

# LookSmart Definitely not Small Business Friendly

By Lee Traupel

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There is a firestorm of negative press regarding LookSmart's recent marketing stumbles via numerous discussion groups, including two of the oldest and most influential, I-Search and I-Advertising Digests. Most of the critiques center on LookSmart's inability to develop viable programs for SMB/SME ("small to medium business or enterprise), the difficulty in managing their new pay per click "Small Business Listings" advertising program, and their overall lack of customer service responsiveness.

Many of us in the agency/marketing services world relied upon LookSmart's directory in the early days; especially as an offset to Yahoo's "my way or the highway" attitude when they became the 20 pound gorilla in the marketplace. So, it's sad to say, but LookSmart appears to be morphing to just another portal with little marketing awareness of how to work effectively with the tens of millions of SMB companies that have rapidly embraced a web-centric business model. Their overall terms of services are geared for big companies and their SMB programs appear to be an afterthought at best!

One of the core issues that frustrates many small businesses is the difficulty in getting a listing that actually describes their company, products, and/or services accurately - to add insult to injury, you have to pay in some cases twice to have your listing upgraded. Apparently, LookSmart's editorial staff can't keep up with the demand, or is so pressured to maintain some internal quota their descriptions suffer accordingly.

LookSmart's new Small Business Listings program is simply not "small business friendly". It is a complex program with lots of important details buried in an FAQ and there are some "gotchas" in the small print - including being forced to wait up to 90 days for the return of the upfront deposit of \$150. and paying a setup fee for a listing; but having it deactivated when you exceed the dollar amount of your "monthly click limit." I can understand their dropping the listing once you exceed your budget, but it does not seem equitable to charge \$49. to setup the listing in the first place - your in essence subsidizing LookSmart's cost of doing business.

We've found inconsistencies in LookSmart's stated Privacy program versus inbound e-mail traffic we've received from them over the past 3-6 months. We've unsubscribed 3-4 times and still keep getting self-promotional marketing materials which are not of any value, other than promoting LookSmart's business. They are clearly not adhering to their stated privacy policy and to compound

matters, our complaints have not been addressed via their customer service department.

So, if you're an SMB company what are your alternatives to working with LookSmart? We would recommend your assessing Google's new "AdWords Select" program which is geared more for business of all sizes; but, I must warn you there is some complexity in setting up this type of program as well. But, you certainly get much more coverage with Google - their rapidly becoming the dominant search engine du jour with approximately 40% market share of all combined searches.

Inktomi's "Search Submit" program should also be assessed as an alternative to working with LookSmart and as an adjunct to an existing Search Engine or Marketing program. They have partnered with some of the same companies that LookSmart is working with, including MSN, AOL, iWon, and many others. They offer very good value for the incurred costs, charging a nominal fee \$39. for the first URL and \$25. for additional URLs to have your web site "crawled" (assessed or indexed) on a regular basis for one year and sharing this information with the most heavily used search engines on the web.

Finally, you may want to consider utilizing standard pay per click ("PPC") search engines to drive qualified traffic to your web site and/or looking at competitive PPC programs offered by LookSmart's competitors including Yahoo, AOL, Alta Vista and others. Overture (formerly GoTo) is the dominant market leader in the pure PPC market that can deliver a great deal of traffic. But, there are approximately 150 second tier pay per click search engines available for assessment and you should be able to leverage your marketing costs by carefully analyzing your "keyword buys" via some of these PPC search engines including Kanoodle, FindWhat, Sprinks and many others.

Lee Traupel has 20 plus years of business development and marketing experience - he is the founder of Intelective Communications, Inc. <http://www.intelective.com> , a marketing services and software company which provides strategic and tactical marketing services exclusively to small to medium sized companies. He can be reached at Lee@intelective.com for e-mail or ltwolf@ix.netcom.com for IM

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