

# Online marketing: *Optimize your Web site for effective results*



**MIKE MEYER, president of NetSearch Direct, helps companies optimize their Web sites – a key strategy for getting noticed on the Internet.**

**THERE'S NO DOUBT THE INTERNET** has created a global marketplace. Where once small businesses might have pulled their customers from the radius of a few city blocks, now they can do business with customers around the globe via the Internet.

"We have small business owners who have been highly successful transforming their

business using the Internet. Some have more than doubled their annual sales via the Internet. You're not just serving people in three zip codes. You could be serving the entire country. It broadens who can see you and what you have to sell," explained Joe Borkowicz, Provident Bank's senior vice president of direct banking.

The challenge for small businesses is how to reach the millions of potential customers out there in cyberspace.

"When you're looking to get your business noticed on the Web, there are really three different places that you can get noticed," advised Mike Meyer, president of NetSearch Direct, a Richmond-based search engine marketing

and optimization firm.

Fortunately for cash-strapped small businesses, two of these are free. The natural or organic results — the list of results generated by search engines when someone searches by keyword — offer the best exposure for businesses. "You cannot pay to get in there. It has to do with how your Web site is constructed and how search engines view it," explained Meyer.

However, keyword optimization can help your business land higher in the search results, improving your chances of being seen by Internet searchers. "Making sure your Web site is properly optimized is critical. There are online tools that you can buy as a small business person to optimize a Web site and that can work quite successfully," advised Borkowicz.

But optimization isn't always easy. "It's difficult to do by yourself. Even a lot of Web designers don't do the optimization — they will subcontract that out," explained Meyer. That's where firms like NetSearch Direct can help.

Small businesses should also take advantage of their free listing in the local results, which usually appear right above the organic results.

"Find your ad, and make sure it's updated with the correct information," suggested Meyer.

Then there's the paid area, which usually appears at the very top or to the right of the organic results, where companies can purchase space on a pay-per-click basis. Rates start as low as 10 cents per click.

Both Borkowicz and Meyer say the exposure generated by pay-for-click advertising is money well spent. According to a recent survey, 40 percent of respondents said they used the Internet to shop for financial services. That trend is mirrored in other industries. "Chances are the site where you end up visiting is where you're going to buy products and services," explained Borkowicz.

Pay-for-click advertising can be purchased directly from the major search engines like Google, Yahoo or MSN or through an Internet marketing firm.

On average, generating online business leads costs less than using direct mail. "A small business owner with very finite resources has to figure out where they want to allocate their advertising dollars. At some point, it's really a leap of faith," concludes Borkowicz.

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