

Chapter 1

Surveying the Search Engine Landscape

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering where people search
- ▶ Understanding the difference between search sites and search systems
- ▶ Distilling thousands of search sites down to about a dozen search systems
- ▶ Preparing your search strategy

You've got a problem. You want people to visit your Web site; that's the purpose, after all, to bring people to your site to buy your products, or learn about them, or hear about the cause you support, or for whatever other purpose you've built the site. So you've decided you need to get traffic from the search engines — not an unreasonable conclusion, as you find out in this chapter. But there are *so many* search engines! There are the obvious ones, the Googles, AOLs, Yahoos!, and MSNs of the world, but you've probably also heard of others — HotBot, Dogpile, Inktomi, Ask Jeeves, Netscape, EarthLink, LookSmart . . . even Amazon provides a Web search on almost every page. There's Lycos and InfoSpace, Teoma and WiseNut, Mamma.com, and Web-Crawler. To top it all off, you've seen advertising asserting that for only \$49.95 (or \$19.95, or \$99.95, or whatever sum seems to make sense to the advertiser), you too can have your Web site listed in hundreds, nay, thousands of search engines. You may have even used some of these services, only to discover that the flood of traffic you were promised turns up missing.

Well, I've got some good news. You can forget almost all the names I just listed — well, at least you can after you've read this chapter. The point of this chapter is to take a complicated landscape of thousands of search sites and whittle it down into the small group of search systems that really matter. (Search sites? Search systems? Don't worry, I explain the distinction in a moment.)

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If you really want to, you can jump to the end of the chapter to see the list of search systems you need to worry about and ignore the details. But I've found that, when I give this list to people, they look at me like I'm crazy because they've never heard of most of the names, and they know that some popular search sites aren't on the list. This chapter explains why.

What Are Search Engines and Directories?

The term *search engine* has become the predominant term for *search system* or *search site*, but before reading any further, you need to understand the different types of search, um, thingies, you're going to run across. Basically, you need to know about four thingies:

- ✓ **Search indexes or search engines:** These are the predominant type of search tools you'll run across. Originally, the term *search engine* referred to some kind of search index, a huge database containing information from individual Web sites. Google's vast index (www.google.com) contains over 3 *billion* pages, for instance. Large search-index companies own thousands of computers that use software known as *spiders* or *robots* (or just plain *bots* — Google's software is known as *Googlebot*) to grab Web pages and read the information stored in them. These systems don't always grab all the information on each page or all the pages in a Web site, but they grab a significant amount of information and use complex algorithms to index that information. Google, shown in Figure 1-1, is the world's most popular search engine.
- ✓ **Search directories:** A *directory* is a categorized collection of information about Web sites. Rather than containing information *from* Web *pages*, it contains information *about* Web *sites*. The most significant search directories are owned by Yahoo! (dir.yahoo.com) and the Open Directory Project (www.dmoz.org). (You can see an example of the Open Directory Project, displayed in Google, in Figure 1-2.) Directory companies don't use spiders or bots to download and index pages on the Web sites in the directory; rather, for each Web site, the directory contains information such as a title and description. The two most important directories, Yahoo! and Open Directory, have staff members who examine all the sites in the directory to make sure they are placed into the correct categories and meet certain quality criteria. Smaller directories often allow people submitting sites to specify which category should be used.

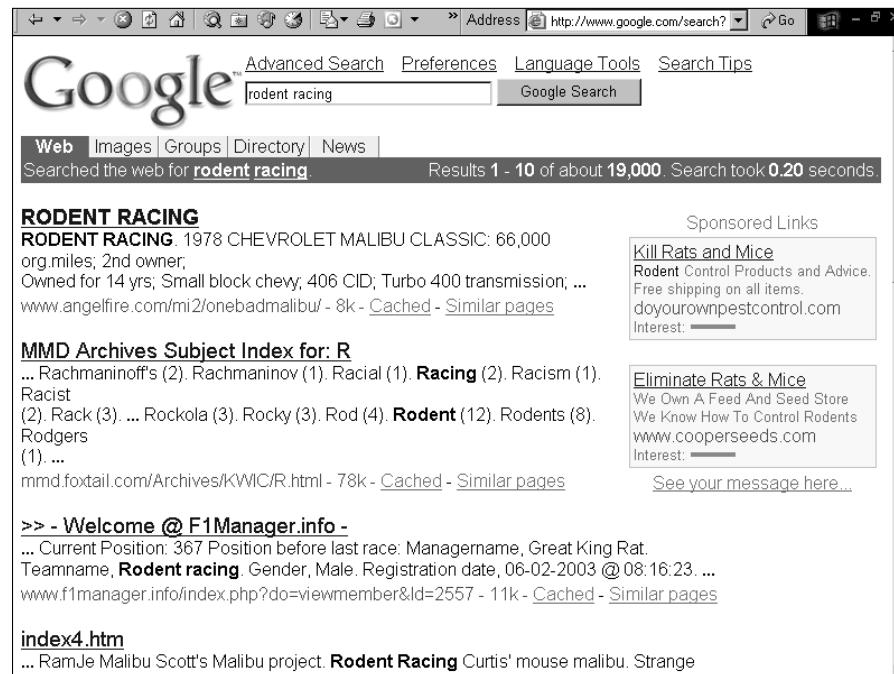


Here's how to see the difference between Yahoo!'s search results and the Yahoo! directory. Go to www.yahoo.com, type a word into the Search box, and click the Search button. The list of Web sites that appears is what Yahoo! calls the Yahoo! Search results, which are currently provided by

Google. But notice the Directory tab at the top of the page; or, underneath some of the search results, you see a line that says something like *More Sites about: Arthritis*. Click either the tab or link, and you end up in the Yahoo! Directory. (You can go directly to the directory by using `dir.yahoo.com`.)

- ✓ **Non-spidered indexes:** I wasn't sure what to call these things, so I made up a name: non-spidered indexes. A number of small indexes, less important than the major indexes such as Google, don't use spiders to examine the full contents of each page in the index. Rather, the index contains background information about each page, such as titles, descriptions, and keywords. In some cases, this information comes from the meta tags pulled off the pages in the index. (I tell you about meta tags in Chapter 2.) In other cases, the person who enters the site into the index provides this information. A number of the smaller systems discussed in Chapter 10 are of this type.
- ✓ **Pay-per-click systems:** Some systems provide pay-per-click listings. Advertisers place small ads into the systems, and when users perform their searches, the results contain some of these sponsored listings, typically above and to the right of the free listings. Pay-per-click systems are discussed in more detail in Chapter 15.

Figure 1-1:
Results from
Google, the
world's most
popular
search
engine.



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Figure 1-2: Google also has a search directory, but it doesn't create the directory itself; it gets it from the Open Directory Project.



Keeping the terms straight

Here are a few additional terms that you see scattered throughout the book:

- ✓ **Search site:** A Web site at which you can search through some kind of index or directory of Web sites, or perhaps both an index and directory. (In some cases, search sites allow you to search through multiple indices.) Google.com, AOL.com, and EarthLink.com are all search sites.
- ✓ **Search system:** An organization that possesses a combination of software, hardware, and people that is used to index or categorize Web sites — they build the index or directory you search through at a search site. Google is a search system, but AOL.com and EarthLink.com are not. In fact, if you go to AOL.com or EarthLink.com and search, you actually get Google search results.

Google and the Open Directory Project provide search results to hundreds of search sites. In fact, most of the world's search sites get their search results from elsewhere (see Figure 1-3).

- ✓ **Search results:** The information returned to you (the results of your search) when you go to a search site and search for something. Remember that in many cases, the search results don't come from the search site you're using, but from some other search system.

Why bother with search engines?

Why bother using search engines? Because search engines represent the single most important source of new Web site visitors.

You may have heard that most Web site visits begin at a search engine. Well, this is not true. It was true several years ago, and many people continue to use these outdated statistics because they sound good — “80 percent of all Web site visitors reach the site through a search engine,” for instance. However, in 2003, that claim was finally put to rest. The number of search-originated site visits dropped below the 50-percent mark. Most Web site visitors reach their destinations by either typing a URL — a Web address — into their browsers and going there directly or by clicking a link on another site that takes them there. Most visitors do not reach their destinations by starting at the search engines.

Figure 1-3:
Look carefully, and you'll see that many search sites get their search results from other search systems.



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However, search engines are still extremely important for a number of reasons:

- ✓ At the time of writing, almost 50 percent of site visits begin at the search engines. Sure, it's not 80 percent, but it's still a lot of traffic.
- ✓ Of the over 50 percent of visits that don't originate at a search engine, a large proportion are revisits — people who know exactly where they want to go. This is not new business; it's repeat business. Most *new* visits come through the search engines, making search engines the single most important source of new visitors to Web sites.
- ✓ Some studies indicate that a large number of buyers begin at the search engine. That is, of all the people who go online planning to buy something or looking for product information while planning a purchase, perhaps over 80 percent start at the search engines.
- ✓ The search engines represent a cheap way to reach people. In general, you get more bang for your buck going after free search engine traffic than almost any other form of advertising or marketing.

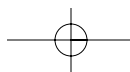
Where Do People Search?

You can search for Web sites at many places. Literally thousands of sites, in fact, provide the ability to search the Web. (What you may not realize, however, is that all these sites search only a small subset of the World Wide Web.)

However, most searches are carried out at just a small number of search sites. How do the world's most popular search sites rank? That depends on how you measure popularity: the percentage of Internet users who visit a site (audience reach); the total number of visitors; the total number of searches carried out at a site; or the total number of hours that visitors spend searching at the site. Each measurement provides a slightly different ranking, though all provide a similar picture, with the same sites appearing on the list, though some in slightly different positions.

The following list runs down the world's most popular search sites, based on the total search hours at each site during a one-month period, as compiled in a 2003 Nielsen/NetRatings study:

Google.com	18,700,000 hours
AOL.com	15,500,500 hours
Yahoo.com	7,100,000 hours
MSN.com	5,400,000 hours
AskJeeves.com	2,300,000 hours



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InfoSpace.com	1,100,000 hours
AltaVista.com	800,000 hours
Overture.com	800,000 hours
Netscape.com	700,000 hours
EarthLink.com	400,000 hours
LookSmart.com	200,000 hours
Lycos.com	200,000 hours

Remember, this is a list of search sites, not search systems. In some cases, the sites have own their own systems. Google provides its own search results, but AOL and MSN do not. (AOL gets its results from Google, and MSN's results come from Inktomi, a company owned by Yahoo! — at least at the time of this writing.)

The fact that some sites get results from other search systems means two things. First, the numbers in the preceding list are somewhat misleading. They suggest that Google has around a third of all the search hours. But Google also feeds AOL its results — add AOL's hours to Google's, and you've got almost *two thirds* of all search hours. Clearly the Google search system is far more important than the Google search site. In fact, the Google search system also feeds four more systems on this list — Yahoo!, Ask Jeeves, Netscape, and EarthLink — and many smaller sites that don't appear on this list. Some estimates put Google's share of the Web's search results as high as 75 or 80 percent. (That statistic will change soon, perhaps even by the time you read this, as you find out a little later in this chapter — Yahoo will stop using Google results soon.)

The second thing to understand is that you can ignore some of these systems. At present, for example, and for the foreseeable future, you don't need to worry about AOL.com. Even though it's probably the world's second most important search site, you can forget about it. Sure, keep it in the back of your mind, but as long as you remember that Google feeds AOL, you need to worry about Google only.

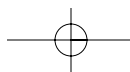
When you get to the search sites that appear below Lycos in the preceding list, the sites become dramatically less important. Google, according to this chart, has almost 100 times the search hours spent at Lycos. And the first 11 sites on this list combined have 265 times the search hours of Lycos. (However, as I explain in a moment, this list doesn't include some important search *systems*.)

Now reexamine the list of the world's most important search sites and see what you remove so you can get closer to a list of sites you care about. Check out Table 1-1 for the details.

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Table 1-1 Big-Time Search Sites		
<i>Search Site</i>	<i>On the List?</i>	<i>Description</i>
Google.com	Yes	Google's the big kid on the block. Lots of people search the Google index on its own search site, <i>and</i> it feeds many sites. Obviously Google has to stay on the list.
AOL.com	No	Fuggetaboutit — AOL gets search results from Google (although it manipulates them slightly, presenting them in a different way from the same search at Google itself) and from the Open Directory Project.
Yahoo.com	Yes	Yahoo! gets results from Google, Inktomi, and Overture, and although it doesn't feed any other sites, it does have its own search system (a search directory in fact), so keep it on the list.
MSN.com	No	At the time of writing, MSN gets results from Inktomi; remove it from the list.
AskJeeves.com	Yes	Ask Jeeves gets its search results from Teoma, but because it owns Teoma, I refer to the search system throughout the book as Teoma/Ask Jeeves (and keep it on the list of important search systems). It also gets search results from Google and the Open Directory Project. Teoma/Ask Jeeves feeds results to many other search sites, too.
InfoSpace.com	No	InfoSpace gets its results from FAST/AlltheWeb and doesn't feed any other systems, so it's out.
AltaVista.com	Yes	AltaVista is owned by Overture, which is now owned by Yahoo! AltaVista has its own search system. Although AltaVista doesn't feed any other sites currently, it seems likely that it may be feeding results to Yahoo! at some point in the future, so keep it on the list.
Overture.com	No	Overture is primarily a pay-per-click (PPC) system, without its own non-advertising search system, so it gets its non-ad results from Inktomi.



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<i>Search Site</i>	<i>On the List?</i>	<i>Description</i>
Netscape.com	No	Netscape gets results from Google and the Open Directory Project (Netscape owns the Open Directory Project, though). Netscape is pretty much a clone of Google, so there's no need to keep it on the list.
EarthLink.com	No	Another Google clone, EarthLink gets all its results from Google and the Open Directory Project, so it's out too.
LookSmart.com	No	LookSmart is another PPC system. It gets non-ad results from Inktomi and Zeal (and maybe, soon, from Grub).
Lycos.com	No	Lycos gets results from FAST/AlltheWeb and the Open Directory Project, so you can remove it from the list.

Based on the information in Table 1-1, you can whittle down your list of sites to four: Google, Yahoo!, Ask Jeeves, and AltaVista. These four search sites are all important, and Google is also an important search system, feeding three quarters of the world's search results to AOL, Yahoo!, Netscape, EarthLink, and many other search sites. Teoma/Ask Jeeves is an important search-system feeder, too, providing results to many smaller search sites.



Okay, so you visited one or two of the sites that you just crossed off and found that you *can* submit your Web site to the index at that site. What's going on here is that the search site is selling paid inclusion into the search system that feeds it. (I talk about paid inclusion in Chapter 9.) When you pay Lycos to submit your site, for example, Lycos takes your money and then places your site into FAST/AlltheWeb — which isn't a Lycos search system. Lycos is simply acting as a reseller.



Some important *systems* are not important *sites*. For example, MSN, one of the world's most important search sites, gets its search results from Inktomi and LookSmart. To take this into account, make the following changes to your list:

- ✓ Add Inktomi to the list. It's not a search site itself — you can't search Inktomi's index at Inktomi.com — but it's an important search system, feeding not only MSN but also Overture and LookSmart.
- ✓ Leave LookSmart off the list because it gets its results from Inktomi and Zeal. However, you better add Zeal to the list.

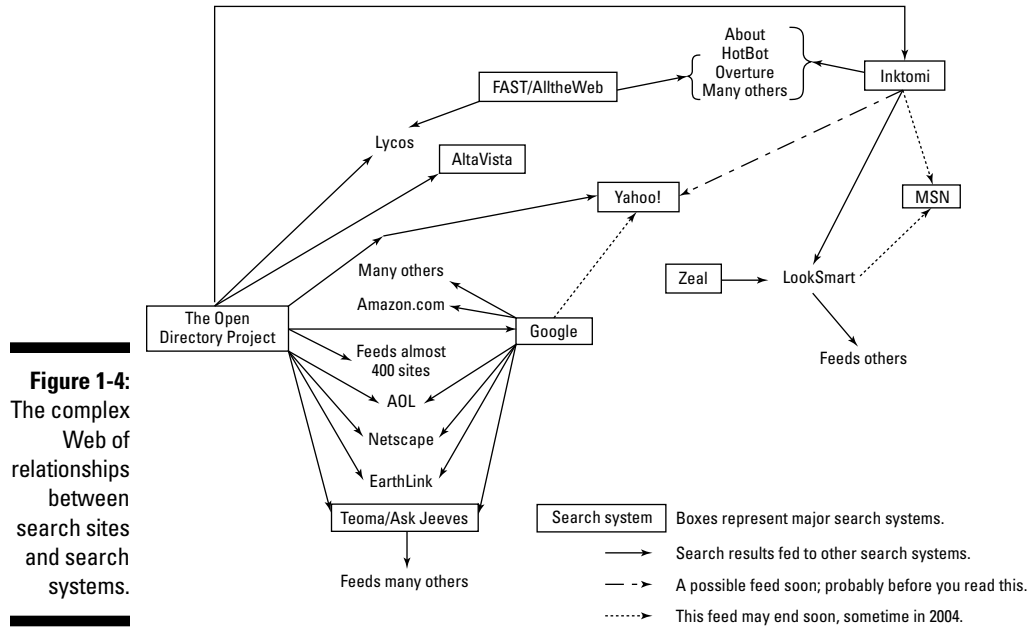
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Now add the most important feeder systems to a “new and improved” chart. The chart becomes a combination of the four important search sites that maintain their own search systems — and, in a couple of cases, feed others — and the most important feeder systems: Inktomi, the Open Directory Project, FAST/AlltheWeb, and Zeal. Table 1-2 shows the chart in all its glory.

Table 1-2 The Search Systems to Watch	
<i>Search Site/System</i>	<i>Description</i>
Google.com	This is the world’s most important search site and the most important feeder system.
Yahoo.com	Yahoo.com doesn’t feed anyone, but it’s still the world’s second most important search site.
Teoma/Ask Jeeves	Not only is this an important search site, but the search system also feeds sites such as About.com, Mamma.com, and many others.
AltaVista.com	It doesn’t feed anyone right now but may feed Yahoo! soon. It is still an important search site in its own right.
Inktomi	Inktomi feeds MSN — an important site, of course — Overture, and LookSmart. It also feeds sites such as About, HotBot, goo, and many sites you may never have heard of.
The Open Directory Project	This is not much of a search site — few people have even heard of it — but it’s a helluva search system, feeding Google, AOL, Ask Jeeves, Netscape, EarthLink, Lycos, and almost 400 other sites. (You can find it at www.dmoz.org .)
FAST/AlltheWeb	<p>This system feeds InfoSpace and Lycos, but it also feeds many other systems, such as Excite, HotBot, Terra.com, Overture, and many more. AlltheWeb is a search site, and it owns the technology known as FAST, so I refer to it as FAST/AlltheWeb and don’t get into the distinction that FAST actually <i>feeds</i> AlltheWeb.</p> <p>FAST/AlltheWeb is owned by Overture, which in turn is owned by Yahoo! And the FAST/AlltheWeb index is huge, rivaling that of Google — with billions of pages — so it’s likely to be part of Yahoo!’s strategy to dump Google.</p>
Zeal	Zeal feeds LookSmart (in fact LookSmart owns Zeal), but only for noncommercial sites. If you have a commercial site, the only way into LookSmart is through Inktomi or by buying PPC placement (which I explain in Chapter 15).

You can get an idea of this complex Web of relationships in Figure 1-4.



Aren't I missing some sites?

Some of you may be thinking, "Aren't you missing some sites? What happened to HotBot, Mamma.com, WebCrawler, Dogpile, and all the other systems that were so well known a few years ago?" A lot of them have disappeared or have turned over a new leaf and are pursuing other opportunities. For example, Northern Light, a system well known in the late 1990s, now "provides search and content integration solutions for enterprises and individuals." In other words, it sells search software. And in the cases in which the search sites are still running, they're mostly fed by other search systems. Mamma.com, HotBot, and MetaCrawler get search results from Teoma/Ask Jeeves, for instance, and About.com gets results from Inktomi.

Multiple feeds

Are you getting confused yet about how all the major search systems are related? Don't worry; the picture will become clearer. A complex Web of relationships between the major search systems exists. Here's a rundown of different types of search-result feeds:

- ✓ **Primary:** Not surprisingly, a primary feed is one in which a search system feeds the most important results to a search site. The primary feed at AOL.com, for example, comes from Google.

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- ✓ **Secondary:** Secondary feeds, sometimes known as *backfill*, are ones in which a search system feeds to a search site results that may or may not appear; in some cases, secondary feeds appear if the primary feed is unable to find good matches for a search. Inktomi, owned by Yahoo!, provides secondary feeds to sites such as Excite, LookSmart, and Overture.
- ✓ **Directory:** Some search sites combine both an index and a directory. Yahoo! gets its index results from Google but builds its own directory. Google, on the other hand, builds its own index but gets directory results from the Open Directory Project.
- ✓ **PPC:** PPC (pay-per-click) results are basically ads — search results that appear because the Web site owners are willing to pay each time someone clicks the link. Google provides PPC results to many sites, including AOL, Netscape, Ask Jeeves, and Amazon. Yahoo! gets its PPC results from Overture, a company it recently purchased. For more on PPC, see Chapter 15.

What the Future Holds — The List Expands

The centerpiece of this chapter is the handy-dandy list of top-flight search sites and systems, some of which you may never have heard of. Trust me; they're either important search sites or feed important sites or many smaller sites. In case you missed it, here are these sites and systems more or less in order of importance:

- ✓ Google
- ✓ Yahoo!
- ✓ The Open Directory Project
- ✓ Inktomi
- ✓ Teoma/Ask Jeeves
- ✓ AltaVista.com
- ✓ FAST/AlltheWeb
- ✓ Zeal

Why is the Open Directory Project — not exactly a household name — so high on the list, higher than some of the top search sites? The Open Directory Project feeds Google, AOL, Ask Jeeves, Netscape, EarthLink, Lycos, and many more. Also, Inktomi is high on the list because it feeds MSN, which is the world's fourth most important search system.

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This list is likely to change soon. My prescient predictions are summarized in the following list:

- ✓ **Yahoo! dumps Google.** This event won't change the list, but it will change the importance of several players on the list. At the time of writing, Yahoo! has already started dumping Google, and will probably complete the process by the middle of 2004. Most of the search results at Yahoo.com currently come from Google. But Yahoo! now owns Inktomi, AltaVista, and the immense FAST/AlltheWeb index.

Yahoo! has begun experimenting with using Inktomi results in some of its non-U.S. search sites, and by the time you read this, Yahoo! will probably have completed the process and be running its own search indexes. The results? From the perspective of someone trying to get traffic to a Web site, Google becomes a little less important (though still very important), and Inktomi becomes far more important because it will be feeding Yahoo! search results. FAST/AlltheWeb may also be part of the equation, making that search system much more important.

Here's a very likely scenario. Yahoo! merges in some way with the Inktomi and AlltheWeb indexes. It dumps the (much smaller) AltaVista index, but keeps the AltaVista brand name, which is more widely recognized than the other two.

- ✓ **MSN dumps Inktomi.** Currently, MSN.com doesn't appear on the list because its search results come from Inktomi and LookSmart (which in turn is fed by Zeal). But Microsoft has begun building its own index and will soon be in the search engine business, which is too important for Microsoft to ignore. MSNBot, as it's known, is traveling around the Web as you read this. It's quite likely that MSN will be a hugely important search site with its own search system feeding results.

The result? The list of important search sites and search systems has now expanded by one *very* important system. Furthermore, Microsoft owns five of the world's top 17 Web sites (MSN.com, Passport.com, Microsoft.com, MSNBC.com, and Hotmail.com), all of which will be fed search results from the new Microsoft system. And when the next version of Windows ships in 2006, the search engine will be built into the operating system — you'll be able to search your hard disk for files and e-mails, search for the content within spreadsheets and documents, and search the Web, all from the same place.

- ✓ **Grub comes alive.** Grub (www.grub.org) is an interesting project that may, one day, be very important. Owned by LookSmart, Grub plans to build a massive index of billions of pages by using distributed computing — people around the world using their spare computing downtime to crawl the Web for Grub. I don't know if this undertaking will become important, but it's certainly one to watch.

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- ✓ **Nutch takes off.** I think Nutch (www.nutch.org) may also become important at some point. It's an open-source project that plans to create a huge, multibillion-page index and make it available to anyone who wants it. At the time of writing, it's in the early stages, but it has the backing of some important people and may turn into something significant. On the other hand, it may not.



Visit www.SearchEngineBulletin.com for the latest news on the Yahoo!, MSN, Grub, and Nutch developments. I'll let you know how to get indexed in the appropriate places.

Reviewing the Final List — Search Systems You Really Need

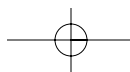
When push comes to shove, you need to care about only a handful of search systems right now. You should care about them because if you can get your site listed in these search systems, you will be in the systems that provide search results to almost all Web searches! And, the winners are . . . (drum roll please):

- ✓ Google
- ✓ Yahoo!
- ✓ The Open Directory Project
- ✓ Inktomi
- ✓ Teoma/Ask Jeeves
- ✓ AltaVista.com
- ✓ FAST/AlltheWeb
- ✓ Zeal (if you have a noncommercial Web site)

I didn't add possible up-and-comers like Grub and Nutch to this list — I'll leave them in the “may become important one day, better keep your eyes on them, but it ain't imminent” list for now. But that leaves one more important search site that will be significant soon, if not by the time you read these words:

- ✓ MSN

That's not so bad, is it? You've just gone from thousands of sites down to nine.



You'll also want to work with some other search systems, as you find out in Chapters 9 and 10. In some cases, you need to check out specialty directories and indexes related to the industry in which your Web site operates. But the preceding systems are the important ones for every Web site.



Google alone provides 75 percent of all search results. Get into *all* the systems on the preceding list, and you're in front of probably over 95 percent of all searchers. Well, perhaps you're in front of them. You have a chance of being in front of them, anyway, if your site ranks highly.

Determining Your Plan of Attack

Now you know what you're facing. You can more or less forget those thousands of search sites and focus on no more than nine search systems. The next step is to figure out how to get your Web site into these search systems and, more importantly, in front of the people using those systems to search the Web. Here's what you need to do:

- ✓ **Do the keyword analysis.** To rank high in the search engines, you better first determine what you want to pop up as a high-ranking search result in a particular search engine. In other words, you have to decide for which keywords and keyword phrases you want to rank. You can take a wild guess, but in my experience working with clients, you'll almost certainly fail to pick all the right keywords. A keyword analysis is the best way to select keywords and decide which you should target. See Chapter 4 for the lowdown on how to do this analysis.
- ✓ **Create readable pages.** If you want your site to appear in the search engines, you have to create pages that the search engine spiders or bots can read. (This isn't an issue for the search *directories*, but if you expect a searchbot to read your site, the pages have to be readable.) You might be surprised to hear that millions of pages on the Web cannot be read by search engines. For the lowdown on how to determine whether your Web pages are being read by the search engines, see Chapter 2; to find out how to fix the problem if they're not, see Chapter 6.
- ✓ **Create keyworded pages.** Having readable pages is just a start. Next you have to put the keywords into the pages — in the right places and in the right format. See Chapter 5 for details.
- ✓ **Register with the search systems.** When your pages are ready to be indexed, you need to let the search systems know where those pages are and get the search systems to include the pages in their indexes and directories — sometimes a harder task than you might expect. You can get into the search systems various ways, as described in detail in Chapters 9 and 10.

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- ✓ **Get other sites to link to your site.** Check out Chapters 12 and 13 to find out how the number and type of links pointing to your site affect how high you rank in the search engines.

The preceding strategies are the basics, but you may want to — or even need to — go further. Here are a few additional techniques that I cover in detail in this book:

- ✓ **Register with other places.** You may also want to register at specialized sites that are not important in the big scheme of things but may be important for your particular business. See Chapter 11.
- ✓ **Register with the shopping indexes.** If you're selling a product, it's a good idea to register with the shopping indexes. Although these indexes don't match the big search systems in volume of searches, they're still important. This is covered in Chapter 14.
- ✓ **Use pay per click.** You can get noticed in the search engines two ways. You can use natural search — that is, get ranked in the search engines without paying — or you can use pay per click. Many companies go straight to pay per click — a system by which you get ranked well but pay each time someone clicks a link to your site — and bypass natural search entirely. This is not a good idea, but at some point, you may want to use pay per click in addition to natural search — see Chapter 15.

Gathering Your Tools

You need several tools and skills to optimize and rank your Web site. I talk about a number of these in the appropriate chapters, but I want to cover a few basics before I move on. It goes without saying that you need basic Internet knowledge, a computer connected to the Internet, and a Web site.

In addition, you need to have a good working knowledge of HTML or access to a geek with a good working knowledge of HTML. Which path should you take? If you don't know what HTML means (HyperText Markup Language), you probably need to run out and find that geek. HTML is the code used to create Web pages, and you need to understand how to use it to optimize pages. Discussing HTML and how to upload pages to a Web site is beyond the scope of this book. But if you're interested in finding out more about HTML, check out *HTML For Dummies*, 4th Edition, by Ed Tittel and Natanya Pitts, and *Creating Web Pages For Dummies*, 6th Edition, by Bud Smith and Arthur Bebak (both published by Wiley).

You also need two great little tools, even if you plan to use a geek to work on your site. They're simple to install and open up a completely new view of the Web. The next two sections spell out the details.

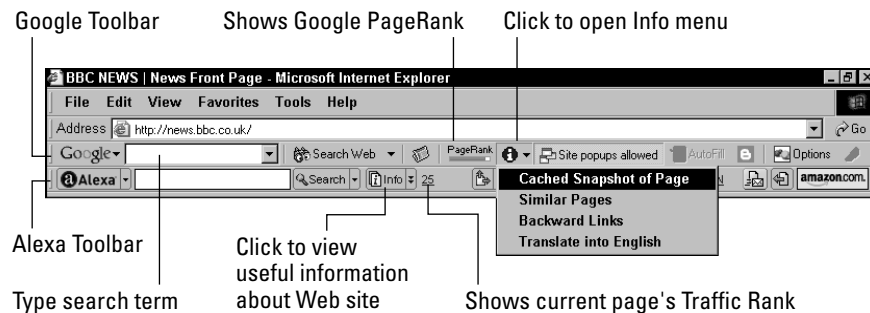
The Google Toolbar

Go to toolbar.google.com, and download and install the Google Toolbar, shown in Figure 1-5. I refer to this fantastic little tool in various places throughout this book because it provides you with the following useful features:

- ✓ A way to search Google without going to www.google.com first
- ✓ A quick view of the Google PageRank, an important metric that I explain in Chapter 12
- ✓ A quick way to see if a Web page is already indexed by Google
- ✓ A quick way to see some of the pages linking to a Web page

The toolbar has a number of other useful features, but the preceding features are the most useful for the purposes of this book.

Figure 1-5: The Google and Alexa Toolbars provide useful information for search engine campaigns.



The Alexa Toolbar

Alexa is a company owned by Amazon.com. It's been around a long time, and millions of people around the world use the Alexa Toolbar. Every time someone uses the toolbar to visit a Web site, the toolbar sends the URL of the page to Alexa, allowing the system to create an enormous database of site visits. The Alexa Toolbar can provide traffic information to you — you can quickly see how popular a site is and even view a detailed traffic analysis, such as an estimate of the percentage of Internet users who visit the site each month.

Work with the Alexa Toolbar for a while, and you'll quickly get a feel for site popularity. A site ranks 453? That's pretty good. 1,987,123? That's a sign that hardly anyone visits the site.

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You can find the Alexa Toolbar, shown in Figure 1-5, at www.alexa.com. Look for a Free Toolbar link in the main navigation bar at the top of the page.

Understanding the Limitations

Before you get started, I want to quickly explain the limitations of search engine optimization: what's possible and what's likely.

You've probably received spam e-mails guaranteeing you top-ten positions for your Web site in the search engines. You've probably also seen claims that you'll be ranked in hundreds or thousands of search engines. Most of this flood of commercial e-mail is nonsense, background noise that creates a picture that is entirely false. So here are the facts.

Sometimes it's easy to get a very high position in the search systems. But usually it isn't. I did one job for a client that went incredibly well. He wanted to be positioned in Google for six important key phrases. I built some pages, ensured that Google knew where those pages were (you find out how to do this in Chapter 9), and waited. In just four days, the client didn't just have a top-ten position or even just a number-one position, but the top *two* positions for five of the six key phrases.

But this situation is unusual. Typically, getting a high position isn't that easy. You try a couple of techniques, but they don't seem to work. So you try something else, and maybe you achieve a little success. Then you try another thing. Search engine optimization can often be labor intensive, and you may not see results for weeks, if not months.

Although the way that search engines work is based on science, search engine optimization is more art than science. Why? Because the search engines don't want outside parties to know exactly how they rank sites. You have to just experiment. Ranking a site can be very difficult, and tremendously laborious. After all, why should it be easy? There is huge competition, so it *can't* be easy. If it were easy for your site, then it would be easy for your competitors' sites, wouldn't it? And, after all, there can only ever be one number one.