I-9 Forms – When Was The Last Time You Did An Audit?

BY GRACE M. CONTI

Don't panic, but your supply of I-9 forms just expired on June 30, 2008. Yes, this was the new form that was issued last year by the U.S. Deptartment of Homeland Security (DHS), but it had an expiration date of 6/30/2008. The expiration date simply means that the DHS is out-of-compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act.

So, what do YOU have to do now? On June 16, 2008, the USCIS released a newly-dated I-9 form which employers should be begin using immediately. Destroy any blank copies of the I-9 form that expired on June 30, 2008 and begin using the new form immediately. Don't worry, the content of the form has not changed from the previous one.

Of note, however, is that the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has launched an I-9 inspection campaign across the country, targeting employers suspected of employing unauthorized workers. These "inspections" are announced by service of a subpoena calling for production of all I-9 forms for all current employees as well as those terminated over the past year.

An increase in federal immigration violation penalties for all employers became effective March 27, 2008.

The penalties for knowingly hiring an undocumented worker will increase from the present range of $275 to $11,000 up to the new range of $375 to $16,000. The penalties for document fraud will increase from the present range of $275 to $5,500 up to the new range of $375 to $6,500.

The good news is that the penalties for improper completion of the I-9 Form will remain the same at a range of $110 to $1,100.

Forewarned is forearmed – all employers should have their existing I-9 forms audited by an outside party and have their staff trained on proper completion of I-9 Forms.

If you need a copy of the new I-9 form, please contact PMP at 516-921-3400 or infro@pmpHR.com. We offer special discounts to Queens Chamber members for both I-9 audits and handbooks. Please contact Grace Conti at 516-921-3400 or gconti@pmpHR.com

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TECH TALK *A feature from the Queens Chamber Info Tech Committee*

Getting Search Engines To Notice Your Site

BY SCOTT WOLPOW

Welcome to a series of articles that are inter-related. They will cover how search engines see your site, good practice techniques to help you gain rank and how paid placement works. I will talk about other engines besides Google, Yahoo and MSN and how you can make sure you are listed locally.

The goal of many people is to get their site a good placement on the free portion of the search engines. This is known as Search Engine Optimization (SEO). A few facts: No one can guarantee you placement. You may place number one today and number 200 tomorrow. There are no shortcuts.

Search engines try very hard to duplicate how humans sort through data. The reality is that search technology is still very raw. The world 'Pitch' returns almost 18 different definitions. This makes ranking very hard to accomplish.

The best practice is not to worry about the engines. Build your pages for humans, not the engines. Each page should be one distinct thought. The better and more succinct you create the content, the better it will be indexed.

How the page is built is a very important factor. Pages built with Flash may look nice and perform needed effects, but they are useless to the engines. To the engine it is just a graphic. This is also true with Javascript.

When you consider what to place on the page, select a concept or keyword and build around that. The keyword should have prominence in text size on the page. It should be mentioned throughout the article. The Meta tags also need to reflect that concept. If you try and stuff too many concepts on a page, you will dilute the message of the page. Page title and page name also need to reflect that page.

Many sites today use dynamic pages, which mean one basic page displays content based on viewer needs. This creates a problem because all the pages share the same name. Depending on what system you are using for your site, the page name can be changed dynamically or you can use parameters. A parameter is what you see after the page name. It is often a question mark followed by data. i.e. pagename.php?subject=sec&type=article.

Some other recommended practices include the use of Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and tableless design. CSS allows you more flexibility in controlling the uniformity of the site and creating effects like rollovers, without using Javascript. Tableless design allows you to place the most important data at the top of the page, where the engines are more likely to read them.

Many firms promise results and use black hat tactics for short-term gains. They use techniques like doorway pages, false domains, link farms, invisible text and keyword stuffing. All these will get your site banned from Google, Yahoo, MSN and most of the other engines.

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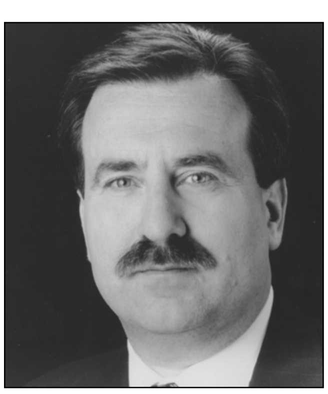
Coaches Corner with Barry Knepper


Barry Knepper

TAB Member's Question: We are considering changing our health insurance plan to reduce costs by shifting more of the burden to employees as we have found that we are paying for relatively generous benefits and want to get back to what the marketplace is offering. What are some good ideas about communicating to the employees when faced with this situation?

Tab Coach: This is a very difficult task indeed, but employees are aware that costs are rising and health insurance costs are rising much quicker that most other costs. Be honest and open with them. Your insurance agent should be able to work with you to compare your coverage with other area employers and explain that all of the options were studied. He can also discuss what is causing the escalation in costs, including over usage by participants. Another suggestion is to form a committee of several employees and one of your managers. This group should shop competing plans within a certain budget. This will allow them to explain the costs to their peers and endorse the plan they have mutually picked out as being the best.

The owner should talk about health insurance being one of the most expensive fringe benefits and he has struggled to keep the cost to the employees down, but competitive pressures demand that changes be made. Do not talk just about the medical benefits, but instead talk about all of the benefits combined including: paid time off (vacations, holidays, sick leave, jury duty, etc), payroll taxes (social security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation) and training. In the entire context, medical benefits are just one albeit a very expensive one, of the many benefits that you offer.

If possible, offer alternative programs so the employees can talk about it. While it may be difficult to obtain a consensus, at least you have made an offer to the employees, and they will feel that they have some control over this difficult situation. It is also important to communicate the possibility of freezing or cutting back the contribution from the company for medical insurance benefits well in advance. Start discussing it at least 6-12 months prior to any changes.

Barry Knepper is the certified facilitator and coach in Queens for The Alternative Board®. The Alternative Board brings together owners of privately held businesses to overcome challenges and seize new opportunities with a combination of peer advice and business coaching. Board members meet monthly to learn from one another's successes and mistakes to grow their businesses to the next level. Business owners also create more valuable and profitable companies with scheduled strategic business coaching sessions focused on business and personal growth.