



FRESH LISTINGS, UPDATED CODE GET SITES ON SEARCH ENGINES

Rick During - Tampa Bay Business Journal
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If you're finding it difficult to get your Web site listed on the major search engines, you're not alone.

According to a recent study by NEC researchers, search engines represent only 16 percent of the 800-million pages in the publicly indexed Web.

That's a pretty grim statistic if you're faced with building a site and then marketing it to the rest of the World Wide Web. If a user cannot find your site easily, you may as well forget having one.

The reason why search engines and directories exist is to locate your site as well as newsgroup postings and File Transfer Protocol files. FTP files can be any file on a computer your computer is accessing remotely.

But the methods they use to read information and match it to keywords vary significantly. The results they return on a given keyword search fluctuates from day to day, which means your Web site could get lost in the shuffle.

Editors rank sites Most search engines rely on complex algorithms and use spiders or "robots" to locate matches to keywords. Yahoo and Snap are examples of "directories," which are maintained by human beings who review sites.

These editors determine your site's rank and the description summary, so you can only hope they like what they see when it comes to reviewing your site.

The criteria used for ranking varies by search engine. Some review the title, contents of a page and the first 25 words of text in order to make a match. The first 25 words are then used as the description for the site when records are returned to users.

Others claim to evaluate all words within a document, while some accept meta tags. These are words embedded within Hyper Text Markup Language code to prioritize keywords and descriptions. HTML is the coding the browser will read to display text and graphics on a Web site.

Often the number of keywords within a page can be very important, but don't overdo it.

Some search engines and directories will not accept a page if you try to hide too many keywords in your HTML code. For example, using a meta tag to include a keyword more than 20 times on a page could result in it not getting listed.

Others may rank your page within the top 10, so balance is key if you want to achieve desired results.

Refresh Web listings Depending on the keyword search, most search engines and directories can return up to 10 full screens of listings or more. If a user doesn't see your site within the first 30 matches, chances are, they're not going to find it.

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Placement within the first 10 is often a guarantee for exposure, regardless of whether a user enters your site.

The importance of certain search engines and directories cannot be overlooked. StatMarket reports that Web surfers originating from America Online outnumber users from the next largest Internet service provider by nearly five to one.

Keep in mind that maintenance of search engine listings is an ongoing process. Sometimes a search engine will drop your listing, and, if you fail to resubmit it, your site won't be found.

Some require a user to submit and/or update a site every 90 days or the listing will be dropped.

There is no hard and fast rule as to when or why a listing may be dropped, but it's safe to say that Web listings have an estimated shelf life of one to three months. If existing listings are not refreshed and new listings are not submitted regularly, the site will lose it's ranking and possibly be dropped altogether.

So what's the best way to get listed on the Web?

For the best results, keep your listings fresh and learn all you can about a search engine's requirements. Always update and revise the HTML code in your files so your pages receive maximum exposure within each search engine and directory.

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