

Make your site work for you

Having a website can be a great marketing tool for an artist. You must be aware that just having the site up and running is not enough: you need to make it work for you!

To have a successful website, you will need to focus on the following:

1. The site needs to be optimized for search engines
2. The site needs to be visible on the Internet
3. The site is only one component of traditional marketing and networking

1. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Google uses software known as “spiders” to crawl the web on a regular basis and find sites to add to its index very much like a library index. When you search Google, the search engine looks up its index, and the results you see are the best matches between your query and Google’s index, according to Google.

Your site will be automatically indexed, though it is not immediate: Google crawls the entire Internet to determine how to index websites. It may take anywhere from a few weeks to 2 months for your site to show up.

Making your site search engine optimized will ensure that the correct people are finding you. For example, if you are a jewelry maker, you must set up your site’s code so that the query “jewelry maker” finds your web address.

The following must be incorporated in the site for search engines:

- Determine what keywords you think people will enter as a query to search for your site or a site like yours. It is better to optimize for 2 to 3 keywords only, and to be specific.
- The title of your page (the title that is listed at the very top of the browser) must repeat those keywords
- The code must contain a description “meta tag” that repeats those keywords
- Parts of the site should contain text that repeats the keywords

The following are recommended:

- The code should have a keywords “meta tag” (although it seems that now Google ignores it)
- Every image should have an “alternative text” tag attached to it. Search engines skips images but look at all text.
- Make sure there are no broken links into your site: Google will skip indexing your site if it contains broken links
- Name your files with relevant names: instead of mytext.html, name a file resume.html

- Avoid having a site all done in Flash or in frames (which is a way of splitting up the screen into sections in html). You can use both Flash and frames, just make sure that there is enough relevant text within the site so the search engines can understand what your site is about.

If you are unsure what keywords people might use to search a site just like yours, Google has a great tool: under the advertising programs, you can create a Google account for free. Go to their Adwords page, and look under “explore Search Queries”. There you can type any keywords, find related keywords, and see which ones are most frequently used. You can then use these keywords within the content description of your site, and you can make sure that those keywords also appear throughout the text of your site.

Make sure your keywords are not too general: American realist portrait artist is actually a much better string for a keyword than just Artist.

2. Increasing your visibility on the Internet

It is not enough to have a search engine index your site with the correct keywords, your ranking will matter as well. Ranking is where you appear in the search engine result: are you on the first page, or are you on page # 2, 987?

Ranking is determined by the popularity of your site. Your site is deemed popular when your URL is listed on other sites. The more sites “point” to you, the more popular you are, the better your ranking will be.

Here are a few suggestions to increase your ranking for free:

- Submit your site to web directories: [onewaytextlink](#) lists hundreds of web directories which are maintained by human editors. Submit only to free directories and directories that do not require a reciprocal link.
- Submit to directories relevant to your profession: if you are a jewelry maker, search for jewelry directories and submit your site.
- List your site with associations: alumni directories, artist registries, local and state arts councils, chambers of commerce, etc.
- Write relevant articles to your trade and use a free online publishing service. Examples of those are [ideamarketers.com](#), [ezinearticles.com](#), [searchwarp.com](#), [goarticles.com](#) [artsymmetry.com](#).
- Participate on online forums, making sure that you sign your post with your name and your URL
- Exchange links with your co-workers, family and friends (people you trust): post a link to their site in exchange for your link on theirs

Here are a few suggestions to increase your ranking for a fee:

- Both Google and Yahoo have paid services to have your site listed in a premium spot. The service is called pay-per-click, and is tied to your choice of keywords. You are charged every time your site shows up and someone clicks on your link. Both Google and Yahoo have a monthly spending limit, so you don't run up an exorbitant bill for promotion. This is best used if you have a product-based website i.e. you sell jewelry, or handmade cards for example.

3. Traditional marketing and networking

Even if your site is search optimized with a perfect ranking, you still need to use your website in conjunction with traditional marketing. A website is a perfect tool in many ways, because it lets anybody in the world see your work for free.

Here are some marketing suggestions to promote your site:

- Have business cards printed with your contact information and your website address. Be very liberal in giving those away. Give them to co-workers, casual acquaintances at openings, your doctor, your dentist, your accountant, your banker
- Have an electronic signature with your name and URL: every email you send out should have that information.
- Consider sending regular updates to your mailing list (and keep a mailing list). Let them know when you have updated your site with new work, or when you have received a grant, an award, a public commission.
- Consider soliciting potential collectors or buyers with an email and a website link: it's easy for people to click, and won't cost you a dime