

THE BASICS – SEARCH ENGINES AND DIRECTORIES

INTRODUCTION

The only thing that remains constant is change and nothing changes on the Internet faster than search engine technology. Millions of dollars are spent each year to provide Internet users with listings of the best matching sites to a user's keyword or key-phrase search.

If the search engine service is fast and returns the sorts of results the user is after, then the user will keep coming back. Popular search engines and directories that can do this for the user are able to charge the website owners significant fees for the opportunity of being found through their facility.

FEE FOR SERVICE

In the early days of the World Wide Web, registering your site with search engines and directories was free. Sadly the Net Wreck in 2001 changed all that and everyone had to start making money out of their online efforts if they wanted to stay in business.

Slowly the more successful search engines (except Google, we'll talk about Google separately) and directories started to charge businesses for directing users to their sites. Conservatively today you will need to spend about AUD\$1500 to have your site visible to your market through these avenues.

Some search engines charge as little as AUD\$36 (Lycos) while Yahoo (US) is charging AUD\$600. (It is interesting to note that you can still choose to list with Yahoo for free, but they warn that the process could take up to three or four months while the \$600 service takes just a week. Importantly neither option is guaranteed to actually get you listed, this is entirely at their discretion and you have no option to get your money back should they decide not to list you.)

You can go further than just listing your site if you wish. Many search engines and directories now have sponsored or featured sites listed at the top of their search results. The positioning of these sponsored sites is paid for by the owners of those sites. Generally they pay a predetermined amount to the search engine when someone clicks on the link and goes through to the website.

COMPETITION DRIVES THE CHANGES

Over the past five years the methods search engines have used to provide users with better results have changed significantly. In line with those changes website owners have done their best to keep up, exploit the technology and get the best possible ranking.

Tactics include having domain names that include keywords (We know of sites that have more than fifty keyword loaded domain names pointing to their site) and using keywords in page titles; often page titles would have no keywords and be something like, "Welcome to the Our Company Website". Now a good page title will have two or more keywords and be more like: "Widgets For Wigwams."

Keywords in the text of the pages; writing good copy to include keywords is not as easy as you may think and some people used to try and get around this by writing their

keywords over and over again in text the same colour as their background. This is now easily detected and sites that do this will most likely be struck off search engine listings rather than being ranked higher.

The search engine industry got a shake up when Google entered the game. Google was initially a program built by two university students who wanted to look at the hierarchy of the web by examining the links from one website to another. The more links going to a site, the more important that site was and if a really important site linked to a particular site it inherited some of that importance. This was termed page ranking and it is what makes Google unique. The only way that you can get a good ranking in Google is to have a lot of sites linking to you and the more important those sites are, the more important your site will become. Because of this, it is much harder to manipulate Google than other search engines, but it has led to the development of Affiliate programs and minor directories where a community of websites is built for the purpose of increasing the number of links to a site.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

If you keep the needs of the user in mind and you consider how the search engines service those needs you will most likely incorporate most of the things you need to get a reasonable ranking in many of the search engines after you have paid your registration fees.

There is no advantage to registering with 100's or 1000's of search engines because the users you want to attract don't use them, and Link Farms have the opposite effect and can have your site banned. Ask your friends which search engines they use and stick with those unless of course you are looking to break into a new or perhaps even an overseas market.

Do not be concerned with the number of search engines and directories you are registered with. Work on the handful that people use and look for some local industry specific directories that could add some high value to a smaller audience.