

Demystifying Search Engines

By Catharine Fennell

(Catharine Fennell is Managing Director of C3 Consulting. C3 Consulting specializes in helping clients to build their business and **market smart**.

We work with small and medium sized organizations on projects ranging from marketing strategy to branding, planning and communications, as a sub-in marketing executive, a marketing project manager, or simply an on-call advisor. For more information on how we can help you, please contact us at info@c-centered.com or call us at 416-406-1224.)

Step 1- What you need to know

How many search engines are there out there? Who acquired whom?

Is there a one-stop-shop search engine that feeds all search engines?

How does the technology work? What is a spider? What are meta tags? What are key words?

Do I have to submit each page or just my web address (URL)?

What is the difference between paid and non-paid search engines?

What is the difference between a directory and a search engine?

How do I evaluate the vendors that provide services in this area?

If you have asked yourself any or all of these questions, you are not alone. In fact, for some of these questions there isn't a silver bullet answer, and this is because the art of search engine placement and "optimization" is a moving target. The technology is always changing. And this is why you really need an expert who lives and breathes search engines to support you in this area.

So, how much do you need to know yourself?

You need to know the importance of search engines as a method of getting your brand out there, building awareness and driving sales. You need to know how to value this activity and build a business case around it so you can allocate a portion of your budget to this both as an upfront project and ongoing as a maintenance activity. You also need to know a little bit about how a vendor should approach this project on your behalf, and what to expect in terms of results. How much? How soon? For how long?

You don't need to know the details of the technology or how to html and tag your site yourself.

There are many organizations out there that have created a business out of search engine registration and optimization. You need to be careful not to fall prey to a vendor that overpromises and underdelivers. "Be submitted to over 150 search engines for \$99." Or "Guaranteed No. 1 website placement on the top search engines within a week". There are no guarantees in this business and this process requires a hard work.

You want to avoid being lured by these superfluous statements as more often than not you end up having an arms length relationship with this vendor, have no real way of knowing or monitoring what they are doing, are not walking away richer with knowledge, and are a nameless, faceless organization to them.

What you need to do is to put this all in context of your bigger picture strategy and answer these questions:



- *What are my marketing objectives and what is the right marketing plan that is going to help me achieve these objectives?*
- *What should I be spending and how should I allocate my marketing dollars to achieve the biggest bang for the buck?*
- *What should I expect to achieve with this program? What are the industry benchmarks?*

In a nutshell.... How can I **<Market Smart>** ?

Def'n: *Getting the right proposition in front of the right audience at the right time, using the right method of communication, and expending as little resources as possible.*

Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Spend an hour on the web searching on “search engine optimization” at each of the major search engines, and learn about the different vendors and their varied approaches and pricing models.
2. Write a list of reasons that search engine placement is important to you and document what you would like to achieve as a result of improving your online visibility.
3. Ensure you understand who your target audience is, where they spend their time online i.e. what search engines they use and what websites they go to, and how they perceive your company.
4. Ensure you understand what you are selling to your audience and how best to express this “proposition” in terms of a description. As part of this, think about what part of your website you would like to send these customers to. Keep in mind, first impressions are lasting... and fleeting.
5. Ensure that you know your competition, the status of their online presence and marketing programs, and how to position yourself against them.
6. Make a short list of search engine vendors who appeal to you on the surface and give them a call. Ask colleagues for referrals.
7. Contact C3 Consulting for a referral to one of its partners who specializes in this area.

If you require support with your marketing strategy and planning, please contact C3 to discuss how we can help you to **<Market Smart>**.

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Step 2- How to Make them Work for You.

Search engine registration is the first step to creating your footprint on the web. Thinking in terms of web surfers – a.k.a. your customers- this is the first place they turn to find what they are looking for online. In fact search engine (keyword) searching is the second most popular method of finding information online, second only to keying in the URL directly and hoping it is the right one.

The first step is priming your site for optimal “find-ability” by search engines. This involves html titles, tags and keywords that are associated with the pages of your site. This can be handled by your website developer or a search engine specialist.

The second step is search engine registration. This involves submitting your website and, in some cases, specific web pages, with the top search engines. If you are selling a commercial product or service, you may also consider paying for a directory listing.

Once this, sometimes time consuming and complicated, process is complete, you are ready to take a good look and see how you are doing. Usually, the answer is “Not Well”. Enter..... search engine optimization. Optimization is the art of trying to achieve the highest rankings with the search engine associated with your related key words.

For example: C3 Consulting provides marketing strategy services. This means that “marketing strategy” are important key words in describing our services.

This is where the experts come in who understand the ins and outs of each search engines methods and technologies. The experts will do an audit of your site descriptions, tagging, keywords and overall positioning relative to competitive sites and determine the best approach to improve your ranking with the top sites and keeping you there.

The secret sauce here is not understood. But, let me assure you, it is a secret sauce. And we have the utmost respect for those individuals who know how to do this well.

One last note to the reader. Search engine registration and optimization are one of many effective marketing tactics your can employ online to build awareness for your brand.

For a referral to one of C3’s partners who specialize in this area, or for more information on interactive marketing techniques, please contact us directly at:

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