

THE ENQUIRER

Sunday, June 8, 2008

Look Who's Talking

Steve Phillips, founder and principal of Purple Trout

High search-engine rankings on the Web are almost as critical as revenues these days. Generating more business-to-business leads and business-to-consumer contacts for clients is the mission of Purple Trout of Fort Thomas, a firm in its fourth year led by founder Steve Phillips, who expects revenues to top \$350,000 this year - up about 70 percent from 2007.

HOW DID IT happen that a former sports reporter is now an expert on Web traffic?

Purple Trout was a fluke. I had purchased a small software company and wanted to try to get the Web site ranked higher. In the process of doing that, some business associates asked if I could help them do the same thing. At the time I had no rate structure, nothing. I thought about how many more businesses must need this type of service and that's how we got launched.

WHAT ARE SOME of the challenges to search-engine optimization?

One big challenge is that everybody's Web site is different and everybody's audience is different. We have to identify what Web search terms are used to find our clients' Web sites.

The other thing that changes a lot is that Google and Yahoo and other search engines change their rules a lot. And they don't exactly send out announcements saying this rule or that rule has changed. Algorithms sometimes change daily and nobody knows what the algorithm is. That's a challenge.

CAN'T CYBER-SAVVY business owners make their own changes?

They can, but they can also do changes that could harm a Web site ranking. One thing some people try to do is to trick Google by trying to hide key words within their Web site. Google refers to that as a Black Hat technique. That can get your Web site punished or even banned. It's not worth it and big time trouble.

YOU STARTED OUT employing yourself and now you have seven full-timers working from their homes. What are the advantages of that?

We've never lost a client because we didn't have office space. From an employee standpoint, they're not buying gas because they do not have to drive to work every day. That's good during blizzards, too.

HOW'S IT WORK? What's the goal?

There are three main elements: No. 1 is to identify key words popular for that type of business to survive. No. 2, make sure those keywords are incorporated into a client's Web site. And the third thing is to get your Web site published in directories and get other Web sites pointing at your site. That link-building is huge because when Google finds those links pointing, that's a factor.

Pay-for-click advertising campaigns reach only about 30 percent of Web users as 70 percent of people who use a search engine don't click on ads. They know they are ads. But people will go to organic ranking results.

John Eckberg



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Steve Phillips is founder and principal of Purple Trout in Fort Thomas, which optimizes search-engine results for businesses.

The Steve Phillips file

Hometown: Indianapolis

Residence: Fort Thomas

Age: 47

Education: Ball State University

Top of iPod: Annie Lennox, "Love is Blind"; Cake, "No Phone"; Death Cab for Cutie, "Marching Bands of Manhattan"; The Jayhawks, "Stumbling Through the Dark"; The Talking Heads, "Burning Down the House."

Favorite condiment: "Plain, yellow, boring Indiana mustard."

Book on the nightstand: "The Breakthrough Company" by Keith McFarland.