> ✔ **Optimizing your site for Google (Chapter 4).** Create content, optimize your page's `meta` tags, and introduce keywords as the fundamental building blocks of a highly ranked site. These are golden topics for the serious Webmaster at all stages of business development, from conception to customer interaction.

First things first. New sites must get into Google and then work to raise their profiles. Getting into Google really means getting into the Google *index*, which is a database of Web content. Google builds the index by crawling through the Web collecting pages. When a user searches for keywords, Google doesn't actually search the Web — it searches its index.

If your site already appears in Google search results, you might feel tempted to skip this chapter and head straight for Chapter 3. However, the next two sections contain useful information about Google's behavior and ways for both new and existing sites to leverage its quirks.

Meet Google's Pet Spider

All search engines operate in the same basic way: they *crawl* the Web with automatic software robots called *spiders* or *crawlers*, which create searchable indexes of Web content. Every engine allows visitors to search its index for keywords and groups of keywords. Search results come in a variety of list formats, but most display a bit of information about each Web page in the list and a link to that page.

Each engine's index is unique, thanks to the programming of its spider. The main element of that programming is the engine's *algorithm*, which ranks pages in an index. This ranking determines the order in which search results are presented.

Google's central technology asset is its algorithm — the complex ranking formula that gives people good search results and often seems to be reading people's minds when they Google something. The results of Google's algorithm are summarized in a single ranking statistic called *PageRank*. Google is secretive about the software formula from which PageRank is derived, but the company does promote the importance of PageRank, and offers Webmasters broad hints for improving a site's PageRank. Google displays a general approximation of any page's rank (on a 0-to-10 scale) in the Google Toolbar, which is shown in Figure 2-1. Although the exact formulation of PageRank is a well-protected secret, its basic ingredients are well-known (and discussed in Chapter 3).