

Can Your Customer Find You?

Chip Cummings, CMC



If you needed to locate a complete stranger by tomorrow, could you do it? Suppose that they had some specialized product or service that you had to have, but that you had nothing more than simply a name - what would you do first? Call information? Check the newspaper or Yellow Pages? How about the web?

It's no secret that more and more people are turning to the Internet for fast, easy access to information. But if your customers needed to find you, have you ever stopped to wonder how easy (or difficult) that might be? As originators, we spend thousands of dollars making sure that customers, real estate agents, CPA's and potential clients know our names; we place ads in newspapers and phone books galore; local radio and TV; and all sorts of other gimmicks to create identity in the marketplace so people will call us first. But what have we missed?

With the access and use of technology growing at a phenomenal pace, and almost 84% of all initial website hits coming from customer information searches through search engines (according to Yahoo!), it's easy to see why we need to have a presence on the web. But presence alone doesn't cut it. If a real estate agent in Dallas is looking to refer a client to someone in your hometown and searches for Internet resources, do you think you'd make the top 10 list? How about even the top 100? Try looking up mortgages, and you'll find that there are over 13 million sites to choose from! For Dallas mortgages alone there are over 221,000 possibilities! What are you missing when it comes to this basic yet powerful resource?

To find out, take this simple test. Go to www.google.com or and type your name into the "Search" box. What results does the search engine show? Now type your company name in, or better yet, enter your city + mortgages (such as Cleveland+Mortgages). Now try the same thing at www.msn.com, www.ask.com and www.yahoo.com (these are the most popular search sites). Is your name or website even listed? Pretty scary thought, huh.....

If your customer doesn't remember your exact website address, or misplaced your phone number, or doesn't WANT to call you because it's 2:00am (thank you), you need to make sure it's easy for them to find you on the web with just a couple of clicks. Here we look at just a couple of tricks to make sure that customers will find you when searching the largest database there is - the Internet.

Domain Names

The first step is so simple, many people tend to overlook it - your domain name. When setting up your site name, make it simple and memorable. Use a dot-com extension with the simple spelling of your company name whenever possible (www.abcmortgage.com). Customers will not check other extensions such as .net, .cc, etc. Think about it, if you wanted to find information about a BMW automobile, where is the first place you would look - www.BMW.com, right? If the name of your company is easily misspelled, make sure that you have also reserved the

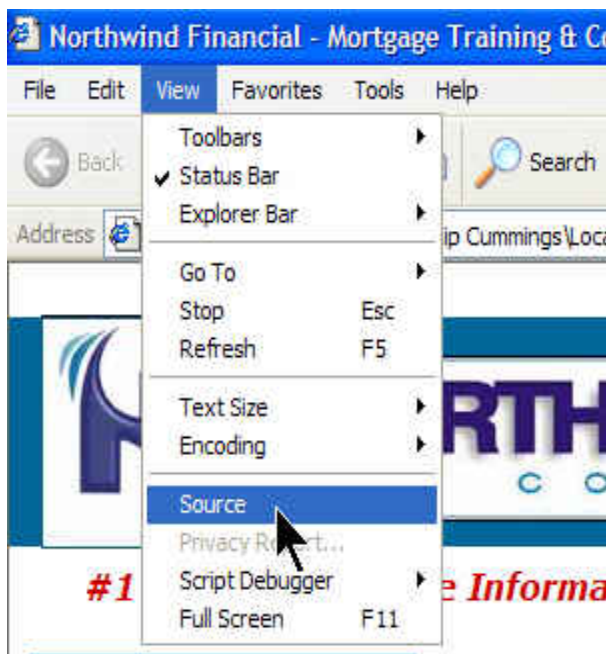
domain names for those misspellings, and forward them into your main website address (such as www.thompsonmortgage.com and www.thomsonmortgage.com and maybe www.tomsonmortgage.com). As originators, you should also reserve YOUR name as a domain name, such as www.johnthompson.com. When someone is looking for me, they will naturally find me at www.chipcummings.com, which will then forward into my main website or webpage. Search engines will first look for actual website addresses that match the search request input by a customer, so that's where you need to start.

The Secret Ingredients

If the domain name were the only ingredient for successful searches, the process would be simple. Unfortunately, there are a few more things that have to go into the mix to insure you get a top ten billing. Be patient though, as the “spiders” and “robots” that search and crawl through websites to feed the search engines take time to find and recognize your websites' secret ingredients.

In training and consulting on technology marketing strategies with companies across the country, we've identified 17 “key ingredients” to making sure that you get a top billing when it comes to the Internet search engines (and they all work a little differently). Here are four simple ones to get started:

1. Make sure that your company name is located in the title of your web page so search engines can find it! This is the line that appears in the top title bar section when you view a webpage. For example, your page source code (html) should contain the following line - `<TITLE> ABC Financial – Conventional and FHA Residential Mortgage Loans Throughout Michigan </TITLE>`. To view the source code of any webpage from your browser, just go to VIEW and then SOURCE (see below), and read the first few sections.



2. Have a separate webpage off of your main website that is specific to YOU as an originator. Use your name in the TITLE header description (as above), replacing the company name with your name.
3. Create “meta tags” for your page “description” and “key words” that the search engines will match with your name, title and services. Include the specific key words in each meta. As an example, you should see this included in your webpage source

code:

```
<meta name="Description" content="Experienced mortgage professionals providing residential mortgage loans throughout Michigan, including conventional and FHA lending.">
```

```
<meta name="keywords" content="mortgage loans, ABC Financial, Michigan loans, Chip Cummings, Michigan conventional mortgage, residential financing, Michigan FHA loans,.....">, as well as other appropriate keywords and phrases.
```

The rules for “keywords” are pretty simple – don’t repeat any keyword in the Meta Keywords tag more than three times, and don’t repeat any one keyword right after each other.

4. Make sure to use your company name and your own name several (3-5 times) within the body text of your webpage. The search engines will check to see if your key words and phrases are used as part of the content, and will rank your information much higher. Don’t overuse this though, as then it will count against you.

Once the construction of the pages is done, then they have to be submitted to the various search engines so that your information can be “found”. There are specific guidelines and tips for submissions as well (which we’ll cover in a future article), but you don’t need to spend a lot of money to get your website listed. You do have to spend some time though, but the rewards are well worth it.

Remember that the increased visibility of your name from a customer search will take a little time, as the “web crawlers” like Inktomi (which feeds over 300 engines including AOL, MSN, HotBot, NBCi, iWon, etc.), find, sort and rank your information.

Getting your website listed on a search engine just isn’t enough. Out of all the results that come up for a search, people will generally look at only the first 10-15 entries on the list. Make sure that when your customer is surfing, searching and looking, that you are near the top of that list – or they might just click on your competitor!

Chip Cummings, CMC is President of Northwind Financial Corp., originator and a national speaker, trainer and consultant to the mortgage industry. He can be reached at (866) 977-7900, or via e-mail at chipcummings@northwindfinancial.com

"Advanced Sales Strategies – Producing Advanced Personal Success"

