



# Business

## Tips to Effectively Work with Your Website

By Debbie Manning



The number of websites on the Internet topped 101,435,253 sites in November 2006 according to Netcraft.com\* ... up from 97.9 million sites the September before! They report that the number of Internet websites doubled since May 2004, when there were a mere 50 million sites.

### How do small business owners hope to compete?

Hopefully most of us are somewhat realistic in our hopes for our websites. We realize that we're not going to be number one in Google searches within our main professions – unless we want to spend a lot of money in search engine advertising or in search engine optimization.

Search engine optimization companies (SEO) have sprung up in response to corporate desires to be “listed #1” with search engines. These companies try to predict what search engines will value when determining rankings in order to get favorable positions for their clients.

Basically, search engines such as Google and Yahoo use computerized “crawlers” to evaluate sites. **Everything** is computerized. Crawlers read and evaluate text and code to determine what your site is all about. Then they rate it according to what they learned.

As you can imagine, SEO work is quite technical. And because it is time consuming following and analyzing the activity of crawlers, SEOs are often quite expensive.

Web design and search engine optimizers are complementary professions. There are many things that can be done in the design phase to draw attention to your site.

### Practically speaking, here's how YOU can optimize your relationship with your website ...

1. **Start with a professional looking site.** Make your website something you like. If it's something you're proud of, you will want to promote it.
2. **Build your website to help your business.** Be practical. If you have a physical store or office location, save time by giving directions on your website. If you have a sale schedule people frequently call about, put that on your website. If you're in a profession that involves graphic promotion of you or products, put print-resolution photos on your website. Designers will love you for being able to access your photos in the middle of the night when your office is closed.

Think about aspects of your business that clients or customers seem to repetitively question. Can you use your site productively to deal with those questions?

3. **Customize your website to showcase YOU.** If you're a speaker, put audio on your site. Or use video. If possible, use professionally created graphics ... photos, audio and videos. You want to present yourself as the professional that you are.

4. **Remember your brand as you build your site.** Try to create an “aha” element when a client who knows you finds your site. They should think “That's her! I recognize that picture” or “I know I'm in the right place ... this looks just like her business card.”

5. **Promote your site yourself.** Give it freely to others on your business cards, flyers, handouts, etc. Keep your site current so others can find up-to-date information on your site ... **USE** your site!

Natalie Sequera, *Formulate a Solid Business Plan Before Jumping on the Internet*, says “If you do it right, a web site can enhance your company's image, build customer loyalty, and get information to customers and potential customers quickly and cheaply. If you have a web site, it makes your small business look big.”

Linda Mitchell, Microsoft Small Business Marketing Manager adds that “[Businesses on the Internet] may not all be seeing a huge increase in business, but they are all building customer satisfaction, improving customer service, and making more information available to customers. These results are very valuable. **If you've been thinking about getting a web site, start by checking out your competition. If they're there, you better be there too.**”



Visit duoforce.com for an exciting video example



Clients who have Kathleen Hayman's business card (above) will immediately feel at home (below) when they visit haymanhealthcare.com. They can listen to her audio as well.



chicagobobcatservice.com and sculpt-ur-body.com both showed up in Google within a few weeks after being submitted to dmoz.org!



### Technical ways to promote your site

**Meta-tags are behind-the-scenes content that help describe your content to search engines.** They appear in the html code of your site, so viewers don't normally see them. To check whether you have metatags on your site, “view page source” in your browser. The tags appear in the heading of your site.

### Metatag information that can influence your exposure with search engines ...

**KEYWORDS.** According to Michael Small in *SiteProNews* (4/24/08), search engines today place **90% or more of their ranking priorities on content and links.** Keywords are most important in the text of your pages, NOT in the metatag section.

**In creating content for your site, think backwards.** Think of the words that you want people to search and find you on ... then **USE** those words in your text. If you want to be high in rankings in “DuPage widgets,” be sure to use both *DuPage* and *widgets* on each page.

**TITLE.** The title tells readers (and search engines) what your page is about. Use keywords! Make your title a sentence. Google's preference is that it be less than 63 characters.

**DESCRIPTION.** This is the little paragraph that appears below titles in search engine listings. This should be less than 20 words, again using keywords. Think of your audience as you write since this is often your first “touch.” Make a good impression.

### Our 'Bon Voyage' Step...

At DebManning Design, our final step in completing a site is to submit your site to dmoz.org. dmoz is a search engine with information entered by real people. Search engines, being the social beings that they are, tend to feed off each other. So if one search engine has discovered your site, it's likely that another will. Recently we discovered that the two sites to the left were both picked up by Google just a few weeks after being submitted to dmoz!

Go ahead – submit yourself to dmoz.org. And if you have any questions, give us a call at DebManning Design. We offer free initial consultations.

### Happy surfing!

With more than 14 years of experience in graphic and web design, DebManning Design specializes in support services that will make your business excel. Call today to discuss your marketing ideas or visit [www.debmanning.com](http://www.debmanning.com) to explore services we offer.

**Call 630-668-0603 to start a partnership with a designer ... or visit [www.debmanning.com](http://www.debmanning.com) today!**

\*(<http://news.netcraft.com>)