

PROMOTING A WEB SITE THROUGH SEARCH ENGINES

This paper is a simple “how to” guide for maximizing the exposure of your website to search engine.

How do search engine robots work

The programs that find and index web pages are called “search engine robots”, “web crawlers”, or “spiders”. These programs read the meta tags on web pages, the text on these pages, and the links from these pages to other pages (and from other pages to your page) to determine how to index your web page.

Different search engines use different algorithms to determine the order in which to present pages in response to a search term. These algorithms are kept secret to prevent competitors from copying and, more importantly, to prevent webmasters from using tricks to get a higher ranking. The following are general rules that seem to apply to most search engines:

- Having the search term in the URL helps more than if it is in the title, which helps more than if it is in other parts of the META tags, which seems to help more than if it is in the body of a document.
- Having more links to your web page from external web pages helps.
- Search engine robots can only index the pages they can find. If you create a web page that has no links to it, a search engine robot will not find it unless you or someone else submits it to them.
- Search engines can only see the content of plain HTML pages. They cannot find text hidden in GIF or JPEG images. They cannot find information in a FLASH object or JAVA applet. They cannot find links in a Javascript program. They cannot navigate through pages that are in frames. If you want search engine robots to see this content, you must provide an alternate way for them to find it, either through duplicating this info in META tags, submitting flat HTML pages directly to the search engines, or better yet not using such devices for the pages you want to be visible to the search engines. It is useful to test the searchability of your website by using Freefind (see <http://www.freefind.com>) to index your website and analyzing the results.

What are the most important search engines

<http://www.searchenginewatch.com> ranks search engines popularity. For example in February 2004, the percentage breakdown of searches in North America was:

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|-------------------|-----|
| • Google | 35% |
| • Yahoo/Overture | 28% |
| • AOL | 16% |
| • MSN (Microsoft) | 15% |
| • Ask Jeeves | 3% |
| • All others | 3% |

The situation is more complicated because:

- Google’s ratings include Google images and the Open directory as part of their 35% share. Google also powers AOL’s 16% market share.
- Microsoft’s search capabilities are powered by Yahoo/Overture and LookSmart. Microsoft currently does not use any of its in-house search engine technology, but is developing some.
- Ask Jeeves owns and uses Teoma, which it has resold to several other companies.

My conclusion is that one needs to submit to Google, Yahoo, and the Open Directory. Optionally, one can submit to LookSmart and Ask Jeeves, but this costs.

Some words about title, description, and keywords

It is useful to have a <TITLE> tag and <META> tags that give a description and keywords in the <HEAD> of your web page. The following are some general guidelines:

- Include complementary words, word variations, and misspellings in your keywords. For example, a site providing skis, might need to include the words downhill, winter sports, snow, skies, and skiing.
- Use words as phrases. For example, “downhill ski”, is better than “ski”, “downhill” because you will get a higher rating for people who type in “downhill ski” into a search engine.
- Use the singular of words instead of the plural. If you have “ski” in your keywords, people who search for “skis” will be able to find your site where the opposite is not always true.

How to submit to the main search engines

Each search engine has its own rules and location. The following are places where you can submit for free:

- **Google.** Submit to <http://www.google.com/addurl>. It may take 3-6 weeks before you see any results.

- **Open directory.** Submit to <http://www.dmoz.org>. This will help you with Google, AOL and Ask Jeeves.
- **Yahoo.** <http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html> is the place to submit for a free listing.
- **Zeal.** <http://zeal.com> is a free directory for non-commercial websites. If you are not selling anything, you may want to list here. It is associated with LookSmart, which is used by MSN.

The following cost money, but may be worth it:

- **Google ads.** This will give you a preferred placement with Google. It typically costs \$0.10 for every person who clicks on your listing.
- **Overture.** This company, now owned by Yahoo provides most of the sponsored listings for Yahoo and MSN. Prices for positions are auctioned off. See <http://www.content.overture.com/d/> for info. Several of my Corp21.com clients have had commercial success using Overture.
- **Ask Jeeves.** It costs \$30 to submit your site. Although the price is low, remember that this will give you privileged access to only 3% of the web searches. For info see <http://sitesubmit.ask.com/>.
- **LookSmart** (<http://listings.looksmart.com>) provides web-based advertising starting at \$0.15/click. This will help get you in the sponsored links for MSN.

If you do not want to spend money, the following are some strategies to use with MSN, Ask Jeeves and LookSmart:

- Get links to your site from sites visible to Yahoo, MSN and Ask Jeeves. For example, perhaps you have a friend or business associate that has a site that does well with these search engines. By adding a link from their site to yours, these search engines will be able to find your site. Although it may take longer, you will eventually be listed.
- Find other directories that are listed by these search engines and get your website included in these directories. For example, if you have free versions of our software, you could try to get a listing on <http://www.freshmeat.net>, which is the #3 listing in the non-sponsored links on MSN.com the #9 listing in the non-sponsored links on Yahoo and the #7 listing in Ask Jeeves when you type in the term "open source software."

Other things to do

Once you have taken the above steps, it is important to use your web traffic management tool (see <http://www.corp21.com/WebPopular.pdf>) to monitor what parts of your site are getting traffic and based on what keywords. You can then use these keywords to generate other content. You can also see what other "competitors" you have when you submit these keywords to a search engine and use this to improve your offering.

It is also important to establish links between your website content and that of others. Some search engines will give you a higher ranking if you link to other sites with similar content. Virtually all search engines will give you a higher ranking if other sites link to yours. The more sophisticated ones look at the other sites, evaluate their rankings and content, and increase your site's ranking based on the similarity and ranking of this other site.

If these things don't generate enough traffic, for your needs, then it is important to look at pay for clicks, or other activities such as those that are covered in <http://www.corp21.com/WebPopular.pdf>).

Conclusion

This paper is an overview. Feel free to give me comments to help improve this. Here are three references to let you further explore this topic:

- http://www.bruceclay.com/web_rank.htm is the best free website I've found that describes how to optimize your search engine ranking.
- Michael, Alex and Ben Salter. *Marketing Through Search Optimization. How to be Found on the Web.* Elsevier ©2003.
- Vermeulen, Bert. *Making Your Website Popular.* Corp21. ©2004.

Please contact me if you would like more info or help on making your business more successful.

About the Author

Bert Vermeulen owns Corp21, a company that supports, incubates and advises businesses, entrepreneurs, and inventors around the world. For more information, see <http://www.corp21.com>.