



The Green Sheet

The Financial Services Industry Source for Education, Inspiration and Actionable Advice

How to Promote Your Website

By Peter Scharnell

Okay, so you're like a lot of other merchant processing professionals out there; you've built your business Website, now what? In order for you to maximize your Web-presence, you need to make sure that people can locate you on the World Wide Web. The following guide will help you to promote your Website and incorporate it in to your overall sales and marketing strategy and more importantly, help your company to be found before your competition.

Get in compliance

Don't get fined by Visa and MasterCard

First things first: in order to avoid noncompliance fines; make sure that your Website content is adhering to Visa and MasterCard compliance regulations. You must represent yourself in accordance to the established rules or pay the consequences. The Green Sheet has published the ISO relevant V/MC regulations online; <http://www.greensheet.com/mlsportal/industryfaq.html>

Code your pages for searches

Title your pages effectively

Make sure each of your pages has a descriptive title. Search engines usually give the most weight to the words between a page's title tags. You can use this to your advantage by adding a short, descriptive phrase in the title of each of your pages, which will make sure certain keywords get the attention they deserve.

Make the most of <META> tags

You can control how search engines catalog your site with two types of <META> tags, META Keywords and META Description. <META> tags are part of the HTML code that some search engines, such as AltaVista, look for but most visitors to your pages never see.

Put the important stuff first

Some search engines, such as Lycos, give precedence to text near the top of Web pages. If some of your must-see content is located far down on a page, move it up, put it on a separate page, or make sure the appropriate keywords from the text are in your <META> keyword tag.

Register your site

Register via submission sites and services

Sure, you could register with search engines and directories one by one, but there's a better way. At sites such as URLsubmitter and addme.com, you fill out one form with your Web site's title, URL, keywords, and other pertinent information. The sites guide you through the submission process for the most popular search engines and Web directories, filling in the appropriate fields in each form. Be aware that the most popular search engines now charge you for submitting your site.

Register individually

Top search engines have standard forms for site suggestions. A link to a search engine's submission form can usually be found on its home page labeled "Add a site" or "Suggest a URL."

Pay for results

Directories (Yahoo!) and pay-per-click engines (Overture.com) can increase traffic to your site as well. "Pay-Per-Click" search engines allow participating sites to pay for high rankings in their results. There are hundreds of site submission services out there, including software packages, web-based applications and companies specializing in custom site submission. Each option has pluses and minuses.

Promote your site on your own site

Make them members

Don't just have visitors to your site; have members. By offering your readers a quick form to fill out, you can instantly learn about your audience and its demographics. You can tailor your site to fulfill their wishes, which will in turn bring them back.

Spread the news

When people become members of your site, give them the opportunity to sign up for your email newsletter. Don't have a newsletter? Make one. Use it to tell your members about new features and happenings on your site. The newsletter is delivered right to your members' email in-boxes, reminding them to stop by for another visit.

Promote your site offline

Put your URL everywhere

You've set up your service provider account, spent months developing your Web site, and maybe even registered a custom domain name. Now it's time to flaunt your online presence. Use the phone number rule: everywhere that your phone number is listed - on business cards, advertisements, brochures, letterhead, and flyers - you should make sure your URL is listed, too. Also, don't forget to use your domain name in your business email address!

Customize your domain name

The value of a custom domain name (such as www.yourbusiness.com) is probably greatest offline. In the real world, people don't have the luxury of hyperlinks; they get to your site by writing down or memorizing the URL. The fewer slashes, tildes, and hyphens that your audience has to remember, the better.

Get some press

Send out a targeted press release to all your industry related publications. Many of these now have editors devoted to Website topics. Also, send the press release to general business and consumer publications that fit the profile of your business.

Measure your success

Use search engines to check your popularity

A few weeks after you submit your new site to the search engines, perform some test searches to see if your site is registered and how it ranks in keyword queries. If your pages fail search engine tests, you may want to beef up your page with more keywords.

Ask how visitors found your site

If you have a feedback form on your site, add a field asking visitors how they found your page. Direct visitor feedback is often the only way to find out if your site has been mentioned offline. If visitors appreciate your site enough to fill out the form, they probably won't mind telling you how they found it.

By following some simple steps, you can increase the traffic to your Website and greatly enhance your sales and marketing efforts. But be sure that your Website is in compliance first. The Internet is the easiest way for Visa and MasterCard to locate those that are not playing by the rules.

For those of you that are serious about marketing your Website, please email me and I will send you our extensive Search Engine Submission & Optimization guide.

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