

"WebPosition Release v2.0 and Reject Reporting Issues"

By Kalena Jordan

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WebPosition Release v2.0 and Reject Reporting Issues
(Interview with Brent Winters, President of FirstPlace Software)

By Kalena Jordan

As you would have heard, FirstPlace Software, creators of the hugely popular WebPosition Gold search engine marketing software, recently announced the forthcoming release of the long-awaited version 2 of their product. WPG v2.0 is already available in Beta format (see link below) and boasts an impressive number of new features to help web masters ensure their web sites are spider friendly, ranking highly and submitted to the most appropriate search engines and directories worldwide.

I recently took the opportunity to interview President of FirstPlace Software, Brent Winters, about their new product and also about his views on the increasing crackdown on automatic reporting tools by some of the major search engines.

Below is a transcript of the interview:

(WR) = Web Rank, (BW) = Brent Winters

Question 1 (WR) - Why has it taken so long for FirstPlace Software to release a new (BETA) version of WebPosition Gold?

(BW) A couple of factors contributed to the delay. We under-estimated the amount of work to keep the current version up to date with the continuous changes at the search engines, while still contributing resources to version 2. We ended up spending time adding and removing engines in the existing product, adding new features, etc. so we were not standing still since version 1.0. In fact, we are on version 1.60.5 now.

We eventually added new developers to accelerate work on version 2. In addition, version 2 includes a tremendous number of new features and engines. In retrospect, we should have scaled back the number of features for version 2 and saved more for version 3. Fortunately, our customers will benefit from getting a lot of bang for their buck when they upgrade.

Question 2 (WR) - In your opinion, what is the most important or significant feature of the new version?

(BW) There are so many important features it is difficult to boil it down to a single most important feature. Every customer will have their favorite depending on how they tend to use the product. Certainly the support for new country specific engines is a big one. Unlike other products, this support extends beyond just submission and reporting. The Page Critic also provides valuable advice for how to improve your rankings in over 75 major engines. A current (although not exhaustive) list of new features can be found at: <http://www.webposition.com/wpg2upgrade.htm>

Question 3 (WR) - The BETA version of WPG v2 includes regional search engines - something your customers have been asking about for years. Why did it take so long to include these?

(BW) See above

Question 4 (WR) - Only a handful of countries were included in the regional engines. Do you plan to include other country search engines (e.g. New Zealand and more Asian countries) in future releases?

(BW) Please keep in mind that you are looking at a beta version right now. We are working hard to add new engines to fill any significant gaps and are listening to customer feedback. For example, you mentioned Asian countries. We already have support for some Japanese and Chinese engines and are working on adding more. We support a dozen different regions currently: Global/US, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, France, Spain/Latin America, Russia, Italy, Japan, China, Scandinavia and the Netherlands.

Some countries like the UK have support for eight or more engines already (or will very shortly). Others have only a few. How many they have depends on how many popular engines we are able to locate for that region, and how far along we are in the development of that region. Even after we release the product we will continue to add more engines (or remove engines) as things change and we receive feedback from customers. We may add support for entirely new regions depending upon demand.

Question 5 (WR) - The major search engines, most noticeably Google, have recently been taking a stand against the use of rank reporting software and even banning the IP addresses of persons using it. How has this impacted WPG sales and how will it affect future releases? Can you confidently say it is safe for customers to use WPG right now to check their ranks?

(BW) A very small percentage of customers had their IP blocked by Google in early 2001. I've heard of no one having their IP blocked for using WebPosition on any search engines for over six months since we released updates to more precisely emulate a browser. Version 2 includes an additional safety feature to slow down searches to a user-definable amount. That way you can be more courteous to the search engines while maintaining a lower profile. We continue to encourage customers to keep their queries to a minimum with the search engines (For example, there's generally no reason to run reports every single day or for hundreds of keywords). You should also run reports at night whenever possible.

As far as our sales, they remain strong and demand for the product remains strong. Businesses with an on-line presence have a significant need to track and improve their search rankings. That is not a need that is likely to change anytime soon. Only the methodology and techniques to improve visibility on the engines have changed over the years and will continue to change. We'll continue to update the product to accommodate that.

Question 6 (WR) - Is there any scope for arrangements with search engines that allow your software limited access to their servers in a restricted reporting capacity, similar to Overture's recent 3rd Party provider agreement with Bid Management Software companies?

(BW) We already have formal affiliate agreements with many major engines including Overture, FindWhat, Looksmart, Bay9, Ah-Ha, About.com, and others. It is our goal to work with the search engines whenever possible and reach mutually beneficial agreements. We approached Google last year, sending over half a dozen letters and faxes to various VP's in their organization.

We offered practical proposals to create a more mutually beneficial relationship. Eventually we gave up on the matter when their VP continued to fail to get back with us as promised. It does not appear to be a high priority issue at Google right now from what I can tell.

Question 7 (WR) - Do you have any exciting new features you plan to add to future WPG releases?

(BW) We always have many features we'd like to add. However, we're focusing our efforts right now on finishing the long-anticipated version 2 and making sure all the features included in it work really well. We may not bang out a major new upgrade every six months because we focus a great deal of effort to refining the product to work as advertised. Many companies focus on including every bell and whistle under the sun, whether it has value or not, and then invest little time to fixing bugs reported by customers. This can be maddening as a consumer and a huge time-waster if you buy a whiz-bang great product and then do nothing but waste time trying to battle crashes, lock ups, etc.

In our case, we are so serious about producing a quality product that we offer up to \$50 bug bounties to customers for being the first to find and report a problem. (These are credits good for the purchase of an upgrade, knowledge base subscription, or other product). It should also be kept in mind that we update the product weekly if not more often so our technology is never standing still between major upgrades. We also prefer to give customers new features and updates for free rather than trying to stick them with a new paid upgrade every six to eight months.

With version 2, we'll be continuing our policy of free product support. Much of our competition offers no phone support, or charges \$50 or more per call. We're also striving to maintain average e-mail response times at 24 hours or less. This has always been a priority issue for me since I've personally been on the receiving end of bad customer support many times. I promised myself to run

things differently when I founded this company ten years ago.

Web Rank would like to thank Brent Winters for taking the time to respond to our questions. If you have additional questions about WebPosition Gold as a result of reading this interview, please visit the links below, or email WebPosition support staff via help@webposition.com. If you'd like to trial the Beta version of WPG v2.0 please download it from the link below.

More: <http://www.webposition.com/d2.pl?r=GCU-55EC> (home page)
<http://www.webposition.com/wpg2upgrade.htm> (outline of features in v2.0)

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Article by Kalena Jordan, CEO of Web Rank. Kalena was one of the first search engine optimization experts in Australia & New Zealand and is well known and respected in her field. For more of her articles on search engine ranking and online marketing, please visit <http://www.high-search-engine-ranking.com>

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