

# Search Engine Submissions & Ranking

By Aaron Turpen

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Aaron Turpen  
aaron@aaronzwebworkz.com

Aaronz WebWorkz <http://www.AaronzWebWorkz.com>

When you are looking for something on the Internet, what do you usually do? You go to a search engine. Where do those results come from and how do you put your website up there too?

The mother of all marketing tools online is the search engine. There are many to choose from and there is no reason not to be listed in as many as you possibly can. However, there are only a few which garner more than 80% (between them) of the Internet's searching traffic. These are usually referred to as the "Top Ten Search Engines." They are, in no particular order: Yahoo!, AltaVista, Lycos, MSN, Netscape, AOL, Excite, LookSmart, Google, and the Open Directory.

Now, this list is misleading for two reasons: 1) not all of those listed are search engines, some are actually directories (human-edited, not computer-based "spiders") and 2) most of these sites interlink with one another to some extent and many even share the same algorithms or databases! Don't get the idea that there's one magic place to submit your site to and everything will be hunky-dory. That's not true. You'll want to submit to at least five or six of the above list regardless of who they "link" with.

The first step in submitting your site to the search engines requires only a text editor, word processor, or a pen and paper. Write down all of the words and phrases (up to three words each) that you can come up with which you might type in a search box when looking for a company that offers products/services similar to what you offer. Put each on a separate line and try to come up with at least five of them. Now open up your email program or pick up the phone and call/email at least two of your friends, colleagues, and family members and have them do the same for you. Take their lists and your list and compare them. Do any of the phrases match? What about individual words? The more matches, the merrier. Make a new list of matching phrases/words and put a number next to each one indicating how many matches it had. These are your keywords! The one with the biggest number next to it is your first keyword/phrase, with the rest falling into place according to rank. After the first key phrase, the order of the rest is not a big concern, so long as they are all listed.

Now look at your website. What is your website's Title (usually appearing across the top left portion, or "title bar" of your browser)? Does it contain your key phrase? If not, it should. Don't make it ambiguous, though, humans have to read that too. In fact, it may appear as the title/link in search results!

Next look to your META tags. They are viewable only in the source of your website. In Internet Explorer, open your website, click "View" and select "Source." This opens Notepad and shows the

source file of your web page. Somewhere near the top will be a group of tags that have the word META as the first word. One of these will be labeled as "content='keywords'" and another as "content='description'." These two are the ones you're after. What do they say, if they even exist at all? Do they match your list of keywords? Probably not. You can either change them yourself and re-upload the new pages to your site or have your Webmaster do this for you. Although the META keywords tag is not as important to keyword ranking as it once was, it still has some merit so it should still be used.

The next thing to consider is the actual body of your index or website's front page (usually index.htm or html). Since some search engines don't utilize the META description or keywords tags, they will use the text appearing on your front page to accomplish this. Make sure that the text is readable, full of your keywords, and not over-zealous (you don't need your keyword to appear 500 times, once at the beginning, once at the end, and a few times in-between is good). There isn't really a hard-and-fast rule on this, but I would say five or six times is more than enough to get the point across.

Now you are ready to begin submitting your site to the search engines and directories. What? You bought a nifty piece of software that does this for you? I hope you didn't pay a lot. No Internet Marketer will tell you to use that software to submit to the Top Ten. Why? Because you need to submit to each site individually and try to optimize to each one. That software won't do that. If it links to "thousands" of others, then by all means, the more the merrier. Just remove the Top Ten from the list and go ahead and use the software! The second rule to site submissions is NEVER submit your site more than once every three weeks (I round off to a month, since it's easier to track). Otherwise, you run the risk of being considered a SPAMmer to the search engines and you (and your site) may become blocked altogether. Getting off that list is nearly impossible, so staying off it in the first place is best!

Each engine is discussed below. I have not included the URL for site submissions because these change regularly and directories require that you go to the area where your site would be listed and submit from there. Another thing you should do is to go through your site completely and make sure that there are no broken links, graphics, etc. If your site doesn't look and act professionally, it might not get listed. I strongly suggest that you open a text editor/word processor and write a keyword list and description line for EACH engine/directory. Label each and put them on separate lines/paragraphs. This will help you track your progress and aid you later with re-submissions.

#### Directories

The Open Directory ([www.dmoz.org](http://www.dmoz.org)) – This is a completely human-driven database and directory and is the leading information house for the Google Engine. DMOZ is run completely by volunteers and is a very tried-and-proven system. Getting listed in the Open Directory will almost guarantee a listing in AOL (America Online), Netscape, Lycos, and other Google Engines.

Rules: Make the Open Directory editor's job as easy as possible. Submit your items in such a way that the editor will not feel the need to edit them (thereby possibly changing your keywords) before acceptance. Your site description should be a single sentence of not more than fifteen words. It should convey what your site DOES (NOT things like "Come check us out!"), contain at least two key phrases, avoid any kind of hype (all caps, !!, etc.), use proper sentence structure (capitalize the first word and proper nouns ONLY), be written in the third person (i.e. "Offers..." instead of "We offer..."), and end with a period (not a ? or a !).

Now select the proper category for your site (usually by searching your keywords!). Once you have found a spot that matches (and the sites are similar to yours), then find the "Add URL" link at the top right. Some categories require that you further specify sub-categories before submission and will not list an "Add URL" link. Keep moving through likely sub-categories until you find the right spot.

Then fill in the blanks. Your official site name should match your TITLE tag and including your email address, though optional, is a good idea since the editor may wish to send you an email to explain why you were/weren't or whether you were/weren't listed.

Yahoo! ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) – Yahoo! and the Open Directory are very similar in function, though they aren't related otherwise. Yahoo! is the mother of all search engines and will gather you more traffic than any other search engine on the Web. Yahoo! knows this, though, so expect to pay for the privilege of being listed there as a business. Currently, it is about \$300 per listing per year and carries no guarantee that you will be listed, only that you will be reviewed.

Rules: Read their instructions THOROUGHLY. Read the Help Index (<http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/url>) and their How To page (<http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest>). They are very strict about their rules, so if you inadvertently break one of them, not only will you not get listed, you may be out your \$300! Now make sure you are "providing unique content." Yahoo! is very adamant about this. If your site is nothing but affiliate links and supplies no useful information for the user (this information is not one-liners, it should be at least three or four pages in total), then you will not get listed. You also need to list a physical address for your business (PO boxes don't count). There are a million things you can do wrong and not get listed at Yahoo!--too many to list here. My suggestion is to either hire a professional and pay them to do it, or get listed in the other engines and wait for your site to pop up in Yahoo! on its own.

You may also wish to note that paying Yahoo! for a listing is not the only way to get listed here. An alternative is to use the Overture Pay-Per-Click engine (listed below) instead. The top three bids are listed at the top of Yahoo! search under the "Sponsor Matches" heading. The next three are listed at the bottom of the results page under the "More Sponsored Matches" listing. See below to find out how to get listed in Overture.

Looksmart ([www.looksmart.com](http://www.looksmart.com)) – Looksmart is now a directory (like Yahoo!), but is based on a Pay-Per-Click model (see below). They require a minimum of \$150 as an account deposit and a \$50 setup fee. Looksmart also lists in MSN and AltaVista, among others. It may pay to get listed here if you can afford it, but I would suggest another route first (Overture or Yahoo!) as a better way to spend your listing dollars. Do not be surprised if Microsoft eventually folds this company as a failure or changes the setup yet again.

Rules: It used to be that this was the easiest pay-for-listing to get included in. Now that they've changed to a new setup for the Pay-Per-Click, it's completely different. The setup is pretty standard for a PPC listing and they do have an 800 number you can dial if you have questions. You'll find it listed as part of the setup information.

#### Search Engines/Spiders

Most of these are similar with only minor differences.

MSN ([www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com)) – The Microsoft Network (MSN) also owns Looksmart (see above). Their first set of results comes from Looksmart, then Inktomi ([www.inktomi.com](http://www.inktomi.com)) and finally at the bottom under the "Web Pages" heading are top-clicks from Overture. MSN no longer accepts submissions, so you have to list in one of the other three listed if you want to show up in a search here.

Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) – This is a good engine to submit to, since it is the base for many other search engines out there and is possibly the second-most used engine next to Yahoo!. The Googlebot takes a couple of weeks to look for you, but will spider your site eventually.

Recently, they added a new pay option called "Ad Words Select." It's not like most pay-per-click engines, however. Paying for this inclusion (starts at about \$5 to get listed) posts your "text

advertisement” on the right hand side of the search results page. This could really pay off. As another bonus, these ads are or will be provided to America Online (AOL) and Netscape for display as “Sponsored Links” on those engines as well!

Rules: It’s pretty simple to get listed here. Put in your URL (including <http://>) and put your keywords (no commas) OR your description (either is good) under “Description.” It may be worth the money to list using “Ad Words Select” if you can afford it.

AOL ([www.search.aol.com](http://www.search.aol.com)) – If you get listed in the Open Directory, you will not need to submit to AOL. Submitting here submits to the Open Directory rather than to AOL! It bears mentioning, however, that AOL gets sponsored links from Google (see above).

Lycos ([www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com)) – This is a simple submission, though somewhat tedious. They usually spider within a month. They now offer a paid-inclusion option which requires a membership fee and URL listing fee totaling only \$30 per year. By paying, you are guaranteed to be listed within two business days.

Rules: There aren’t really any rules to this engine. Put in your URL and you’re finished. If you want to create search terms for EVERY page on your site and enter each page individually (Lycos allows this), then you should do so. This becomes tedious, but may pay off when their spider comes to your site.

AltaVista ([www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)) – This engine is still accepting free submissions, but don’t expect to get indexed soon. Since they started indexing again at the first of the year, AltaVista took over three months to index a site I submitted shortly after January first. If you opt for their “Express Inclusion” paid listing, you can get your URL listed for about \$40 every six months. Interesting, AltaVista also lists Overture’s top four or five bid positions at the top of the search results page with the heading “Products and Services.” More are listed at the bottom of the search results page as well. See below for more information on Overture.

Rules: Although they give a lot of options, I wouldn’t go beyond “basic” at this point. You can add the others later (they all cost something). Other than that, there aren’t any specifics to know when submitting here.

Netscape ([www.netscape.com](http://www.netscape.com)) – The same as AOL, this engine gets its listings from the Open Directory. “Ad a Site” is only a link to their professional search engine submission service. They recently penned a deal with Google to begin listing top bids from their “Ad Words Select” program.

Excite ([www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)) – Excite, which once shared information with MSN and Looksmart because of their mutual interests in @Home (now bankrupt), has changed a lot in the past year. It resembles a search engine less and less and gets its listings entirely from Looksmart and Overture. A recent surge in advertising, however, may build them back up and save them from falling away as a top ten engine.

Ask Jeeves (<http://askjeeves.com>) – Although not listed in the “top ten” at the beginning of this article, I felt that adding this engine as a bonus was warranted. A year ago, this company appeared to be going out of business for lack of interest. Since their deal with Overture and a new surge of advertising to increase their exposure and counter the bad reputation they had gathered, this engine has risen in the ranks. Still not really a “top ten,” it may eventually bump one of the others. It had a unique niche when it first started, since you ask “Jeeves” a regular-English question instead of just inputting search terms, but that quickly boiled down to mis-matched listings and common phrases returning next to nothing in results. They’ve apparently done some work on their engine in the meantime and it seems much better than it was before.

Rules: Getting listed here is fairly simple. Simply email them ([url@askjeeves.com](mailto:url@askjeeves.com)) with your site's URL and description. It will take some time to get listed, but might be worth it. It's worth knowing, also, that this engine lists "Sponsored Links" which it gathers from Overture with every search.

### Pay-Per-Click

I have written an entire article on Pay-Per-Click engines before, but will quickly summarize the idea behind these newer engines. You usually log into these engines, set up an account, and deposit money into them. You then list your site's information and choose keywords you wish to bid on. Then you enter a bid which is what you're willing to pay EVERY TIME someone clicks on that link and visits your site. In the short-run, this is a great way to get a LOT of response quickly. In the long run, though, it will become very expensive so you'll want to either begin budgeting for it or just make it a short-term portion of your overall search engine marketing strategy. The only pay-per-click (PPC) engine listed here is Overture. There are literally hundreds or even thousands of these, but Overture is by far the largest and most well-known of these engines and, if you're going to be serious about listing, will be your first and possibly only stop on the PPC trail.

Overture ([www.overture.com](http://www.overture.com)) – formerly known as Goto.com, this engine allows you to choose your keywords/phrases and try to outbid your competition for top billing. Current spending minimum is \$20/month and five cents per click, so if you list here, expect to spend money doing so. If you're serious about getting listed here and with every site Overture partners with (and there are SEVERAL), you should take your time and definitely do it right.

Rules: Overture doesn't really have "rules" per-se, but there are several points you'll want to be sure of before listing here. The first point is that you will spend more than just the submission time getting listed here. Once you're in, you'll want to check back at least weekly to check your current status. You'll find that money in your Overture account doesn't last long (once it's gone, your site is no longer listed) and that you may become outbid by another lister at any time. I suggest checking at least weekly and upping the bid as you see fit. Be prepared to spend this time keeping your site at or near the top. The second point has to do with listing your site. Before you just start spewing keywords and making bids, do some research. Check to see if your competition or if sites similar to yours are listed here already and watch the keywords they appear under. When you enter a keyword/phrase, check the current bidding. Chances are it's more than double that minimum five cents a click! Realize that even at only five cents a click, a thousand clicks a day can mean \$50!

Obviously you need to get listed in the search engines to get noticed significantly online. The down-side to this is that, unlike the early days of the World Wide Web, getting listed in the popular search engines is time-consuming, becoming expensive, and takes FOREVER. There are few "free" alternatives for the little guy anymore. If you are in a hurry to get listed and have the budget, then by all means use the paid services. If you aren't, make sure that you're listed in the Open Directory (at the very least) and you'll show up elsewhere as time goes on. Search engine placement/marketing has become a full-time job in itself with several professionals making careers out of it. I suggest 1stSearchRanking (<http://www.1stSearchRanking.com/t.cgi?1778>). Although they are expensive, your results are GUARANTEED and you will be listed high in each search engine!

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