



## Driving Traffic to Your Web Site

*You won't get many people at your site till you list it with search engines. Here's how.*

BY MARY ELGES

**S**o your new Web site is completed and you're ready for people to visit. First, you need to list your site on the search engines that direct Internet traffic to you. But what if you don't have the budget to pay an Internet company to list your Web site on search engines?

Don't give up hope. You can submit your Web site to search engines yourself and save money in the process. Here are the steps to follow:

### **Make Sure Your Site Is Search-Engine Friendly.**

Submitting to search engines is really quite simple. Before you start, however, you should understand how search engines work. If you structure your Web pages for optimal search-engine indexing, you'll get more action. Here are some points to keep in mind:

**Use all types of HTML text.** The World Wide Web is constantly being updated and indexed by search engines, using programs called "spiders" and "robots." When the robot or spider visits a Web page, it reads the page's HTML text, which can include such things as Meta tags, page titles, HTML text, comments, and links. It's important to remember that not all search engines look at all these criteria. Since specifications vary from one search engine to the next, it's an excellent idea to develop a Web site that uses all types of HTML text—in particular, the Meta tags and page titles.

**Include external links.** Search engines use external links to crawl onto your site. Thus, it's crucial to have external links leading to and from your Web site. Links are especially important if you want your site indexed and updated quicker and more frequently.

**Don't use frameset technology in your Web site.** If robots and spiders encounter a frameset, they may not be able to leave, since the HTML page of the parent

frameset most likely doesn't provide any links. This is often the case when pages are brought up in search results individually and not displayed in conjunction with the other HTML pages in the frameset. This can be a real nightmare if you want search-engine traffic to be able to navigate your Web site.

**Be sure your Web site is created with technologies that use HTML links.** Otherwise, search engines will have a hard time accessing your site. Technologies such as Macromedia Flash won't allow the text portion of the page developed in Flash to be indexed. There are creative ways around this, however, such as insuring your pages have a title, using Meta tags, and using navigation links in HTML at the bottom of each page so the robots and spiders will have access to other pages in your site.

### **Prepare Your Web Pages for Search Engines.**

How do you get the individual HTML pages ready for the robots and spiders? Here's what you need to do:

#### **Be Sure You Have Page Title Tags.**

Insuring that all your HTML documents have a page title is extremely important. The document title is the one thing on which all search engines see eye to eye and will be used when indexing your Web page. The page title is located in your HTML code, in between the header tags in your document. Beware if you look in your source code and see this:

```
<title>Untitled Document </title> or <title>  
</title>
```

That means you have no page title.



Your Web page title should be descriptive and state the name of your organization. Here are a few examples and explanations of page titles:

**<TITLE>Pinnacle Decision Systems </TITLE>**—This is the bare minimum a title should be. It helps to be more descriptive rather than just offering the name of your organization. It also helps individual pages achieve ranking if they have unique page titles describing what each page has to offer, rather than giving a general page title to the whole site.

**<TITLE>Pinnacle Decision Systems, Home </TITLE>**—This again is pretty minimalist for a page title. It adds a bit more description, but “home” really should be replaced with more descriptive words.

**<TITLE>Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, Internet/Intranet development, information systems, computer consultant, Microsoft technologies, application development</TITLE>**—This example is certainly descriptive and uses keywords in the title, but it’s too long. Page titles should be short and descriptive.

**<TITLE>Pinnacle Decision Systems - Microsoft technologies, computer consultant, application development/></TITLE>**—This is what you want to aim for. This title gives the name of the organization and a few key descriptive words for the page. The descriptive words can and should change to reflect the page content.

### Create Meta Tags.

There are three Meta tags you need to know as you prepare your pages for search engines:

**1. The description tag** is the Meta tag that tells the search engine about your site. It is also the explanation that is displayed when Internet users are viewing search results. Your description tag should be 20 to 30 words long and should contain your organization’s title, geographic location (if important), and key descriptive words and phrases used in such a way that Internet users recognize quickly what your Web page has to offer. Here is an example of a page description tag:

**<Meta name=“description” content=“Pinnacle Decision Systems, Connecticut first Microsoft Gold certified Partner, is a professional service and software development company. Pinnacle’s consulting and development offerings include e-commerce, portals, and other Internet/Intranet sites; decision support and intelligence systems; legacy transformation and migration; and Internet deployment of legacy applications. We manage all aspects of the**

**project development lifecycle to analyze, design, and build complete, creative software applications” />**

**2. The keyword tag** is used by search engines to locate your site when a user submits a search. Keywords should be words or phrases that someone might type into a search form to find your site. These words and phrases should explain your site’s content and objectives to your target audience. To help your search-engine ratings, use different keywords on different pages. Use a variety of keywords that reflect each page’s content and reinforce the most important words and phrases on all pages. It’s a good idea to do your own search of sites and see what keywords they use. This can help you brainstorm for your potential keywords. Remember that repeating words doesn’t mean you’ll get listed better or faster. However, you should combine keywords in your use of key phrases. For example, you can use the word “gymnastics” and follow it with the phrases “gymnastics school,” “gymnastic lessons,” or “gymnastics classes.” Be sure to separate your keywords by commas. Use 25-30 key words and phrases. Here’s a good example of a keyword Meta tag:

**<Meta name=“keyword” content=“All American Gymnastics Academy, gymnastics, gym, gymnastics lessons and classes, Acrobatics, Gymnastics Team, Springfield, Massachusetts, tumbling, preschool physical exercises, children, birthday parties, cheer-leading, USGF, Gymnastics School, Summer Camp, Sports Camp, fun, trampoline, preschool, after school” />**

**3. The robot tag** is a tool you can use to make sure that a search engine doesn’t list a particular page on your site. You can also use a robot tag to tell the crawlers how often they should come back and update the information. To get the robots and spiders to index your Web pages, you need this tag:

**<Meta name=“robots” content=“INDEX” />**

To tell the crawlers how often to re-index the site, use the following tag:

**<Meta name=“revisit-after” content=“30 days” />**

Remember, the tag should reflect how often you add new information that needs indexing. If your Web site isn’t constantly changing its content, this tag isn’t required, given that a one-time search-engine index is enough.

If you don’t want a search engine to index a particular page, here is the code needed to deflect the robot:

**<Meta Name=“robots” content=“NOINDEX”/>**



## Maximize Your HTML Text.

Most search engines use the HTML content text, header text, link text, image alt tags, and even comment tags to predetermine how a Web site will be indexed and ranked. Here are some simple tricks you can use to place more indexable HTML text into your pages:

1. Use **HTML text** in place of graphic text whenever possible.
2. Label **image names** that can be indexed.
3. Use **straightforward tags** with images.
4. Use **descriptive link names**.

## Attract Search Engines to Your Site.

Once your site is coded and your tags in place, the next step is to get search engines to come to your site so they can index it. There are two ways to do so:

1. **Internet directories** use human editors that review sites submitted to them. They are looking for sites that are rich in original content and relevant to the work, leisure, or home lives of busy people. In particular, editors prefer sites that are high-quality, reliable, up-to-date, accurate, easy to use, fast, interactive, unique in content, interesting, visually appealing, and useful. Directories usually charge a fee. For example, Yahoo and LookSmart charge around \$200 to be reviewed by the directory editors. One of the best Internet directories—DOMZ, a.k.a. the Open Directory Project—is free. DOMZ was started by Netscape and provides search sources for major search engines such as Netscape, Lycos, and Hotbot.

2. **Search engines** use programs to crawl through the Internet, indexing Web site URLs. The process starts when you submit your URL to a search engine or when a crawler accesses your site via an external link. When this happens, the crawler indexes the HTML and various tags on your site and place them in its database. But all search engines are not created equal. Different search engines index different information. That's why it's important to cover all your bases and insure the use of proper technologies (such as Meta tags, page titles, and HTML text) to achieve the best results with search

engines. One good aspect of search engines is that many have merged or enlisted the services of other search engines to pool their databases. Thus, being listed on one site can help you get listed on others.

## Submit Your Site.

Now you're ready to submit your site to search engines and directories. Which ones should you choose? Here are our top seven suggestions. We've chosen them because they offer the most bang for the least amount of buck:

**1** **Alta Vista** ([www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)) is a full text search engine. It reads all HTML text that appears on your Web page, such as your Web page titles, Meta tags, links, comments, and headers. Thus, it's extremely important to make full use of HTML content to achieve good rankings with Alta Vista. As well as being its own search engine, Alta Vista uses sources from other search engines and directories such as LookSmart, DOMZ, Real Names, and Ask Jeeves. In turn, these other search

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engines receive their search content from Alta Vista indexing. Alta Vista has three submission levels: Basic Submit, Alta Vista Express, and Trusted Feed Inclusion. Both Alta Vista Express (for more information go to <https://www.infospider.com/av/app>) and Trusted Feed Inclusion (for more information go to <http://www.altavista.com/sites/search/trustedfeed>) charge for submissions. The best way to submit your site with the lowest cost is to use Alta Vista's Basic Submit. Here are the steps to follow:

- **Visit** <http://add-url.altavista.com/cgi-bin/newurl?>
- **Find the submission code** that looks like jumbled-up text and numbers above the submission text field. Enter it into the submission text field using all capital letters. (It is a bit odd that they do it this way and it can be confusing.)
- **Enter the URL** you wish to submit in the URL text field.
- **Push the submit button.** If you did everything correctly, it will take you to the next page. On this page you may submit up to four URLs.
- **It will take 4 to 6 weeks** to get listed with Alta Vista.

**2 Excite ([www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com))** is a search engine that uses directories such as LookSmart as sources when searching. The search engine uses HTML text, text phrases, and document titles. Excite reads the description Meta tag only for index rankings. Excite is also part of the LookSmart directory which is used by Alta Vista, Excite, IWon, and MSN. Excite offers two levels of submission: (1) the Express Submit (for more information go to [http://www.excite.com/info/add\\_url](http://www.excite.com/info/add_url)) which for \$299 places you on the LookSmart Directory, and (2) the Excite Search Index. You can get into the Excite Search Index for free by doing the following:

- **Go to** [http://www.excite.com/info/add\\_url\\_form/](http://www.excite.com/info/add_url_form/).
- **Fill out the form.** You will need to provide the following information: URL, e-mail address, primary language, geographical location, and Web site category.
- **The time involved** to get listed in Excite is 2 to 4 weeks.

**3 Yahoo ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com))** was started in 1994 and is one of the oldest directory-based search engines. Instead of using an automated tool, Yahoo relies on a directory database assembled by people called Yahoo editors. After these editors review your Web site, it is up to them to decide whether to place your site on Yahoo's exclusive database. Yahoo also uses Google to provide its secondary listings when no results are returned by Yahoo's index. Yahoo uses page titles, domain names, Meta descriptions (up to 25 words), and keywords to

index and rank your Web site. Yahoo offers two levels of submission: (1) Yahoo! Express (for more information go to <http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/busexpress.html>), which costs \$299 to submit your site, and (2) Standard Free Submission, which is free but doesn't guarantee that your site will be indexed. Here's how to submit your site using Yahoo Standard Free Submission:

- **First check to see** if your site is already indexed by MSN.
- **Starting from Yahoo's front page**, go down to where Yahoo lists 14 directory categories (arts & humanities, business and economy, computers & Internet, education, entertainment, government, health, news & media, recreation & sports, reference, regional, science, social science, society and culture). Click on the category your Web site most likely falls under. If you are interested in attracting an audience in your surrounding area, click the regional category.
- **Continue making selections** until at the button (of the page next to the copyright) there is an URL that says "Suggest a site." It may tell you to "Please be more specific!" If you get this message, return to the previous page and continue to make selections until you reach a page that displays a category called "site listings." Now go to the bottom and click "Suggest a site."
- **For free submission**, click the button that says "standard consideration."
- **Make sure your intended category** for your Web site matches the category in the gray shaded box at the bottom. If it does, click on the "continue" button. On this page you will fill out a form providing Yahoo with site title, URL, geographic location, description, and contact information.
- **It can take several weeks, even months**, to be listed in the Yahoo directory. One way to speed up this time is to submit to <http://ca.yahoo.com/>.

**4 Lycos ([www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com))** gets its sources from its own editors, DOMZ, and Direct Hits. It is important when submitting to Lycos to use your heading and text correctly, because in addition to checking your URL name, Meta tags, and HTML headers, Lycos will rank you according to the initial HTML text in the preliminary pages of your site. Here's how to submit your site using Lycos Free Standard Submission:

- **Go to** <http://home.lycos.com/addasite.html>.
- **In the text fields**, enter your site URL and your e-mail address. You can also click on the button that says "36+ search engines free" and submit your site to [indeedhits.com](http://indeedhits.com).
- **It takes 2 to 6 weeks** to be listed with Lycos.



**5 Hotbot (<http://hotbot.lycos.com/>)** is a search engine that is part of the DOMZ and the Lycos network. For ranking and indexing purposes, Hotbot uses Meta tags and high frequency words. For example, if your Web site is a nonprofit organization that provides literacy training, you should use the word “literacy” frequently in your HTML text. This will help your ranking in the literacy category. Hotbot doesn’t index very deeply into the Web site, so only the documents in the upper directories will be indexed. But you can submit more than one URL from your site to get the Hotbot spider to delve deeper into those subdirectories. Hotbot receives its search engine data from Direct Hit, Inktomi, and Open Directory. Here’s how to submit your site using Hotbot Free Standard Submission:

- **Visit** <http://hotbot.lycos.com/addurl.asp>.
- **Submit your Web site URL** and contact e-mail. It’s plain and simple.
- **It takes about 2 months** to be listed with Hotbot.

**6 Webcrawler ([www.Webcrawler.com](http://www.Webcrawler.com))** is a search engine that obtains its directory results from the LookSmart network. Now that Webcrawler has merged with Excite, it uses the Excite search engine when searching for results. Webcrawler indexes all text on a page, but it doesn’t provide support for frames or image maps, and it will ignore comments and alt text. Webcrawler is a surface crawler, so be prepared to submit more than one URL to get your subdirectories listed. If you get listed with Webcrawler, you will be listed with Excite. Excite will re-index your site roughly every 10-14 days. Webcrawler has three levels of submission: (1) Express Submit costs \$299 and will get you listed in the LookSmart Directory. For more information go to [http://www.Webcrawler.com/info/add\\_url/](http://www.Webcrawler.com/info/add_url/). (2) Basic Submit costs \$149. For more information and to submit a site, go to [http://www.Webcrawler.com/info/add\\_url/](http://www.Webcrawler.com/info/add_url/). (3) Webcrawler Free Submission costs nothing. Here’s

how to submit your site using Webcrawler Free Submission:

- **Go to** [http://www.Webcrawler.com/info/add\\_url\\_form/](http://www.Webcrawler.com/info/add_url_form/).
- **Complete the form, and provide the following information:** URL, e-mail address, primary language, geographic location, and category.
- **Click the submit button** at the bottom.
- **It can take up to 2 months** to get listed into the Webcrawler database.

**7 LookSmart ([www.looksmart.com](http://www.looksmart.com))** is the only non-free directory listed in this article. If you want your site to be submitted effectively, consider paying the one-time fee to LookSmart. This will get your site listed in the search directories of LookSmart, Microsoft’s MSN, Excite, Alta Vista, IWon, Time Warner, Netscape Net center, Sony, Qwest, and over 370 ISPs. LookSmart uses human editors to look for sites that are rich in original content. LookSmart has two levels of submission: (1) Express Submit guarantees submission review in two business days and costs \$299. For more information go to <http://submit.looksmart.com/info.jhtml?synd=US&chan=lshomepg>. (2) Basic Submit promises review within eight weeks and costs \$149. For more information go to <http://submit.looksmart.com/info.jhtml?synd=US&chan=lshomepg>. ■

#### Resources

- Bogossian, John, “Internet Content Management: What’s Next for Nonprofits?,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 19, No. 6.
- Hoffman, Leslie & J.P. Frenza, “Building Your Web Site: HTML Basics,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 16, No. 3.
- Roufa, Mike, “Marketing Your Web Site with Search Engines,” *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 17, No. 2.

These resources are available from the Society’s Resource Center, [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org).

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