

Microsoft Gets Out of Vapourwear Business and Shows Up in Search

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Tomorrow, Microsoft finally releases the beta version of its proprietary search engine. For over a year, webmasters and SEOs have seen evidence of MSNbot spidering their sites as MSN Search gathered information and compiled its database. Microsoft's full entry to the world of search engines will have fairly significant effects on the industry. Up to this point, MSN displayed results from the Yahoo/Overture database. A preview shows highly relevant results under a variety of keyword phrases. Relevant results, coupled with the search engine's clean design and piggybacking on the MS Windows operating system, MSN Search could provide a serious challenge to Google's current dominance of the organic search market.

Bill Gates has long expressed his dismay that Google and Yahoo were able to bypass Microsoft's near monopoly to capture dominance of search. At last February's World Economic Forum, Gates publicly remarked "Google kicked our butts". While MSN has been working on a search tool for at least two years, this statement was both a warning to competitors Google and Yahoo, and a rally-cry for Microsoft's search-unit.

The beta search engine will be live tomorrow but a preview can be seen at the [MSN Test Preview site](#). A desktop search application is expected to be released before the new year.

MSN has published a list of guidelines for webmasters and SEOs on their site. While they read as simple SEO common sense, they also give a small window into how MSNBot views websites.

The following is copied directly from MSN's guidelines with short comments for SEOs in italics.

Technical recommendations for your Web site

All sites should be W3C validated.

Use only well-formed HTML code in your pages. Ensure that all tags are closed, and that all links are functioning properly. If your site contains broken links, MSNBot may not be able to index your site effectively, and users may not be able to reach all of your pages. For more information about correct HTML syntax, see the [HTML 4.01 Specification](#).

Moving hosts and URLs shouldn't damage rankings.

If you move your page, use the appropriate HTTP redirection code to indicate whether the move is permanent or temporary.

MSNBot follows common exclude tags

Make sure MSNBot is allowed to crawl your site, and is not on your list of Web crawlers prohibited from indexing your site. Use a robots.txt file or Robots Meta tags to control how MSNBot and other Web

crawlers index your site. Using a robots.txt file will tell Web crawlers which files and folders on your site it is not allowed to crawl. For more information, see the [MSNBot FAQ](#).

URL syntax carries some weight.

Whenever possible, use URLs that are simple and easy to read.

Content guidelines for your Web site

Page size matters. Keep it simple, one topic per page.

Limit all pages to a reasonable size. An HTML page with no pictures should be under 150 KB. MSN Search recommends discussing one topic per page. Use links to take users to related topics.

Links Matter and MSNBot relies heavily on continuity with URL paths.

To ensure your pages are easy to link to from other sites, keep your URLs simple and static. Complicated URLs, or URLs that change often, are difficult to use as link destinations. A persistent URL is easier for users to find and remember, and makes it a more likely link destination from other sites.

Items and techniques discouraged by MSN Search

MSNBot recognizes the following items and techniques as spam, an inappropriate use of the index. Use of these items and techniques may affect how your site is ranked within MSN Search, and may result in the removal of your page or site from the MSN Search index.

Content matters, as does keyword density. Spam will be noted and dealt with, otherwise they would be less likely to make the implied threat.

Loading pages with irrelevant words in an attempt to increase a page's keyword density. This includes stuffing ALT tags that users are unlikely to view.

Easy enough to understand.

Using hidden text or links. You should use only text and links that are visible to users.

Links matter. As an algorithmic spider, MSNBot has taken a lesson from PageRank, following links to consider as a factor in rankings.

Using techniques to artificially increase the number of links to your page, such as link farms.