

XML Trusted Feeds – They’re Not for Everyone

Have you been told that an XML Trusted Feed is good for your website?

Whether you’re just shopping for search engine optimization services, or are versed in the jargon of the industry, you have probably heard about XML feeds. Perhaps the latest craze in search engine marketing, XML feeds are offered by Search Engine Marketing (SEM) companies that have relationships with the search engines that accept this form of data delivery. These SEM companies offer what is known as a Trusted XML feed. However, you should know that this form of search engine marketing is not for every web site. In fact, only a small percentage are actually qualified and stand to benefit. The mere possibility that you *CAN* do an XML feed of your site’s pages to a search engine doesn’t mean you should.

Google Says No Way to XML Feeds

For those of you who just want higher positions in Google, you can stop reading now. Google doesn’t allow them. Now that this important issue has been addressed, we can move on to explaining what XML feeds are.

What is an XML Feed?

An XML Feed is the process and act of delivering information into a search engine’s index using the XML formatting language. The XML formatting language uses containers to format information in documents. You can compare the containers used in XML to the tags used in HTML. An XML feed can also be thought of as a spreadsheet, where the left column of the spreadsheet is full of individual page URLs, and the other columns represent other common web page variables such as Titles, META keywords, META descriptions, content, etc.

When a user types in a search engine query, the search engine scans its index for the most relevant pages. Using its own unique algorithm, it will then compare all the pages in its index, whether the pages come from natural spidering, paid inclusion, or XML feeds, and serve the results.

Which Search Engines Allow XML Feeds?

The search engines that except XML feeds are AltaVista, Ask Jeeves, Inktomi, and FAST. These search engines only allow approved “XML Trusted Feed” partners to submit pages via an XML feed. Additionally, these engines require that a website has a minimum of 300-1000 pages before it can qualify for an XML feed. If your site has fewer than 300 unique pages, no one should be suggesting that you do an XML feed.

XML Trusted Feeds – A Word of Caution

Some Trusted Feed Partners get around the minimum page requirement by combining pages from several small sites into one large XML feed. To do this they take the combined pages from various clients’ sites and submit them to the search engine as if they were pages from their own site. The Trusted Feed partner then directs all incoming traffic coming from the XML feed to its own server, then redirects the traffic to the various small sites used to make up the feed. This way the Trusted Feed partner fulfills its minimum page requirement. Because the traffic is at first directed to the Trusted Feed partner’s site, owners of the several small sites lose control over their listings. This creates a power vacuum for the smaller sites because they can’t control their own listings and subsequent traffic. If a smaller site decides to end their service with the Trusted Feed partner, they have no way of making sure that any future traffic from their feed will be sent to their site.

If done properly, an XML feed can be effective. The Trusted Feed partners that achieve the most success for their clients invest the most time and knowledge into optimizing the XML feed before it is delivered.

Like Paid Inclusion, XML feeds don't guarantee to increase a page's ability to position highly for a keyword. Companies that see the most success with XML feeds have both optimized pages and optimized XML feeds. If you have hundreds of product pages that are poorly optimized an XML feed isn't likely to help position your site near the top of the search engine results. Sure, the Trusted Feed partner and the search engine will guarantee that your pages are included in the index, but that is about all they will guarantee.

While there is no debate that some companies do benefit from XML feeds, it must also be stated that only a minority of websites should even consider the service. Many owners of dynamically generated websites are made to believe that XML Feeds are their only hope of getting pages into a search engines index. XML Feeds are also being pushed on the owners of websites that are created with static pages. Only very large, dynamically generated sites that have hundreds or thousands of products should consider XML feeds. Even these large sites should explore natural optimization as much as possible before embarking on an XML feed.

XML Feeds – Costing You More than Paid Inclusion & Natural Optimization

XML Feeds may be cheaper up front than paid inclusion, but you may end up paying far more in the long-term because there is a minimum cost of 25 cents for every click made on your listing. In just 100 clicks on any one of your XML feed URLs, you are spending more money than you would have had you chosen paid inclusion. So, if one of the pages you submitted through an XML feed is receiving hundreds or thousands of clicks, you are paying many times more for the traffic than if you had just taken the time to optimize the page and submit it through Paid Inclusion.

Organic SEO – The Next Step in Your Site's Development

Organic search engine optimization is still at the core of any successful search engine marketing campaign. By investing in the architecture and content of your website, you stand to see long term return on investment. Many companies don't understand that most dynamic sites can be spidered, or can be with some changes in architecture. Product pages within dynamic sites can be optimized and submitted through paid inclusion where you pay one small annual fee and never pay per click. Better yet, if you optimize your static or dynamic site properly you can achieve high positions in Google where any leads you receive from the organic listings are free.

Explore your options before jumping into XML feeds. They are only useful for a small percentage of websites.