

Rank First Local Presents

Small Business SEO



The Definitive Guide to
Winning the Web

made with
Beacon

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

2. Why SEO?

3. Choosing a Platform

4. Where to Start

5. Tracking Your Results

6. Keyword Research & Content Planning

7. On-Page Optimizations

8. Local SEO & Off-Site Optimizations

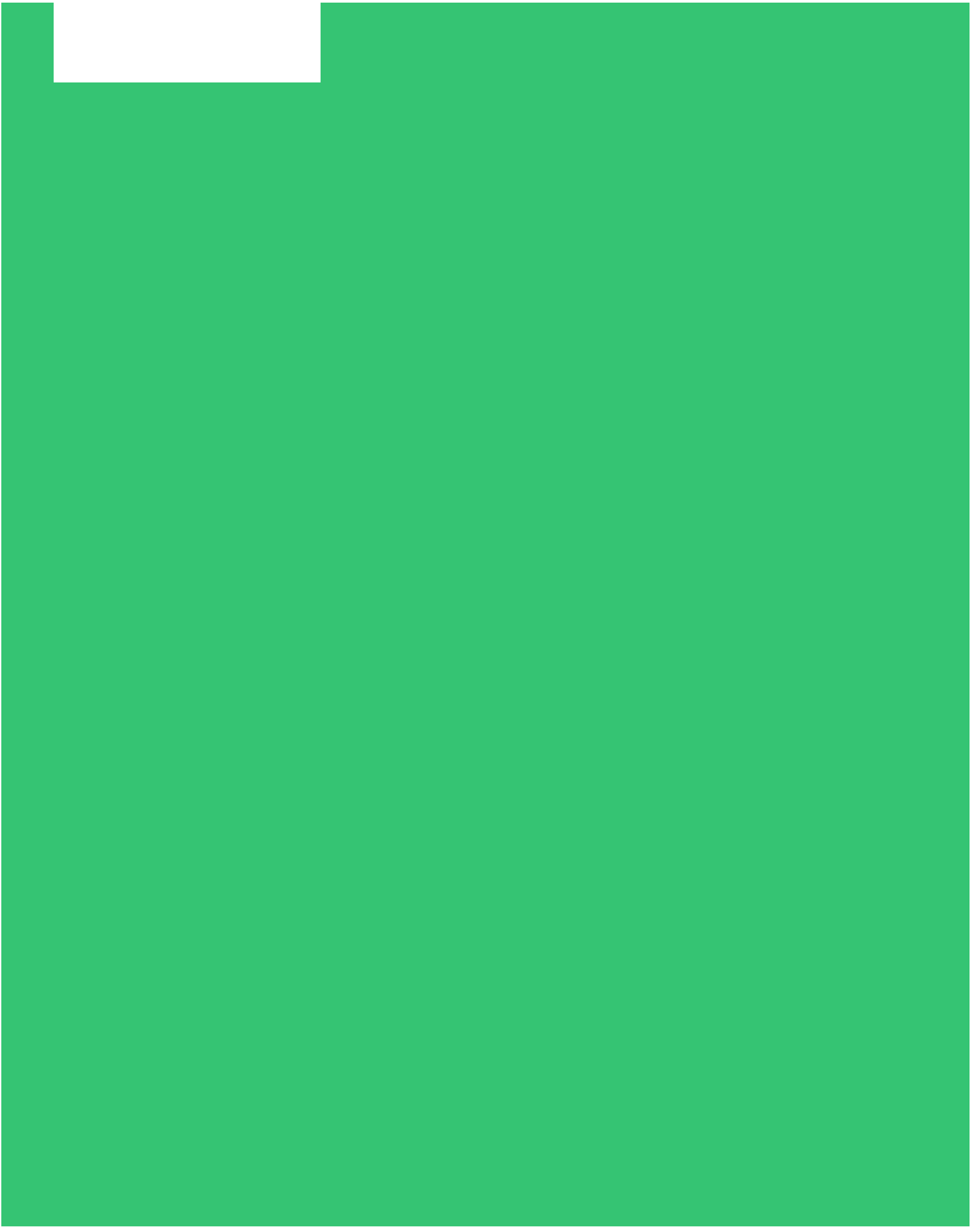
9. Converting Visitors to Leads

10. Backlinks

11. How to Write the Perfect Service Page

12. The End

13.
ADDITIONAL
READING



Introduction

While this guide is meant to be informative to all, our small business SEO guide is extremely beneficial for small business owners.

It's meant to give you a full rundown of the most important, and most beneficial SEO strategies, tactics, and optimizations to **get more customers, generate more contact form submissions and phone calls—**and ultimately—**grow revenue.**

Let's face it, number one rankings are great, but increased annual revenue and more profit is even better!

Each chapter covers an important topic in small business search engine optimization and is written to help you increase your online visibility using Google.

We know that as a small business owner, you probably don't have a lot of free time on your hands. That's why *this guide* is broken into eleven different bite-sized sections.

Some common challenges small business owners face when attacking their own SEO campaign are:

- Knowing where to start.
- Trusting the information and resources available to them.
- Evaluating the work—*is it working?*
- **Outranking competitors in local service markets.**

We're going to accomplish all of those and then some. Ready?

Let's get started.

Why SEO?

Let's first start with the elephant in the room. **What is SEO?** Search engine optimization (or SEO) is the collection of all of the tactics to help you rank higher in search engines.

It can be called a lot of different things, but simply, the goal is to help you rank higher.

WHY CHOOSE SEO?

Why do you want to rank higher? Well - according to data from December 2015 (special thanks to Advanced Web Ranking for [their study](#)):

- 25 - 29% of all searchers click on the #1 search ranking.
- 16 - 18% of all searchers click on the #2 search ranking.
- 10 - 12% of all searchers click on the #3 search ranking.

The point is - the higher on the page you rank, the more clicks you get.

The more *qualified* clicks you get, the more leads you get.

The more leads you get, the more sales you make.

The more sales you make, the more MONEY you earn.

Our entire guide is focused on helping give you the RIGHT tactics to increase your position in the search engines, so that you can make more money, period.

For us - the web is a zero-sum game, you're either going to win or you're going to lose. If you're like all of the business owners we know then you don't like to lose, and neither do we.

WHY YOU SHOULD INVEST IN SEO OVER OTHER DIGITAL STRATEGIES (AND NON-DIGITAL)

If you're anything like the small business owners we know (and we know a lot of them), you're probably thinking about WHY you need to go with SEO.

Even the smartest business owners we know also ask us why they should choose SEO versus any other marketing strategies (digital or not).

Well – since we consider you to be a smart small business owner (you are reading this wonderful guide we put together for you) – we'll let you in on why we think SEO is so valuable for you and how it compares to other digital and non-digital marketing strategies.

Before we do that, let's look at some of the great benefits of SEO and compare them to the other marketing strategies you could throw your dollars at.

- SEO works 24/7/365
- SEO (often) means high rankings, which equals a perception quality from prospects ([link to study](#))
- SEO puts your company in front of prospects who are looking for what you offer ([link to study](#))
- SEO is cheaper than paid search
- SEO is a long-term win
- SEO commands the lion's share (75%+) of the search volume ([link to study](#))

Now – SEO has its faults:

- SEO can take time to “ramp up” (we couldn't find research on this, but our general rule of thumb is 8-12 weeks)
- SEO can lead to potentially unqualified leads
- SEO can lead to high keyword competition
- SEO puts your fate in the hands' of search engines
- SEO can consume a lot of time if you're balancing doing SEO ([upwards of 20 hours/week](#)) and running your business.

The list below compares SEO to each of the top digital marketing strategies our customers invest in often:

1. **Pay Per Click (PPC)** – Your daily spending depends on your ads, your bids, your landing page experience, and the bids of others. Without a good model, you could easily overpay for leads. You also pay for every single click: good, bad, or ugly. If your sales funnel isn't optimized, it could be a total waste of money for you.
2. **Social Media** – Only 6% of your followers on Facebook will actually see your posts ([link](#)). With Twitter, it's all noise. With Instagram, you could build a following, but will they convert? You can build an audience and a following, but it's getting harder and harder to turn them into buyers, especially if you're a small business. If you become one of the big boys it might be worth it.
3. **Email Marketing** – Requires constant updating, checking, and a system to review if your processes are actually producing leads or not.
4. **Pay Per Lead Services** – Some, like Home Advisor, are tough because you're competing with “Chuck in a Truck” for lowest price and fastest service. They could also lead to unqualified leads and if improperly managed, could lead to overpaying for service. We've also heard feedback from clients that Angie's List customers (and the like) are some of the WORST customers. They ask for everything and use the rating system to back contractors against a wall for the customer and for the small business.
5. **Yellow Pages** – Do we really need to talk about these? Yes – some of our clients (the ones who target areas dominated by customers 65 years or older) see value in YP. They're able to squeeze enough of a discount out of their rep (since everyone is fleeing YP). Is the volume there? Absolutely not. So you might get a few jobs here or there throughout the year and the cost per acquisition is right, but if you're in need of A LOT of leads, this probably isn't going to be your target channel.
6. **Billboards** – High cost, inaccurate tracking.
7. **Direct Mail** – The amount of annual budget that you'll need to make Direct Mail really work for you is so high that if you're reading this article, you can't afford it to make it work.

WHAT ABOUT DIFFERENT SEARCH ENGINES?



Google and Bing and Yahoo, oh my!

There are so many different options to choose from, so how do you know that one digital strategy isn't negatively impacting the other?

Well - here's a quick rundown on the differences in ranking factors among the major search engines.

We always recommend optimizing for Google FIRST, since it **commands over 64%** of all search traffic.

Even if you rank #1 on **Bing, which has 21%** of search traffic for your target keyword, that means you're going to have to rank at least 4 or better on Google to get the exact same amount of search volume to your website.

It's really a matter of scale.

Since this guide is meant to be an effective and efficient use of your time, we're going to focus all of the tactics here forward on ranking well in Google.

If you're interested in more advanced topics for other search engines, feel free to email us at questions@rankfirstlocal.com and we'd be happy to share those with you.

Choosing a Platform

One of the most common questions we get from prospective clients is, *“What platform should my website be on?”*

With the wide array of options out there and some of the different opinions on this topic, we're going to put this quick question to bed with one word:

WordPress.

There are questions about every possible CMS (content management system) and what features and functionality come with it, but we wholeheartedly recommend WordPress for your website and search engine optimization.

With over 50% of the global CMS market share ([link to report](#)), WordPress is the *de facto* standard.

We actually make it a requirement of all of our new on-going customers to have their site built on WordPress – if they come to us without, we'll transfer it on to WordPress to unleash the toolkit you'll soon learn about.

If you've got a WordPress Website, you can skip the next section and head down to the section on plugins, just to make sure you've got the right ones setup to follow along with our guide.

WORDPRESS INSTALLATION

If you don't have a WordPress website, it's time to get one. Depending on your hosting provider the installation should be pretty simple.

Below are links to setup a WordPress website using the most popular hosting providers on the web. If you don't see yours below, send us a message at questions@rankfirstlocal.com and we'll help you find yours.

1. [GoDaddy](#)
2. [1&1](#)
3. [Bluehost](#)
4. [Dreamhost](#)
5. [HostGator](#)
6. [InMotion](#)
7. [SiteGround](#)
8. [Hostwinds](#)
9. [Liquid Web](#)
10. [A Small Orange](#)

WORDPRESS PLUGINS

Plugins reveal the true power of WordPress websites. Plugins help us implement the coding and technical SEO optimizations you'll need on your website.

Here's the WordPress plugins we recommend:

Technical SEO Plugins:

- [Yoast SEO](#)
- [SEO Ultimate](#)

Yoast SEO and SEO Ultimate are plugins you need to do the on-page optimizations that we'll discuss in chapter 7.

Both of these plugins are powerful when it comes to additional technical SEO items that come across your entire website - like title tags, meta descriptions, Open Graph markup, etc.

We work with both.

Yoast SEO happens to be the de facto standard, but SEO Ultimate is also very useful to WordPress novices.

[Google XML sitemaps V3 for Qtranslate](#)

While both of the above SEO Plugins create XML Sitemaps, we really like this XML Sitemap tool and the output it provides for our clients and for easy tracking.

Tracking Plugins:

[Gravity Forms](#)

This is our favorite form plugin that allows you to easily build many different and many forms to capture leads from your website. That's a good thing, right? Once you get someone to the site, you'll certainly want to make sure they can get in touch with you. Gravity Forms is the way.

Leadin

We love Leadin because it provides great insights into those forms you've captured. Specifically, you can get data like which pages (in which order) did that lead take and how long they were on each page. Yes – it's creepy, and for data junkies like us, it's GREAT.

Yoast Analytics

Yoast happens to provide a lot of really great WordPress plugins and the Google Analytics one is really good. When we walk through setting up Google Analytics on your own, below, we'll show you how to specifically do it with Yoast. You can put your GA code on your site however you'd like to, but your installation is on you.

Security Plugins:

Wordfence

This isn't really much for SEO – but more for peace of mind. There are a lot of bad people out there who want to break into your WordPress installation and use it to host Viagra ads (yes – it does happen). Wordfence is a great, free, solution that will help keep a lot of those bad folks at bay.

All of our screenshots are going to include use of those specific plugins. The tips will still be applicable to whichever plugins you use or how you deploy what you've learned out of this guide.

Where to Start

“Write content!”

“Get Links”

“Build several websites!”

“Start a blog!”

We've heard it all. We know you don't have any time to waste, so let's cut to the actually effective activities that are going to get you dollars in the bank.

There is really an on-going process that happens when you're “doing SEO”. It's not just a one-time optimization that's going to magically get you to rank well (although, if carefully done, a one-time optimization can certainly help). Here's the quick three-step high-level process for SEO success:



1. **Research** – In this section, we break it down into four additional steps:

company research, competitor research, keyword research, and website baseline research. For our purposes – you REALLY only need to do basic keyword research. That is going to then inform your Optimization step. If you're dealing with a SERIOUSLY screwed up website, or one that isn't on WordPress, give us a call or send us an email and we'll get you on the right path. We've provided a bonus keyword research document to help you identify your target keywords. Most of the businesses we work with are local service businesses, so it's specifically geared towards them. If you don't fit into that bucket, you can still use it to help organize your thoughts.

2. **Optimization** – This is where you apply what you've got from the keyword research and begin to put it to work on all of the different parts of your website. When we talk about Optimization, there are really three component parts which all of the tactics lie: Technical SEO, On-Site Content, and Off-Site Authority. It's really the magical combination of these three parts and having them all dialed in correctly, that allows you to rank well quickly.
3. **Analyze** – It's vitally important that you know if the work you put in during your research and optimization phases actually got you any improvements! Yes – there are people who forget to track and then want to analyze what happened in the past, don't be one of those chuckleheads. Analysis is so important that our entire next chapter is dedicated to help you setup your tracking to make sure the data you are collecting are both accurate and precise
4. **REPEAT!** – There's a hidden step here, but you can only get so far with going around the process, instead it's one you'll want to repeat.

So – where do you start? First – you've got to make sure that all of your tracking is setup correctly. When that's done, it's time to get onto research. If your tracking is installed correctly and showing you data with the appropriate filtering, skip the next chapter and go onto the following one. If not – take the hour to go through the following chapter and ensure that all of your tracking is setup correctly so you're making accurate decisions.

Tracking Your Results

Let's get started on the setup Google Analytics to make sure that you're ready on that end. Follow our Google Analytics quick setup guide to get a website setup to give you the correct data. We use Google Analytics because it's the de facto standard in website analytics software, there are plenty of other ones out there, but for a small business it's the best option.

Here are a list of common problems that occur when you're looking at a pre-existing, and non-optimized Google Analytics account:

1. **SPAM traffic** – this has been a large burden on Google Analytics accounts, especially in 2015 and early 2016. There are bad web people out there who are sending fake traffic to your website, sometimes it doesn't even hit your website, but your Google Analytics account # is put through an automated processor. We've seen this account for up to 75% of a given website for some of our clients. By filtering this out, you're going to see what *real* traffic you're getting and will be able to make accurate decisions.
2. **Counting your conversions** – Did you know Google Analytics can count every contact form that you're getting from your website? This makes it *incredibly* easy to see how many web conversions that you're getting. Another benefit? You'll be able to see the path that your converters took. This allows you to do two things: get more people onto that path, or connect other parts of your website to that path.
3. **Filtering YOUR visits** – How many times a day do you visit your website? How about your employees? These visits artificially inflate your stats and will give you a false reading of what's going on.

STEP 1: Go To [Google.com/analytics](https://www.google.com/analytics)

STEP 2: Login

STEP 3: Sign up to start Using Google Analytics

The screenshot shows the Google Analytics sign-up interface. At the top left is the Google Analytics logo, and at the top right is the user email 'Tyler@rankfirstlocal.com'. The main heading is 'Start analyzing your site's traffic in 3 steps'. Below this are three numbered steps: 1. 'Sign up for Google Analytics' with an icon of a notepad and pencil, and the text 'All we need is some basic info about what site you'd like to monitor.' 2. 'Add tracking code' with an icon of a notepad and pencil, and the text 'You'll get a tracking code to paste onto your pages so Google knows when your site is visited.' 3. 'Learn about your audience' with an icon of a notepad and a bar chart, and the text 'In a few hours you'll be able to start seeing data about your site.' To the right of these steps is a box titled 'Start using Google Analytics' containing a 'Sign up' button, the text 'Sign up now, it's easy and free!', and a link to the 'Help Center'. A red arrow points from the third step towards the 'Sign up' button. At the bottom of the page is a footer with the text '© 2016 Google | Analytics Home | Terms of Service | Privacy Policy | Send Feedback'.

STEP 4: Get A Tracking Code - Agree to Terms & Conditions

New Account

What would you like to track?

Website Mobile app

Tracking Method

This property works using Universal Analytics. Click [Get Tracking ID](#) and implement the Universal Analytics tracking code snippet to complete your set up.

Setting up your account

Account Name required

Accounts are the top-most level of organization and contain one or more tracking IDs.

Rank First Local **1**

Setting up your property

Website Name required

Rank First Local **2**

Website URL required

http:// www.rankfirstlocal.com **3**

Industry Category ?

Select One

Reporting Time Zone

United States (GMT-05:00) Eastern Time **4**

5 Data Sharing Settings ?

Data you collect, process, and store using Google Analytics ("Google Analytics data") is secure and kept confidential. This data is used to provide and maintain the Google Analytics service, to perform system critical operations, and in rare exceptions for legal reasons as described in our [privacy policy](#).

The data sharing options give you more control over sharing your Google Analytics data. [Learn more](#).

Google products & services RECOMMENDED

Share Google Analytics data with Google to help improve Google's products and services. If you disable this option, data can still flow to other Google products explicitly linked to Analytics. Visit the [product linking](#) section in each property to view or change your settings.

Benchmarking RECOMMENDED

Contribute anonymous data to an aggregate data set to enable features like benchmarking and publication that can help you understand data trends. All identifiable information about your website is removed and combined with other anonymous data before it is shared with others.

Technical support RECOMMENDED

Let Google technical support representatives access your Google Analytics data and account when necessary to provide service and find solutions to technical issues.

Account specialists RECOMMENDED

Give Google marketing specialists and your Google sales specialists access to your Google Analytics data and account so they can find ways to improve your configuration and analysis, and share optimization tips with you. If you don't have dedicated sales specialists, give this access to authorized Google representatives.

[Learn how Google Analytics safeguards your data.](#)

You are using 0 out of 100 accounts.

6 Get Tracking ID

Cancel

1. Enter your company's name in the first cell highlighted above
2. Enter your website's name in the second cell highlighted (this can be identical to #1)
3. Add your website URL in the third cell
4. Change the time zone to the one you're in. It defaults to Pacific Time
5. Change up the Data Sharing settings. We recommend to allow sharing with Google products & services and Benchmarking, but not with Technical support and Account specialists. We do this so you don't get bombarded by Google folks trying to take your data.

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