



# Marketing Your Web Site with Search Engines

*Want to be sure people find you while they're searching the Web? Here are some tips.*

BY MIKE ROUFA

**T**he most common question nonprofits ask about their Web site is how to market it. After selecting an Internet service provider, learning HTML basics, and creating Web pages, the big question inevitably follows: How can I get people to find my Web site?

In our January-February column, we noted that there are three kinds of search engines: active, passive, and meta. To recap, active search engines use a program called a “spider” or “crawler” to scan the Web for new links to add so they’re available for searching. Passive search engines, or directories, are hierarchical collections of links developed by companies (for example, Yahoo) that organize the Web for users. Finally, meta

search engines search the search engines, both active and passive, and return the best results from each.

The way to make sure people find your Web site is simple: Register with the major search engines. The good news is that registering your site is easy and takes just a few minutes. Of course, once you’ve registered, ensuring that your site is ranked high on the list when a user performs a search requires a little more forethought. In this article, we’ll discuss how to register your site with search engines and how to make your pages easier to find for the casual user.

submitting your Web address, you’re adding your site to the spider’s “to-do list.” Instead of finding your site when it gets around to it, the engine will place your Web site in a queue with others who submit sites, and your site will be indexed much more quickly. Most search engines require a period of at least two weeks to add a site to their system, though Alta Vista ([www.altavista.digital.com](http://www.altavista.digital.com)) claims that people can find your site on their system less than a day after you register.

## REGISTERING WITH ACTIVE SEARCH ENGINES

An active search engine is constantly on the prowl for new links to add to its database. Thus, the simplest way to add your site to the engine is to do nothing. Eventually, the spider will work its way around the Web to your site. This process could take anywhere from a few weeks to a year, but ultimately your site will be found and catalogued.

### You Can Speed Up the Process

If you don’t want to wait that long, you can take a more active role. Most active search engines let you enter your Web site’s address into their database. By

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Adding your URL to an active search engine is incredibly simple. First, go to the search engine’s home page (we provided a list of active search engines and their Web addresses in the January-February 1999 issue). You’ll see a link

Ensuring that your site is ranked high on the list when a user performs a search requires forethought.



with an instruction such as “add a link,” “add an URL,” or “add a page.” Clicking on that link will lead to a page of information about the site’s policies, along with a text box. Just type the full URL of your site (<http://www.yourorganization.org>) into the box, and press the submit button. The search engine’s spider will find your Web site and index all your pages, starting with the page you submit.

**Don’t Underestimate the Importance of <META> Tags**

For every page the active search engine enters into its database, it adds a description and list of keywords. When users enter a search, they submit keywords to the search engine. The engine compares these keywords to its database, finds sites with the same keywords, and returns those Web pages to the user.

Unless instructed otherwise, an active search engine will automatically create a keyword list and description for

Relying on the search engine to generate keywords for you isn’t a good idea.

Fortunately, you can replace them with your own content by adding what is called a <META> tag to your HTML documents. Here’s how <META> tags work:

In your HTML page, add the following two HTML tags somewhere in your document header (between the <HEAD> and </HEAD> HTML tags). For example:

```
<META name=“keywords” content=“Earth Pledge Foundation, Sustainable Development, Technology, Environmental Organization, etc.”>
```

```
<META name=“description” content=“The Earth Pledge Foundation is a 501c3 nonprofit organization promoting sustainable development.”>
```

Here’s another example, this time for an imaginary Denver-based organization, GlobalMusic.org, which sponsors world music concerts:

```
<META name=“keywords” content=“world music, classical, traditional, concerts, ethnomusicology, nonprofit, Denver, Colorado”>
```

```
<META name=“description” content=“GlobalMusic is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and promoting classical and traditional music from around the world. We offer concerts in the Denver area every weekend. Come to our Web site to find out more about our organization and our schedule of events!”>
```

Based on these <META> tags, when Web surfers search for “world music AND Denver,” the search engine is more likely to find GlobalMusic. And, when it does, it will present users with a concise description that encourages them to explore the site.

**REGISTERING WITH PASSIVE SEARCH ENGINES**

Unlike active search engines, passive engines will never happen across your site unless you submit your address to them. When you give them your address, an actual person rather than a spider or robot, will verify that your link exists and make sure it belongs in the category you prefer.

The process for registering your site with Yahoo is almost identical to submitting your URL to an active search engine. The only major difference is that before you submit the link, you find the hierarchical category that best describes your site. For example, before registering Earth Pledge Foundation’s site, I went to the category

Society and Culture/Environment and Nature/Sustainable Development/Organizations/

By submitting your Web address, you’re adding your site to the spider’s “to-do list.”

you. The description will be the first 50 or so words from the body of your HTML document. The keywords will be the same 50 words minus the unimportant “and’s,” “or’s,” and “the’s.”

Considering that the keywords are how a user finds your site and the description is the user’s first impression, relying on the search engine to generate these for you isn’t a good idea.

People are as loyal to their favorite search engine as they are to their favorite sports team.



which fits our organization nicely. Registering within an appropriate category saves the people at Yahoo the trouble of going to your site, analyzing its contents, and deciding how to classify your organization. It also gives you control over how to place your site where it will get the most attention. Since a person is going to add your site to the directory, the description that appears next to your site's name doesn't come from your <META> tags. Instead, you can enter the description about your site from the registration page.

## REGISTERING WITH META SEARCH ENGINES

You may have guessed that there's no way to register with a meta search engine! Remember that meta engines don't contain their own databases; instead, they submit queries to other active and passive search engines and return the best results—a search engine of search engines. Provided your site is listed with these active and passive engines, people will be able to find you using a meta search engine as well. ■

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These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For ordering information, contact the

## Tips for Registering Your Site

In an ideal world, everybody on the Internet would use one search engine, and you would need to register your site just once. Unfortunately, people use a variety of search engines to find the information they want, and often they'll be as loyal to their favorite one as they are to their favorite sports team. How can you guarantee your site will get the exposure you deserve? Here are some simple strategies:

### 1. Register with the most popular search engines and directories.

The search engines that people use the most are: Yahoo, Excite, HotBot, Alta Vista, Lycos, and Infoseek. The other active search engines will find your site eventually, so you needn't worry about registering with every single one.

### 2. For an extra fee. . . .

There are services that will automatically register your site with literally hundreds of search engines. Submit-it ([www.submit-it.com](http://www.submit-it.com)) and Net Creations ([www.netcreations.com/postmaster/](http://www.netcreations.com/postmaster/)) support more than 300 search engines around the world, including those that aren't in English, and will charge you around \$60 a site. Considering how easy it is to register with the major search engines, spending the extra money on this service depends on your schedule and budget.

### 3. Remember: Search engines aren't the only way people will find your site.

If you've used the Web for research, you've probably already found resources that pertain to the kind of work your organization does, be it a trade publication's Web site or simply an enthusiast's. If a site is useful to you, it will probably be useful to the people you want to reach. Getting listed on those pages may lead to more hits than from all the search engines combined—and registering for these "engines" requires nothing more than a well-written e-mail.

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Nonprofit World • Volume 17, Number 2 March/April 1999  
Published by the Society for Nonprofit Organizations  
6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, WI 53719 • (800) 424-7367

## Any Questions?

If you have a question or comment you'd like to see covered in future columns send an e-mail to [jpfrenza@earthpledge.org](mailto:jpfrenza@earthpledge.org), or contact JP Frenza c/o Nonprofit World, 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719.