

## *So how do I get to the top of Google, Yahoo, MSN, etc?*

### *SEO and Internet Advertising – EXPOSED!*

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The most popular question our website clients ask is how to be Number 1 or at least get a higher ranking in the search engine results. Well, there is no easy answer.

The question is really about what we call *Search Engine Optimization* or *SEO*. SEO is the process of increasing the volume and improving the quality of traffic to a website by way of search results. Studies have found that the earlier a site appears in a search results list, the more visitors it will receive from that search engine. As a marketing strategy, SEO looks at how search engines work and how people search. Websites can be “optimized” to leverage the relevance of specific search terms and to enhance the ability of the search engines indexing technologies. This optimization, typically involves editing the web site’s underlying HTML or other source code.

Other techniques, such as “Spamdexing “, are used by unethical websites and web marketers. Spamdexing involves a number of different techniques, such as incorporating unrelated phrases that manipulate the indexing algorithms of the search engines. The modern search engines employ sophisticated technology that eventually “tags” such sites and will drop them from search indexing. So using such techniques will likely result in far fewer, or zero hits from search engines. When having a website built, be sure your web developers do not intentionally or accidentally resort to “spamdexing”.

The original method to optimize a webpage for search engines was the use of “ Meta tags”. Metatags are HTML code in the header section of a webpage that are invisible to the user. They provide a guide to each page's content. The use of metatags became less than reliable because webmasters used inaccurate and misleading tags that misrepresent the site's actual content in an attempt to gain traffic. Today, most search engines analyze these metatags but no longer base their algorithms on them.

Search engines started by focusing on metatags and other elements under the website developer’s control. The early search engines suffered from abuse and manipulation. In order to provide meaningful results to their users, the search engines had to “sanitize” their results pages showing the most relevant search results, rather than unrelated and meaningless pages that were filled with manipulative web code snippets. This forced search engines to develop more complex ranking algorithms and using methods that we not easily manipulated by webmasters.

Today, search engines use “crawlers” which are automated programs that “crawl” thru links and then analyze and index the various pages found according to the search engine’s algorithms. Search engine crawlers look at a number of different factors when crawling through a site. Not every page is indexed by the search engines. The number of pages or “clicks” away from the main page or directory of a site is often a factor in whether or not pages get indexed. When training web developers, we tend to advise them to stay to a 3-click rule. That means that any one page on a site should be no more than 3-clicks away from any other page.

The biggest change in search engines is that of “paid placement”. The easiest way to be the number one result is to pay the search engine company a placement fee. The more you pay the better placement you can get based on specific keywords. Though this is the one method that has guaranteed results, it can also be extremely expensive. Paid placements often do not make sense for small and medium sized businesses that operate locally or regionally. If you are an auto mechanic in Melbourne, Florida, being the #1 result to someone in Fargo, North Dakota probably does not help your business.

Other techniques for advertising are “pay by click”. Some search engines, have a paid submission service that guarantees crawling for a set fee or a pay per click. Inclusion in the search engine’s index is guaranteed but specific ranking within search results is either not guaranteed or requires additional fees. Yahoo’s paid inclusion program has drawn criticism from advertisers and competitors. Two major directories, the Yahoo Directory and the Open Directory Project both require manual submission and human editorial review. Google offers Google Webmaster Tools, for which an XML Sitemap feed can be created and submitted for free to ensure that all pages are found, especially pages that aren’t discoverable by automatically following links.

New technologies are providing yet another change to SEO and internet advertising. LocalAdLink (a Beyond Commerce company) uses geo-targeting technology which determines the physical location of a web site visitor and delivers different content to that visitor based on his or her location. This service pushes your advertising to the search engines and high traffic sites and provides sponsored placements based on the user’s location. For as little as \$50 per month, a business’s advertising is pushed to Google, Yahoo, MSN, AOL, Ask.com, YouTube, GMAIL, About.com, PGA.com, Monster.com, MySpace, LinkedIn and over 200 other partner sites.

This is the future of SEO and internet advertising. In our web design and development classes, we refer to this as “micro-advertising”. It is simply the ability to focus your ads to a specific and targeted region of likely clients. And today, studies show that 63% of consumers search the internet BEFORE they purchase local goods or services.

Research from a major market research firm shows:

**84%** of internet users have used search engines. On any given day, **56%** of those online use search engines.

**92%** of those who use search engines say they are confident about their searching abilities, with over half of them, **52%**, saying they're 'very confident'.

**87%** of searchers say they have successful search experiences most of the time; **17%** of users say they always find the information for which they are looking.

**68%** of users say that search engines are a fair and unbiased source of information; **19%** say they don't place that trust in search engines.

A study by Yahoo has some interesting insight into what people search for. Approximately 3,000 people were surveyed on their search habits for specific types of information.

- Vocational Education – 67 percent of respondents used a major search engine compared to 41 percent who used local search
- Healthcare – 53 percent used insurance provider directories while 44 percent relied on a search engine
- Real Estate – 51 percent used a real estate vertical search engine versus 44 percent who used a major search engine
- Legal – 36 percent of respondents referred to a search engine while 25 percent used the internet yellow pages
- Home Contracting – 36 percent used a search engine while 26 percent used the internet yellow pages

Based on these overwhelming statistics, we feel that the concept of “micro-advertising” is reaching a critical mass level. Local businesses need to focus on broader SEO solutions that cross different search engines, cross into social media sites and do a better job of targeting specific audiences.

*About ntb group, LLC*

*ntb group, LLC is a woman-owned small business located in Vero Beach, FL, founded in 2003. We offer website development, hosting services, disaster management, business continuity, training services, technology services, and software development services to small businesses, corporate and government customers.*

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