

FACT SHEET: LISTED ON SEARCH ENGINES

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Search engines allow users (customers) who have not heard of you to find you on the web. They provide the greatest opportunity available for you to reach customers that your traditional offline marketing is not reaching, or can not reach.

There are around 200 Million web users at the time of writing, if you're listed in the search engines they can all find you; can you imagine any of your offline marketing having the same potential audience? While it is not impossible, it would cost a lot more to achieve this offline.

Considering the potential gains, and relatively low costs, optimising for search engines is an important task, it should be thought about right from the start of development of any new site, as the design of the site affects how well search engines list it.

Search Engine Types

When discussing search engine marketing we tend to lump together a number of different options under the general term Search Engine. In fact there are four different key types, portals, directories, free search engine listings, and paid for listings.

Within each category there are a number of options available, depending on your budget, and how quickly you require the results. You can achieve an awful lot using the free listings, but it will take longer, maybe even months. If you're prepared to pay, you can get listed, even choosing particular keywords almost immediately, certainly within a weeks.

Portals - are sites that specialise in reaching a particular audience, such as the over 50s, computer games fans, or trade related. They can be very useful as they attract a regular repeat audience, almost entirely made up of users with the interest that the portal caters for. Getting a listing on the relevant portals ensures you are immediately reaching your target audience, and any fee you've paid has not been spent reaching an audience that isn't interested.

Directories - provide a service similar to the traditional Yellow Pages. Useful for the user that wants to browse for a number of sites relating to a particular topic, as they tend to be regulated by editors that ensure the entries remain relevant to the chosen category.

The most important directory in many ways is the Open Directory Project, www.dmoz.org, which is run by a series of volunteer editors. It should be a key part of your Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) efforts as a number of key search engines use it as one source of input to their spiders, and the category gives them a basis on which to initially index you. There are also a number of specialist directories.

Some directories are free, others require a fee to cover the cost of having a human editor review your site and categorize it correctly. As always the key difference between free and paid for entries is the delay between submission and appearing in the directory. Note that both can refuse to list you if you appear for an inappropriate category.

Free Listings - are available from most common search engines, typically requiring no more than a quick visit to the search engines' home page to find out how to add your URL to their list for future consideration. Unfortunately while free, this provides no guarantees that they will either spider your site or index it. Even without submitting your site, if it's listed in one of the directories, or linked to by another site you might appear in the index.

Paid for Listings - are the quickest way to get listed, but can require an upfront fee for entry in the index, and it is also possible to commit an ongoing monthly budget for key advertising slots on a search engines' results page. For example Google allows you to buy advertising for particular keywords, take a look down the right hand side of the search results on www.google.co.uk, those are the paid for adverts.

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This fact sheet is based on extracts of the book
"DOT NOT, Getting Your Business Online"
by John Crickett.
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