



Helping Search Engines Find You

Integrators can bring new visitors to their site and new clients to their businesses by following this advice.

by Don Kreski

YOU'VE WORKED HARD on your website and it looks really good. But it doesn't seem to be bringing in any new business. What went wrong?

"You can think of your website as an online brochure," says Tim Grant, director of search and social media strategy at Gamma Partners in Chicago. "It may do great a job of talking about your company, but it doesn't do any good sitting in your office. You have to take one more step and mail it to potential clients."

Like a mailing service, the search engines can help you reach people who have never heard of you. They are better than any mailing list, however, because they can target people specifically interested in products like yours.

If you're going to use the search engines effectively, however, you need to learn some skills entirely different from creating a website.

SoLoMo

"The buzz word in search today is 'SoLoMo,' — social, local and mobile," says Grant. "These three areas are having a crucial impact as Google and the other engines increasingly focus on social media, local businesses and mobile devices. What does this mean for your online program?"

First, it should be no surprise that

Google, which powers roughly 70 percent of searches in the United States, is interested in social media. Google has been involved since they purchased YouTube in 2006, and Google Plus, launched during summer of 2011, gives the Google search engine a way to measure how much users

and their friends like specific websites. "It's no longer true that you can measure a uniform ranking for a web page," Grant says. "Rankings differ for each individual as Google attempts to tailor results to the preferences of the searcher."

It is true that Google tailors results to the location of the searcher for any term it feels has local intent. That is, if you own a pizza parlor in Boston's North End, your store will tend to rank higher than a store in Roxbury and much higher than a store in Los Angeles for people searching from the North End.

Of course, integrators don't sell pizza, and the relevancy of location for someone trying to buy an installed audio visual system may or may not be obvious to the search engines. Still, as a commercial integrator, you can expect your rankings to improve if you spend the time or money to register your site correctly on Google Places and Bing Business Portal and if you include your office locations on your website.

As web managers, we also need to realize how quickly the use of mobile devices is growing and develop a mobile strategy. The sales of smart phones and tablets surpassed laptop and desktop computers last year, according to *Forbes*, and this year should see unit sales about 50 percent higher than PCs. If you sell to



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technical users, you can assume they are using their smart phones to access your website. Furthermore, if they search from a mobile device, Google will try to triangulate their location and provide nearby results. Grant suggests that, while A/V integrators may not need fully fleshed-out mobile websites, sites should detect mobile users and provide contact and other key information in a format optimized for small screens.

Another important factor is the amount of real estate available on the results page to display your listing.

I live in the Chicago suburbs. If I search Google for "AV systems," for example, I'll see sponsored listings, a Google Places result for "Audio Visual Systems, Inc." with a map of its location, as well as natural search results that, for this term, seem to be selected on a national basis. But if I search for "projector installation" I also see image and video results.

"The type of results you see depends on the search phrase," Grant explains, "but the one thing in common is that sponsored listings are always on the top." Grant believes that the ideal is to land in more than one place on the results page. "Combining paid search with organic search and other search results is a good way to increase your company's exposure and improve the chance of a consumer clicking through to your website."

Content Remains King

As integrators plan their online strategy, it can be helpful to realize that the search engines' No. 1 goal is to provide users with the most useful results for any inquiry. They will evaluate each page of your site and try to judge its utility, but they only have three things to go on: the text actually on that page, the references on other sites linking to that page and the

very limited information you submit using Google, Bing or Yahoo webmaster tools. The search engine "spiders" that visit your site can't watch a video or appreciate the quality of a photo. Although image and video results can be valuable, all the spiders can do is index text and follow and index links. That's not such a bad thing, because it fits with your goal to create pages that not only rank well but are helpful to potential customers.

"It doesn't help to try to fool the search engines," Grant explains. "Ultimately, it's only by providing reliable, useful information that you can interest a visitor and convert him into a sale or sales lead."

Finally, Grant cautions against making page rank your number one goal. "Rather than chasing rankings, you need to watch the site's analytics to measure the targeted traffic and, ultimately, the sales that originate from your website." **CI**

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