

Search Engines and Directories

Introduction

Building a good website is only part of the key to an effective Internet presence. Marketing that site is just as important – the best looking site in the world is useless if nobody knows it is there.

Search Engines are most people's first port of call when looking for information on the Internet. There are thousands of search engines on the Internet, but 90% of people use the major ones – Yahoo, Google, MSN, Altavista and so on.

In most cases the term Search Engine will cover Directories also. A Directory is just that – a categorised collection of websites. A Search Engine works by matching your search term with a database of websites, listing what it considers the most relevant sites first.

This views expressed in this document are our own, developed over several years of experience submitting sites to Search Engines. You are quite welcome to disagree with them!

How Websites Get Listed

In most cases you must submit your site to the Search Engine. Most search engine sites have an 'Add URL' or 'Submit a Site' page – you enter your site's URL (address) and, usually, a few more pieces of information.

Spiders

Your site normally isn't listed at that time. At some point in the future the search engine sends a 'Spider' to your site. This is just a piece of software which reads the web page you submitted, looks for links to other pages, reads those and so on. It returns the information it finds to the Search Engine. At some point after that, the gathered information is processed and added to the engine's database. Your site will then be listed. This process can take anything between a few days and a few months.

Directories

Normally, Directories don't use Spiders. Either you are asked to enter more details about your site (a description, a title, a category), or a human visits your site and creates that information, or a mixture of the two.

How Long Does it Take to Get Listed?

There are no hard and fast rules. It is possible to obtain a listing from some Search Engines in a few days, others may take many months.

A few years ago most Search Engines were free. Now, most have paid-inclusion schemes. These normally allow you to 'jump the queue' – the submission process is the same but your site is listed much faster. However, something has to give, and free submissions seem to take much longer to show up. Sometimes they don't appear at all.

Optimising Your Web Pages

A Search Engine will examine the data returned to it by the Spider before listing it. It will use a variety of methods to determine which are the keywords and phrases and thereby determine where your site will appear in the results.

Different Search Engines use different methods, so you must optimise your web pages to make them as attractive as possible to each Search Engine. Unfortunately, what is attractive to one Search Engine may not be to another. How to perform this optimisation is beyond the scope of this document – a good place to start is <http://www.searchenginewatch.com>

Which Search Engine Uses Which Listing?

Just to complicate matters, Search Engines may use databases other than their own to provide results. They may mix the results with their own, or use a combination from a number of sources.

Just who uses whose data seems to be a constantly changing situation. For instance, AOL uses Open Directory Project (ODP) data, Lycos uses AllTheWeb and ODP data, and so on. By the time you have read this the situation has probably changed!

Free vs. Paid Submission

The decision of whether to go for paid submissions is yours – it depends entirely on your budget, the expected revenue from your site and how quickly you would like to get listed.

Some paid schemes (such as Altavista's) provide exactly the same listing as you would get when submitting for free, but do so much faster. Others provide an enhanced listing in return for some of your money.

If yours is a commercial site, you must pay to get listed on Yahoo.

Other pay schemes, such as Overture's Pay-per-Click, allow you to buy prominent listings.

Don't Rely on Search Engines

Generally, search engines won't provide you with more than 20 – 50% of your site's traffic. You should consider other ways of marketing your site:

- Reciprocal links (i.e. exchange links with complementary sites)
- Traditional paper-based advertising
- Mailshots
- Including your web address on all stationery

Pay-per-Click

Several Search Engines are using the Pay-per-Click model. Overture is the best known, but FindWhat is another using a similar system.

It works as follows (using Overture as an example):

1. You create an Overture account and deposit a sum of money into it using your credit card
2. You then decide which search terms (keywords or phrases) you wish to be found under
3. You then 'bid' for these search terms. For instance, someone else may have bid \$0.05 for the phrase 'blue widgets'. You may decide to bid \$0.06 for that term.
4. For each search term you enter a description and the URL (address) of the web page you wish to be displayed when someone clicks on your listing

When someone types 'blue widgets' in the Overture search engine, matching listings are displayed with the highest bidder at the top of the list. Only when that person clicks on your listing to visit your site do you get charged the bid amount (i.e. your account is debited that amount).

Now the clever bit – Overture supplies data to other search engines. For instance, when you type 'blue widgets' in the AOL search engine, the top two or three results from Overture are

displayed along with the AOL listings. Overture claims to display its listings to over 85% of the Internet population.

Pay-per-Click has the following advantages:

- You choose how much you want to pay for your listings
- You only pay when someone visits your site
- You may examine and change your bids at any time – changes take effect immediately
- It works using search terms you have explicitly entered rather than ones which the Search Engine's spider has deemed to be relevant. In other words you do not have to optimise your web pages for those search terms

Your Submission Strategy

This will vary depending on your requirements. I think it is fair to say that you will struggle to get good search engine listings without parting with some money.

One step must be performed no matter what your budget – PREPARATION:

- Make sure your site is up and running, optimised for Search Engines
- Remove any 'Site Under Construction' banners and replace with real content.
- Make sure your site's pages load quickly and look good using a number of different web browsers
- Prepare any key words and phrases, directory titles and text. You will then be able to copy-and-paste them into forms when submitting to Directories

Visit <http://www.searchenginewatch.com> for a more comprehensive list of preparation steps.

Yahoo

If you are expecting to generate revenue from your site you should seriously consider spending \$300 per year for your Yahoo listing.

If you have a non-commercial site you should be able to get listed on Yahoo for free. However, obtaining a listing is notoriously difficult – ensure you prepare thoroughly as per the instructions on <http://www.searchenginewatch.com> first.

Don't be tempted to submit your commercial site as a non-commercial site – it WILL get rejected.

Get Listed Fast

If you need listings quickly (i.e. in less than a couple of months), consider the following schemes:

- Overture – Pay-per-Click, usually up and running within a week. Minimum \$50
- Inktomi - \$40
- Teoma/Ask - \$30 per URL, inclusion in the Ask.com and Temoa databases within 7 days.
- Google AdWords – minimum of \$5, plus whatever you wish to spend per month
- Looksmart – a minimum of \$230 per year, paying \$0.15 per clickthrough
- Altavista - \$40 per URL for six months – your page will be re-crawled and re-indexed every 14 days

Free Listings

The most important of these are:

- Open Directory Project (ODP) – A volunteer-driven directory. Results are used by many search engines and 'badged' directories.
- Looksmart – If yours is a non-commercial site you can get listed here for free
- Google – currently the most popular Search Engine. Listings are free but can take some time to appear.

Conclusion

This is only a briefing document. As mentioned several times before I highly recommend you take a look at <http://www.searchenginewatch.com> for more comprehensive information.

If you are running a commercial site it is difficult to avoid having to pay money to obtain reasonable Search Engine traffic in a time frame of less than a couple of months. Things are slightly easier for non-commercial sites, but the trend is definitely towards paid listings.

We recommend you avoid the 'Submit your site to 10,000 search engines for \$20' type of offers for the following reasons:

- The site is being submitted – there is no followup and no guarantee that your site will appear. Your site's URL will just be fed into some automated submission software.
- Most search engine traffic will come from a dozen or so search engines – concentrate on those first – submit manually to ensure everything goes smoothly.

It is also important to make sure you have access to your website's access logs. These will tell you where your site visitors came from – an important part of judging whether or not a particular search engine is performing for you (even more important if you are paying for your listing).

How We Can Help

Goldseal don't claim to be search engine experts, but we have had a reasonable amount of success with both our own site and those of some of our clients.

We can help with the process of preparing and submitting your site and we can report on your site's traffic and search engine positioning. We can do this on a formal basis (i.e. our Monthly Maintenance & Monitoring package) or as-required (hourly rate).

Call us or visit our site at <http://www.goldseal-solutions.co.uk> for more details.