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Local Search: Raking In Business From Your Own Backyard

Thomas Fox is president of Tech Experts, southeast Michigan's leading small business computer support company.

So you're in the mood for a pizza. You turn to Google (because no one uses phone books anymore). Instantly, 10 local pizza shops are displayed in your search results. You order. It's a win-win. You have your pizza, and the pizza parlor shop has your business.

What made this so easy? Local search - a type of search engine query that's intended to produce local information, often about nearby businesses, products and services. What it does is help customers in your own town, city and neighborhood find you quickly and easily.

All of the big players - Google, Yahoo and Bing - have local search capabilities. So do the Internet Yellow Pages, various business aggregation sites and review sites, as well as directories created specifically for different cities.

As you can imagine, there are several business directories for Monroe. One of the best is: http://business-finder.mlive.com/MI-Monroe.

I want my local listing!

How do you get your company listed? There are two ways: Navigate the process of submitting your business information to each of the local search engines yourself or save some time and hassle by hiring professionals to do it for you. Either way, getting listed on local search doesn't happen automatically.

So many directories, so little time.

It's not a matter of if you should submit your business information to a local search directory, it's a matter of choosing which ones. To help you make the best decision, consider:

Location. Be sure to understand which geographic region or regions the directory serves. Some are very specific, while other serve a larger geographic area. Check to see if you're able to list your company within a radius of your zip code.

Price. Many directories are free, or charge a nominal fee to enhance your listing or include additional information. If it's free, why not list? If there's a cost, make sure you understand what extras you're getting for your dollars.

Relevance. Make sure a relevant category exists for your business. Some directories focus on a single industry, like hotels.

If you own a gourmet restaurant, you don't want to be listed under fast food. Be thorough. If the specific category doesn't exist, don't list there.

Popularity. One characteristic of a good local search directory is the amount of traffic it gets. More traffic potentially means more potential people will find you.

A quick way to determine this is to go to a web traffic metrics site, like Alexa (http://www.alexa.com/). The higher the ranking, the busier the site.

No matter what you're selling - computers, sandwiches or shoes - local search can help bring local customers to your door.

That is, people who could possibly return again, generating repeat business, and who will tell their friends and family about your company. First, they need to be able to find you. Think about the last time you used a phone book, versus a search engine. Local search is where you need to be.

> *"No matter what you're selling - computers, sandwiches or shoes - local search can help bring local customers to your door."*

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Need help? Call the Tech Experts 24 hour computer emergency hotline at (734) 240-0200.

Legit Or Bogus? How To Spot A Rogue Anti-Virus Program

Corey Bogedain is a network technician and web developer with Tech Experts.

Have you seen an advertisement or pop-up offering a free PC scan, or telling you that your computer is infected and at risk? If so, you've seen first hand a harmful trojan disguised as an anti-virus program.

These types of rogue anti-virus scams are on the rise. They appear legitimate, and the number one way unsuspecting users get infected is from clicking a malicious link in the pop-up message. Most of these pop-ups have what sound like legitimate virus names, and some even ask you to pay for the program.

They will almost always have a notice indicating you need to "click here" to install the program to disinfect your PC. Once you click on that link, you're infected.

To take it a step further, if you actually do enter your credit card information, the hackers have your personal data and can use it at will.

I have anti-virus. Won't that protect me?

Though the best anti-virus programs will protect you from many threats they can not protect you against all malware, especially the newer infections.

There are millions of different types of infections and hundreds created every day. Even top of the line security companies take days and even weeks to catch the infections.

What can a rogue anti-virus program do?

An infection can do almost anything to a computer, from stealing information to destroying your valuable data. Some malware will log your password information and use it to try to infect other computers on your network.

Some infections will let your computer be used as a "bot," which lets attackers use it to share illegal files, attack other systems on the Internet, or spread infections to your friends and family.

How do I protect myself?

Here are some basic tips to keep yourself from being a victim of a rogue anti-virus program.

1. Keep your computer updated with the latest security patches for your operating system and web browser.

2. Never click on a pop-ups that you come across on a website. Even if the advertisement looks legitimate, chances are it isn't.

3. Check to make sure your Internet firewall and anti-virus are updated every time you use your computer.
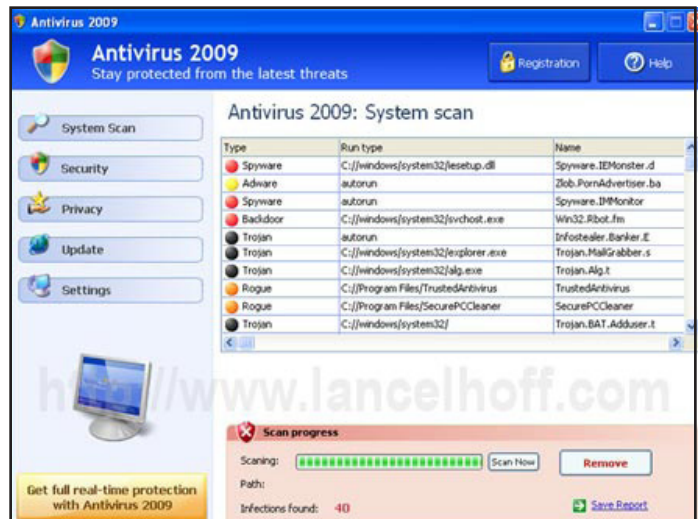
Fake Antivirus 2009 messages vary from a fake Google Tips area displayed when visiting the Google homepage saying that "Google recommends you activate Antivirus 2009," to a simple line of text toward the top of your browser telling you that an infection was found.

4. Turn off any Active-X and scripting from foreign websites. Many of the infections come from these types of scripts. Almost always, your system will ask you if you want to run the script. Always pick "no."

5. Keep a good backup. Some infections can be so severe that you will need to restore files for your PC to be disinfected and repaired properly.

6. Scan your computer on a regular basis. Most anti-virus programs will do this automatically. AVG is a very good program that will scan every day, and can be set to run at night so it doesn't slow down your work.

Sit Back And Relax. We'll Do The Driving

Remote support software put a technician at your desk, without ever leaving the office

Robert Saylors is senior network technician and a hardware specialist with Tech Experts.

It goes without saying that nearly everyone has a computer not only in their office, but also in their home. Just about everyone has experienced a problem at one time or another, and many times, the problem can be pretty simple to resolve once a technician starts working on it.

Larger companies have IT staff that can address and fix most problems in person because they are in the same building as the system with the problem.

Small to medium size businesses, however, generally can't justify having someone on staff to resolve PC issues when they come up. Home computer users often have to carry their machines in for service.

In the past, clients would call us with a problem, perhaps an error message that pops up when they try to open a document. The technician would try to ask the right questions, and try to visualize what the client was experiencing so we could resolve the problem.

Home users would have to disconnect their system (taking care to remember exactly where the cords plug in) and bring the machine into our office for service. It isn't very convenient, and trying to remember how everything plugs back together can be a real problem.

Well, all of that has changed now! You can sit back at let us drive your computer using remote control.

We've invested in software that lets our technician view and operate your computer remotely, without you ever having to bring it in for service, or have a technician come on site. Nearly everyone has high speed Internet now, so the software runs very quickly and efficiently.

This remote management software makes diagnosing a problem a lot easier and quicker than before. Our remote control software is encrypted for security (your data is never sent over the Internet unprotected) and requires that you give permission in order for it to work. It's very safe and secure.

Once connected to your computer, the technician can view your desktop and take control of your system. He sees the same screens you do, including any error messages. It is just like having one of our highly trained technicians sitting right there with you.

Our clients have found this remote support software to be one of the most time saving and useful tools in our technology toolbox.

Unfortunately, for problems that are more in-depth, or hardware related, remote control doesn't work. For simple error messages or software issues, sit back and let our technicians help you remotely.

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The Tech Experts technical services team blogs about changes in the IT industry, tips on keeping your network safe, and other useful information at www.ExpertsGuys.com.

Tech Experts president Thomas Fox shares thoughts on small business computing and using technology to grow your company at www.ExpertTechTips.com

Questions About Cloud Computing? Hosted Services 101

Ryan Seymour is a PC hardware specialist and the Tech Experts Service Manager.

With cloud computing taking off the way it has in the information technology field, hosted services are becoming widely implemented, more and more each and every day. So what are hosted services?

Hosted services are a wide variety of IT functions including: email hosting, web hosting, storage, security, monitoring, applications, (SaaS) and infrastructure over the Internet or other wide area networks (WAN).

Email Hosting

This type of service offers premium email at a cost rather than using advertising supported free email, or webmail (IE: Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail, AOL, etc.).

Email hosting allows for custom configurations, as well as supporting a large number of accounts. Another great benefit that people love is the fact that you can have your email with your own custom domain name.

For example, instead of JSmith@ yahoo.com, you can have JSmith@ (yourcompanyname).com.

Security can be enhanced with this service, from spam filtering, to custom platforms and policies.

Hosted email is far more customizable then a traditional free email

solutions. Most companies that provide email hosting also provide web hosting.

Web Hosting

This service lets users publish personal or professional websites, and make them available via the World Wide Web.

The hosted service provider is basically providing the customer with server space to store the various information, videos, audio, and image files, as well as management and backup services for their websites.

Remote Backup

This service provides users with an online system for backing up computer files and storing them. We covered remote backup service in our September newsletter (www. TechTidBit.com).

Typically, remote backup software would run on a schedule, and backup files daily, compress,

encrypt, and sends the files to our servers via the Internet.

The beauty of a remote backup service is the fact that the client does not have to worry about switching and labeling tapes, or any manual steps what so ever.

Disaster recovery takes it a step further, and is able to take a backup image, and virtualizes your entire server. In the event of a server crash or other disaster, the service provider can have your server back online and fully functional within hours.

Hosted services are here to stay, due to their ability to minimize IT and training costs, control and predict your costs, remotely monitor/manage the infrastructure, and maximize the changing business needs and requirements, allowing the business to focus on its operations, and core growth rather than their computer networks.