Feed Service User's Guide

Somacon's Data Feed Service
http://froogle.somacon.com/

June 3, 2004

Abstract

This user's guide provides detailed instructions for managing your account and feeds on Somacon's Data Feed Service website. A section explains the process of setting up a data feed step-by-step. Setting up an automated feed on this system allows Internet merchants exporting a Yahoo! Store XML file to submit their products to the Froogle price comparison engine on a regular basis.

Contents

1 Site Overview

1.1 Getting Help

The answers to some questions may be found online on the website. To find these answers, click on the 'Site Map' link at the top of every page. From there, you can reach all the public parts of the website. You can also find the contact information if you need further assistance.

1.2 Conventions

1. Clickable links appear as blue, underlined text throughout the site. Links generally lead to information and perform no actions.

2. Clickable buttons appear in grey throughout the site. Buttons perform the action indicated by the button label.

3. Irrevocable and important actions are usually perfomed by buttons. Sometimes, an alert is shown where you can cancel or confirm the action.

4. Link labels referenced in this document may not exactly match the link labels on the website.

You should feel free to explore the entire site, knowing that the site will protect you against any major actions by warning you before they occur.

2   Managing Your Account

2.1   Logging In

1. Type http://froogle.somacon.com into the web browser.

2. Click on the 'Log In' link.

3. Enter your email address and password and press the 'Login' button.

 After logging in, you will start at the 'My Account' page.

2.2   Resetting A Forgotten Password

1. Type http://froogle.somacon.com into the web browser.

2. Click on the 'Log In' link.

3. Click on the 'Forgot Password' link.

4. Enter your email address and click submit.

 Your old password will be replaced with a new, randomly generated password. The new password will be sent to your email address.

2.3   Changing Your Password

1. From the 'My Account' page, click on the 'Change Password' link.

2. Type your old password and new password, then submit the form.

 The password change will be effective immediately.

2.4   Updating Your Account Information

1. From the 'My Account' page, click on the 'Account Information' link.

2. Make the desired changes to your email address, name, address, and phone number.

3. Click on the 'Update' button when finished.

2.5   Viewing Account History

1. From the 'My Account' page, click on the 'Account History' link.

The 'Account History' page lists credits and debits to your account, ordered by date. It also shows your current balance.

2.6   Adding Funds to Your Account

1. From the 'My Account' page, click on the 'Purchase Credit' link.

2. Read the instructions and notes.

3. Click the 'Purchase Credit' button.

4. Follow the proceeding instructions.

The funding process is completely automated. After going through the steps, you will be returned back to the 'My Account' page and your balance will reflect your payment.

3   Managing Feeds

3.1   Adding a Feed

1. From the 'My Account' page, click on the 'Add Feed' link.

2. Click the 'Help' buttons for help.

3. Enter the specified information and submit the form.

3.2   Modifying and Managing a Feed

1. From the 'My Account' page, click on the 'Modify' or 'Manage' link next to the feed you would like to work with.

Use the 'Modify' function to change the feed information, and the 'Manage' function to perform all other tasks. The 'Manage' link takes you to the 'Manage Feed' page.

3.3 Importing Products

Importing products retrieves the product list from your store and saves it temporarily into the system's database.

1. From the 'Manage Feed' page, click on the 'Submit Processing Request' link.

2. Choose the 'Retrieval' task and submit the request.

3.4 Viewing the Product List

1. From the 'Manage Feed' page, click on the 'Product List' link.

2. Use the sort and start options to control the display of the product list.

3. Click the 'View' link to see all the details for a particular product.

The 'Status' column shows whether or not the product is to be submitted in the feed. Products listed as 'Submit' will be submitted and products listed as 'Exclude' will be excluded.

3.5 Excluding Products

1. From the 'Manage Feed' page, click on the 'Exclusion Criteria' link.

2. Select the field, comparison type, and criteria, and click the 'Add' button.

3. To delete an exclusion criterion, click the 'Delete' link.

For example, to exclude all gift certificates from your product list, you might set up a criterion to exclude all products whose name contains the term *gift certificate*. To do this, add an exclusion criterion with field as 'Product Name', comparison type as 'contains', and term as *gift certificate*.

To see how the criteria affect your product list, go back to the product list and sort it by 'Product Status'. All the excluded products will be grouped together. Note that once an exclusion criterion is added, it can be deleted but not changed. A criterion can be effectively changed by adding a new criterion and deleting the old one.

Whenever an exclusion criterion is added or deleted, the product list is assumed to have changed. In other words, the next feed submission, whether manual or scheduled, will be successful. Otherwise, the submission might be skipped because the latest product data has already been submitted.

3.6 Submitting Feeds

Submitting a feed does two things. First, it retrieves the product list from your store and saves it into the system's database. Second, it applies any exclusion criteria and sends the product data to the Froogle FTP server. Either or both steps may be skipped if the product data is up to date.

1. From the 'Manage Feed' page, click on the 'Submit Processing Request' link.

2. Choose the 'Retrieval and Submission' task and submit the request.

4 Working with Tasks

Because retrieving and submitting product data over the Internet can take a long time and may fail, the system disconnects you, the website visitor, from the actual processing of these tasks. Instead, you submit *tasks* which are queued by the system. The system then runs these tasks in the background and returns the results of their processing.

Tasks are usually queued for less than a minute, and usually execute to completion within a minute. However, sometimes the execution time may be much longer, especially for large stores having lots of data to transfer over the Internet. Queue time will be longer late at night if you happen to queue a task right after the the scheduled tasks are enqueued for all the other feeds in the system.

4.1 Submitting a Task

1. From the 'Manage Feed' page, click on the 'Submit Processing Request' link.

2. Choose the task and submit the request.

4.2 Viewing Task Status

1. From the 'Manage Feed' page, click on the 'View Task Status' link to see the list of all tasks.

2. To see detailed information about a task, click on the 'View' link next to the task.

The task status changes from *queued* to *executing* to *completed*. A time stamp is recorded at each step. Once the task is completed, the result is displayed in the task details.

The task result can be of three types. The first is *success*, which is when the task performs all its actions as expected. The task result will be *system error* if some error occurred that you do not have to worry about. These errors will be found and fixed by the system administrator. Finally, the result may be a *public error*, in which case a detailed message is given regarding what occurred and how you should handle it.

For example, one public error is when the 'Export URL' for the product data does not contain valid XML data. In this case, the message instructs you to check the URL in the feed settings because it may be incorrect. Another public error is when a feed submission (or retrieval) is skipped because the product data is up to date. In this case, you do not have to do anything, so the error message just informational.

5   Setting up a Feed

The previous sections described how to perform individual actions in the system. To set up a feed properly, you need to perform a number of actions in sequence with a few goals in mind. Below are the recommended steps.

5.1   Importing Products

1. Add a feed from the 'My Account' page. Make sure to read all the 'Help' instructions to understand how to enter the correct settings. The system is fault tolerant, so do not worry about getting everything right the first time.

2. Submit a 'Retrieval' task for the new feed.

3. Go to the 'Task Status' page, and wait a few minutes for the task to be completed. Reload the page to check the status.

4. Read the task result.

5. If the result is success, then do the following:

    (a) The 'Manage Feed' page will display the number of products imported. Go to the product list and click 'View Details' link for any product.

(b) Check all the product details as described below.

6. If the result is an error (for example, a mis-typed 'Export URL'), then take these steps:

   (a) Go back to the 'Modify Feed' page and update the settings.

   (b) From the 'Manage Feed' page, click on the 'Clear Product List' button.

   (c) Go back to step 2 and repeat the verification process.

If you resubmit a 'Retrieval' task without first clearing the product list, then the retrieval will be skipped because the product list will be up to date. Under most circumstances, product details will be imported correctly as long as the 'Export URL' feed setting is valid.

The main thing to check after retrieving the products is the Product URL, especially if you have specified a 'Conversion URL' feed setting. From the 'Product Details' page, click the Product URL and make sure it goes to the product page on your store's web site. In general, the default product URL will work, but it will contain extra path information or be at a Yahoo! Store domain.

You can customize the Product URL by visiting your store's website at your preferred domain, and copying the URL of any of the products. Paste this URL into the 'Conversion URL' feed setting, and replace the product ID portion of the URL with the keyword *somacon_product_id*. See the 'Conversion URL' help on the 'Modify Feed' page for more details. You do not have to retrieve the products again after changing the 'Conversion URL' setting, because it is applied dynamically to the product list.

Another thing to look for is products with no category. Simply sort the product list by category to find these products. If there are products with no category, then you <u>must</u> specify a 'Default Category' in the feed settings.

Finally, look for products that will not be accepted by Froogle. The most common product is the gift certificate. You will need to add exclusion criteria for those products that Froogle will not accept.

5.2   Submitting Products

1. Submit a 'Retrieval and Submission' task for the feed.

2. Go to the 'Task Status' page, and wait a few minutes for the task to be completed. Reload the page to check the status.

3. Read the task result.

4. If the result is an error, then take these steps:

   (a) Go back to the 'Modify Feed' page and check the settings, particularly the FTP username and password.

   (b) From the 'Exclusion Criteria' page, add an empty criteria and immediately delete it.

   (c) Go back to step 1 and repeat.

5. If the result is a success, and it is your first submission, then take these steps:

   (a) Send an email to feeds-support@google.com stating that you have submitted your feed for review.

   (b) Wait 2-7 days for a reply (longer if you have many products).

   (c) If they reply and state there is a technical problem with the feed, please forward their email to somacon@somacon.com for assistance.

   (d) If they reply and state there is a non-technical problem, such as unaccepted products, please re-check your feed settings and exclusion criteria.

   (e) If they reply and state they have accepted your feed, then look for your products to appear in Froogle shortly.

During testing, you may need to repeatedly submit your feed to Froogle. This has two potential roadblocks. First, the system will skip a submission if it thinks that the product list is unchanged since the last submission. The system gets the publishment date of your store from the XML file at your 'Export URL'. Then it records this date whenever it retrieves or submits the product data. Adding and deleting an empty exclusion criteria resets the last submitted publishment date, so that the system thinks the product list has changed.

Second, Froogle's FTP server has account limitations built-in. These disallow downloading, deleting, or renaming the uploaded data file. More importantly, re-uploading a data file will be blocked if the data file was last uploaded within the past few hours. Therefore, if you need to resubmit an otherwise successful feed submission, you must wait a few hours so that Froogle's FTP server will allow the submission.

6 Advanced Topics

6.1 Submission Frequency

Froogle requires that the product information displayed on your website matches the product information submitted in the data feed. Therefore, you should set your feed's submission frequency according to how often you republish your store. The best frequency is 'Daily', because then the system will resubmit your feed each day that you republish your store, ensuring that Froogle always has your latest product information. The system *only* submits on days your store is republished, thereby preventing unnecessary submissions.

6.2 Automatic Duplicate Exclusion

For users with multiple stores, the system offers automatic duplicate exclusion. This feature is useful if there are products appearing in multiple stores with the same product ID. In this situation, assign a 'Duplicate Priority' to each feed. Any product appearing in multiple feeds will only be submitted in the feed with the highest priority. Thus, the feed with the highest priority of one will have all its products submitted. This feature ensures that each duplicate product will be submitted in exactly one feed, and every product will be submitted in at least one feed.

Duplicate exclusion only works for feeds that have the same Froogle FTP username. Each set of feeds with the same FTP username automatically forms a *duplicate exclusion group*.

In order for duplicate exclusion to work, each feed in the group must have its latest product data imported into the system's database. When manually submitting a feed in the group for the first time, please ensure that the product data for every feed has already been imported.

During scheduled submissions, the system automatically retrieves the product data for all the feeds in the group one hour prior to their scheduled submissions. (The default behaviour is to retrieve the product data for each feed at the time of submission.)

A Change History

1. 2004 June 3 - First published.

Glossary

Conversion URL This is a pattern that is used to convert product URLs to a more desirable format.

Data Feed This is a formatted, tab-delimited, text file that is sent over the Internet to Froogle. It may also refer to the systematic submission of product data to Froogle.

Export URL This is the location of the XML file that contains the store's exported product data.

FTP (File Transfer Protocol) - A way of transferring files over the Internet from one computer to another.

URL (Uniform Resource Locator) - The World Wide Web address of a site on the Internet. The URL for the Internal Revenue Service, for example, is http://www.irs.gov.

XML (Extensible Markup Language) - A text-based, human-readable, and standardized information organization for sharing both the format and the data between computers.