Publicizing Your Site

If you do nothing to special to publicize your web site to the world at large, you are effectively relying only on search engines such as Yahoo and Google to discover you and do your advertising for you. Search engines build indexes of keywords gathered from web pages on the Internet (using ‘robots’ - small programs which roam the Internet, accessing all the sites that can be found, and scavenging them for text to be included in the index.)

Assuming your site is accessible to the Internet, you can help these search engines to include your site in their indexes by including keywords in your web pages, in the appropriate locations.

Not all search engines look everywhere in a web page or web site for keywords to index, so it makes sense for you to place your keywords in the more commonly searched locations. Searching every word of text in a web site can be time consuming, so many of them restrict their search to specific areas of a web page; these include the contents of meta tags, title tags, comments, headers, and alt tags.¹

The meta element

<META></META> tags are placed in the <HEAD></HEAD> portion of a web page. They are used for various informational text, such as the name of the editor used to create the page (Front Page, Dreamweaver), the format of the document (HTML, XHTML, XML, etc.), the default scripting language, author information, and many other kinds of information useful to various programs, administrators and web servers. The meta element can take three attributes: name, content, and http-equiv. The first two of these are of interest to us here.

Two of the values which the name attribute can take on are ‘keywords’ and ‘description’. These values identify the kind of information to be found as the value of the content attribute. The content attribute contains either the list of keywords you want search engines to find (when name=’keywords’), or a prose description of your web site (when name=’description’). Here are examples of this usage:

```
<meta name="description" content="My terrific site about dogs" />
<meta name="keywords" content="dogs animals canine" />
```

It is important that you use restraint when providing text for the content attribute of the meta tag. Too much text, or too many keywords, will be detected by the search engines and cause them to refuse to index your site at all. On the other hand, it is not a bad idea to include common misspellings of your keywords so that users with sloppy spelling skills

¹ Note that not all search engines search all of these locations, while some do, in fact, search the entire web site’s content.

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NTC Oct 21, 2006
can still find your site.

The name attribute can also take on the value ‘robots’ If, for some reason, you do not want search engines to index your web page you can use ‘robots’ as the value for the name attribute of the meta element, and specify ‘noindex’ and/or ‘nofollow’ in the content attribute. The nofollow value tells the search engine not to follow any of the links in your site. You can prevent a search engine from archiving your web page (making a copy of your page to be used when your site is not available) by using the ‘noarchive’ content value for the ‘robots’ name. Examples of these are:

```html
<meta name="robots" content="noindex, nofollow" />
<meta name="robots" content="noarchive" />
```

Site Registration

Rather then just wait until the search engines stumble onto your site, you can proactively register your site with the various search engines.

You can manually register your site (‘submit’ your site) by going to the home page of each of the search engine sites and entering the information they ask for. Of course, the first thing they will want to know is the URL for your site. Many sites only allow you enter a single URL. Although they will usually find all the links within your site and follow them, it is a good idea to speed things up by creating a single page which contains all of the links to the most important parts of your site.

Registration services charge a fee to perform the registration process for you at a large number of sites.

Registration software runs on your computer and performs the registration process for you.

Improving your Ranking

Getting search engines to index your site is just part of the problem of promoting your site. You would also, of course, like your site listed near the top of the listings produced by a search engine when it lists the results of a search, or hits.

• First, and most costly, is that you can pay a search engine to give your site preference. You become, in effect, a sponsor of the search engine site.
• The more sites, not your own, that you link to and, more importantly, the more sites belonging to other people which link to your site, the better your ranking will be with many search engines.
• Buy advertising on other sites.
• Include your site URL in your email signatures.
• Post messages about your site in newsgroups.