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LookSmart Not Small Business Friendly

By Lee Traupel

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There is a firestorm of negative press regarding LookSmart's recent marketing stumbles via numerous discussion groups, including two of the oldest and most influential, I-Search and I-Advertising Digests. Most of the critiques center on LookSmart's inability to develop viable programs for SMB/SME ("small to medium business or enterprise"), the difficulty in managing their new pay per click "Small Business Listings" advertising program, and their overall lack of customer service responsiveness.

Many of us in the agency/marketing services world relied upon LookSmart's directory in the early days; especially as an offset to Yahoo's "my way or the highway" attitude when they became the 200 pound gorilla in the marketplace. So, it's sad to say, but LookSmart appears to be morphing to just another portal with little marketing awareness of how to work effectively with the tens of millions of SMB companies that have rapidly embraced a web-centric business model. Their overall terms of services are geared for big companies and their SMB programs appear to be an afterthought at best!

One of the core issues that frustrates many small businesses is the difficulty in getting a listing that actually describes their company, products, and/or services accurately – to add insult to injury, you have to pay in some cases twice to have your listing upgraded. Apparently, LookSmart's editorial staff can't keep up with the demand, or is so pressured to maintain some internal quota their descriptions suffer accordingly.

LookSmart's new Small Business Listings program is simply not "small business friendly." It is a complex program with lots of important details buried in an FAQ and there are some "gotchas" in the small print – including being forced to wait up to 90 days for the return of the upfront deposit of \$150. and paying a setup fee for a listing; but having it deactivated when you exceed the dollar amount of your "monthly click limit." I can understand their dropping the listing once you exceed your budget, but it does not seem equitable to charge \$49. to setup the listing in the first place – your in essence subsidizing LookSmart's cost of doing business.

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We've found inconsistencies in LookSmart's stated Privacy program versus inbound e-mail traffic we've received from them over the past 3–6 months. We've unsubscribed 3–4 times and still keep getting self-promotional marketing materials which are not of any value, other than promoting LookSmart's business. They are clearly not adhering to their stated privacy policy and to compound matters, our complaints have not been addressed via their customer service department.

So, if your an SMB company what are your alternatives to working with LookSmart? We would recommend your assessing Google's new "AdWords Select" program which is geared more for business of all sizes; but, I must warn you there is some complexity in setting up this type of program as well. But, you certainly get much more coverage with Google – their rapidly becoming the dominant search engine du jour with approximately 40% market share of all combined searches.

Inktomi's "Search Submit" program should also be assessed as an alternative to working with LookSmart and as an adjunct to an existing Search Engine or Marketing program. They have

partnered with some of the same companies that LookSmart is working with, including MSN, AOL, iWon, and many others. They offer very good value for the incurred costs, charging a nominal fee \$39. for the first URL and \$25. for additional URLs to have your web site "crawled" (assessed or indexed) on a regular basis for one year and sharing this information with the most heavily used search engines on the web.

Finally, you may want to consider utilizing standard pay per click ("PPC") search engines to drive qualified traffic to your web site and/or looking at competitive PPC programs offered by LookSmart's competitors including Yahoo, AOL, Alta Vista and others. Overture (formerly GoTo) is the dominant market leader in the pure PPC market that can deliver a great deal of traffic. But, there are approximately 150 second tier pay per click search engines available for assessment and you should be able to leverage your marketing costs by carefully analyzing your "keyword buys" via some of these PPC search engines including Kanoodle, FindWhat, Sprinks and many others.

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LookSmart to acquire WiseNut

By Cyrus Taraporvala

LookSmart to acquire WiseNut by Cyrus Taraporvala

The focus of LookSmart so far, has been to provide it's directory results to other search sites and

portals.

In what could be considered a wise move, LookSmart will now compete with Inktomi, Fast and Google in providing search engine results as well , to large portals like AOL and MSN, who have in the past used the LookSmart directory listings, combined with search engine results from Inktomi.

The former CTO and co-founder of mySimon, Yeogirl Yun, launched WiseNut in September, 2001, and have already expanded their reach through a joint venture in Korea -- Korea WiseNut -- already one of Korea's top ten sites.

With this new takeover, it will be interesting to see the eventual effect on Google, who have had tremendous success so far, especially after Yahoo began using the Google search engine results in preference to the Inktomi results.

WiseNut has been labled as a strong rival to the Google search engine, and with this acquisition by LookSmart in a stock transaction valued at \$9.25 million, Evan Thornley, chairman and CEO of LookSmart says that "By acquiring WiseNut, LookSmart becomes the first company to have both high quality scalable search technology and strong listings revenue generation. We believe this will position us to compete with companies that have only one of these capabilities."

With this new move, LookSmart's partners will now benifit with a more relevant search experience, as well as the benifit to LookSmart's directory customers, who in turn should benefit from a higher return on marketing investment, as more relevant search results drive more qualified leads. So far, LookSmart is the only company that provides both pay-for-placement and paid inclusion search listing platforms, aimed towards the bigger advertisers.

Cyrus currently manages a few web sites, the most recent of which is PromotionData.com a community center for site promotion and web development, located at <http://www.promotiondata.com/>

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