads + Local Map is primarily appearing with a business’ head terms, i.e. “party supplies.” Even by adding one additional adjective or modifier, i.e. “birthday party supplies,” the map pack is gone and in some cases, even the 4-Pack is gone.



**Erin Everhart**  
Lead Manager,  
Digital Marketing, SEO  
The Home Depot  
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The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of Google search results. The left screenshot is for the search term "party supplies" and shows approximately 88,500,000 results. The top results include Shindigz Party Supplies, Shop Party Items Online, Party Supplies 21st Birthday - Amazon.com, and Party City. A local map pack is visible at the bottom, showing locations like Dollar Tree and Party City. The right screenshot is for the search term "birthday party supplies" and shows approximately 17,300,000 results. The top results include Birthday Party Supplies - Birthday Party Favors, Birthday Party Supplies for Kids & Adults, and Kids Birthday Party Supplies at Birthday Direct. A local map pack is also visible at the bottom.

People aren’t scrolling past the ads, probably because 40% of them can’t even distinguish between “paid” and “free” listings in the first place. Google made \$19 billion from advertising revenue with a 31% increase in their aggregate paid clicks, according to their Q4 Earnings Statement. The reality is people are clicking on ads, so it wouldn’t surprise me if we start seeing paid placement in Local Maps in the coming years.

The value of long-tail keywords just increased since those keywords are naturally appearing higher above the fold. Yes, they are searched for less often, but they're now even more likely to provide higher CTRs in addition to the higher conversion rates they've historically come with. The longer the query, the closer a person is to purchase. I don't think that you can have a sound SEO strategy by ignoring head terms and just focusing on long-tail, but the idea here is diversification. And maybe putting a little more thought into optimizing the 3+ word queries.

## The shell game of local clicks

I'll be honest; I was as shocked as anyone else when it came to recent news that Google was ditching right rail ads in favor of a top/bottom only configuration. The reality is there are only two things that drive every change to Google search results, and how, why or the manner in which they are displayed: 1. User Experience 2. Click Revenue.

From the limited data we've seen internally and through some of our larger vendor partners, the latest paradigm shift has come solely at the expense of organic rankings at this point, with a large percentage of our clients seeing an increase in CTRs in the other positions of what would now be 5-7 at the bottom.

I think this move is motivated by a variety of factors, from more closely matching the user experience across mobile and desktop, to a direct response to ever rising CPCs. With an additional "spot" at the top, we should see a gradual decrease in average CPCs across a wide spectrum of verticals and niches as the "sweet spot" just grew larger.

To me, the losers in this latest update are those relying only on a specific formula or channel for their business solvency. Google provides three potential methods for local listings to achieve impressions, Paid Ads, Map Pack Listings & organic results, and we're firm proponents of working to effect all three. In the end, if you're working all three avenues, then the seemingly impactful variation changes of position x vs y are mitigated by overall brand exposure. Mathematically, what was 23 possible combinations (10 organic, 10 AdWords, 3 Map Pack) is now down to 20 (10 organic, 7 AdWords, 3 Map Pack), and if you properly position your brand for each type (PPC, Map Pack, Organic Listing), then the specific placement and rankings of each of your three potential listings (PPC, Map Pack, Organic Listing) will always be mitigated by your presence on all three.



**Damon Gochneur**  
*Managing Partner*  
Aspiro Agency  
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## How my client increased bookings after being suspended from AdWords



**Beth Kahlich**

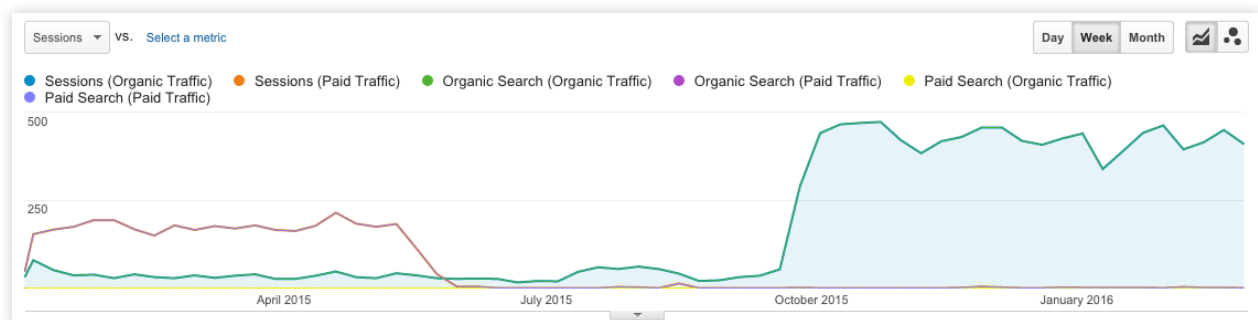
President

Search Engine Academy Texas

[@BethKahlich](#)

This is only a *little* misleading—but nonetheless true! I inherited an AdWords campaign several years ago from my client that provides breast thermography services in Dallas. While I wasn't crazy about the language on the landing page, the ad was performing very well, bringing upwards of 200 visitors to their site a week, as well as a healthy level of appointments – for a very modest budget.

Mid-2015 we got the bad news, Google had removed the site from AdWords for “Misleading or unrealistic promotions”. However, in the meantime, we had done a great job of on-page SEO, a strong level of citations and the usual suspects for local SEO so the business was still very vibrant.



Then, in October of 2015, we saw a huge jump in traffic. They are now ranking #2 in a 2-pack map listing. Organic search jumped from 52 visits per week to almost 500 visits per week (see chart above). And best of all their bookings are now 25-30% more than before!

With all the changes in AdWords, it still rings true that time and effort invested in Local SEO tactics makes the biggest difference for our local clients.

## Expect more national local competition

As Todd Bairstow recently said on our site, “there’s really no way to overstate what a massive change this is for everyone in the SEM industry. But it’s going to have a more profound – and even devastating – effect on locally-oriented businesses who had relied on Adwords as a key marketing tool. Those who will suffer from this change include small businesses who advertise locally; local SEM providers; car dealerships; local insurance companies; media providers; and assisted living and elder care providers.

“In some local categories, this will simply narrow the field on search results pages. The local plumber who has a strong Adwords campaign is in no danger of having a big national plumbing company entering the market and pushing them out of the SERP. There are no such big plumbing companies.

“Instead, each vertical market will take the next 1-3 months to re-organize around Google’s new 4-ad dynamic. Many, many, many local advertisers will simply abandon AdWords altogether. In this way, Google will be thinning its own massive herd.

“The local plumber mentioned above is going to have to worry about his competitors choosing to instead compete at the top of the page alongside him. This will force the price of clicks at the top of the pages upwards – which one suspects could be the rationale for Google’s change to begin with. Those local advertisers who were already competing at the top of Google’s pay-per-click auction are in good shape, and won’t see much immediate difference. If anything, they will see gains in clicks, conversions and revenue.” Read the rest of Todd’s excellent post [here](#).



**Laura Rich**  
CEO  
Street Fight  
[@streetfightmag](#)

## Google stopped showing ads on the Right Rail of desktop SERPs and users keep clicking

“We have been tracking the effect of this change on our multi-location clients and our pure ecommerce & media clients and thus far the data is mixed,” said Andrew Shotland, CEO of Local SEO Guide, “In a few cases we are seeing a drop in CTR for branded queries in Google Search Console’s Search Analytics, but in most cases we are seeing no change. And it’s unclear how much the CTR drops are affected by factors outside of this update such as rankings changes, increase in Knowledge Graph results, seasonality and mostly unreliable GSC data.”

“At the moment we don’t think this is a big deal for Local sites,” says Dan Leibson, VP of Local & Product at Local SEO Guide, “Considering that users have long had to navigate around paid ads to get what they want, simply adding one more paid ad above local and organic search results may not end up being that big of a deal. There are several click tracking studies that show more people click on local + organic than paid searches and we see that trend continuing. If anything the reduced amount of paid inventory makes your SEO program even more critical.”



**Andrew Shotland**  
*Founder & CEO*  
Local SEO Guide  
[@localseoguide](https://twitter.com/localseoguide)

## Increased competition in an already competitive market

The recent Google shake up of placing four ads on top of the SERP has been an interesting change for the law firms I work with.

While it's still new, we're already starting to see a shift in competition for paid space. Even before this major change, some of our clients bid on keywords that were in excess of a couple of hundred dollars and we expect that to rise as a result of this change. While there are now fewer distractions on the side of the page and only four listings, we're starting to see some minor increase in cost per click. I bet this will continue to happen as time goes on and the already fierce competition gets stronger and more competitive.

On mobile, as the user continues to become the centroid for all searches with local intent, you have to scroll past the first screen to see the local results. If you're an organic player, it's even tougher as you're pushed about two screens down depending on your phone.

The legal market has always been competitive for paid listings and I think we're going to see even steeper increases in cost per clicks this year.



**Casey Meraz**  
*Founder*  
Juris Digital  
[@CaseyMeraz](#)



## Relevance wins

For premium advertisers, the right rail of ads represented a small percentage of overall clicks – especially since it only appeared on desktop, which now accounts for only half of all search traffic. The change in performance will instead come from the addition of the fourth ad in the main column that pushes down organic and local results potentially “below the fold” for important queries.

The change in investment will come from less inventory and fewer opportunities to be visible. This layout update also comes after the new local 3 pack last August, which reduced local listings from the 7 previously available on many results pages for keywords with local intent. So while most headlines predicted potential increases in paid search costs per click (CPC), we also foresee clients’ SEO and local SEO budgets to increase in order to regain this lost visibility.

Google’s direction on desktop is clear: fewer, more relevant results – and more like mobile.



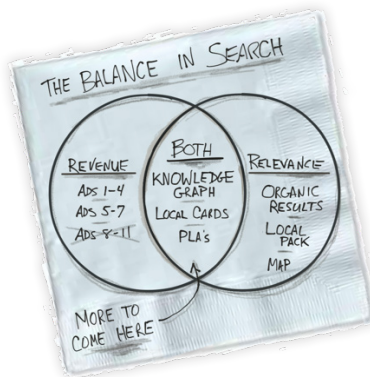
**Adam Edwards**  
SVP SEO  
Reprise Media

# Revenue vs. relevance: the Venn napkin

This new layout for the Google SERP is driven by the same, on-going struggle that drives all changes in Google results. Fundamentally, Google is forever caught in a **battle between revenue and relevance**.



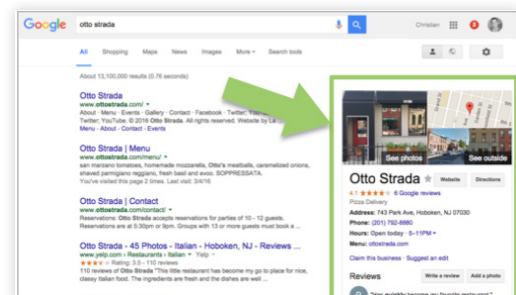
**Christian J. Ward**  
EVP, Strategic Partnerships  
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The quiet, unspoken contract between the searcher and the search engine. This is where every user says, “Yes, Google, you can show me ads to make revenue”, but also states, “No, Google, you can’t do it at the expense of bringing me truly relevant results.” This is never more visible or evident than in Local, because Local is at the heart of relevance.

For a small percentage of total search, where there are highly competitive markets and categories, this removal of ads 8-11 may increase demand. That said, this should only reinforce that a proper paid media approach combined with a proper Local SEO and organic approach is necessary. Additionally, because the Local Pack and map results are still prominent, marketers need to focus on ranking as highly as possible by maximizing their local SEO campaign and data strategies.

What I find particularly interesting about the removal of the right rail ads is what has already begun to pop up in their stead. Product Listing Ads (PLAs) are beginning to fill in this space, similar to topics, local business cards (new!), and other highly relevant results. This highlights the magnificent “middle ground” in the battle between revenue and relevance in the Venn napkin, where truly relevant answers can be infused with revenue-producing “actions”. Look for more and more intersections of revenue and relevance in the right-rail, as Google continues to leverage the Knowledge Graph concepts around structured data married with calls to action.



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