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Program: WEB SITE HOW-TO'S FROM THE PROS.

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Question: How do I make sure people can find my site?

ANSWERS: Make your web site more searchable.

"Search engine optimization" is the industry term for making your web site as friendly as possible to search engines and thereby getting your web site ranked as high as possible in search results. Search engine optimization takes knowledge, but most importantly TIME and COMMITMENT. It has become one of the most important, yet often overlooked marketing tools available today.

There are two basic types of search engine placement: organic and sponsored. Simply put, you pay the search engines (or directories) for a sponsored listing, while organic optimization of your site is achieved by properly building, maintaining, and marketing your site.

Quick description of how search engines work/spiders:

The most basic description of how a search engine spider works is this: a "spider" is simply a computer program who's sole task is to gather, analyze, rank, and index (or not) a web page, then follow all links on that page and repeat the process ad infinitum. Each search engine has many algorithms it uses to decide what to do with a page, and these algorithms are constantly changing.

Some SEO Myths:

A misconception about search engines, Google in particular, is that it is the 'Internet directory'. You just tell them about your site and you'll get listed along with every other site on the Internet. To a small extent this is true, but each search engine does what it sees fit as far as including (or not) web sites and web pages in its directory. Nobody knows the number of web pages that actually exist on the Internet, but regardless, each search engine currently indexes only a fraction of these total pages.

- There is NO GUARANTEE WHATSOEVER that you will get listed at all, how long it will take to get listed, what position you will achieve, or how long you will remain there. Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying.
- There are NO CONCRETE RULES for optimizing your web site. There are certainly many

guidelines and generally accepted published facts, and also many published assumptions and opinions, some of which completely contradictory. Search engine optimization is not a simple cut and dry operation.

Submitting your web site to search engines

Just submitting your URL to search engines has little to no effect. As long as you RESPECT THE RULES of submission, it certainly can't hurt, but it takes far more than just this to get your site listed well. The quickest way to get your site indexed is to properly link to it from another site with good page rank.

Top items on your web site that help it rank higher

The top three keys for optimizing your web site for search engines are:

- #1 - Relevant content. Search engines are hungry for content. The more relevant content you have, the better the search engines will like your site. Non-relevant content does you no good. Content in images does you no good either.
- #2 - Inbound links. The more links you have pointing to your site from other relevant sites, the better the search engines will think of you. Think of this as referrals. For those with businesses, you know that word of mouth is your best form of advertising. The same applies with links into your site – it's like other sites vouching for your site. The better the search engines like the site that is linking to you, the more credit it gives your site.
- #3 – Properly created pages and friendly links.

If you do the first two well, properly created pages are not as important, but should be done regardless. Proper and validated HTML, proper titles, usage of proper HTML tags and attributes, and proper usage of meta information all contribute to better page ranking. Friendly links, such as:

www.novusnetworking.com/news

as opposed to:

www.novusnetworking.co/cgi-bin/news.cgi?content=1&id=42&style=view

tend to be indexed more by search engines.

How much time and money should I expect to spend on optimizing my web site for better search engine placement?

This depends greatly on the industry you are in, the desired target audience, target keywords, and the size of the site itself. Regardless, SEO takes TIME and COMMITMENT no matter the size of the site. Proper SEO requires consistent analysis and content maintenance and using a professional for at least a portion is highly recommended. If you plan to outsource your site optimization, at a minimum you should budget for \$2,000 annually.

Q. Help! How do I keep the content fresh on my web site? Who can help me manage the content?

Content management systems

Content management systems (CMSes) cover a wide range of specifics, but generally speaking they are software programs which make managing web sites easier. Although knowledge of HTML doesn't hurt, good

CMS's hide the complexity of building web sites and generally offer point and click, WYSIWYG (What you see is what you get) content editing as well as specific packaged features, such as calendars or news feeds.

Where can I find a content management system?

There are many CMS's, but there are two basic types: Desktop based and Server based.

Desktop based systems must be installed on each computer where you want to manage your site and work like most other desktop applications. You manage your site using the tools the software provides, then when you are ready to publish the site live, it uploads your changes to your web server. Examples include Front Page, and Macromedia's Contribute. Prices range from free to several hundred dollars.

Server based systems run on the actual web server where your site is located and administration of your site is generally done via a web browser. An advantage of a server based CMS is that you can manage your site from any computer with a current web browser without having to install any additional software. Most good CMS's have a secure method of authenticating users and properly allowing access to edit the site. Many server based CMS's can be downloaded and used for free. Others are offered as a leased service, and others can be purchased, similar to Desktop based systems.

How much time should web site management take?

One of the biggest reasons web sites fail as a good marketing tool is simply lack of commitment. Many people start into a web project with great intentions, but unfortunately let it fall to the wayside. This happens for several reasons, one of which being technical difficulty in managing and maintaining the site. The difficulty could be with attaining the skill level necessary, retaining proper staff with the necessary skills, or affording a third party to do the work. This is where a content management system can be a lifesaver. Most good CMS's make updating a web site very easy, and if you use a server based CMS it can be done from any computer on line, at anytime.

For a successful web site, you must resolve yourself to a proper time and budget commitment for your particular site, be that personal time, staff driven, or hired out to a third party. The actual time commitment varies per site, but you should commit to spending at least 1 hour per week on your web site AFTER it is built and operational. This time should be spent analyzing your web logs to determine where people are going once they get to your site as well as how they got there in the first place (good web log tools will help with this). You should then modify existing and create new content on your site to further target your audience.

What to do yourself/what to hire out?

This largely depends on your budget, general skill level, and available resources. I recommend consulting with a web professional to define, design, and build the initial site. Once your site is built, you have the option of maintaining it yourself, outsourcing maintenance entirely, or a combination. If a content management system is used, you can achieve excellent combination results. General site content maintenance, such as posting of news stories, uploading of documents, etc, can be handled easily by you and/or your staff, while maintaining a third party professional to consult on any heavy lifting tasks.

See our web site for more information on search engine optimization and content management:

<http://www.oicgroup.net/search-engine-optimization>

<http://www.oicgroup.net/web-content-management>