

A Common Sense Approach to Search Engine Optimization

By Mario Sanchez

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Most web surfers start their sessions at a search engine or a web directory. There are a number of different methods you can use to capture their traffic and drive it to your site:

1. Stick to the big names: The two largest directories: Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>) and the Open Project Directory (<http://www.dmoz.org>), and the two largest search engines: Google (<http://www.google.com>) and Inktomi (used by MSN search (<http://www.msn.com>) and AOL (<http://www.aol.com>)) are likely to deliver 80% of your traffic, so concentrate on those and don't spend too much time on anybody else.
2. Yahoo and the Open Project Directory are administered by humans, so an editor will inspect your site before they include it. They receive so many submissions that it can literally take months before your site is reviewed, and nothing (not even paid subscriptions) guarantees that it will be listed. It's worth to keep trying, though, so check back every month or so and, if your site isn't listed, submit it again.
3. Google and Inktomi are robots (software programs) that "crawl" (find and read) millions of sites on the web and add them to their index. That is why it is not absolutely necessary to manually submit your site to a search engine, since they may find your site and add it to the index automatically when they find a link to your site on another page.
4. You don't need to submit all the pages on your site. Once the search engine finds your main page (homepage), it will find the other ones by following the links. To improve the chances of your secondary pages being found, create a link called 'site map' in your homepage, and have that link point to a page that is nothing but a collection of links to all the pages on your site. This way, the search engine will follow the link and "suck in" all your pages. Try putting this link as close to the top of your homepage as possible, since it will have a better chance of being picked up by the search engine.
5. Your site will stand a much better chance of showing up at the top of the search results list if you choose keywords that are not that common. In general, niche sites that use very specific keywords have a better chance of being at the top of the list than generic sites that use more common keywords. For example, a restaurant that specializes in brick oven pizza (keywords: brick oven pizza) has a better chance of showing up in a prime position than an all-encompassing Italian restaurant (keywords: Italian restaurant).

6. A good search engine ranking is also conditioned by the amount of inbound links to your site that the search engine finds in other websites. A significant amount of links to your page from high ranked, quality sites with content related to yours, will significantly boost your rankings. Try contacting the webmasters of the leading websites for the keywords of your choice and try to get them to link to your site. You can offer a link exchange or place a paid link (advertising) on their pages, if that's an available option.

7. Creating a good page title tag is also key, since it's usually the first thing the search engines display in the search results page. Also, you must create a well written, easy to understand 'Description' meta tag, since some search engines will use it to describe your site. The more your title and description match your preferred search keywords, the more likely web users will click into your site.

Finally, one last word of advice: don't obsess with search engines, since they are not the only way to generate traffic to your site. Try different approaches, like writing articles and posting them in discussion groups and newsgroups. Also, don't overlook bricks-and-mortar techniques like passing around business cards embedded with your website address, or advertising in traditional media. It is a combination of all these things, and high quality, original content, what will make your site popular.

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