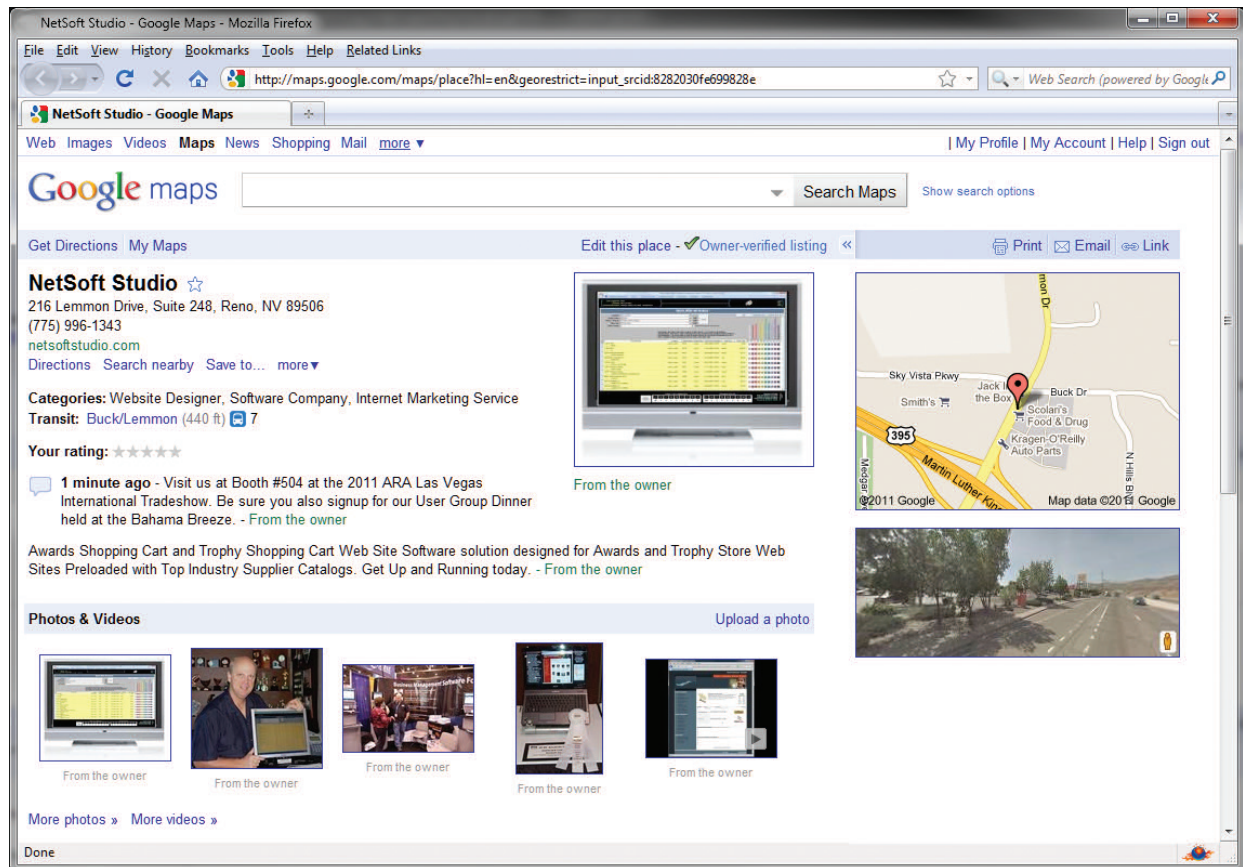


If You Build It, They Will Come

An Investigation in Search Engine Rankings

PART 4 OF 5

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During the last three months, we delved into the primary steps in preparing your website for the search engines. This month we will talk about ongoing marketing of your website with Google Places, Social Media, and Blogging. If you have not read Parts 1-3 in the December 2010 and January and February 2011 issues of *Recognition Review*, please read them before proceeding to this month's installment, as we will continue building upon what we have already learned in those articles.

Google Places

What is "Google places?" Google places can be viewed as a telephone book advertisement, except obtaining a listing with Google places is free and is located on

the Internet. Think about how you find businesses you are interested in. You often will use your computer and the Internet to find that great steakhouse for your romantic dinner with your spouse.

Google places can affect your search engine rankings simply because it's on Google. Remember from last month's article, 72% of the Internet users find what they are looking for in Google. So if you're not listed prominently in Google places, you're missing the boat on potential traffic to your website. Google places listings appear in the Google maps portion of Google's website. When someone visits Google maps to find trophy stores geographically in their city, your listing will appear (assuming you have created one).

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You can add photos, list your store hours, add videos, create announcements on activities, or promotions. And best of all, it's free. Free exposure for your business should never be overlooked when you're working on increasing your search engine rankings. Every piece of exposure you can gain on the Internet will boost your rankings in Google. Remember, popularity is important in determining rankings.

In **Figure 1**, you will notice the NetSoft Studio Software listing as shown on Google places. Notice we have placed photos of BizWizard Order Manager and ShopKart, a photo of one of our customers standing in their store next to our software, screenshots of winning entries for ShopKart at ARA Las Vegas tradeshow, as well as some videos from our YouTube listing. Photos and videos are eye catching. People's eyes are naturally drawn to it versus just simple text.

What benefit does this serve? When someone looks at a Google places listing, photos, and videos catch the eye quicker and more efficiently than text. Your listing may appear next to other awards stores, so if you enhance your listing with photos, videos, keyword details in the description of your listing, then you will stand out. In addition, Google will place higher priority to any listing on its own website so when someone does a search on a keyword that matches your Google places listing; you're going to rank higher on a geographical search.

In addition to Google places, do not forget to list your site at Yahoo's website. The Yahoo equivalent to Google places is called Yahoo Local. Again, a free listing anywhere will be beneficial to your search engine rankings and exposure. Take advantage of them.

Google places can be found at: <http://places.google.com/>

Yahoo Local can be found at: <http://local.yahoo.com/>

Social Media

I was on an engraving forum website a few weeks ago, and I read a forum posting that I found interesting. The paraphrased version of this posting

was "I just don't see the whole hoopla about social media. I know I'm behind the times, but I just cannot bring myself to subscribe to it"

Let's talk about this. Not understanding something does not mean it has no validity. The best way to ascertain the importance of anything is by listening to others. Simply because we don't like it, don't understand it, or just don't want to deal with it, will not make it go away, nor will it debunk its validity. Social media is here, and at least for the time being it is playing a key role in search engine rankings, as well as exposure for your business.

There are more than 1 million conversations going on right now in the social media networks such as on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and other social media networks. Twitter alone has more than 50 million tweets every day. Social media provides an avenue to disseminate short snippets of information to the masses and then the masses can forward on those short snippets to others. We call this "going viral" when information gets passed on and on and on.

How does this affect my rankings? Well, let's imagine the dining room of a banquet. Each dining table has 6 to 8 people from all walks of life having a meal and also conversing with each other. That means there are about 70 dining tables, each with 6 to 8 people carrying on countless conversations.

Let's imagine a person standing in the very center of the banquet hall and all they are doing is listening to the conversations at the various tables.

Table one's conversation topic: The latest laws governing human rights

Table two's conversation topic: North Korea and its growth in nuclear weapons

Table three's conversation topic: The presidential campaign

The person standing in the middle of the room is listening to all the conversations going on in order to ascertain one thing "What is all the hoopla about?" The person standing in the middle of the room is equal to the search engines.

The search engines are listening. The search engines are watching the social media conversations and depending upon the conversation

topics, rankings of websites will shift and adjust not only on a daily basis but an hourly basis. If no one is talking about your awards stores and yet three of those dinner tables are talking about your competitor's award store, your rankings will be affected by those conversations in a negative way, and your competitors rankings will be affected in a positive way.

Whether we like it, subscribe to it, or want to get involved in it. Social media is not only here (at least for right now until the next greatest thing) but we must embrace it if we want to gain the affects it has on our websites' popularity.

To what extreme do we take social media? There are hundreds of social media websites and we will not even attempt to talk about them all. There is no need to. Let's talk about those sites that actually will benefit your store. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn are the primary three social media websites. There are thousands of search engines; however, there are only three primary search engines. In the same manner there are hundreds of social media networks with new ones popping up every day, but only three primary social media networks.

Facebook (www.facebook.com): Post interesting facts about your business happenings, or even personal happenings. Do you have a new granddaughter? Post it. It's not necessarily about business, but people love looking at a photo of a new baby, and it gets people to your Facebook page. Did you do the award for a major event in your city? Post photos of it to let people know. Keep your friends, customers, and family informed.

LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com): Build your network of business professionals. You never know when one of them might need your services. Remember, one of your contacts may know someone that is looking for an award or trophy, and they will refer you.

Twitter (www.twitter.com): Expose your business with small snippets of information called tweets. You can actually communicate a lot of information in 140 characters. Did you know the Library of Congress

actually archives every tweet on twitter? (Read more: <http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2010/04/how-tweet-it-is-library-acquires-entire-twitter-archive/>).

Blogging

What is a blog? Merriam-Webster defines a blog as: "a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer"

So how is a blog important to your business? First of all, a blog must provide some sort of useful value in a business sense. After all, people who will read your blog must be interested in what is written. A blog can have little articles you may write that will attract people to your site. For instance, this week you may write a blog article on how engraving is accomplished and maybe even post a photo or two of your staff doing engraving. Another article you post to your blog may be about the benefits of creating an employee recognition program. Another article you might post to your blog may be totally unrelated and may have to do with current events about a child with cancer and your company wants to help raise money for that child. What you write about can be anything, business related or not, but must be of interest to the reader.

Getting someone to your blog provides you with a way to send them to your website. For instance, if you write an article about how engraving is done, someone interested in how engraving is done may go to your blog via a search in Google, Yahoo, or Bing, and then read about what you wrote. If they are impressed, they may click a link to your shopping cart website and take a look at your awards and trophy products.

The more popular your blog, the more traffic it will receive. The more traffic your blog receives, the higher its popularity. The higher its popularity, the more Google will raise your rankings in the search engines. When Google feels your blog is an authority on a particular topic, it will begin to raise the rankings of websites you link off to from your blog.

Just like social media, you may not understand blogs, you may not like

blogs, you may feel the entire endeavor cumbersome, time consuming, and, in many ways it is. However, if you're serious about your site, you need to be serious about blogging.

Be Nice

This one goes without saying, but I feel it's important to communicate. You never know who you come into contact with that will become your next fan on social media networks. There is a story of a young attorney who was an intern at a law firm. This attorney was an insignificant employee as far as the ranks within the organization go. There was an executive at that same law firm that took notice of this young intern, and made simple gestures such as saying hello in passing, or carrying on a conversation in the break room.

Years later, that young intern became an executive. Using social media connections, he connected with the friendly executive from years earlier who took notice of him while he was an intern. The executive no longer practiced law, but was in the

computer information technology field. The young-intern-turned-executive provided more than \$2 million worth of referral business to his former contact solely on the basis that the former executive took the time years earlier to treat him with respect and as a human being.

With social media so important today, it is important to maintain such contacts and reap the benefits of prior random acts of kindness. Next month we will talk about geography and the search engines, keeping up with the changes in the search engines and ongoing website marketing. ▲



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