Hip websites need hard facts to thrive

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Mixed in with technology innovations at South By South West (SXSW) were reminders that real-world performance facts are vital to thriving on an increasingly crowded Internet.

"There is a lot of creative energy on the Net now and it is hard for stuff to get noticed and hard for people to find you," Pear Analytics senior analyst Romy Misra told AFP. "We think a lot of people don't understand this."

Pear Analytics was among the firms touting their latest offerings in [search engine](#) optimization (SEO), the art of ranking high in results delivered by Internet query handlers such as Google.

"Web 2.0 is so crowded that people's attention spans are dwindling and search engines are becoming smarter," Misra said. "Your site should be search-engine friendly and you should be on top of rankings if you want to be found."

She cited research showing that people seeking information on the Internet seldom look farther than the first 30 links served up as results to search engine queries.

When ranking websites, search engines go beyond page content to how quickly data loads and what roles they play in conversations on social networks such as hot microblogging service Twitter, according to SEO firms.

Main factors weighing into how close websites get to the top of search results includes age and reputation of domains as well as who else on the Internet links to them, according to Ryan Russell of Star Nine Ventures.

Star Nine was demonstrating a Who Links To Me service that provides precise details regarding whether websites are getting lost in the online din.

"It's great to say you have 10,000 Twitter followers but how does that relate to your bottom line?" Russell asked rhetorically. "We very scientifically show you what your online efforts are producing."

SEO services also promise to show websites what to do to get into the top ranks of results of online queries.

A Pro version of Who Links To Me promised to "benchmark exactly what it is going to take to outrank your competition."

"At the end of the day all the pie-in-the-sky stuff and numbers of followers and friends you have sounds good but you need a strong grasp of the analytics that are behind it as well."

Internet powerhouse Google provides a free Analytics tool to help website publishers figure out how their online operations are performing and improve their rankings in search results.

Boston startup Lytiks lets websites track how much time people spend there and what actions they take while visiting.

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