

12

Places to Promote Your Site

You've built a great site—now get the word out! There are plenty of places where you can promote your site for free.

Although you want to generate traffic to your site, you might be the type of person who shies away from awkward marketing situations. Talking yourself up can sometimes feel a little strange. Promoting your site is actually pretty easy, and requires little to no marketing savvy. What it does require is a little **creative thinking, and some **diligence**.**

The primary focus of this chapter is to get your URL in as many places as possible to generate traffic and boost your search engine rankings. The more inbound links you have to your site from reputable sources, the better you'll rank when users search for your target keywords.

Site promotion is most successful when it's done on a regular basis. When you launch a new site it's generally a good idea to make a big push to get the URL out there to generate awareness and traffic. As time passes and people become aware of your site, you'll still stumble across new places to list your URL to broaden your audience even further. The key is to stay on the lookout for promotional opportunities.

As you work to promote your site, never resort to spamming sites with your link. Posting nonsense or blatant advertising on blogs, discussion boards, or other open platforms is annoying to all and it's the quickest way to destroy your site's reputation. It does way more damage than good, so keep your promotion efforts spam free.

We'll focus on three primary goals in this chapter:

1. Making sure search engines know where to find your site for indexing
2. Building inbound links to your site to increase your site's search ranking and generate more traffic
3. Attracting local traffic to your site

Submitting Your Site to Search Engines

In Chapter 10, the section entitled “Building and Submitting sitemap.xml” informed you that some of the major search engines support a sitemap standard to facilitate more efficient and descriptive URL submissions. It’s beneficial for site owners and search engines alike, as it provides a detailed listing of all the URLs the search spider should crawl. It results in better content indexing for site owners, and a more comprehensive index for search engines.

Unfortunately, the sitemap.xml protocol doesn’t totally negate the need to submit your URL to search engines as not all of them support the standard, especially some of the smaller ones.

As Chapter 10 pointed out, be sure to use your robots.txt file to tell any search engine spider that visits your site where to find your sitemap.xml file. Those that support the standard—Yahoo!, Google, Ask, and MSN Live Search—will be able to read your sitemap.xml file and index your site accordingly.

To provide the most popular search engines immediate notice of your URL, use the following submission links:

- **Yahoo!:** <https://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/submit>
- **Google:** <http://www.google.com/addurl?continue=/addurl>
- **MSN Live:** <http://search.msn.com/docs/submit.aspx>
- **Ask:** no submission page as it looks for a directive to your sitemap.xml file within robots.txt
- **AOL:** listings come from Google so no need to submit
- **Altavista:** listings come from Yahoo! so no need to submit

A number of sites provide free search engine submission services that will notify a number of search engines of your URL for you. Do a quick search for “search engine submission service” and you’ll discover many options to consider.

One such service called AddMe (<http://addme.com/>) submits to 14 search engines simultaneously for free, including all of the following: focusLook, Burf, Subjex, Alexa, Scrub The Web, Google, LookSeek, Jayde, InfoTiger, NerdWorld, Aeiwi, Walhello, LifeTips, ExactSeek, and EntireWeb.

Be aware that search engines might not index your site immediately when you submit your URL. Your site will go into a queue, and it could take weeks to index your content depending on how many sites have been submitted before you.

Watch your site stats for user agents like Googlebot, Yahoo! Slurp, and msnbot. These are the spiders sent out by Google, Yahoo!, and MSN Live Search, respectively. When you see these user agents in your Web stats you know your site has been indexed.

Submitting Your Site to Directories

Yet another way to drive traffic to your site is through a directory. Directories are categorized listings of content on the Web, much like a phone book. The folks in charge of directory sites create a generalized, intuitive taxonomy that allows users to browse through their content to find sites. A search feature also makes navigating the categories easier.

Directories get all of their content from user submissions, and don't use spiders for content gathering. Because humans evaluate each submission for content quality and its appropriate placement in the directory it may take a little time for your site to be listed. Directories do not base their listings off of the content inside a page as a search engine does. They look at a site as a whole for content value, and pay no attention to SEO techniques.

Open Directory Project

The Open Directory Project (<http://dmoz.org/>) is a great place to have your site listed for free (see **FIGURE 12.1**). It's the largest human-edited directory on the Web, and is edited by thousands of volunteers who handpick the sites for inclusion. It feeds content to Google for indexing and supplies content for the directory services of many search engines.

Because Google's directory (<http://directory.google.com/>) pulls listings from the Open Directory Project, once your site is listed on the Open Directory Project site you will also be listed on the Google directory.

It's free to submit your site to the Open Directory Project. Just navigate to the best category for your site, and click the "suggest URL" link at the top of the page. Fill out the form to submit your site, and be patient as the volunteer editors review your submission.

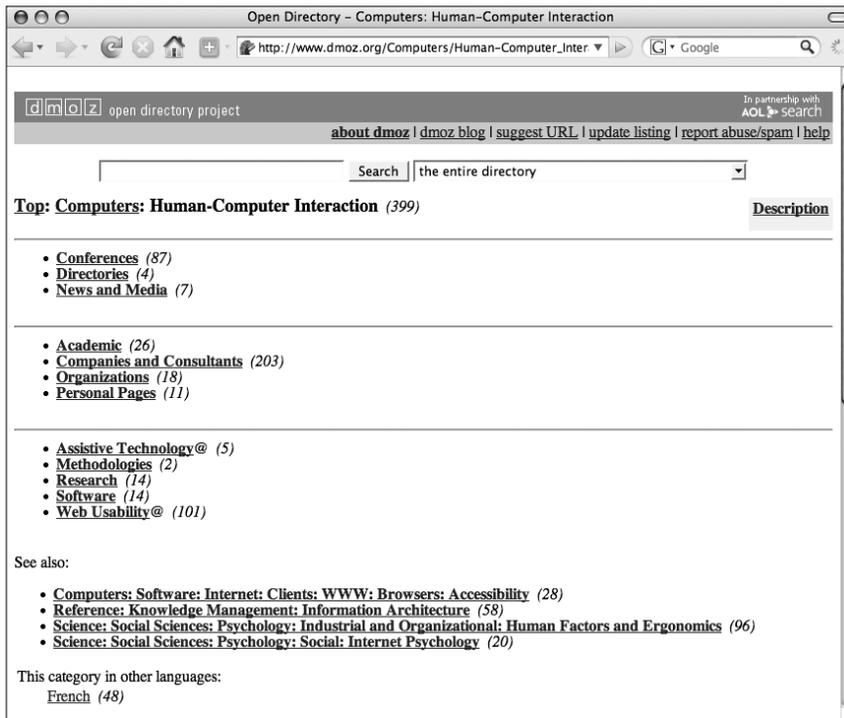


FIGURE 12.1 *The Open Directory Project (<http://dmoz.org>) is the largest human-edited directory on the Web. Submitting your URL is free and can generate some good traffic to your site.*

It may take a few months for your site to be listed in the directory, but it's worth the wait. Not only will the inbound link generate some traffic to your site, it can also help boost your search engine rankings, as the Open Directory Project site ranks high itself.

Yahoo! Directory

Yahoo! has its own Web directory (<http://dir.yahoo.com/>) reviewed by paid employees. It's also a great place to list your site, but unfortunately it's not free. The Yahoo! Directory charges \$299 to submit your site, and \$299 per year to continue your listing. Yahoo! promises to review your site in seven business days. Submission to the Yahoo! Directory does not guarantee inclusion.

Though it may not be very practical for small businesses or independent sites, the Yahoo! Directory might be worth considering for large business sites especially after first launch when new traffic is harder to come by.

Building Inbound Links

Inbound links are an exceptionally valuable resource for your website. It's speculated that inbound links are the most significant factor in Google's PageRank algorithm that determines how a site ranks in search results. Build inbound links to your site from reputable sources and you'll boost your site's PageRank. Of course, inbound links expose your URL to more people browsing other sites, which will also boost your traffic.

It takes time to generate quality inbound links. The content development techniques discussed in Chapter 4 will help encourage unsolicited inbound links to your site, which are the best kind because they usually come from sources relevant to your target audience.

You can also be proactive in building inbound links to your site. Here are a few places where you can begin your link building initiative.

TIP

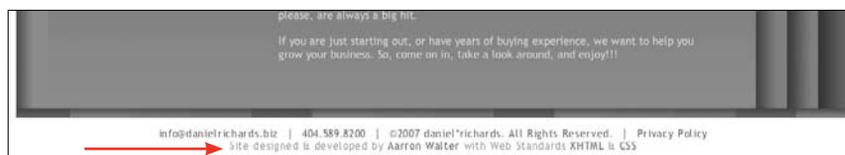
You can keep tabs on your site's inbound links by typing `link: followed by your domain` in a Google search box. Here's an example:
`link: aaronwalter.com`

Links from Clients and Affiliates

If you run a Web design company or do freelance work, you probably build new sites on a regular basis. Each new site you build is an opportunity to create an inbound link to your site. At the bottom of each page near the copyright statement include an acknowledgement that indicates who created the site with a link back to your site. **FIGURE 12.2** shows an example of an acknowledgement line.

Be sure to include information about the design/development acknowledgement line in your project contract so your client is not surprised by it when they see the site for the first time. For various reasons, some clients may not agree to the acknowledgement and link to your site. If you make them aware of it upfront they'll be more likely to accept it.

FIGURE 12.2 At the bottom of each page on <http://danielrichards.biz> I've included a link to my personal website.



In addition to boosting your search engine rankings, inbound links from client sites are also a powerful marketing tool that can generate leads for your next project. These links can significantly decrease the amount of time you and your company have to spend marketing your services because the clients will come to you.

Partners and affiliates are another prime opportunity to build inbound links. A small Web design firm might outsource certain tasks like usability studies to another company. If your company partners with affiliates to offer clients additional services be sure to ask your affiliates to create a link to your site from theirs. If you create an inbound link to their site from yours, they're likely to reciprocate.

Contribute to Discussion Boards and Blogs

You and your organization have expertise on a subject from which others could probably benefit. By sharing your expertise on discussion boards and blogs you can build your reputation, help others, and build valuable inbound links to your site.

Find a few discussion boards where you can share your knowledge, then proceed to contribute to some threads. Discussion boards often let you create a custom signature that will be added at the bottom of each post you make. Modify this signature to include a link to your site, and perhaps a few words about what you or your site is about.

Each time you help someone solve a problem or contribute an interesting perspective on a topic, your benevolent comment will be accompanied by a link to your site. This will build trust and respect for what you do, and will encourage traffic to your site.

You can contribute to blogs in a similar fashion by commenting on posts. Most blogs let you include your site's URL when you write a comment. As Chapter 4 already pointed out, trackbacks can also generate inbound links to your site. A trackback is an automatically published excerpt of your blog post displayed as a comment on another person's blog. When you blog about and link to other blog posts you'll generate an inbound link to your post.

Be sure your comments are valuable, and are not gratuitous attempts at getting your URL linked on a popular site, or you'll end up damaging your site's reputation.

A smart strategy for a company would be to set aside an hour or two each week during which all employees contribute to blogs and discussion boards. With an entire team helping people out each week you can quickly build your organization's reputation and your inbound links.

Write for Other Websites

Another way to share your expertise with others and generate quality inbound links to your site is to publish articles on other websites. Regardless of your area of expertise there are probably a number of reputable sites that publish articles on the subject.

Take some time to compose an article on a unique topic and submit it for publication. If you're stumped on what to write about, visit some discussion boards to see what people are asking questions about most.

A link to your website from an online publication is exceptionally valuable, as they're likely to have very high search engine rankings. When a popular, credible website links to yours, your site's rankings can climb quickly. This type of inbound link is likely to generate lasting traffic for your site as people will read the article for years to come.

Although it may take a little time to write an article and get it published, it's well worth the efforts.

Design Galleries and Contests

If your site or the sites you're promoting exhibit great graphic design built with Web standards, be sure to submit the URL to all of the popular CSS design galleries. You can find a list of the most popular ones at <http://www.listible.com/list/full-list-of-css-galleries>.

The CSS design gallery sites receive thousands of visits daily. If your site is accepted to any of these galleries, you'll notice a significant spike in traffic.

It's important to note that the type of traffic you'll receive from CSS galleries is mostly from designers in search of inspiration. These visitors may not be as inclined to complete the business goals of your site—like buying a product or signing up for your mailing list—because they've come for a different reason. However, they are likely to have a personal website where they might blog about your site or create a link in their blogroll—a list of recommended links on the side of a blog.

Because CSS design gallery sites are so popular, they often have a very high Google PageRank. An inbound link from any of these sites to yours can help you boost your site's PageRank.

Don't be afraid to enter your website into design competitions as well. Winning or even placing in a design competition can generate a great deal of notoriety and respect for your work. Although it's tough to achieve, winning a design competition is perhaps the best promotion your site could receive. Your site will receive inbound links not only from the competition site but also from many people who will be talking about your work on their blogs.

You can find a good list of reputable Web design competitions at <http://www.bestwebawards.com/>. A quick Google search will point you to even more competitions worth entering. As you discover design competitions, mark their deadlines on your calendar so you can be sure to submit your work on time each year.

Social Networking Sites

Because social networking sites of all kinds are so ubiquitous on the Web and often have hundreds of thousands of registered users, they are a perfect place to promote your site. If you don't have an account on any of the popular social networking sites, you might consider jumping on board with a few so you can broaden your site's exposure.

Any and all social networking sites on which you have a profile created are an opportunity to create an inbound link to your site. When you write the content of your profile, be sure to integrate some of your target keywords discussed in Chapter 4 to pick up some search traffic. Here are a few of the most popular social networking sites where you might already have a profile, but may not have added your URL and keywords yet.

- **LinkedIn** (<http://linkedin.com>): professional networking, post your resume, build business contacts
- **Flickr** (<http://flickr.com>): photo sharing
- **Digg** (<http://digg.com>): vote on and share news stories
- **YouTube** (<http://youtube.com>): share and watch video
- **Magnolia** (<http://mag.nolia.com>): organize and share your bookmarks
- **Delicious** (<http://del.icio.us>): organize and share your bookmarks

- **Facebook** (<http://facebook.com>): create a profile, and connect with friends
- **MySpace** (<http://myspace>): create a profile, and connect with friends
- **Technorati** (<http://technorati.com>): tracks blogs and user-generated content
- **Upcoming** (<http://upcoming.org>): event sharing
- **Eventful** (<http://eventful.com>): event sharing
- **Last.fm** (<http://last.fm>): log your music playlist and discover new artists

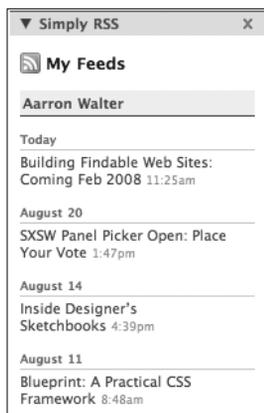


FIGURE 12.3 On my Facebook profile page I display recent posts from my blog using the Simply RSS Facebook application.

In addition to posting your URL on these sites, be sure to post your content on them where possible, as it can be the catalyst that encourages users to visit your site.

Facebook's open platform has encouraged hundreds of developers to create applications that can be added to your profile. Using one of the many free RSS reader applications you can display your blog's RSS headlines directly on your profile page—see **FIGURE 12.3** for an example. You can find some Facebook RSS apps by searching at <http://www.facebook.com/apps/>.

If your site has a calendar of events, be sure to post them on Upcoming and Eventful to boost attendance. Visitors to these sites can search for and get automatic notifications of events in their area. It's an easy way to increase awareness of your events, organization, and your site.

Become Part of a Community

Ironically, you can also generate inbound links to your site and great PR by going analog. If you have a brick-and-mortar location for your business or organization, consider hosting events for local professional organizations like AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts <http://aiga.org>) or any of the Adobe user groups (<http://www.adobe.com/support/usergroup/>).

The organizations you host at your events are likely to create links to your site, where people can get directions and learn about your company. People attending might also create inbound links to your site when blogging about the event.

The events you host don't even have to pertain to Web design. The idea is to get people to your event so they become aware of your company. When you

become part of a local community you not only build brand awareness, you also create trust and respect for what you do.

If you're not in a city where event hosting opportunities abound, or you don't have a location that would be conducive to hosting events, consider creative alternatives. Headscape (<http://headscape.co.uk>)—a Web design company located in England—contributes to the Web design community while promoting their services through their podcast called Boagworld (<http://boagworld.com>). Thousands of Web designers around the world listen to their podcast each week for news and advice on managing and building websites. According to Marcus Lillington, co-host of the Boagworld podcast, in the process of serving the community they've significantly improved the brand awareness of Headscape, and have acquired a number of new projects for the company.

“At Headscape, we used to struggle to find an effective way to promote our services,” Lillington says.

“From the very early days in '02-'03 we were keen to promote the company through providing free advice and guidance to anyone who wanted to listen. It seemed that any Web design agency providing this advice through free articles and newsletters would be held in higher esteem (and therefore more likely to win work) than those who kept their cards close to their chests.

“However, doing this via the Headscape website always felt like too much of a 'sell.' Paul decided to start his own blog (<http://boagworld.com>) in 2004 and quickly found himself writing more and more for Boagworld and less for Headscape. The Boagworld site soon became more popular than the Headscape site and we started to recognize that it was a far more powerful vehicle to promote our expertise.

“Being a creative, experimental type, Paul started to record podcasts to support his articles in 2005. After a handful of episodes I joined him and people seemed to like our light-hearted, yet hopefully still informative, style. We have recently recorded our 100th show and regularly have over 60,000 downloads a week.

“Though it is hard to measure the podcasts' effectiveness, I can think of a number of high-profile clients who have contacted us solely as a result of the podcast. Of totally new clients—i.e., those who have not contacted us via recommendation—I would estimate that easily 50 percent (probably a lot more) do so because of the Boagworld podcast. Added to this, for every new client who does not contact us because of Boagworld, the podcast and associated articles only help to underline our message and promote the Headscape brand.”

Link Exchanges

Another good way to create inbound links to your site is by exchanging links with friends and acquaintances. Create a links section on your site where you can post links to sites run by people you know and trust. When you meet people at conferences or professional events, ask to exchange links.

As Chapter 2 pointed out, there are some disreputable link exchange initiatives out there. Often link-building companies send out mass emails to the administrators of various sites asking for a reciprocal link exchange. If you begin linking to disreputable sites you could hurt your site's page rank. Stick to exchanging links with sites that you know and trust.

Don't Overlook the Obvious

As you begin new initiatives to promote your site don't forget to include your URL in existing promotional materials as well. Ironically, I've seen clients make a big push to publicize their new website, but forget to include their URL in obvious places like on their business cards. Here are a few places not to be overlooked:

- Business cards
- Brochures
- Catalogs
- Email signatures
- Letterhead and envelopes
- Radio and TV commercials

If you're going to be attending a conference, or professional event, bring plenty of cards with your URL on them to hand out to people. You can create great little promo cards more unique than a typical business card using Moo (<http://www.moo.com/>). For \$19.99 you can get 100 mini cards, each with a unique photo or design on one side, and six lines of text on the other (see **FIGURE 12.4**). You can see tons of cool ways people are using them to promote their work at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/moo>.



FIGURE 12.4 Moo (<http://moo.com>) prints handy little mini cards that are great for promoting your site at conferences and professional events. David Stone created these mini cards to promote his site <http://www.joard.com>.

Attracting Local Traffic with Local Listings

You can promote your business to your local audience by creating a local listing on Google, Yahoo, MSN Live Search, Localeze, and the online Yellow Pages. When users search on major search engines for keywords and a geographic location like a city or state, a listing will be displayed above the usual search results with your business's address and phone number along with a link to a map where the business location is clearly marked.

You can create local listings on all three major search engines for free, each following a similar signup process. After providing the necessary listing information on the respective site, you'll be mailed a postcard to the business address you provided with a PIN number or code. Once you've received the code, revisit the search engine's local listing sign up site to enter it and activate your listing.

Google Local

You can set up your Google Local listing at <http://www.google.com/local/add/>. In addition to being displayed on search results pages, your local listing will be displayed on Google Maps, and included in Goog411—Google's free phone directory for business listings (<http://www.google.com/goog411/>).

Google Local also lets you add coupons to your listing for free. Users who find your local listing can print the coupons you've created and bring them into

your business for discounts. This can help you track the business being generated by your local listing.

If your business has more than one location you can upload listing information for them all with one Excel spreadsheet file. Instructions on how to create your local listing spreadsheet can be found at <http://www.google.com/local/add/helpFeeds>.

Yahoo! Local

Create your Yahoo! Local business listing at <http://listings.local.yahoo.com/>. Yahoo! offers three versions of their local listings ranging from basic and free to a paid service that guarantees your listing will be displayed on the first or second search results page.

You'll find a detailed comparison of the three listing options at <http://listings.local.yahoo.com/comp.php>. Paid listings let you include more detailed information about your business, and provide some statistics about how often your listing is shown, and click frequency.

MSN Live Search

You can create a MSN Live Search local listing at <https://lhc.local.live.com/BusinessSearch.aspx>, but you'll have to use Firefox or Internet Explorer to do it as other browsers are not yet supported. MSN Live Search lets you post a great deal of information about your company including a description, hours of operation, and photos—all free of charge.

Localeze and Yellow Pages

In addition to creating local listings for the big three search engines, you can also submit your business's information to Localeze (<http://webapp.localeze.com/bizreg/add.aspx>), which syndicates data to a number of websites including the online Yellow Pages. MSN Live Search has in the past received their local listing data from Localeze, but are now collecting new listings themselves.

In addition to receiving local listings from Localeze, the online Yellow Pages also accept listing submissions directly. You can submit a free listing at <http://store.yellowpages.com/post/>, or select one of their paid options to include further information about your business.