

OPTIMIZING WEB SITE FOR SEARCH ENGINES

85% of all Internet traffic is generated by search engines. This means that in order to build a successful, prosperous online presence for your business, you must ensure that users of Internet search engine can find your Web site. A 2004 survey performed by the Pew Internet & American Life Project revealed that 84% of online Americans have used search engines. In fact, comScore Networks estimates that American Internet users performed about 40 billion Internet searches in 2004.

For an online business, the importance of search engines cannot be overestimated – if search engine users won't find your Web site, then, likely, no one will. This problem could become very real for business owners who fail to understand the importance of Internet search engines and search engine optimization. As the Internet boasts several billions of Web pages – and counting – unless your Web site is optimized for and indexed by such search engines as Google, Yahoo! and MSN, Internet users simply won't know that it exists.

In order to use search engines as a business tool, you must first understand how they work. The Internet is dominated by four search engines – Google, Yahoo!, MSN Search, and Ask Jeeves, which combine to account for more than 90 percent of all Internet searches. The first step into the online business world, therefore, should be to get your Web site listed with these engines. To do so, you can either wait for the search engines to find the site, or you can submit it directly. Because search engines rely on spiders – robots that "crawl" the Internet by following the hyperlinks that connect Web pages – most Web pages will in fact be found – assuming that they are being pointed to by other Web sites. However, submitting a page directly might save you valuable time as it will ensure that the search engine's spiders will visit and review that page the next time they crawl the Web. Most search engines allow submission of Web pages at no cost, but some charge a fee for direct submission

Having a site listed in a search engine's index, however, does not guarantee success. The critical part is to ensure that the site is ranked high enough in the search engine(s) to actually be found. Research has shown that the majority of Internet users rarely venture beyond the first one or two pages of search results. This means that very few – if any – users will actually find a page that shows up several pages into the search results. Thus, obtaining a top 10 or 20 search engine ranking for the applicable keyword(s) is the only way to gain Web visibility. This is where search engine optimization comes in.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

The term search engine optimization encompasses a number of methods to improve a Web site's search engine ranking.

When optimizing a Web site, you must first define the Web site "keywords"; then weave those keywords into the page content. The keywords are the words and phrases Internet users will type into a search engine when looking for Web content. Search engines look for those keywords in such site elements as page copy, Title tags, and – to a lesser degree – Meta tags and anchor text on internal links.

Another important element in the search engine optimization process is link building, which is the process of making sure that other – preferably topically similar – Web sites link to a given site. Though the exact methods vary, currently, all of the major search engines focus heavily on link analysis when determining the importance of a given Web page. This means that the search engines look at the number and, particularly, the relevance of a Web page's back links (i.e., the links that point to the reviewed site) when calculating Web page rankings. If an originating site offers similar or related content to the one it is pointing to, the link will be rated higher than if the originating site's content was entirely unrelated.

Securing a top ranking with the Internet's search engine engines can be a daunting proposition. However, if you dedicate the necessary time and effort to meticulously optimize your Web site, you will eventually reap the fruit of your labor in the form of visitors to your site.



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