

## If Your Website Isn't Worth the Monthly Fee--Restart Your Search Engines

by Leisa Good

Have you heard the story about the little girl, who worried she wouldn't be able to sell her Girl Scout cookies, without a website?

Whether this actually happened or is a satirical view of e-commerce found in an excerpt of an ongoing e-mail chain letter, we may never know. But it does seem that even crafters want to get on the website and search engine bandwagons. At your last craft show, how many times were you asked, "Do you have a website?"

With today's technology, a well-designed website and search engine registry could become a working possibility for this worried Girl Scout and us crafters as well. Everything from groceries to arts and crafts can now be sold over the Internet by simply typing a few keywords into a search engine.

Explaining why search engines are the backbone of websites is Todd Summers, a sales representative from EBStor.com: "It's like having a restaurant in the boondocks. If no one knows about it or can *find* it, they won't go there. It doesn't matter what you have on your menu."

But how do search engines work, and why are they so important?

Why do we as crafters need to understand them to promote our websites? Do we even need a website or is this just a passing trend? Will we be able to test our websites and be reassured that it reaches our target market and not some non-related group?

Without additional questions and information overload, Todd explained in layman's terms how search engines work, "Search engines take the words, which are typed into a search field, evaluate them and use 'crawlers' to find the results in company names, homepages, or paragraphs. It is always desirable to be in the top ten search results, and there are ways to register and reregister to get there."

He later went on to explain how there are different types of search engines, each with its own unique way of finding and evaluating criteria. Website registry should be done often especially after an upgrade, and a good website should be registered with at least 1,500 search engines. This number may sound high, but sometimes registering with one multiple submission site will automatically catapult your website into 450 search engines.

While all of this may sound very practical and formative, a website

owner must not lose sight of why he needs a website for his business. What does the website need to accomplish? Will it be selling products, services, or be used solely for informational purposes?

Yuvi Sidhu from Vividio.com explains, "Many times a customer will think he/she needs a full-blown website when really all he/she needs is an e-store on eBay or any similar site--just to sell a few products." Sites like eBay already do their own search engine registering, so it would save the seller the time spent on search engine registry.

Likewise if a craft store owner only wants to have a picture and map of how to get to his/her store posted to his site, he probably doesn't need a secured server added to take online credit cards. He/she may wish to take credit cards in his/her store; he/she just doesn't have the need or expense to take them online.

Owning a website should not sidetrack your business objectives, but it should serve to help narrow and define your niche and overall business goals. With this advice it is important to be selective with the search engines, catalogs, and directories in which you register. Finding online catalogs and online directories listing similar products to yours are well worth your research.

Where are all of these search engines, catalogs, and directories found? A good place to start would be with the book, *101 Ways to Promote Your Website* by Susan Sweeney. She lists some of the more popular ones such as Alta Vista and Lycos and some of the lesser known ones such as AAA1biz.

As Todd Summers explains, "No one is in love with their first website. There is always something to fix. We are all learning this new technology. So if you are unhappy with your first website, you're not alone. Just remember: Websites can always be improved in design and the content should always be updated."

Do you remember the little Girl Scout at the beginning of this article? I am sure that her freckled-face smile, decorated uniform, and special way she hands you your Thin Mints™ could never be virtually captured in cyberspace on a website or fully described in a search engine. Could she still improve her annual cookie sales volume? Maybe. Maybe with the right search engines.