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By Rocky Lewis

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By Sage Lewis, President, SageRock.com

So Yahoo brings approximately 50% of web traffic. Its directory is the place to be and the place to search - full of legitimate business people willing to pay to do online business and full of good non-commercial listings. Everyone's site should be there, right? That's what we've always said. Well, not anymore!

Yahoo has soft launched a bold new policy in the terms and conditions of submission. As of December 28, 2001, all inclusions in the directory are up for review yearly and all sites must pay \$299 yearly for that review. That means, if you plan to sign up for a Yahoo listing using the biz express in 2002, you'll be paying that \$299, not just once, but once every year.

That's \$0.82 a day to be listed on Yahoo. So if a company is in a category with 100 names and the company's name starts with "T" (placing it at, Oh, spot 79) is this worth it?

Here's the quote from the "YAHOO! EXPRESS SERVICE AGREEMENT," followed by the link:

"If your web site is accepted for inclusion in the Directory as part of Yahoo! Express on or after December 28, 2001, then your web site's continued inclusion in the Directory will be subject to additional review each year and you agree that your credit card will be charged the Recurring Annual Fee. Subject to Section 1.3 above, the current applicable Recurring Annual Fee is US \$299 for web sites which do not offer adult content and/or services and is US \$600 for web sites which do offer adult content and/or services. If Yahoo is unable to successfully charge your card or if the charge is refused, your site will be removed. IT IS THE APPLICANT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP CREDIT CARD INFORMATION CURRENT."

<http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/terms.html#2.4>

Companies should seriously consider this: Overture (GoTo) listings are still given top billing in Yahoo searches, so money spent on Overture bidding might be a better bet - considering the traffic is guaranteed to have seen the site.

Consider a company that sells metal-cutting lathes. The term "metal lathe" is \$.07 on Overture for position #2. That would place the site in position #2 in Overture and position #2 in Yahoo under

'Sponsor Matches' when someone searches that term. And the term is searched online approximately 1,547 times a month. This client is not paying for Yahoo's yearly fee, but is reaping the rewards of their traffic. Food for thought.

Some other things to consider:

Non-commercial sites are still free, but this policy will change the quality of Yahoo! listings. For better or worse is the question. On one hand, this fee will weed out many businesses not "serious" about doing online business. But does that mean only firms that can afford \$300 a year for a listing in one directory are "serious" about finding success online for their business?

More thoughts . . . Yellow page ads are still WAY more expensive than this per year and often return lesser results for many businesses (and yet many still buy Yellow Page ads). The same is true with banner ads and print ads and etc., etc. People have been underestimating the value of search engine traffic for some time, and those who have realized its benefit may be willing to justify this cost when they know the Return On Investment (ROI) is valuable.

And the final observation . . . Yahoo! launched this new policy more than quietly -- no press releases, no squeaks as of yet to the press. Just a few new paragraphs in their service agreement and a year long timeframe before anything happens. They could be doing this because they know the news will be taken poorly. Perhaps they also want a little time built in to gage (or influence) public opinion before the policy takes effect?

So, a company can check out where it would likely end up in Yahoo. Then, it's just a matter of deciding where to spend hard-earned money. More than a few will decide to spend it elsewhere. And as for SageRock, instead of Yahoo, our company will be recommending an Overture campaign to any small business clients who would be buried in a less than top 5 position in a Yahoo category.

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