

Jesse L. Young Web Site Design

by Jesse L. Young

Your website can be one of the most effective marketing tools available for promoting your business. However, it's a common misconception that the moment your website goes live, thousands of people will immediately find it and purchase the products or services being offered. The reality is not quite so simple. To get to your website, people have to know it's there — your website has to be promoted so it in turn will promote your business.

Traditional methods for promoting your website

Some of the most important methods available for promoting your website are surprisingly traditional: Tell people about it verbally. Tell them about it in writing. Put your website address on everything you can — business cards, brochures, letterhead, print ads, the side of your delivery truck, the signature on your e-mail, and your company pens. You would be amazed how many companies fail to take these simple but crucial steps.

Using the search engines to promote your website

It doesn't happen overnight

When people think of website promotion the first thing they usually think of is search engines, such as Google and Yahoo. There's no doubt that having your website listed in the search engines can be an important element of getting visitors to your site.

It's a disappointment for many people to find out that their website does not automatically appear in the search engines the moment the site is placed online. Getting listed on Google, for instance, can take many months.

So, an important thing to remember when your site first becomes live: save yourself some fretting and don't immediately start searching for it on Google. You won't find it. At least not right away.

Content is crucial

Most search engines find and categorize websites based on the content of the site — the text that is on the website page. The home page text is especially important and, generally speaking, should contain at least 200-300 words.

As an example, if a web page contains the words "homemade candles", and someone searches for those exact same words, the site would theoretically appear in the search results. It may not appear in the number one position, but it should appear somewhere in the list.

How do you want to be found?

To get your site included in the search results, you have to figure out how you want it to be found. Let's say you run the Acme Pet Sitting Company in Seattle. Your pet sitting web pages should include the keyword phrases that your customers might use when searching for a pet sitter.

What would a "real person" use as a search phrase if they were looking for a pet sitter? Would they search for "canine in-home care"? Or would they try "pet sitter"? More likely the latter.

You may even want to repeat the same phrases in the plural form, since "sitter" and "sitters" are two different words as far as the search engines are concerned. The bottom line is, always keep your potential customers in mind when writing your website content.

Repetition

Once you've figured out two or 3 search phrases you want to use in your pages, write your content using those phrases repeatedly, without making it sound ridiculous. For your pet sitting site you may end up with something like this:

"Welcome to Acme Pet Sitting in Seattle. We offer the finest pet sitting services in the Seattle, Bellevue and King County area."

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“At Acme Pet Sitting, our pet sitters believe that caring for your pet while you’re away is an important element in keeping your pet happy and content. Our team of Seattle and Bellevue pet sitters is skilled at...blah, blah & blah”.

Right there in the first two sentences there are numerous occurrences of likely keywords: “pet”, “pet sitting”, and “pet sitters”. In addition, incorporating the location helps since, odds are, someone in the Seattle area looking for a pet sitter is going to search for “Seattle pet sitter”.

But don't overdue it

At the same time, it's possible to overdue it with the keywords. Search engines don't like this and consider it "keyword stuffing". So it's best just to write your content as you would normally, and then look for places where you can easily incorporate some valuable keywords. It can definitely take some creative writing skills.

Getting your site into the search engines

In many cases, you don't need to do anything to get your web site listed in a search engine. Google, for instance, automatically "spiders" the internet and reads everything that's out there, then adds it to their listing based on the content of the web page. Other search engines work in a similar fashion.

There are methods, however, of manually submitting a site to the search engines. This is generally done by the web site designer.

After your website is online you simply have to wait to see the results. How long you have to wait depends on the search engine, but you should usually allow a number of months, particularly with Google.

Search engine ranking

In addition to the misconception that a site is going to appear in the search engines immediately, there is the belief that a particular site will be at the top of the list. But it's simply impossible for everyone to be at the top of the list.

If a search engine shows 200 pet sitters in Seattle when searching for “pet sitters in Seattle”, only one of those can be in the number one position for that particular keyword phrase. Note, however, that if you transpose the words and search for “Seattle pet sitters”, you may find that the number one position is held by a different company than the previous search.

There are things you can do to increase your ranking. Tweak the text on your site. Look for one more spot where you can incorporate pertinent keywords into your text (again, without overdoing it). A few months later, look again. There are always new ways of writing things.

And most importantly, keep in mind that a website's ranking in the search engines is never static. It can change from day to day, week to week. There are always competitors out there – and they, too, want their site to be higher than yours.

Other methods for getting website traffic

There are a variety of other methods out there for promoting your site. Some work, some don't. Some are expensive, and some can be expensive scams. A few you may encounter:

- Sponsored links: Google and many other search engines offer “sponsored links”, basically a paid listing. Sometimes these ads work, sometimes they don't. Most feedback seems to lean toward the latter. You may want to give it a shot and see what happens. Just don't expect miracles.
- Linking with similar sites: Having other sites show a link to yours can be a very effective way to help increase your ranking in the search engines, especially if the other site is very popular.

Be aware, however, that simply having your site listed on a bunch of random web sites probably won't help you much. It's best to get listed on sites that have a similar topic. And you will usually be expected to put their link on your site too. So you have to be careful, since you obviously don't want to send your customers off to visit the web sites of your competitors. Additionally, if you link to sites that don't get much traffic it may negatively affect your own ranking.

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- Submission services: Once you have a website, you will very likely start to receive solicitations for services that promise to bring a lot more traffic to your site. Be very cautious about these services. While it's possible some of them may be able to bring you more traffic, a lot of them turn out to be a waste of time and money.

While this is just a brief overview of the methods for getting traffic to your site, it should give you a basic understanding of how it works. The task of getting and keeping traffic coming to your site is never a one-shot deal. It's an ongoing process that lasts as long as you have a website.

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