



Can lawyers add a keyword to their Google Places profile title? Yes... with restrictions.

The latest change to Google Places was announced last week, and the update is sparking some consternation. Could this latest update to Google's quality guidelines open the door to spam?

The update was made to clarify how attorneys and other business owners may name their businesses within Google Places. Before this change, Google strictly enforced a "legal business name only" policy. Now, the service will allow the legal business name to reside alongside a one-word descriptor. That single descriptor may be added via the Places dashboard for existing firms and business. The addition is intended to help people locate the firm or describe what the business offers.

Consider a firm with the legal name "Zonga Hardling, LLP." Google now allows the firm to add a single-word descriptor to help potential clients to find the office or understand what it offers. Now, that listing could read, "Zonga Hardling Attorneys, LLP." The revision of guidelines does not consider store codes, URLs, marketing taglines, keyphrases or phone numbers to be valid descriptors.

Google has offered examples of acceptable titles to demonstrate the modifications. Its descriptors are: "Starbucks Downtown" or "Joe's Pizza Restaurant". In turn, Google's examples of unacceptable titles are: "#1 Seattle Plumbing", "Joe's Pizza Best Delivery" or "Joe's Pizza Restaurant Dallas".
Examples

Business Name: Zonga Hardling, LLP

Permitted: Zonga Hardling, LLP: Attorneys

Not Permitted: Zonga Hardling, LLP: Injury Attorneys of Dallas

Unfortunately, these examples may cause confusion, particularly for businesses with established names like "Joe's Dallas Pizza Restaurant" or "Zonga Hardling Attorneys of Dallas". Check back with us for resolutions and developments on these specifications.

Analyzing the change, Blumenthals.com stated that "either [the] business name is no longer so important in defining search results or the descriptor . . . is ignored, or Google is so confident that they know what the business name is that they can penalize abusers." Some feedback in the blogosphere suggests that any spam introduced would not be easy to detect and/or control. It is not yet clear how Google views the possibility of an invitation to spam within its guidelines.

Currently, only those who own a business (or their authorized representatives) may verify their listings. If multiple users will need to access the account, a shared email under the law firm's domain name is recommended for clarity.





Additionally, take care when selecting a category for a listing. Categories are intended to demonstrate what a business is (a law office), not what it does (estate planning, criminal defense) or what it sells (60-minute legal consultations, paperwork checks). The latter categories of information can be listed in a listing's business description (not the real-world business title or single descriptor).

We will be watching as this Google Places update is deployed across the Web. Stay tuned.

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Jan/Feb | Vol. 27

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