

# Search Engines, directories, affiliate programs, paid placement! Part

## 2

By Brett Egan

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Vortex Media recently conducted an exclusive interview with Mr John Cussen, Director, Small Business Services for LookSmart International Pty Ltd. Part one can be viewed at <http://www.vortexmedia.com.au/articles/looksmart1.htm> Here is the eagerly awaited conclusion to this interview.

Vortex Media: Yahoo recently made a US\$235 million bid to take over Inktomi search engines and in all probability it will be successful. What impact can you see this having on the services LookSmart will need to provide to maintain market share in Australia?

John Cussen: We're still not sure of the implications of Yahoo's decision, but it does highlight how important search is to the major portals. In particular, it emphasises a point that we've been making for some time: major portals are looking for alternatives to Google to supply search results, because Google is now so clearly a competitor to those sites, and is focused on building its own consumer brand. Because the LookSmart Australia brand doesn't compete with our partners – like Yahoo! Australia & NZ, or ninemsn – for consumer traffic, we're able to increase our market share in Australia, a trend that's been quite clear over the past 18 months.

Vortex Media: There has been great dispute in the past on the effectiveness of "Paid Placement" programs with reports of a vast majority of users avoiding the top 3 - 5 positions of results on search engines known to undertake "Paid Placement" advertising. Can you shed any light on this? And do you think it is the responsibility of search engines/directories to notify their users on which results are "Paid Placement"?

John Cussen: Our experience with the LookListings product doesn't indicate a change in behaviour at all. Our experience may be different because relevancy is a primary component of the LookListings search algorithm. I know that other "paid placement" services use price as the only ranking attribute and I agree that that may not be a sustainable approach. Search engine users learn to avoid irrelevant content. Poorly targeted banner ads had a lot to do with the collapse of the banner advertising market in recent years. Users learned to avoid that part of the page. I'm surprised that some companies in our industry have not learned from that. Our LookListings partners certainly understand that relevance is important to the long-term future of their business, which is why they like our approach with the LookListings product. A high cost per click is of no use to anyone if no one clicks on the link, or if, once they've clicked, the page doesn't turn out to be what

they were looking for. Relevancy really matters to both advertisers and the portals which is why we built LookListings the way we did.

Vortex Media: Under your "SmartListings" product it is stated that 'Up to 3 URLs per domain' may be included into the LookSmart directory. Are participating clients able to specify which 3 URL's are to be included?

John Cussen: Absolutely! Our submission forms include and facility to include titles, descriptions and URLs for each of the three submissions. It's important that the customer tells us which pages are most important to their business. A company may offer 8 different products or services but might specialize in two areas. If that's where they make their money or where they need to find more customers then they should submit links to the homepage plus links to both of those areas. It increases their profile in the directory and multiplies their chance of being found in the search results on our partner sites.

Vortex Media: With a large number of websites now being set-up solely for affiliate based Internet Marketing purposes and with this number seeming to increase by the thousands every week, does LookSmart deem these sites to contain relevant material and as such should they be included into the LookSmart directory? And where do affiliate centered sites stand with LookSmart?

John Cussen: We assess each submission on its merits. Our guidelines include three relevant requirements here. We require that:

- a)Your site should contain original content.br
- b)Your site should contain sufficient pages and recognisable contentbr
- c)Your site cannot mirror or redirect to another website.

There are some sites that do not make any attempt to add value and merely have a random list of affiliate links on their site. We reserve the right to reject that submission because they are not offering any value to a search engine user. In the past people have merely submitted an affiliate link to the SmartListings service or set up a page that later redirects to the affiliate link. We reject those submissions as well.

However, some sites that gather together affiliate based links do a great job of organizing links and provide original content that helps users find products and services. I have no problem with the site owner making some money for their effort and we will accept those submissions.

Vortex Media: Are there any specifications or criteria a website must meet before being considered for inclusion into LookSmart?

John Cussen: The SmartListings product is designed for legitimate businesses that already have a functioning web site that is useful to Australian search engine users. Our submission guidelines are merely designed to exclude illegal, offensive, unusable, or irrelevant web sites from the LookSmart Australia Directory. The vast majority of SmartListings submissions are accepted without any problem.

The specifics of LookSmarts' guidelines are available at <http://www.vortexmedia.com.au/detail.asp?d=looksmart> and follow the guidelines tab.

Vortex Media: If a website has been turned down for inclusion, penalised or blacklisted for any reason, what recourse will the website owner have to get their site reassessed?

John Cussen: We provide a simple and fast way to discuss the situation if this does occur. If a site

is rejected, we give the specific reason for the rejection and provide the customer with the opportunity to resubmit. The SmartListings service entitles you to resubmit once per URL, at no additional charge. You may request one reconsideration of your site via email to LookSmart within 30 days from the date you received your decline notification. Simply reply to the email you received notifying you that your site was declined, or send an appeal to the SmartListings team at [mailto:aus\\_esappeal@looksmart.net](mailto:aus_esappeal@looksmart.net)

As in <http://www.vortexmedia.com.au/articles/looksmart1.htm> we thank Mr John Cussen, Director, Small Business Services for LookSmart International Pty Ltd for his time.

Find out more or list with LookSmart by visiting  
<http://www.vortexmedia.com.au/detail.asp?d=looksmart>

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