

Is A Yahoo Listing Still Worth The Cost?

By Dan Thies

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In October 2002, the Yahoo! portal changed the way it delivers search results. In the past, the most prominent results were exclusively culled from websites listed in the Yahoo directory itself. Since October, sites listed in the Yahoo directory no longer enjoy this privileged status.

The Google search engine now drives the primary search results on Yahoo. While this is certainly an improvement for users of Yahoo search, it's a disaster for many businesses that counted on their Yahoo listing to deliver substantial traffic.

This change has also led many site owners to question the value of a listing in the Yahoo directory. In this article, I will outline the pros and cons of maintaining, or paying for, a Yahoo listing. In the process, I will delve into more details of the recent changes.

Argument #1: Yahoo Listings Mean Link Popularity

Pro:

Even if the Yahoo listing itself delivers little or no traffic, other search engines will rank your website higher if it's listed in Yahoo. Because Yahoo is so important, a link from Yahoo counts more than a regular link. Thanks to its higher "PageRank," Yahoo means even more to Google.

Con:

Yahoo listings do not deliver nearly as significant a contribution in this area as you might think. You can verify this by doing a "backward links" search on Google for any Yahoo-listed website. The most important links are listed first, and the Yahoo listing is rarely even on the first page of links for top ranked sites on Google.

Argument #2: Listed Sites Look Better In The Search Results

Pro:

Websites with a Yahoo listing show up in the combined Yahoo/Google results with their title, description, and category from the Yahoo directory. This may boost the response when the site appears in the search results. This applies when the URL listed in the results is the same as the URL in the Yahoo listing.

Con:

Results listed with Yahoo information include a link to the site's category, which may prompt surfers to pass over your listing and go to the category. Sites without Yahoo listings have the more inviting "search within this site" link, which leads to more results exclusively from your site.

So, Is A Yahoo Listing Worth It?

If you have a non-commercial site and can get listed for free, of course! If you're not one of the lucky few, though, you have to evaluate whether it's worth \$299 a year for what amounts to a better than average incoming link. Everyone must make their own decision. If \$299 is small compared to your total marketing budget, it may be easier to just continue paying. My own listing expires in March, and I don't intend to renew it.

How Can You Profit From The Changes At Yahoo?

The obvious answer is that you must take steps to improve your own position in Google's search results. Google's rankings are made up of many factors, but the dominant factor is "PageRank," which is based on the number and quality of incoming links from other websites.

Therefore, the first step in improving your position on the Google search engine (and now Yahoo) is to improve your site's link popularity. This takes time, and trying to take shortcuts can get you into real trouble - Google doesn't like "link farms," or any program designed to artificially boost your link popularity.

Finding Quality Link Partners Through Google

Since only links from quality sites will count for much with Google, let's take a quick look at how you can find these sites. Start by targeting the sites that link to

existing top-ranked sites. You can do a backward links search for any site by typing "link:http://www.domain.com" in the Google search engine.

An even faster method is to use the Google toolbar (<http://toolbar.google.com/>), which requires Internet Explorer 5 or greater, running on Windows. With the toolbar's advanced features enabled, you can conduct a "backward links" search from the "Page Info" menu for any site you visit.

Since Google lists these results in descending order by "PageRank," you can quickly determine the best places to get links by doing backward links searches on the top 10-20 sites for your desired search terms, and seeking links from the top 10-20 places that link to them.

Links Are Not Enough: Optimizing For Google

While "PageRank" is the dominant factor in Google's algorithm, it's not the only factor, and you still need to optimize your web pages. This can be a complicated topic, but the most important factors are:

- Keywords in the title of the page
- Keywords in headings on the page (H1 or H2 tags), especially the first heading.
- Keywords in the body text of the page, particularly the first paragraph.

Don't Complain, Act!

By some estimates, Google now controls 2/3rds of the searches conducted on the Internet in a given day. Not only is Google.com extremely popular in its own right, but Google also controls the search results on popular portals like AOL and Iwon.com - not to mention Yahoo.

A lot of website owners are complaining bitterly about this change. All the more reason for you to take action now, while so many of your competitors are busy licking their wounds. With a little planning and effort, you could be in a dominant position on Google before they even get started.

I wish you success...

Dan Thies is the author of "Search Engine Optimization Fast Start," the ultimate beginner's guide to higher search engine rankings - available today at <http://www.cannedbooks.com>

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