

## SEARCH ENGINES

*"Why isn't the web site you just produced for me able to be found in a search?"*



Even though we deal with this issue on our FAQ page, we still get calls from clients who expect instant visibility on the web with their new site just because it's there. If they type in the URL on the address bar, the site comes up, but if they put the name on the search block, the site doesn't appear. That's because the search engines don't have the URL in their databases yet. You need to submit your site to the search engines and be prepared

to wait.

In the early days of the Internet, the classifying and indexing of web pages into databases was quick and easy, even if the search results were sometimes off the mark. Humans placing pages in directories was, and perhaps is, the surest way of eliminating irrelevant results, but the robots and spiders of search engines with their secret formulas for evaluating the content and relevance of web pages for search queries, do so 24 hours a day nonstop without pay. Even if you did nothing, robots would eventually find your site, but to be included in a directory, you had to register your site for evaluation, an inherently slower process.

### Searching for Your Web Site



With the explosive growth in the number of web sites clamoring to be indexed, the time it takes to be noticed after you've got your site up has gone from days to weeks to months. The proprietors of these directories and search engines have realized that instead of offering the service gratis as a way of enticing you to their portals to read their advertisements, they could also make money off of all those web pages wanting to be indexed in the databases. They could also make money from those sites wanting to be at the top of the results' page.

Thus was born the idea of having people pay to get to the head of the line to be classified. This is euphemistically called "Expedited Service," and it means that if you don't pay, you can expect it will be a really long time before they get around to looking at your web pages. After you've paid to be indexed, you can pay again for high placement in search results.

### Paying for Placement

Many search engines and directories have dropped all pretenses at being an open index of everything that's on the web. Their search results are determined

by who has paid the most. There are a number of ways to do this, but it amounts to the same thing: you've got to pay for high placement.

You can bid your way to the top of a keyword search at so much per click through, you can buy exclusive use of a keyword on a particular search engine, or you can pay to pop up on the "Are You Looking For . . ." ? boxes that follow your initial query. Just be prepared to spend money.

### **Lower Cost Alternatives**



For now, however, if you don't want to pay directly for placement, you can opt for one of the following: You can hire someone to rework your site so it conforms well to the latest search engine's formulas for relevance, you can purchase software to do it yourself, you can spend a weekend or two manually submitting your web site to the search engines, or you can just be patient.

If you are computer literate and can submit your own site to search engines, by all means do so. The directions aren't hard to follow. It just takes time. If you aren't computer literate (or you don't have a computer), you can contract with one of the many companies specializing in search engine optimization. It doesn't take much of your time, but it will take money.

It may take 6 months. It may take a year. But if your site is up and preferably on its own domain rather than a sub-domain, you will be found and indexed eventually.

### **Helping Your Web Site Become Visible**

We have advised our clients not to have unreasonable expectations about the potential customer-base available on the Internet, but rather to use their web sites as another way of keeping in contact with the customers that they already have.

We suggest they use their URL in all other advertising: newspaper, radio, TV, billboard, stationery, business cards or on the side of the company truck. Do what it takes to put the web address where it can be seen. The result will be that as more and more people visit the site, its visibility on Internet searches will increase as well.

### **Too Good to be True**

If you do decide to try your hand at modifying your web site to improve its search ranking, be forewarned that few of the techniques and services being advertised are as effective as they claim to be. Also, using some of them could result in having your site dropped from a search engine's database. Using deceptive practices to advance your ranking may work for a while, but it won't keep your site up there when the loophole that allowed the deception is discovered and closed.

### **Bulk Submitting is not the Answer**



The reality is that the majority of those sites you're submitting to are set up for the sole purpose of collecting e-mail addresses from people like you so they can send you junk mail. Within hours you'll receive hundreds of e-mails like "Thank you for submitting to Martha's Search Engine. Now take a look at our homemade discount Viagra products."

Even if you do land your site in some of the real search engines (there aren't that many), those bulk submission services generally do little or nothing to optimize your rankings. You'll simply be buried at the bottom of the results with the millions of other web sites.

### **Quick Results Cost Big Money**



If you want to rank high fast, you have to pay for it. These ads guarantee placement, but you can see it doesn't come cheap! For small businesses the reality is that unless you occupy a unique niche market, you can't rely on web search queries to put your name in front of the public. But you can promote your web site in other ways and if you have content and reason for people to return to your site, it will eventually climb in the rankings.