How to Rank For Local SEO

3 Packs in a Tough Market

By Steven Kang

If you are doing local SEO in the U.S., you should already know that Los Angeles is a highly competitive market for almost any vertical. Approximately 2 months ago, I was able to rank for 'Los Angeles Furniture Store' in the 3 pack by pushing it from page 2 and the ranking is still there as of this writing. Below is the information on how I was able to achieve this and I want to share the framework I've been using for a long time.
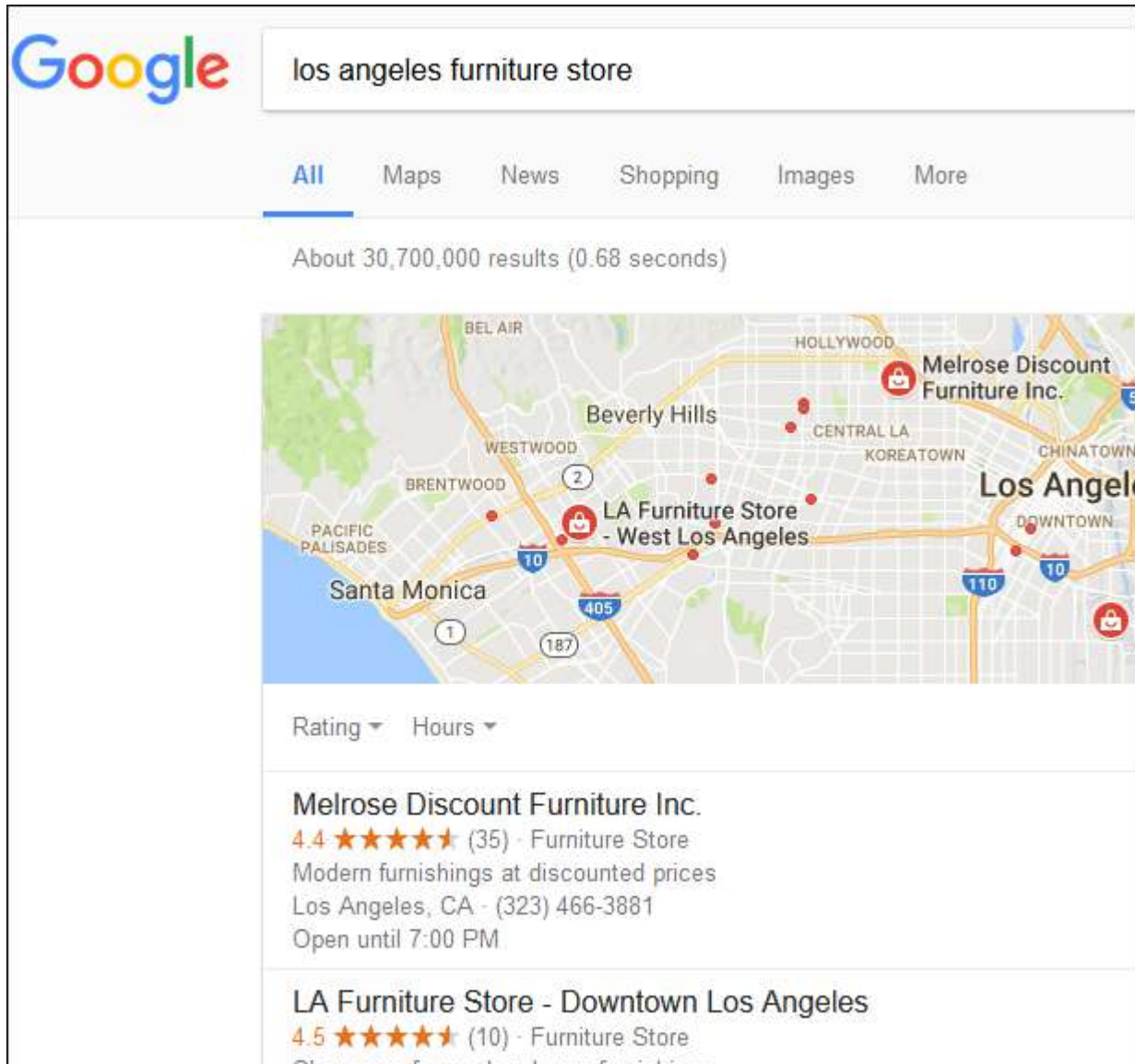
I have a good news and a bad news. The good news is that if you understand the signals framework, you can beat the competition even in a tough market. The bad news is that it will not be cheap to play in this game as it became a game of thrones for the resources.

Prerequisite – SEO Signals T.R.A.P. Framework

Before going further, I highly recommend reading my SEO signals framework which will help you understand some of the signals references I will be making.

https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/web.content.misc/SEO-Signals-Framework.pdf

One of the most frustrating things for a local SEO guy is making it into 3 packs in a highly competitive market. This is an environment where doing your typical citations, schema, and reviews won't cut it. You are competing in a space where everyone is watching each other and can ask for a decent budget increase from their client. Following a basic local SEO to-do list is what everyone is already doing at this level and you can't expect a special treatment from Google. You have to earn it. Ever since Google has eliminated 7 packs, ranking on maps for a local keyword with a high search volume became a cash cow for most businesses and the stakes are higher than ever before. If you are relatively new to local SEO, here is the PDF I've created to help you with some of the to-do lists. https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/web.content.misc/Google-Local-Maps-Strategy.pdf

Think of it this way. You can't play for the national league by playing a high school level game. If you do, you'll be laughed out of the game. If you are an SEO consultant, you'll be laughed out of the SERP. What's the solution? You need to change how you view the game and play it differently.

Checklist SEO vs Moving Target SEO

I often get surprised by how many SEO guys think by doing A, B, and C, your effort should yield D. I totally understand that this is what is taught by a plethora of courses and coaches. Unfortunately, the equation often fails at this level of competition. If you do A, B, and C, you've just covered the minimum essentials. To play the game correctly, you need to look for ways to augment A, B, and C whenever possible and can't expect the ranking landscape to stay still while you work on fulfillment. Just like what you see in a championship basketball game, your opponents are always moving and looking for ways to catch you off-guard.

I am not going to list all the to-do list for establishing local relevancy. Please refer to the PDF I've mentioned earlier. Instead, I am going to approach it from a holistic signals perspective called T.R.A.P. The framework states that all signals must be kept at a maximum rate in order to have a shot at better rankings.

The website has close to 10,000 topically organized pages indexed, has a growing number of backlinks built from press releases, trusted local directories, and trusted sites totaling over 100,000 off-page properties. It means the website has done a good job of satisfying both on and off-page (R) Relevancy and (A) Authority signals. Unlike Relevancy and Authority signal which can reach a point of diminishing return, Popularity signal is derived from the quantity. By quantity, I mean real human activity, not bots or fake signals which can be filtered by Google's ever-evolving algorithm.

Sites with Real Traffic Matters for Backlinks

To increase Popularity signal, I reached out to vendors who have established a relationship with websites with real traffic, not PBN websites with artificially inflated high DA/TF. One benefit of working in this industry for a long time is that you build a relationship with the vendors.

The Litmus Test for Identifying Websites with Traffic

If website traffic matters for rankings then what's the best way to filter sites against fake websites with no traffic? Although the method I use isn't perfect, I spot check sites using DA, indexation, and Alexa. Below is an example of the domains I recently received from my vendor. Let's look at the patterns I generally look for.

DA – I only use DA as my initial qualifier. Generally speaking, not all websites with traffic will have a high DA value and I will not dismiss links based on DA value alone. Unless the domain has DA of 10 or lower, I will go on to observe other metrics.

lighthouse-sf.org (DA 59) (Datestamp: 11/14/2017)
chinet.org (DA 45) (Datestamp: 11/14/2017)
theteacherdiva.com (DA 39) (Datestamp: 11/14/2017)
kidsworldfun.com (DA 37) (Datestamp: 11/14/2017)

Indexation – Typically, websites with a good amount of traffic will have over several hundred pages. Most will have thousands. For a growing site, it makes sense for the website to keep adding blogs and relevant content over time. Most PBN websites will fall short in this department as their aim is to maximize SEO juice via its homepage.

Alexa – I checked the example websites and it was good to see that they all had traffic recorded. Keep in mind that not all websites may show up in Alexa especially if a website is serving a local region.
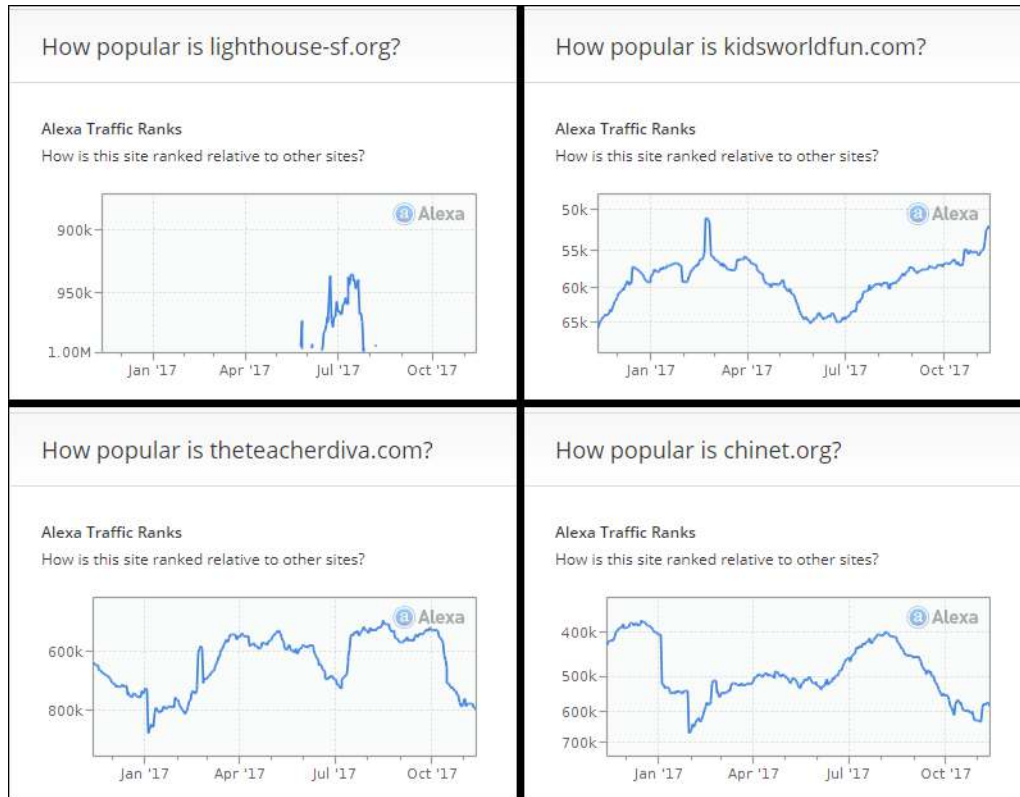
There is one thing I do not check is how pretty a website looks. It's irrelevant as traffic doesn't always correlate to its aesthetics as some sites were built years ago. Quite often, older sites do not reflect the modern design philosophy like the newer websites do.

By staying off of DA and TF and using indexation and Alexa instead, you now have a weapon against PBN link sellers passing them off as real links.

Process

I've ordered 40 links targeting various pages and used 20 of them to target a specific page which was centered on 'Los Angeles Furniture Store' related keywords. To ensure the anchor text didn't appear spammy to Google, I used semantic variations such as 'LA Furniture Store', 'Furniture Store in LA', 'Los Angeles Furniture', etc. as anchor text. Once I received the links fulfilled by

multiple vendors, I've used an indexing service to ensure Google crawls the links. About 4 weeks after the links have been created, the keyword made it to the maps 3 pack.

Where to Get Links

You can do the outreach yourself or look for link vendors who specialize in outreach services. If you are not sure whether a vendor you've come across sells PBN links or links from real sites with traffic, you can ask for a feedback in my Facebook group.

You can also visit http://www.scalemyseo.com/ and fill out the form. I am putting together a package using various vendors I am currently working with.

Conclusion

T.R.A.P. framework theory states that Popularity has a validating property for SEO. I witness this daily and the evidence is all around us. I have people telling me PBNs are losing power. I also have people telling me fake social signals are not working. If Google is using real human activities as (P) Popularity signal and doing a great job, then SEO has no choice but to comply. Fake is out and user activity is in.

About Me:

I immigrated to the United States from South Korea when I was 10 years old. When the internet took off in the 90's, I started to learn web programming and internet marketing as a hobby while running two other business ventures. What started out as a hobby soon turned into a full-time profession.

During my career, I've helped thousands of small businesses, ad agencies, and Fortune 500 companies. I also became a third founder of a supply chain SAAS startup which was sold for millions.

With my programming background, SEO knowledge, and marketing angles, I was able to put on many hats including lead developer, lead consultant, and lead project manager for various marketing projects for agencies and companies.

I've created this PDF to educate my clients and share my views on marketing with the community. I am hoping this blog will bring value to your marketing endeavors.

My Blog

https://stevenkang.me/

SEO White Label Partnership

If you own an agency and need help with scaling SEO, please visit http://www.ScaleMySEO.com

Advanced SEO Training

If you want to further your SEO knowledge and training, please visit http://www.RelevancyStacking.com for lessons and custom tools I've developed over the years. The course leverages relevancy signal to rank a large number of keywords.

SEO Community

Please join my non-spammy discussion groups:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/SEOSignalsLab/ (discussions on Technical SEO and ranking factors)

https://www.facebook.com/groups/LeadStacking/ (discussions on client SEO marketing and sales)

Value-added Newsletter Website

https://footinthedoor.io/ (weekly expert advice to attract prospects and scale your digital marketing agency)