

Internet marketer knows the power of search engines

FabulousSavings.Com

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Financial Post

Friday, July 07, 2006

Michael Yack is in the business of making the Internet work for small companies.

"We're turning on the lights for small businesses and getting paid for it," says the 35-year-old Toronto native. "It's a beautiful thing." Mr. Yack (who goes by "Mikey") is making a proposal that many small- and medium-sized businesses have heard before: Put your online presence in our hands, and we'll pull the customers to you.

Countless companies have migrated to the Internet in recent years, but many have struggled to use it in a way that reaches customers and wins them over.

Mr. Yack claims he's got a solution. He is the founder of FabulousSavings, a Toronto-based company that links customers to more than 1,200 local merchants through FabulousSavings.com.

FabulousSavings researches its clients and positions them in the best way possible for search engines to read. Mr. Yack says more than 90% of clients end up on the first page of relevant Google or Yahoo! searches within four weeks of signing up.

"There's really no secret," Mr. Yack says. "There's no manipulation of anything. We provide the content in a way that's relevant. It's all about how it's presented. We have the credibility in that we've been around a long time."

Prospective customers who click through reaches a page with a description of the business and what it does. Then they also get a coupon they can use.

"Everyone wins," Mr. Yack says. "It makes the search engines more popular because it provides relevant content for them. For us, we're able to bridge the gap between a customer and a business that wouldn't have found each other unless we were there."

The clients range from car rental companies to arts and crafts retailers. One time, FabulousSavings linked up Cirque du Soleil with a local yoga teacher.

Mr. Yack started his online business in 1998 as a personal site telling friends where to find deals in Toronto. He spent a lot of money doing traditional advertising without results.

The turning point came a year later when he was indexed in Yahoo! and immediately started getting targeted clients. He realized search engines were the most important sales tool on the Internet.

His plan to take the company public fell apart when the Internet bubble burst. Mr. Yack hung in, bringing in one client at a time. Now, he plans to expand to 30 markets in the next 18 months.

And then there is the affiliate marketing program. Through alliances with LinkShare and Commission Junction, FabulousSavings drives customers to giant retailers such as Wal-Mart and Sears. Mr. Yack says he does millions of dollars in sales every

month with those companies, getting paid anywhere from 2% to 40% of the proceeds.

The payoff has been more than just dollars. Last month in New York, Mr. Yack won the "innovative affiliate of the year" award at LinkShare's awards gala. Other winners included Overstock.com, Cingular Wireless and Wal-Mart.

"I have the trophy here. It's like an Oscar. Everyone in New York wanted to see me," he says.

Now he has a publicist, a stylist, and works 100 hours a week.

"I may be 35, but I'm a boy," he says. "I'm a professional Web surfer. I play on the Internet. That's what I do."

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