

# INFORMATION SERIES

## E - C O M M E R C E F O R S M A L L B U S I N E S S

### FACT SHEET # 5

### PROMOTING YOUR SITE ONLINE

The process of getting people to your site will require some effort and expenditure, but will pay off by making the most of what you have already invested in site development, hosting and domain name registration. This Fact Sheet tells you about how to get traffic to your site.

#### BECOMING VISIBLE

The search engine Google currently catalogues over three billion web pages! That figure keeps growing as the internet continues to expand. So how are people expected to find your site amongst all that noise? There are four main ways that internet users will find you online:

##### **1. Brand power**

If you have a well known name, they will either know or guess your internet address (domain name) and go straight there. For most small businesses, however this is unlikely.

##### **2. Tell them where to go**

Ensure that your business cards, exterior signage, press and directory advertising, vehicle livery and printed marketing materials refers to your web address. With so many people on the internet these days, you can save a lot of space in these areas by simply referencing them to your site where you can put pricing, product information, full (interactive) contact details – and be able to change these quickly and at low cost.

##### **3. Linking**

Another option is to exchange links to your site with other complementary or partner businesses. The deal is you put a link to their site on yours, and in exchange they reciprocate to you. You need to be a little judicious on this, particularly if you are not familiar with the company you are keeping. At the very least make sure they are reputable, and better still get a contract that clarifies who is doing what for whom and on what conditions. Directories can sometime provide a link to your site, either for free or for a cost. Again, be careful as a number of fly-by-night operators have emerged, only to later send you a bill for something you thought

was free. But placement in a reputable and well trafficked directory can generate more leads.

#### 4. Searching

Users can type your business name or product category into a search engine, or they have some idea of what they're looking for and search for it by keyword or phrase. Ensuring you appear in the first page of results of the major search engines is probably the most effective way to capture these potential customers since most internet users will have a limit to how long they are prepared to look for a target site before they give up. It is important that they find your link sooner rather than later.

When building your site, remember to tell the developer to put the appropriate 'meta tags' into your site's source code. Meta tags are hidden words that help search engines to find you. Use as many relevant words as you can think of – they all translate into pulling power. For example, if you are a plumber in Tuggeranong, use words like "plumber", "Tuggeranong", "emergency", "water", "connections", "gas" "ACT" etc. in other words, all the terms users are likely to put into their searches.

The more closely your tags relate to the search terms the higher up the list of search results your site will appear. Meta tags are not the only thing that search engines catalogue. They also work on keywords appearing on your site. So make sure you use words on your home page that relate to what you do and where you are located. This will increase the accuracy of searches to your site, so you are found quicker.

#### ADVISE SEARCH ENGINES THAT YOU EXIST

In addition to the above tips, you can also notify search engines about your site. To get listed in any of the major search engines, you first need to 'submit' your site to them.

Many search engines use programs commonly called 'robots', 'web crawlers' or 'spiders'. These are simply software applications that trawl the Internet trying to find as many web pages as possible. The text from these pages is then copied and stored as database entries on very powerful servers. It is these text entries that are searched when a potential customer performs a key word search.

When the search is performed against the database, entries that contain all the user's key words score more highly than those that don't. The search engine will then rank them using their particular scoring method.

As an Australian business your very first port of call should be to submit your web site to the Looksmart Directory which provides the search results for web sites including ninemsn, AOL, Excite, Optus and approximately 50 other Australian sites which combined expose your listing to more than 5 million Australian Internet Users. Talk to other portal providers like Yahoo! Australia who will have similar tips for getting noticed.

This process is not expensive and will help generate site visits. Experience suggests that consumers are more likely to buy a product or service after seeing a directory listing than a banner ad, so start with a listing then build on that with targeted ads over time.

#### NO SPAMMING!

A final word on promotion. Some businesses use email to send untargetted, uninvited emails to potential customers. Our advice on this is – don't do it. While you may be tempted to buy an email list and send out thousands of low cost emails to people, this practice, known as spamming, is reaching plague proportions. Consumers hate it, best practice industry standards discourage it, the Privacy Commissioner takes a dim view of it, and the Federal Government is considering banning it. The Internet Industry Association has campaigned against this practice since 1998, and has worked to educate businesses to use permission based marketing instead. The benefits are these builds on customer trust, rather than eroding it. By all means, ask you existing customers if they would like to hear from you by email, but if they say no, respect that. It is not worth the damage to your business reputation to be branded as a 'spammer'.

## USEFUL LINKS

**Promoting your Site**

Eight Degrees.com

[http://www.eightdegrees.com.au/reference/search\\_engines.html](http://www.eightdegrees.com.au/reference/search_engines.html)

This is a great site, with tips and tricks for getting noticed.

**Search Engine Watch**

<http://www.searchenginewatch.com>

This provides the latest news about search engine marketing and optimisation.

**On Spam**

Internet Industry Association No Spam campaign

<http://www.ii.net.au/nospam>

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