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Sales from the Internet -- Being found on the Internet

By Dennis McDonough

In a previous article I have talked about your domain name as your Internet identity. Your domain name is unique and should be easy for people to remember. When they cannot remember your website address, they will usually turn to a search engine.

Search engines are the place most users start to find websites on the Internet. If they don't know your domain name, they will go to Yahoo, Google, MSN Search, or one of the many other search engines to find you. Your challenge is to be setup for them to find you first, and not all of your competitors.

Each of the search engines has it's own rules and works differently. There is not enough room in these articles to cover each one, so I have just selected the top two **Yahoo.com** and **Google.com**. Yahoo requires submissions and review by editors. Google is a spider engine that searches the Internet for content and ranks the sites automatically according to its rules.

One thing you must remember about search engine rules, they change. They are in a continual evolution where the companies are trying to be the best, getting the most hits while making a profit. There is a continual exchange of needs from the business and the technology sides of these companies. These rules and practices evolve due to this exchange. Remember, the advice I give you in January of 2003 may be out dated a few months from now.

Yahoo.com

Do you Yahoo? This is what their commercial asks. Yahoo has been around for a long time. Almost anyone who has any experience with the Internet has been there more than a few times. Yahoo has become a portal, much more than a search engine. Yahoo may say it best on their company information page:

"When Yahoo! was founded in 1994 by Stanford Ph.D. students, David Filo and Jerry Yang, it began as their hobby and has evolved into a global brand that has changed the way people communicate with each other, find and access information, and make purchases. As the first online navigational guide to the Web, Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com) is the leader in traffic, advertising, household and business user reach. Yahoo! is also the most recognized and valuable Internet brand globally, reaching over 237 million unique users in 25 countries and 13 languages. "

Yahoo started with free directory listings. This helped them build the top directory on the Internet. It was human edited and took months to get listed. Last year Yahoo started charging \$299 per year for a directory listing. When submitting a listing, you get to select two categories for your site to be listed under, and here is the real catch, they do not guarantee that you will be listed. Of course the fee is the charge to review your request and is not refundable if you do not get placed.

"Sponsor Matches" were added this past year. They get listed first on Yahoo. These are Pay Per Click listings that are provided by Overture. These are placed in the most visible location, at the top of "Web Matches" and the "Directory" pages. These positions are bid on and require an additional strategy for your listing. I will devote an article to this subject later.

September of 2002, Yahoo changed their default search results listings to "Web Matches" which is provided by Google. This is in addition to the "Directory" listings. This means you can get a good listing on a Yahoo search without being listed in the Yahoo directory. "Web Matches" page coming up first, seems to be taking away some of the importance for the Yahoo directory listings. The directory listings are now a revenue stream for Yahoo, so I look for this to be modified in the future.

While Yahoo is using Google to provide the "Web Matches" and is placing this page first in their results, Google is extremely important for the visibility of your website. Google has their own rules and is trying to maintain their place for independent and valuable search results.

What does Google mean?

Google is a play on the word "googol", which was coined by Milton Sirota, nephew of American mathematician Edward Kasner, to refer to the number represented by 1 followed by 100 zeros. A googol is a very large number. There isn't a googol of anything in the universe. Not stars, not dust particles, not atoms. Google's use of the term reflects the company's mission to organize the immense, seemingly infinite, amount of information available on the web.

Sergey Brin and Larry Page met at Stanford, where they worked on the project BackRub, named for its unique ability to analyze the "back links" pointing to a given website, which became Google. Together they founded Google Inc. in 1998.

The above paragraphs are from Google's website. Both founders are currently involved at the company. They have a unique web ranking technology that does not allow for human intervention. They are continually striving for an automated way to provide fast and quick relevant searches. Google publishes a guide for webmasters on how to be ranked by their engine (<http://www.google.com/webmasters/>).

Google does not require, nor request, submission to their site. They do not ask for payment to be listed. They have a technology called "spider" that "crawls" the Internet looking for content to list. This includes web pages, Adobe Acrobat (PDF) files, images, news articles, and Usenet discussion groups.

Google is looking for content, pages with 250 to 400 words. These pages need to contain the words describing your business. The name of your company needs to be in text form. If you are using a graphic image or logo for the name of your company, also include your company name in the "alt" tag. Acrobat files will be indexed, but not Macromedia Flash files. Flash files are seen as images to Google.

Use words that will localize your company. If you have a business in Tampa, FL, you may not sell many products to customers from Seattle, WA. Put your city and state in the content on many pages, not just on the home page. If you are in a small town outside a large city, include references to the city in your text. Include surrounding towns in your text. Remember, it is text that gets indexed. If the "spider" does not read it, it cannot be added to Google's data.

There is a lot more to getting, and keeping your site listed at, or near, the top. Your site must not have coding errors that the directories find. Your website host must be fast and reliable. The site must withstand the speed of the search "spider" and be available when an editor wishes to review it. They are reviewing so many sites that there is not usually a second chance, without a long wait. These are just some of the reasons sites don't get listed with search engines.

Search Engine Optimizers or SEOs provide useful services for website owners, from writing copy to giving advice on site architecture and helping to find relevant directories to which a site can be submitted. However, there are a few unethical SEOs who have given the industry a black eye through their overly aggressive marketing efforts and their attempts to manipulate search engine results. Be wary of unsolicited emails that offer a number one ranking overnight. These emails are usually sent by the same people with offers for "Making a Million on the Internet" or a request that you to send your bank account

number to help them hide funds from dead dictators of third world countries. As my Grandfather was fond of saying, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

A good SEO will talk with you about your business goals, website goals, your customers, and what your current results are. They study the Internet trends. A good SEO can help you make modifications to your website that will increase your ranking in the directories.

Getting a good domain name and setting your site up for the search engines is just the start of Internet marketing. Knowledge of your customers' desires, making your site easy to navigate, and having a current inventory available are all important to making your site a success.

But first, your customers must be able to find your website.

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