



Creating a Store Locator

A handy print-out guide to Blipstar v2

Background

Store locators are simple. You enter a zip code or post code or address and get a list of relevant places ordered by distance. Having a locator tool on your website is great if you are:

- a business with multiple locations and want to let people discover their nearest store or branch – e.g. shops, car hire, factory outlets, garages, depots;
- selling your product or brand via retailers and want to let customers find the nearest retailer that stocks your products e.g. you sell a particular brand of clothing available at “all good retailers”;
- an organisation with numerous branches or offices and want clients/users to quickly find their local office (e.g. local government, services).

With Blipstar it is easy to create your own locator and this short document will guide you through the process. It assumes you have created a Blipstar account (<http://www.blipstar.com>) and have logged in to your account.

Main menu

The account page has links to the main sections and useful bits of information regarding your account such as locations limit and when your account needs to be renewed. The menu links are in logical order, starting with Upload & Edit, so just follow them one at a time.

Upload & Edit

Whatever your “things” represent (e.g. stores), Blipstar needs to know where they are. This is done in two ways.

Firstly, creating a spreadsheet with the name and address of each thing (as well as lots of other optional information). Below is a simple example.

	A	B	C	
1	Name	Address	Zip code	Phone
2	4 GOODNESS SAKE	3538 ROUTE 309 OREFIELD, PA	18069	(610) 398
3	A & S NATURAL HEALTH	1559 HANES MALL BLVD WINSTON SALEM, NC	27103-1359	(336) 774
4	A MARKET NATURAL	125 LORING ST MANCHESTER, NH	03103-5716	(603) 668
5	A MATTER OF HEALTH	1478 FIRST AVE NEW YORK, NY	10021	(212) 288
6	A MOVEABLE FEAST	9341 KATY FWY HOUSTON, TX	77024-1516	(713) 365
7	A NEW LEAF	261 CABOT ST BEVERLY, MA	01915-4519	(978) 927
8	ABNER'S NUTRITION CENTER	2327 KELL BLVD STE 100 WICHITA FALLS, TX	76308-1032	(940) 766
9	AHEAD	117 ARDEN AVE SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO, CA	94080-1615	
10	AKINE NATURAL FOODS	7007 E 51ST ST THURSDAY, OK	74115-7047	(405) 743

Note the column names – these are important as Blipstar uses these to recognize certain types of data. The full set of field names supported is:

Field	Function	Needed	Example
Name	Name of store	Yes	Super Sports
Address	Location address in full ...or...	Yes	999 Main Street, Los Angeles, CA
Address1	Location address line 1		999 Main Street
Address2	Location address line 2		Los Angeles
Address3	Location address line 3		CA
Postal code	Location zip or post code	No	90210
Phone	Phone number	No	0123-456-789
Website	Website address, in full (appears as link)	No	http://www.supersports.com
Email	Email address (appears as link)	No	info@supersports.com
Products	Defines available product types (~ delimited)	No	Type1~Type13~Type25
Misc1	Any extra information to show	No	Open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm
Misc2	Any extra information to show	No	
Misc3	Any extra information to show	No	
Position	Lat,Lng WGS84 (overrides address)	No	38.67342,-77.56438
Priority	Allows you to determine the relative priority of stores in the results (i.e. value of 1 appears above 2, which appears above 3 etc, regardless of distance)	No	8
Icon	Store icon url	No	http://www.mystore/icons/type1.png
Website label	Label for the website link (i.e. instead of the URL website)	No	View Website

Note that the column name is case-insensitive (so “phone” is okay, as well as “Phone”). Most importantly, apart from “Name”, you either need a single address line (called “Address”) or up to three separate lines Called (“Address1”, “Address2” and “Address3” funnily enough).

Once you have created your data and selected the file via the file upload dialog, click the Upload button.

Important: Keep a copy of your spreadsheet safe, in case you need it to make any updates to your locator in the future. Treat it as your definitive dataset.

- If you want to ADD a new location, add it to the spreadsheet and upload the full spreadsheet again.
- If you want to EDIT a location, edit it on the spreadsheet and upload again.
- If you want to DELETE a location, remove it from the spreadsheet and, you guessed it, upload the spreadsheet again.

Secondly, you can do everything with Blipstar via the Quick Add, Quick Edit and Quick Delete buttons available on the Upload & Edit page.

If you use a spreadsheet to upload data and lose it you can download your data as stored in Blipstar using the Download as CSV link.

Blipstar will attempt to read in your data and geocode the address. Geocoding is the process of converting a text-based location (an address) into geographic co-ordinates which can be shown on a map. Blipstar uses the best geocoding service available but even that can sometimes fail to geocode something, or geocodes it in the wrong location. In these instances you need to edit the address and turn it into something the geocoder does recognise or, as a last resort, manually define the geographic co-ordinates.

Geocoding can take a while and a progress bar shows you the current status. Once complete it will tell you how many, if any, locations failed to geocode. For these you need to go back to the spreadsheet and alter the addresses to valid ones, then upload your new file. Alternatively you can use the Quick Edit function to correct addresses within Blipstar.

Clicking the link to Verify locations allows you see where Blipstar thinks each location is. It's worth double-checking as a sanity check, especially if a store or thing doesn't appear in the results when you'd expect it to.

Geocoding tips:

1.	Double check the spelling is correct. Even subtle things like "rd" instead of "Road" can make a difference.
2.	Make sure the address is as complete as possible (state codes and postal codes all help).
3.	The easiest type of text to geocode follows the structure of an address you'd put on a letter or parcel.
4.	If your locations are in one country then specify the country in the Configure options page (under the "Search page" tab) – this provides an extra clue to the geocoder.
5.	If your locations are in more than one country then it advised to add the country name at the end of the address e.g. "XXXXXXX, USA" and "XXXXXXX, Canada"
6.	Load up Google Maps and try out different variations until the address is recognised - if Google Maps can geocode it then Blipstar Plus should be able too.
7.	If all else fails then you can specify geographic co-ordinates yourself by adding a field to the spreadsheet called "Position" and entering a WGS84 lat,long position. For example the position of Big Ben in London is '51.500611,0.124611'. Helpfully, if you go to http://www.blipstar.com/blipstarplus/verifylocations.php , the Verify Locations page, then moving the cursor over the map will display the latitude and longitude.

Configure

The Configure page allows you customize all aspects of your store locator. It is split into seven tabs:

Tab	Purpose	Tips
Basic	Key parameters	Go here to set the size of the locator window defined by width and height. If you want a Text-only store locator (one that doesn't have a map) you can set that
Heading/Logo	Title and Logo graphic	Allows you to set the main title and upload your logo (optional) which appears at the top of your locator
Search page	Page 1 of locator (search input)	There are two main types of search – Distance Radius and Nearest locations. Distance Radius returns all stores within a defined radius of the search point. Nearest locations returns a defined number of locations (even if some of them are far away). You can also let users search by store name, or US state, or keyword. Note you can set miles or km on this page.
Results page	Page 2 of locator (results)	The Results to Map ratio allows you to change how large the map is in relation to the results (e.g. 30:70 means 30% of the window is given to the text results, 70% to the map)
Icons	Store icons and Search location icon	You can change the icon used to plot your locations by uploading a custom results icon. A smallish, square, PNG file works best. You can also change the icon used to show where the user searched for (e.g. their zip code) by uploading a custom search icon.
Captions text	Text labels	Any text, heading or label that appears in

		your locator can be changed here. So if you are setting up a stockist finder you could change the Main heading to “Find your nearest AMCE Stockist” or whatever. This means you can have a store locator in a different language.
Advanced	Options for advanced configuration	Various

Tip: When you have edited any settings be sure to press the “Save options” button below the tabs to commit the changes.

Preview

The Preview page gives you a quick heads-up on how your locator will basically appear on a standard PC/laptop/tablet, smartphone and very basic cell phone.

Publish

Once you’re happy with the set up of your locator the final step is to add it to your website. Your locator has a unique website address (called the unique Blipstar URL) and linking to that will display your locator in a new page.

There are various options and you can use one of them, or lots of them, depending on your particular requirements. Option 2 (iframe) is typically the most deployed method as it effectively adds your store locator as a plug in and you can position the iframe anywhere on your page.

Tip: If your website is powered by WordPress then we recommend using the Blipstar store locator plugin.

Tip: If you know a little Javascript then our personal recommendation is Option 4 (lightbox) because it looks quite cool and doesn’t take up any screen real estate (apart from the button/link that opens it)

Tip: The Smartphone and Mobile viewing modes work best when they take up the full screen, rather than an iframe. If you have a specific mobile friendly version of your site we recommend Option 1 (opening up a standalone page) rather than an iframe (Option 2).

Even if the search page is displayed in an iframe, the Smartphone and Mobile viewers will ALWAYS open up the map results in standalone mode (this can be turned off in the Advanced tab of Configuration).

Conclusion

You should now have successfully set up your locator. The key is making sure your data is good, particularly the addresses – *Garbage In, Garbage Out* as the mantra

goes. Why not play around with some of the Configure options or try some of the more advanced Publishing options?

Do you have a specific question? We'd love to hear from you – check out <http://www.blipstar.com/blipstarplus/contact.php>.