

# About Search Engines

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March, 2007

When the WWW started and there weren't a whole lot of websites out there, the search engines came along to help people find what they were looking for. And they helped a lot; one could zero in on this or that and get to what was being sought pretty quickly and efficiently. The search engines weren't perfect however, and they started being abused. People started figuring out ways to trick them into giving their site a higher ranking than was deserved and finding stuff on the Internet became more difficult. All the while, hundreds, if not thousands, of websites were being added to the Internet daily.

Time passed. The search engines learned most of the tricks and took steps to avoid them. Finding stuff got a bit easier, but by now there were so many websites that the returned list in any search engine query was sure to contain more that you weren't interested in than what you were. And that is still the case because there are now literally billions of websites, each competing with all the others for high search engine rankings ... or rather "for more customers." Just like always.

So that's the history in a nutshell. Here's a little bit on how they work.

**YAHOO!** You've all heard of "key words" and that the search engines need them to find your site, which is not actually true anymore. Key words are one of a number of items called Meta Tags that appear in the top code on each web page. The best known is Key Words. The title plays an important role, and there are also ALT Tags, that go on each picture or graphic on the page, describing it (for a variety of reasons) that search engines use in their ranking. The way the words are situated on the page and what those words are, oftentimes comes into play for the search engines. They use mathematical algorithms to arrive at a final ranking number, and that's the basis for how you show up on their lists. At least that's how it used to be.

Now-a-days the search engines have a new tactic ... it's called Pay Per Click ... and it's generating a lot of money for their coffers. With Pay Per Click, you sign a contract with each search engine to pay them a particular amount each time someone clicks on your link from their page. (This can be very dangerous by-the-way!) The more you pay (per click), the higher your ranking because they now have a vested interest in driving visitors to your site. I suppose this is ok, since search engines are businesses too and need to generate profit, but it doesn't help the smaller sites that can't compete when it comes to big bucks.

The sites you now see at the side of every page, no matter what you asked for? Those are the ones who pay a LOT to show up. I ignore those because the chance of their actually relating to my query is slim to none. The ones at the very top, above the obvious dividing line, also pay *beaucoup* dollars to be there. The ones at the top of the bottom list are either Pay Per Click customers or have been on the Internet a long time and have longevity, which is also something used in the ranking algorithms. They can also be very close matches to the query, if not exactly so. For example, if I put in "teton valley horseback ride outfitters," I will very likely see a number of others above Dryridge Outfitters. But if I put in "Dryridge Outfitters," they will be #1 ... and probably #2 as well because that matches the query exactly.



Another thing that search engines use in their ranking system is what they call Reciprocal Links. These are links to and from other sites ... from a links page, or from any page on your site. The more closely related they are in subject matter, the better. I mean, linking to your best friend's personal

site will not give as much boost to your ranking as linking to someone in the same business ... or an information database that has good info on what you do. The more appropriate links you have on your site, the more "popular" your site is considered, and search engines really like popular sites! Fickle little things that they are.

And just like people, they're all different, with different wants, needs and requirements. The algorithms they run are strictly guarded secrets that they hope will give them an edge over the others. Their criteria are different; they each look at different things and lately, there's only one of them that uses Key Words in its algorithm! This is because the concept of "key words" has been so abused that they can no longer determine anything of true value from it. As a result of this abuse, key words are now ignored.

Not only are they different in what criteria they use; they are also different on what's required to submit your site to them. And because these requirements change as often as the algorithms, which is pretty frequently, it is no easy task to submit your own site for search engine perusal and ranking. It is an art, and there are numerous companies out there who do nothing but that. They are good at it (most of them) and keep current on what the requirements are and what the new algorithms seem to be searching for. And getting a good ranking in Google or Yahoo today does not mean that it will be as good tomorrow or the next day ... or even a hour from now. As the rankings are constantly coming in from the search bots that are scouring the Internet 24/7, the rankings change minute-to-minute.

There are many things that can be done to a website to optimize it for search engine placement. Meta tags are always a good idea, even though they're becoming more and more old fashioned. ALT tags are an excellent idea, and restructuring of the text to give the search engines what they want is helpful as well. I keep all of these things in mind when I create a site. It's one of the steps to finishing it up and I've always known it to boost the rankings a bit for a while. But the best way to drive visitors to your site is the old way, traditional advertising methods and word-of-mouth. The more visitors you send there, the more interesting you become to the search engines. After your site has been up for a while (and I'm talking years here), you'll have the longevity factor going for you as well.

Initially, you cannot count on the search engines doing you any favors. It is up to you to sell your business and generate new customers. You have created a website, which is currently the best advertising tool available, and now you must use it. You cannot sit back and expect the world to beat a path to your door. It just isn't gonna happen! You need to be out there, telling people and showing people why your business is the one they should choose. This is how it's always been, and this is how it will continue to be. You CAN have clients globally, but you have to let them know you're there!



There is an alternative to search engines available now. It's called a Directory, and there are a bazillion of them out there. It

resembles a search engine's query response in that it's a list of websites that match the query, but it's different from a search engine in that it doesn't search the entire WWW to generate its list! It still searches a huge database, those who have listed their site, and the results you get are more accurate to your search.

I have compiled a short list of good ones that I've discovered (see below). It's a short list, but you will see that by using just these you can start compiling a much longer list. Another way to find other directories you might want to be listed in is to go to Google (yes, the search engine) and enter "web directories" as your query. This spews out quite a long list of possibilities!

Listing your site in Directories is pretty easy to do, most of the time. Many of them are free and those that aren't are oftentimes worth the expense. I advise that you keep a good record of any that you list with however. It will serve you well down the road when you need to make changes, and you will need to make changes.

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There are good ones, and there are not so good ones. I determine which is which by looking up my category and seeing what's there and how difficult it was to find it. If it's only a few clicks, I'm satisfied; Any more than that and I start to get edgy and am tired of drilling down through the database. I also look for visual appeal and accuracy. I won't even consider a Directory that doesn't appeal to me visually and if I see more than a couple typos (if even that many) I will think twice. Those are my criteria for selecting which ones to list with. Whatever criteria you use, Directories can help generate visitors to your website. Many people use them instead of the search engines because they find an answer to the request more quickly and accurately. Like the "olden days," when search engines were new and actually provided a good service. I think we've gone full circle, and the Directories are the next generation.

Use them. That's what they're there for!!

#### WEB DIRECTORY LIST

<http://www.zepti.org/>

<http://directory.google.com/>

<http://dir.yahoo.com/>

<http://dmoz.org/>

<http://www.seocompany.ca/directory/free-web-directories.html>