

# If You Submit It, They Will Come

*An Investigation in Search Engine Rankings*

PART 3 OF 5

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**D**uring the last two months we delved into the primary steps in preparing your website for the search engines. This month we will talk about preparing your website's search engine sitemap files and submitting your website to the search engines. If you have not seen my December 2010 and January 2011 *Recognition Review* articles, please stop and read them before proceeding to this month's article. We will continue building upon what we have already learned in those articles.

## Sitemap Files

Maps are important. We use them every day to find our way around the cities where we live. Can you imagine how hard it would be to ensure you were on time to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony at the performing arts center if you didn't have a map to assist you with instructions on how to get there? Sure you know where it is, but that is because you have already been there. What about the first time you drove there? You probably needed directions.

Imagine the frustration of your customers trying to find

your store for the first time without a map. Hopefully they won't happen upon a competitor store before they find yours as they keep driving around town in circles. Maps are an integral part of our daily lives and provide us with a roadmap on how to get from point A to point B.

The Internet isn't much difference. We need maps on the Internet as well. After all, it is the information superhighway and with so much information, how do we find what we want? So let's discuss sitemap files. Well this is a bit technical; however it is important to your search engine rankings to accurately inform the search engine spiders about the web pages on your site. Sitemap files accomplish a few goals

1. Informs search engines which web pages on your site you consider to be important.
2. Provides a hierarchical mapping of those web pages on your website.
3. Provides a search engine priority on web pages to ensure the most pertinent web pages are included in the search listings.

Figure 1

```

http://www.netsoftstudio.com/
http://www.netsoftstudio.com/helpdesk/index.php
http://www.netsoftstudio.com/support/index.php
http://www.netsoftstudio.com/news-events/index.php
http://www.netsoftstudio.com/contact/index.php
http://www.netsoftstudio.com/privacy/index.php
http://www.netsoftstudio.com/references/index.php
http://www.netsoftstudio.com/tradeshows/index.php
    
```

▲ ASCII text-based sitemap file. Each web page must be listed on its own separate line. In this example, we show the first two web pages in color to help distinguish them.

Another way to view a sitemap file is to think of it as a listing of files or more importantly web pages that are part of your website. It is typically a hierarchical listing of pages, much like an outline. The most important web pages are found at higher levels in the outline than the less important web pages.

As you determine which pages are important it is easy to fall into the trap of “all pages are important” which causes you to rank all pages with a high priority. This type of thinking is a no-no! Spend some time ranking your web pages in an outline format and identify priorities of which pages are the most important. If your site doesn’t appear to have an outline format, than that is a good indication your website design has some serious flaws and a rework of the site is needed.

There are two types of sitemaps. One type is a simple ASCII text listing of web page addresses one web page address on a line (Figure 1). The name of this sitemap file must be sitemap.txt and it must be located at www.your.domain.com/sitemap.txt.

The second type of sitemap is an XML (Extensible Markup Language) sitemap, which is the preferred sitemap format as you can provide more details to the search engines such as priority of pages and change frequency (Figure 2). The name of this sitemap file must be sitemap.xml and it must be located at www.your.domain.com/sitemap.xml

I personally recommend providing both sitemap file types, as not all search engine spiders can read an XML sitemap file. Whereas we will focus on the primary three

Figure 2

```

<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<urlset
  xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9"
  xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
  xsi:schemaLocation="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9
    http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9/sitemap.xsd">
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.netsoftstudio.com/</loc>
    <changefreq>weekly</changefreq>
    <priority>1.00</priority>
  </url>
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.netsoftstudio.com/contact/</loc>
    <changefreq>weekly</changefreq>
    <priority>1.00</priority>
  </url>
</urlset>
    
```

▲ XML based sitemap file. Each web page must be listed between the <url> opening tag and the </url> closing tag with sub-tags of <loc></loc> at a minimum. It is recommended to add the Change Frequency and Priority tags to assist search engines, but these are not required

search engines, other less prominent search engines will eventually crawl to your website even without submitting your pages to those search engines and typically those search engines will not be XML compatible.

If you are using prepackaged shopping cart software be sure it will generate sitemap files of both types. Ideally the sitemap files should be created without any intervention on your part, as your shopping cart program should know its own hierarchy. This is extremely important as you can easily end up with more than 1,500 sitemap entries, and it is all but impossible for a human being to maintain such a large list of Web pages.

When you submit your website to the search engines, you may be asked for the website address to your sitemap file. Simply provide the search engine with the website address that is appropriate based upon whether the search engine wants a TXT or XML sitemap.

### Google and Yahoo Analytics

Business decisions are (or should be) based upon decision support data, which is data that describes factual statistics about your business. Your website is a business tool, and should also have decision support data, which we call analytics. What are analytics? In a nutshell, analytics provide you with website statistics decision support answers to questions such as:

- How many people are visiting your website?
- Where are those people located geographically?
- What are the most popular web pages on your website?
- What times of day result in the highest website traffic?
- What web browsers are these people using?
- What type of computer (PC, Mac, or UNIX) are these people using?
- And many other statistics!

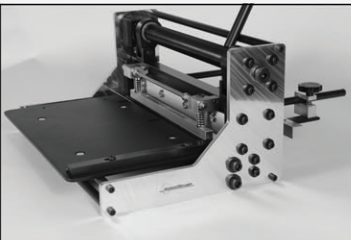
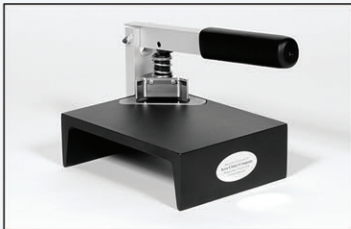
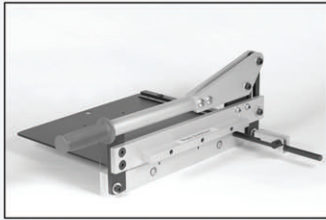
Most websites provide these statistics as part of the website hosting package. Because this is the case, the question begs to be asked “Why use Google Analytics and/or Yahoo Analytics?” The answer is quite simple—and right in front of us if we think about it. The search engines want and need to know how your site is used.

When you add the search engine analytics code to your site, the search engines obtain a better view of how your website is used and thus the search engine can provide better rankings for your site using factors such as web page popularity statistics. To add search engine analytics to your site, Google or Yahoo will provide you with a snippet of code that you simply copy and paste into either the header or footer page of your website. In the case of shopping cart programs, your shopping cart should provide you with a field you can paste the analytics code into.

We recommend using analytics from both Google and Yahoo so you are, in essence, providing your site usage data to both search engines thus giving those search engines valuable data about how your website is used, and this can result in higher rankings for your website.

To get started using Google analytics, you will need to setup a free Google Analytics Account To setup a free

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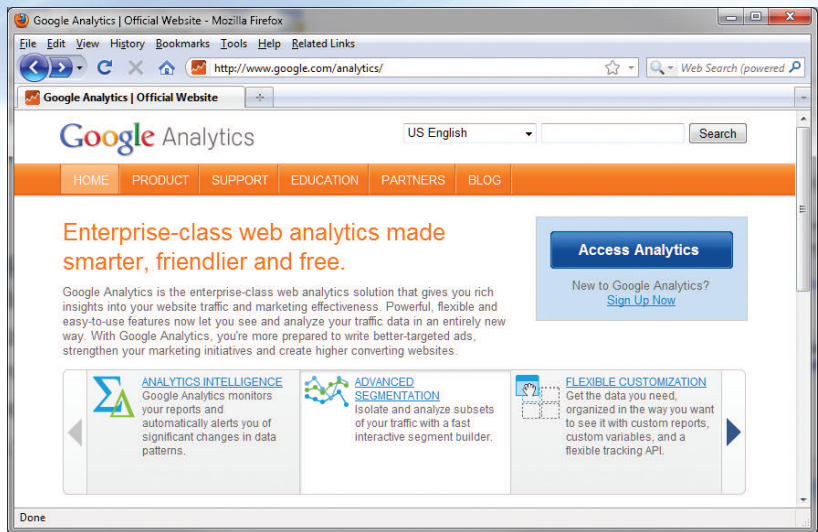
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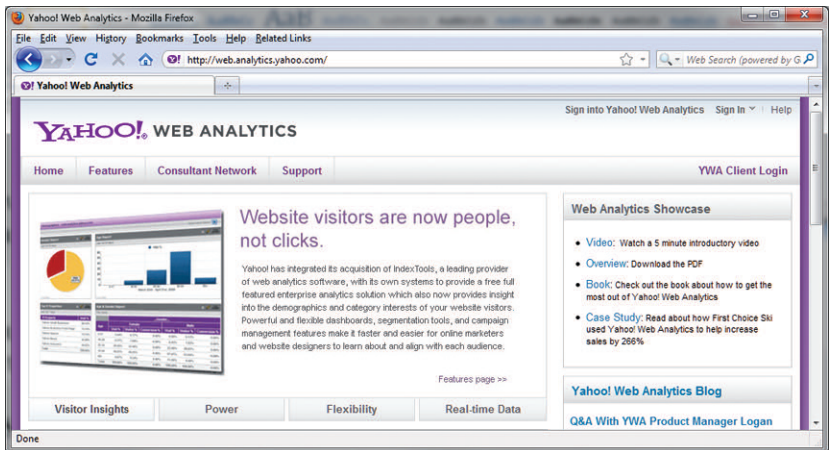
**Figure 3**



▲ Google Analytics accounts are free. Simply go to <http://www.google.com/analytics/> to get started.

account, visit <http://www.google.com/analytics/> (Figure 3). For Yahoo Analytics, you will also need to setup a Yahoo account at the following website address: <http://web.analytics.yahoo.com/> (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**



▲ Yahoo Analytics accounts provide great tools for analysis of your site traffic and includes other marketing tools visit <http://web.analytics.yahoo.com> to setup an account.

**Submitting Your website to the Search Engines**

This can seem to be the most daunting task of all; however it truly is the simplest. You hear how there are thousands of search engines. Well, this is true to an extent, but the reality is, there are only three primary search engines that dominate the search engine landscape. We are talking about Google (approx. 72% of the Internet users search using Google), Yahoo (approx. 15% of the Internet users search using Yahoo) and Bing (approx. 10% of the Internet users search using Bing). If you submit your site to each of these search engines, you will reach 97% of the Internet. Three percent of the Internet users will utilize the minor search engines. So let's focus only on submitting your website to the primary three. The process of submitting your site to the major search engines is easier than you think.

Let's start with Google. There are two ways to submit your site to Google. The preferred method is to submit your site from within the webmaster tools interface at Google's website. This interface allows you to submit your sitemap file and typically, search listings will be incorporated very quickly using this method. To get started with a webmaster tools account, simply visit [www.google.com/webmasters/tools/](http://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/) and sign up for a new account. Login and follow the instructions.

The less preferred method, which will take longer for complete crawl of your site, is to submit it at the Google Add URL page found on the Google website at [www.google.com/addurl/](http://www.google.com/addurl/). For Yahoo, submission of your website is quite simple. Use the submission form found at [www.search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html](http://www.search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html). To submit your website to Bing, simply point your web browser to [www.bing.com/webmaster/SubmitSitePage.aspx](http://www.bing.com/webmaster/SubmitSitePage.aspx).

The last place you will want to submit your website is to DMOZ, which is a human-managed directly listing and is the open directory project on the Internet. There is no guarantee of listing at DMOZ, so you must follow the submission instructions exactly, and be persistent. It is very hard to get listed in DMOZ. Its submission page and instructions may be found at [www.dmoz.org/docs/en/add.html](http://www.dmoz.org/docs/en/add.html). Very few people use DMOZ; however the minor search engines and even the major search engines use the data found in the DMOZ database to rank web pages. Even though this is used very little by people, it is used extensively by the search engines themselves.

**Patience is a Virtue**

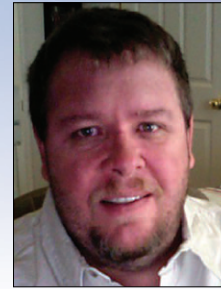
I hear it over and over again. Why isn't my site listed yet? Or why isn't my site on page one of the search engines? Remember, this article series is titled "If You Build It, They Will Come," and more to the point, we are debunking many myths as well as correcting mistakes that cause search engine ranking degradations.

One of those myths is the amount of time it takes for a search engine listing to appear. Another of those myths is how long it takes to move up in the rankings. It takes time. As much as 36 months just to reach page 3 of the search results (and that is assuming you keep working at it). Just putting a website online, doing everything right, does not guarantee page-one ranking. It takes time, effort, dedication, devotion—and patience.

The companies you see ranking on page one of the search engines have mostly been working at their rankings for more than 5 years. One of the reasons it takes time to move up in rankings is because your site is under the microscope. Websites pop up and go offline every day. The search engines

are keeping an eye on your site. Do you have the right content? Have you done everything right? But also, are you here for the long haul, or just a fly-by-night website? Be patient and do not expect overnight success. It simply will not happen.

Stay tuned next month as we delve into Google places, Leveraging Social Media and Blogging. ▲



David Matney has more than 20 years experience with Internet application development and search engine optimization. He is the developer of BizWizard ShopKart.

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