

Search Engine Placement

BY GREGORY HALEY, CONSULTANT


How important is the placement of your website in search engine rankings?

According to Jupiter Media Metrix, over 85% of all initial website visits originate from search engines. There are millions of websites on the World Wide Web, all competing for visitors with money to spend, and you need them to be able to find you. Being listed in the major search engines can be a crucial factor in getting your website discovered by potential new clients.

Getting listed in a search engine, however, can be tricky. Completing the form for your website to be reviewed and cataloged is the easy part. Achieving good placement (your actual rank in the lists), however, is a little more complicated. At the very least, a basic analysis of your website, goals, competition, and current search engine visibility should be done. Effective keywords and phrases should be decided upon, based on what people searching for you will be looking for. Overly generic search words will drive very little traffic to your website these days. The Meta description and keyword tags (found within your website) are important to your search engine ranking and traffic. Many search engines will use them as your website's summary on their results pages. Have your Meta tags been reviewed lately? Most people don't realize that this information should be reviewed periodically. Does your company offer a new service? Have your Meta tags been changed so that your new

offering can be found on the Web? While Meta tags are important, keep in mind that they aren't everything when it comes to search engine placement. The content of your website itself can play a significant role, too. Lots of pictures can make a website pleasing to the eye, but they don't help your website get found. It's the content (text) that can play a major part in getting new visitors.

There are some traps to be wary of. There are tricks some web designers use to attempt to increase a website's ranking, and many of these methods can cause a website to be banned from a search engine. Over-submission of the pages in your website can also get you blacklisted from a particular search engine. This is referred to as 'spamming' a search engine. Automated submission services that use software to submit your website to hundreds of search engines have been known to do this. That's why we recommend submission by hand. This is far more effective and a safer route to website submission than automated solutions. Submitting manually enables you to craft each submission to the likes and dislikes of each target search engine and produces much better results.

Sound like a little much to think about? Not to worry: the professionals at Computer Bits, Inc. can help you with any questions you might have. Give us a call today and we'll be glad to help future visitors find you on the Web. 

Web Sites You Can Use ...

The following is a list of Web sites that various CBI staff members use on a regular basis to assist with tech support, research, information retrieval, or in one case, just for fun. We thought that some of these sites might be useful for our readers:

General Information

- www.google.com (one of the fastest, best general search engines available—a favorite of many CBI staff members!)
- www.usps.com (to find zip codes)
- www.acronymfinder.com (a general site for acronyms, including those of a technical nature)
- www.primeris.com/fonefind (area code finder)

Technical Support

- <http://support.microsoft.com>
- www.microsoft.com/technet
- www.techweb.com
- www.driverguide.com
- www.tek-tips.com
- www.extsearch.com
- www.micro-tek.com/tech_links.htm
- www.nolo.com
- www.powerasp.com

Fun

- www.shockwave.com (loads of games from classic arcade to puzzles to flight simulators)

Domain Name Registration... *continued from page 4*

serving the purpose and function of such a site—to register my domain names quickly and efficiently. Gandi.net provided this, and they did it for less money.


Regardless of my near nirvana when I finally succeeded in the registration, my total experience registering domain names was one I would not care to repeat for any journalistic undertaking. It was filled with frustration as well as the genuine fear that my card may have been charged for services that were not rendered.

Why the tech woes of these sites? How can you avoid making these mistakes if

you develop a site of your own? Consider the bicycle analogy once again: You can read about riding a bicycle, and you can understand every physical law of riding a bicycle, but until you get on one and learn to do it, you don't know how to ride a bicycle. Your feedback is when you hit the cement. If you don't feel pain, you won't ever learn to ride the bike. Listen to the feedback that you receive. When customers complain, you must find the solution. Be imaginative. If you need to, break some rules! Increase clicks, reduce content, speed the process, lengthen the

process, but don't complicate it!

In e-commerce, with the diversity of online businesses, the golden rule is to give the customer what they want. That doesn't mean *everything you think* they want. Rather, sell the services that you perform. And do it in the manner that pleases the most customers. Otherwise, you will be so busy reinventing yourself all the time that your site will be a mess. The more transactions you execute, the richer you will be and the happier your customers will be.

And remember: watch out for fast moving cement. 



134 N. LaSalle St.
Suite 408
Chicago, IL 60602

PSRST STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Buffalo Grove, IL
Permit No. 518


Training Reminder

Just a reminder that our **Technology Training Center (TTC)**, located at 134 N. LaSalle, is up and running. We offer training on Microsoft Office products (Word, Excel, Access, Outlook and PowerPoint), as well as on WordPerfect and Internet Explorer. The TTC is fully equipped with state-of-the-art Dell equipment, and class sizes are limited to 12 students.

Please note that the TTC is also available for customized training sessions and rental to outside organizations. If you have any questions about the TTC or our training offerings, please contact Mary Beth Sheehan at **(708) 243-5589**.

Computer Bits, Inc. Teams With Topiary Communications To Offer **PersonalPro[®]** **Software**

Computer Bits, Inc. recently initiated an alliance with Topiary Communications, the publisher of **Personal Pro[®]** software. **Personal Pro[®]** is a Web authoring tool that provides end-users who are experts in their field with a development environment for rapidly creating Knowledge Management Web sites. The product supports the ability to describe and implement rule-based applications for use in education, just-in-time training, troubleshooting, sales, and customer service by providing the capability to configure solutions based on specific problems, needs, or scenarios. **Personal Pro[®]** is also very useful when addressing and automating multi-faceted administrative functions such as HR.

If you think that you may have an application for **Personal Pro[®]** in your organization, or would simply like more information about this dynamic product, please contact Mary Beth Sheehan at **(708) 243-5589**. Live demonstrations of the **Personal Pro[®]** software are available to interested organizations. 

Tired of spam? Try SpamWeasel 1.0.18 at www.mailgate.com.

Disaster Recovery and Business Resumption—

Having a Plan If You Can't Access Your Office

BY JIM HARMENING, PRESIDENT, AND MARY BETH SHEEHAN, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 have forced many organizations to begin thinking more critically about the disaster recovery and business resumption systems that they have in place, if any. However, IT professionals have been thinking about such matters for a much longer time. Terrorist attacks are only one example of events that can render an office space inaccessible. Fire, chemical contamination or something as simple as a plumbing problem in your building are examples of other events that could make it impossible for your organization to open its doors and function properly.

Have you been thinking about these types of issues and not known how or where to start addressing them? Read on for a practical checklist of items that need to be addressed in order to avoid the pitfalls of such unforeseen circumstances.

THE PRELIMINARIES

Tasks That All Offices Should Perform On a Regular Basis

■ **Backups**—Backups are a critical, core aspect of every disaster recovery and business resumption plan. On a daily basis, the entire server should be backed up, or an “incremental” backup should be done to copy changed files. The advantage of doing a backup of the entire system is that all files will be copied, so if you have a bad tape, you could simply go back to the tape from the prior day. Given the same situation with an incremental backup, you would have to go back a week or more. The drawback of doing a backup of the entire system is that it takes more time to execute each backup, and you consequently may need more tapes to cover each day's backup.

Regardless of which daily backup choice you make

incremental backup
UPS
data storage
OFF-SITE STORAGE
full backup
BUSINESS RESUMPTION
disaster recovery

(full vs. incremental), a weekly full backup must be done. Monthly archive backups are a good idea because they provide the ability to go back several months if a problem occurs that isn't noticed by the time that the weekly backup tapes are overwritten.

It is very important that backup logs be checked on a daily basis. This task only takes a moment or two, but is the best and quickest way to verify that a backup is indeed being properly made every night, according to your specifications. It is also CRUCIAL that a test retrieval of the backed up data is performed at least quarterly,

but hopefully monthly, in order to be sure that your tapes are readable.

■ **Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) Battery Replacement**—Many people are not aware that UPS batteries are only good for three to four years. They should be tested and replaced when they are no longer able to sustain a useful charge. Most batteries do have built-in monitoring functions. If you haven't replaced your UPS battery recently, you should consider doing so immediately.

Items That Should Be Stored Off-Site

There are a number of items that should be stored off-site that many organizations don't think about when putting a business resumption plan in place. It is very important that 1) copies of workstation and server software; 2) hardware specifications information (especially tape drive and tape format descriptions); and 3) any applicable user listings be retrievable as quickly as possible after a disaster. Placing them in a safety deposit box at your bank is a great idea.

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Helpful Data Storage Hints

■ Do not allow users to save data to their local hard drives or especially floppy diskettes, as diskettes are the least safe form of data storage. The only exception to this rule is if the hard drive or diskette(s) in question are part of the regular backup routine.

■ The magnetic tapes that are typically used for backups have a shelf life of less than five years. Consequently, they should be replaced regularly. The cost of purchasing new tapes, while not negligible, is relatively small compared to the cost of losing important data associated with the daily operation of your business.

■ CDs have a shelf life, just like magnetic tapes do. For CD-ROMs, the shelf life is approximately 20-30 years when stored properly (CD-RWs have a much shorter shelf life). This means that they are stored vertically, not on top of each other, in a cool, dark place. The major causes of problems with CDs are scratches, dust and sunlight. Thus, it is important that all CDs, as well as magnetic media, be kept clean and away from heat sources and out of the sunlight (this includes leaving either in hot cars!).

THE PLAN

It is important that your business resumption plan is “owned” by one person or a group within your organization. The task of creating this plan needs to be deliberately assigned to this person or group. The plan should include everything that is needed to operate your business on a daily basis, and should be tested *at least* once a year. Some experts are even suggesting that these plans be tested two or three times per year. Keep in mind that some organizations can operate for several days without the use of their offices (e.g., the U.S. Congress closed down in October, 2001 for four days), while other organizations cannot afford to be closed for even a single day.

Your business resumption plan should address many different aspects of your daily operations. Some of the key elements to think about are as follows:

■ Computer Server and Workstations—

It is not always easy to be able to get five computers in a day. One option is to shop Best Buy, CDW or other “superstores”, as they usually have a few computers in stock that can be used for workstations. A temporary server can be set up from a newly purchased workstation. Getting the correct tape backup drive (so that you can restore from a backup) might be the most difficult aspect of this process, so check with your vendor to see if your drive or a compatible one is still available.

■ Computer Network—Don’t forget about your hubs/switches/routers. They are necessary pieces of hardware that make all of those computers talk to each other.

■ Battery Backup—Given that you have to move to a new location, your new “temporary headquarters” should have battery backup too. The number of machines that you install may strain the power, so check how many amps you are going to pull. Monitors are about 2 amps, computers .5 amps, servers 1 amp, laser printers/copies 4-6 amps. If it is a 20 amp circuit, don’t put more than a 20 amp load on it!

■ Phone Systems & Voice Mail—Utilize phone company voice mail to inform your clients of your temporary office numbers. Or use call forwarding from your old numbers to new numbers at your contingent site (e.g., another office building, a person’s house, etc.).

■ Internet—Depending upon how you “get” your e-mail, have it forwarded to your own account, or sign-up for a free Yahoo or Hotmail account to be used in a disaster. These web-interface e-mails are great, and mobile too. Have all of your employees sign up for one! Access to the Internet can be done through dial-up lines such as AOL or Earthlink, which are easy to get up and running in as little as 20 minutes.


■ Desks/Chairs/Miscellaneous Office Furniture—The market is great right now for used office furniture. In addition, hotels with phones, Internet connections and furniture may provide for a good alternative.

■ Office Supplies—Don’t forget about the little things that you need to make a business run on a daily basis – paper, pens, scissors, copy paper, ink, toner, etc.

■ Checks/Accounting—Checks for writing some last minute expenses should be kept offsite (if your bank will give temporary checks, that might suffice). If you have a business line of credit, put three checks from that line in your safe-deposit box for easy access.

DISASTER RELIEF AGREEMENTS—WORTH THE MONEY?

Maybe. In a perfect world, every organization would be covered by a disaster relief agreement*. However, these agreements can tend to be expensive, so each organization has to compare the costs associated with such a plan with the benefits involved. In other words, is it worth it to your organization to spend \$X on such a plan every year, when it would only cost you \$1/50X to be closed for, say, three days? If that is the case, a disaster relief agreement may not be right for your organization. On the other hand, your cost to be closed for three days may be \$2/3X, so if the interruption to your business has the potential to last for a while, a disaster relief agreement could be a good “insurance” plan to invest in.

If you are interested in having your organization be better prepared for a potential disaster, CBI has a service available that might be of interest to you. Our “Disaster Recovery and Business Resumption Review” includes a physical review of your workspace and business practices as they relate to disaster recovery and business resumption. After the physical review, a report is prepared and delivered that will specify what corrective action needs to be taken in order to bring your organization current and protect against future access/productivity issues in the event of a disaster. The cost of this review is \$1,999. Turnaround time is usually between one to two weeks. 

**These agreements tend to be somewhat complex in nature, and the details are beyond the scope of this newsletter. If you are interested in exploring such an agreement for your organization, please feel free to contact our office for more information.*

Ask the Experts

BY SCOTT ELLIS, CONSULTANT

A client recently e-mailed...

Q: Dear Scott,

I'm trying to get some images up on my web site, but the images that my supervisor gave me to work with are of very poor quality. I know I can go into Photoshop and clean them up by hand, but even when I do that, the parts of the image that are "junky" looking come right back. I'm attaching the image. Can you help?

Thanks,
Elaine

A: Dear Elaine,

The "garbled" junk you're seeing is a result of JPEG "lossy" compression. Here's how to clean it out:

First, make the image bigger. Make it five times bigger. Then use the smart blur filter [Filter | Blur | Smart blur] until you see the rippled and blotchy effects of the JPEG compression disappear. Then resize it back down to the size you started with. This technique will not work unless you enlarge the image first.

Please note that it is important to resave your cleaned image as a high quality! Now that your image is all nice and crispy looking, when you save the image, do a "Save As"—this will allow you to adjust the amount of compression that is used in saving. JPEG images always save with a baseline—this basically means that you always save an image with the same amount of compression that you opened it with—UNLESS you "save as" and alter it. Basically, you were cleaning up your image and then, by resaving it at the same baseline it was given to you with, you were "losing" your changes. Images saved at "highest quality" JPEG compression are also lossy, but the image degradation is barely visible at 1200% magnification.

Hope that helps!
Scott

Scott Ellis, Consultant, is the author of "Designing WBT Logic: Building the Cornerstone Functions: A Development Study", published earlier this year in Auerbach Publications.

Do you have a question that you would like to submit for consideration and publication in a future issue of *Bits You Can Use...*? If so, please e-mail it to MaryBeth@computer-bits.com.


What Is Windows Update?

BY GREGORY HALEY, CONSULTANT

Windows Update is the online resource for Windows that helps you to keep your computer up-to-date. On the Windows Update site, new content is added regularly, so you can always get the most recent updates and fixes to protect your computer and keep it running smoothly. The question often is, however, which of these updates should be done? We've all heard the saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." But what if we can't tell if it's "broke"?

The complexity of any Windows operating system makes that system prone to bugs and other system failures, not to mention a myriad of security issues. The most valuable feature of Windows Update is the readily available set of security patches provided by Microsoft. It is very important that these patches, almost always listed under Critical Updates, be downloaded by anyone using a Windows operating system. These updates are provided to help resolve known issues, and to protect your computer from known security vulnerabilities.

Besides the important Critical Updates, there are many other updates offered by the site. This is where the downloading process can become tricky, and where it is important that you know what you're doing. An update that is not appropriate for your system can cause problems. For example, the **NVIDIA Corporation - Display** download listed under **Device Drivers** is intended for specific Gateway computers and will disable the video on other computers using NVIDIA adapters. While most of the patches offered by Windows Update can be safely installed, it is very important to know which ones can cause potential problems.

Another point to keep in mind is that many companies use specifically designed proprietary software, and some upgrades can cause problems with this type of software. CBI can verify and test any upgrades to make sure that they are compatible with any software being used. 

Domain Name Registration: Fast Moving Cement

BY SCOTT ELLIS, CONSULTANT

Registering a domain name can be the modern day equivalent of learning to ride a bicycle; but only because “falling down” during the registration process and losing a domain name is about as painful as falling off a bicycle and hitting some fast moving, unyielding cement.

Recently, a client asked me to register three domain names. It had been a couple of years since I’d registered a domain name, and I remembered it being a rather simple process. As a byproduct of that request, I have undertaken the task of evaluating the domain registration process for three registrar websites: networksolutions.com, verio.com, and gandi.com. Only one of these sites passed the registration test. All they needed to pass the test was to allow me to register a domain name.

Verio

www.verio.com

After five attempts to get past the first page of registration, this site was abandoned as a potential registrar because its registration form repeatedly crashed, preventing registration. There didn’t seem to be any easy access to help, and calling the 1-800 number yielded a customer service menu that did not contain any options for help with domain name registration.

Verio may have been experiencing excessive site load and their application load balancing may have been inefficient. The application technology behind the site is ColdFusion, and I certainly have nothing bad to say about ColdFusion—it is a fantastic, easy to use, and wonderfully scalable, multi-threaded, interpretive language. However, it is so easy to use that it is easy to take some “poor man” shortcuts with load balancing that simply cannot handle session management with bandwidth chocking, heavy site traffic.

Finally, the lack of customer support features (because they were so desperately needed) drove me away from this site.

NetworkSolutions/VeriSign
www.networksolutions.com

By far, this was the most frustrating site because it waited until the registration process was complete before returning errors. Since I actually had several domain names to register, you can imagine my frustration was akin to waiting in line at a movie for an hour only to have them sell out right as you get to the window. The following paragraphs analyze the problems I had using this site. If you’ve ever registered a domain name, you’ll be familiar with this. Most of these situations occurred during the registration process.

■ Upon discovering that the domain names I wanted to register were available, I added them to my shopping cart and proceeded to checkout. This was more like a sales extravaganza than a checkout.

■ The credit card authentication/validation rejected three different credit cards (hey, my credit is good!). Authentication and fraud detection are nice, but not when it stops legitimate buyers as well.

■ The “live help” icon is visible on a Sunday even though the live help is only available M-F. I was three clicks into “live help” before being notified of their hours.

■ At several places in the registration process, I received errors. I could click my back button and go back, but when I tried to move forward after correcting what I thought (guessed) caused the problem by changing my credit card, I found that I could not move forward again. The site served up a white screen. No error. Just white. I had to start the ENTIRE process over again. It took a complete browser shut down to correct the problem.

After a cumulative five hours spent on VeriSign’s NetworkSolutions.com (three hours spent earlier in the week), and despite all its live help, security features, and total web service packages and diverse product offering, I decided to give up. At its best, this site follows E-commerce 101 to a “T”

but, unfortunately, genius programming is not taught in that classroom.

Gandi

www.gandi.net

I went to gandi.net and completed my registration of multiple domain names with no problems in less than 10 minutes.

Gandi.net was very informative, with a very linear process and except for a slight hitch with the phone number—it required that I submit my phone number in the European format—the submission process was utter simplicity. Ultimately, I will have the opportunity to do much of the configuration work after the submission is approved. This is good because it reduced, by 50%, the amount of work I had to do to execute the submission; if the submission fails for any reason (competing registrations by other registrars), I won’t have wasted my time. Later, after the transaction and the registration with Gandi were approved, I received several confirmation emails from support@gandi.net, so I then returned to the site to configure the DNS redirects, etc. The total time to complete the redirects was less than 10 minutes. For technical users, gandi.net is the site of choice. For the inexperienced user, it contains very simple explanations of terminology. The only problem I found with the site was when, after transferring the hosting, I clicked on a link to do another domain name and I ended up on the French version of the site. Other than that, the gandi.net site is crisp, cleanly executed, mostly featureless but rich in functionality.

Overview

Certainly, features are nice, and features are good, and I love to design and code clever features, *but features must follow functionality*. It is this registrant’s observation that VeriSign has built a domain registration process around its features, rather than

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