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By Angela Wu
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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the exciting world of eBusiness! My name is Angela, and I'm the editor of this manual. Here you'll find the very same basic methods I've personally used to build a profitable business from scratch. You won't find any hype here, and no promises of easy riches – just real information that any beginner can learn to use.



Marketing is very dynamic and what works today may not work tomorrow. Track your results and then hone in on the things that work *for you!*

Some of the most important things I've learned about building a business on the 'net include:

- **"Nobody plans to fail -- but many fail to plan."** Take whatever time is necessary to do your research.
- **You won't get-rich-quick.** That is, you won't get rich quick unless you win the lottery or come into an inheritance!
- **You cannot force an unwilling market to want your product. You can only give a willing market what they want.** In other words, find a market and then develop a product or service for the market. Don't create the product first, fall in love with it, and then hope to find a market for it.
- **You can't be everything to everyone.** Don't try to "generalize" your market. Target one specific group and do what you can to make them happy.
- **Marketing is the lifeblood of your business.** An amazing product and a stellar website won't do you any good if your prospects don't know about you. Consistent marketing is vital to the success of a business.

- **"You need to spend money in order to make money."** If you could spend \$100 and get a return of \$10000, wouldn't you do it? It's not how much something *costs* that matters; it's how much it will *make* you that counts.

This book will provide you with the *basics* of what it takes to build a profitable business on the web. Please read it, absorb it, and then *take action*. Information by itself won't do you any good unless you put it to use!

Ready to get started? You can print out this eBook if you like, then hole-punch it and place it in a binder. That way you'll have easy and convenient access to it to make notes. Let's get going!

Angela

Getting Started

You know you want to build an online business of your very own, but aren't sure where to start. This section is all about the very basics of building an Internet business, a good "foundation" to get you started!

The Truth About Building a Business on the 'Net

We've all read claims of fast money; the alluring siren-call of the Internet 'get-rich-quick' scheme can be hard to resist.

Most of us have also heard the saying, "If it seems too good to be true, it probably is..." We know in our hearts that 'get-rich-quick' can't possibly work, yet we can't help but be intrigued by it.

Instead of pursuing the fruitless search for a quick and easy way to make money on the 'net – and as much as it pains me to say it! -- **there is no such thing as "get-rich-quick"**. You *can* earn a solid income from the Internet, if you're willing to put in the time, effort, and money.

Disadvantages of an Online Business:

- **Hard work and long hours.** Just like any business, building one online requires a great deal of effort. Most people do it while still working a full-time job elsewhere; you may find it hard to keep doing what you have to do when you're always 'exhausted'.
- **Always changing.** What works online today might not work tomorrow. When you do business on the 'net you have to constantly 'keep up' or you may find profits beginning to lag. Educating yourself is a continuing process. If you hate change then the Internet is probably not for you.

- **Need to be able to cut through the 'hype'.** You'll find plenty of misleading promises on the Internet, many of which will tell you that there's some sort of 'magic bullet' to getting sales. There isn't. Sorting through marketing techniques that work and those that don't can be very time-consuming.
- **Definitely *not* a quick-rich-quick scheme!** Regardless of what you may read, the Internet is *not* the path to quick, easy money and not everyone will be successful online. An online business contains an element of risk, just like any other business.
- **"Build it and they will come" does NOT apply to the 'net.** Your web page is only one of billions. Learning how to get the *right* people to see your site is a tough job.
- **Persistence is vital to your success.** Just like with any business, there's a lot to learn. It's very easy to give up and try something else online... but playing 'biz op tag' isn't going to help you make money any faster.

That being said, there are lots of advantages for doing business on the Internet! It truly offers one of the best opportunities for the 'average' person to test their entrepreneurial spirit.

Advantages of an Online Business:

- **Affordable startup costs.** You can get started with just a few hundred bucks.
- **Flexible.** Because your work is done on your computer and from home, you get to choose when you work.
- **Possibility of more free time -- eventually.** Some online businesses can be automated to a certain extent. Automation will help to reduce your workload and eventually give you more free time.
- **Testing and research are relatively cheap.** Need to find out what your potential audience thinks of a product idea? Chances are, there's a message board (or a hundred) where your potential audience gathers. Need to research your competition? Use the search engines. There's so much you can do online for little or no money.

- **Exciting!** If you thrive on change, the Internet is one of the best places to get it! You can experiment and test to your heart's content for minimal cost.
- **Ever-growing.** Every day more people get 'connected' to the 'net. That means there your potential audience is always growing.
- **Multiple streams of income.** You have the ability to sell lots of different products online -- including other company's products, in return for a commission -- which means that you can potentially earn several 'pay cheques'! A bunch of 'smaller' cheques may not seem like much on their own, but add them all up and they can become a solid stream of income.
- **Opportunity is everywhere!** The Internet reaches a worldwide audience with a wide variety of interests. There are countless niches on which you can focus your energies!

Starting a business online is in many ways the same as starting a business in the 'real world'. It requires hard work, long hours, and yes, even some sacrifices. How long it takes you to turn a profit will depend on many different factors. Some people turn a profit within just a few months; others take years. There are lots of 'little guys' -- small, home based businesses -- who are happily and successfully earning a living from the Internet.

How to Get Started

Spending time in the planning and preparation stage helps you to anticipate problems, identify areas for improvement, and spot new opportunities! Here are a few things to consider...

Take a Personal Assessment

Knowing what you're capable of doing and what you enjoy plays a large part in deciding what business to go into. If you choose to stick to what you know, you'll probably find it easier to establish contacts, get supplies, etc. Ask yourself:

- **What skills do you have?** Include the skills you currently use at your job (yes, even if you're a full-time parent), and those you've developed through hobbies.

- **What types of businesses interest you?** Do you love to meet and talk with new people, or are you the type that prefers to sit nose-to-screen in front of your computer all day long? More information on types of businesses is available later in this section.
- **How much time are you willing to spend?** Factor in the amount of time you'd like to spend with your family, friends, and other commitments (volunteer work, for example). Of course, *every* business is going to require a lots of time - particularly in the startup phase - but some businesses will require more than others.
- **Would your family support your choice of business?** There may be certain types of businesses that may cause friction within your family - and your family's support can be a real blessing when you're trying to build your business.

Ultimately your goal is to make money doing something you love. Many people dream about quitting their jobs to run a business of their own – but there is no point in leaving a job you hate for a business that makes you miserable! It's possible to have a genuine love for your business and be excited to go to work everyday!

Focus.

Decide which skill or interest to concentrate on. You might have many different business ideas - but the fact of the matter is, time is limited and most people find themselves plenty busy just starting one business! **It's better to have one profitable business than a whole bunch of unprofitable ones.**

Preliminary Research.

Find out where your prospective audience gathers. This could be within special online communities such as message boards or chat rooms. One place to start looking is at [Network54](#). And don't forget to find out where your audience gathers in the *offline* world as well!

There's also the old reliable fall-back of using the search engines to do your research. One of the best SEs is [Google](#); try them out -- they'll return to you some excellent, relevant results.

Spend some time reading everything you can. Purchase a notebook and start jotting down ideas as they come to you. As you read

through other people's postings, articles, and anything else you can find, they may trigger ideas of your own for a product or service. Write them all down - don't be critical! You can refine your product ideas later on.

Get Help.

Get opinions and advice from others -- both from your prospective audience, and from 'mentors' - people who have 'been there, done that'. There are many ways to do this. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Use the message boards.** You'll find some people who are willing to help - people who can speak with the voice of experience. Just ask.

Of course, you should be reasonable in your requests. Asking someone to become your personal full-time mentor for free is not reasonable. Asking for help with a specific problem is far more likely to get responses.

You could also contact the board moderator and ask for permission to post a survey on his or her board.

- **Advertise in newsletters.** Find quality newsletters where your prospects gather. Subscribe to the newsletter to see the quality of the publication for yourself. Then purchase a solo ad and send out a reader survey. You will likely need to provide an incentive for people to respond - for example, a significant discount on your new product or service, or a nice gift that appeals to your prospects.
- **Use your website.** Okay, you might not have one at this point - or you may not have much traffic - but you might as well use what you've got. Assuming that your site draws visitors who are also your prospects, place an interactive survey on your site and again, give visitors a reason to fill it out. Make it as intuitive and easy for them as possible; if it's confusing or too long, chances are they won't bother.

Analyze the Competition.

I often hear people saying that they want to be the first into a market. I personally disagree. Given the choice of entering a market with no competition or one where there's lots of competition, I'll take the one with competition.

Why? Because competition is evidence that there's a demand for the product. No competition at all may indicate that there's no market for the product... while too *much* competition can also spell trouble!

Actively search out your competitors. What are they doing, how are they doing it, and how *well* are they doing? How are they reaching their intended audience? How much are they charging? How do they differ from their own competition? What can you offer that they can't? Is there room for you in this market?

This last point is a very important consideration. I'll use an example to illustrate the point. Let's say you live in a small resort town that specializes in various "outdoor adventure packages" - skiing, dog-sledding, mountain climbing, etc.

Someone in your town runs an Internet business where he's made arrangements with these outdoor-adventure companies: for every package booked through his website, he earns a percentage of the package price as his commission. Now would it make sense for you to try to compete with him?

- He's been in business for a couple of years now, and has developed a steady, loyal clientele.
- He has a great reputation that has spread by word-of-mouth.
- There aren't that many outdoor-adventure companies in your little town; most of them are his clients.

Doesn't sound very promising for you to start a competing business, does it? Unless you can somehow lure his clients to you, then your chances don't sound very good. Plus if your town really is small, you probably wouldn't want to create any ill-will between you and your neighbor!

Prepare and Plan

I know how tempting it is to jump right in with both feet - especially once you have solid evidence that you have a great product idea and an audience that wants it. But preparation is vitally important; it will help you to anticipate potential problems or issues, and keep you organized - you'll more likely to do everything you need to do, rather than facing an unexpected problem in a panic later on. Some things to think about include:

- **How will you arrange your time?** You cannot build a business in your spare time, although you can build one part-time. What time commitments can you make on a consistent basis?
- **Your work area.** Do you have a quiet, private place from which you can build your business without worrying about other people getting into your files? It might sound trivial, but it really isn't. Imagine if you put a great deal of time and effort into writing up a business plan, and before you could back it up, someone used your computer and accidentally deleted the file or crashed the machine...!
- **Assess your startup costs.** How much will you need to develop your product? Are there special materials, software, or research you'll need? Create a list of necessities, plus a list of things that would be "nice to have". Then figure out where you'll get the money.
- **A business and marketing plan.** Both will give you a "blueprint" of where you want to do. They'll provide your business with direction and goals.
- **Bookkeeping.** No doubt you will make purchases for your business... come up with a simple but effective bookkeeping system so that you don't have to scrounge around for receipts or invoices. Talk to your accountant for bookkeeping suggestions.

The [US Small Business Association](#) website is a great place to get some general business startup information.

Crunch the Numbers.

You're in business to make money! How much would you need to sell the product/service for in order to make a decent profit (after paying all expenses)? Consider:

- **Your time.** How much would you like to be paid after everything's said and done? A service such as web design requires a far greater time-commitment than, say, writing a book and continuing to sell it "forever".
- **Production and marketing costs.** How much do you have to invest in the development of your product? Do you need any

special software or other materials to create it? How will you reach your prospects and what are your estimated costs?

- **Shipping and inventory.** Do you sell a tangible product or one that can be delivered electronically? Instant delivery over the 'net is very cheap, whereas a physical good that has to be packaged or shipped will incur extra costs.
- **Customer service.** How much support will you need to provide your customers? Obviously you should do everything you reasonably can to keep your customers happy. Factor in the amount of time you think you'll need to spend on support requests. Will you need to hire additional staff to help you with support? For some products and services it is reasonable and even accepted to charge support fees (a typical example is technical support for a software product).
- **Fees.** How much do you have to pay your order processor in fees? For example, many third-party merchant providers take between 10 and 25 percent of your gross sale.

Poll Your Prospective Audience.

Contact your prospective audiences to see if there is any demand for your product or service at your intended price. One way to do this is through surveys (on your website, in targeted newsletters, through message boards).

Your goal is to try to find out if people are willing to buy your product at a price at which you can make a decent profit.

Selling for "cheap" isn't necessarily better, either. *Perceived value* is important. For example, let's say you found a 500-page Internet marketing manual selling for \$1.49. You would be suspicious, right? People automatically place a value on goods depending on what they think it's worth.

Create a Business Plan.

Gather together all the information you've researched up to this point and develop a business plan, something that every business should have. It's typically used when applying for a loan -- but

even if you don't use it for that purpose, a business plan will give your business some "shape". It will help you to anticipate problems, allocate resources (financial or otherwise), set clear and measurable goals, and in general, it acts as a guide to help you make the right business decisions.

There's a lot of information on how to create a business plan; one great source is the [US Small Business Association's Business Plan Outline](#). If you prefer to have some help, you can hire a freelancer by [posting a job description](#).

Product or Service Development.

As you develop your product, be sure to "check in" with yourself regularly -- just to ensure that the product is turning out as intended.

Consider getting your product reviewed. This is the "painful" part for many people -- send your product or service out to colleagues and prospective customers in order to get their opinions. Hopefully you'll get some great testimonials that you can use on your site... plus you may also get some valuable criticisms to help you to make improvements.

Market, Market, and More Marketing.

A great product by itself is nothing. Customers have to know about your product and be convinced that they want it!

Internet marketing isn't an exact science. Don't be afraid to experiment with new methods of your own. And be sure to market *consistently* – that's one of the keys to success.

Just remember that marketing should **not** be pure "guesswork". Invest in an ad tracker and some website stats; this information can provide you with many insights into the effectiveness of your marketing that you wouldn't otherwise know. Your investment will repay you many times over if you learn how to read and use these stats to your benefit.

Of course, this is just the beginning! There are plenty of other things you can work on as well - for example, building a (potential) customer base is very important; one way to do this is by offering a free newsletter. You might also choose to make some extra cash by promoting a couple of carefully-selected affiliate programs (commission-based sales).

What it comes down to is this: don't believe any hype about how "easy" it is to make money online. It's a business, and like every business, it takes perserverance and plenty of hard work. **But many "regular" people are successfully earning a comfortable living online!**

Of course, "success" isn't necessarily measured by how much money you make. For some people, success may simply be making a few hundred a month and being able to contribute to the household expenses. Another person may just want "make a difference" somehow, with the extra income as a nice "bonus". How long it takes each person to reach his or her goals will vary.

Permits, Licenses, and Other Details

Business registration and licensing requirements will vary depending on where you live. This is not intended to be legal advice; please consult with a lawyer for information on your specific situation.

- **Check zoning regulations.** Make sure that you are allowed to run a business from your home. Some residential areas may place restrictions on the types of businesses that can be run from your home. Try calling city offices first; if they don't have this information, they may be able to point you in the right direction.
- **Purchase any required licenses or permits.** Once again, you will need to check with local authorities to find out what licenses and permits you need.
- **Decide on a business structure.** Many Internet home businesses start out as sole proprietorships; visit the [US Small Business Association](#) for more information.
- **Register a business name.** This is usually a quick and easy process. Start by calling your local government offices, or even the business department of your local bank. They should be able to tell you where you can register a business name.

- **Look into opening a business banking account.** Make an appointment with your bank to discuss your situation. They'll be able to make suggestions on the best package for your needs.
- **Consult with professionals.** Depending on your situation, you may need to use the services of lawyers, accountants or bookkeepers, insurance agents or brokers, and others.

This isn't an exhaustive list, but it's a good start. Many cities also have organizations dedicated to helping small businesses -- check your Yellow Pages or the local Chamber of Commerce to see if there's one in your area.

How Much Does It Cost to Start a Business Online?

Starting a business on the web is affordable ... but like any business, you should be prepared to make some smart investments.

If you have no money to spend at all, then you're better off looking for a job, rather than starting a business.

That's the hard truth... businesses will take time, money, and effort to turn a profit. If you're serious about making money online, be prepared to treat your business as a **business** - not a hobby! That doesn't mean you have to go wild and throw thousands of dollars at anything that might help you make money ... but be willing to do a lot of reading and research, and then make some wise investments. The old saying, "*It takes money to make money!*" still applies on the Internet.

Unlike brick-and-mortar businesses, starting an online business is very affordable. Your goal is to keep your expenses as low as possible while getting the highest possible return. Weigh convenience, time-savings, and the value of the information against the cost. **The key is work within your budget.**

One other point I want to emphasize is that **cheap is not necessarily better** (it's not necessarily worse, either). Other considerations are customer service, technical support, "extras", and reliability. How much something costs isn't as important as how much return you'll get from it.



A General Note About Using Free Services

Some services start off as free ... but later on, the company figures out that they can't be profitable without charging for the service. So they remove the free service and tell you that if you want to continue to use the service, you're going to have to pay.

You may have already expended a great deal of time or effort setting things up with the free service. That's life. Don't use a service just because it's currently free – that could change anytime. Instead, find a service that meets your needs (if it just happens to be free, so much the better!).

Here's a list of startup costs to help you begin your research.
Costs will vary depending on what you choose, where you live, etc.

One-Time Costs

1. Computer System

You don't need a top-of-the-line, start-of-the-art, super-duper mega-machine that costs more than your mortgage. Computers are always being improved - and thus the older models are always getting cheaper. Get a good computer that will serve your current and projected short-term future needs well. Don't go for extravagant, high-priced features unless you truly need them.

Two things you should definitely get are [anti-virus software](#) and a [firewall](#).

A [virus](#) is a malicious program that may simply be annoying, or that may have serious consequences - including erasing your hard drive! New viruses come out all the time, so you should have an up-to-date virus scanner constantly running while you're using your computer. Viruses can end up on your machine through an email attachment or when you download something off the Internet. There are many virus scanners available, including:

- [McAfee Virus Scan](#)
- [Norton Anti-Virus](#)
- [Trend Micro's Housecall](#) (free online scan)

A firewall protects your computer from unauthorized access (eg. hackers). This is especially important for people with DSL or cable modems. The one I use is [Zone Alarm](#).

2. Reference Books

I do think investing in a few good reference manuals are well worth the time, effort, and money they save you. And they **do** save you money in the long run - you can learn from other people's experiences and avoid making the same mistakes!

- **Visit online auctions such as [eBay](#).** For example, if you are particularly interested in a certain Internet marketing manual, you may be able to find someone who's willing to sell it to you cheap.
- **Take advantage of free online services.** For example, there are many excellent free HTML tutorials available, such as:
 1. [Joe Barta's HTML tutorial](#)
 2. [Joe Burn's HTMLGoodies](#)
 3. [BigNoseBird.com](#)
 4. [HTML Primer](#)
 5. [WebMonkey](#)

3. Email Software

Most new computer systems come pre-installed with email software - usually Microsoft's Outlook Express program. This is adequate, but there are better choices. Outlook is also often the target of malicious email viruses. Why not switch to a different program that offer better peace of mind? Here are a couple of alternative email programs with great reputations ...

- [EudoraMail](#) is an excellent email program. You can get the full-featured version free if you're willing to run it in "sponsored mode" (view small ads). The "light" version has fewer features but no ads; and the paid version is full-featured with no ads. Your choice.
- [Pegasus Mail](#) is another free download. I've heard good things about it, but have never used it myself.

4. HTML editor

You don't actually need an HTML editor; you can create your web pages using Notepad if you like (the free text editor that comes with Windows). However, HTML editors have convenient features and lots of flexibility for people who want it.

- [Arachnophilia](#) is a free HTML editor that's received rave reviews, including 4 stars from ZdNet. It's popular with many "beginners".
- **The editor I use is [HomeSite](#).** If you're someone who likes to write their own HTML, have complete control over the look-and-feel of your site, and who wants maximum flexibility, you'll probably love HomeSite. A free trial is available.

5. Permits, licenses, and company registration fees

Check with your local authorities for costs and instructions. Many bookstores carry publications on these topics. Your local tax office may also be able to offer help for small/home business owners. See the previous section for more information.

6. Home office furniture

A computer desk, chair, adequate lighting, and perhaps also an additional working surface (for when you're doing stuff by regular 'ol paper & pen) and a filing cabinet are sufficient for many home business startups. Check your local auction houses for great deals on office furniture and supplies.

7. Search Engine / Major Index Review Fees

You can get a great deal of targeted traffic to your website from the major search engines and indexes. Visitors that find your site through the search engines and indexes are highly targeted; they specifically search you out, rather than you searching them out.

Many of the major SEs and indexes now charge for a review. These are just for **reviews**; they **don't** guarantee that your site will be indexed or listed. You will need to budget for these submissions -- and possibly also for professional search engine optimization services, if you choose to use them.

8. Ad Tracking Software

This is probably one of the most overlooked parts of building an online business. Tracking software "codes" your URLs so that you know which ads are working best, and which ones aren't working very well at all. It allows you to refine your ad copy, target your audience better, discard marketing campaigns that aren't working, and concentrate on those that are.

The cost for tracking software varies widely. Some sites will charge a monthly usage fee (typically in the range of around \$20/month); others sell their software for a one-time fee.

Recurring Costs

1. Internet access fees

Monthly fees typically range from \$10 (dial-up connections) up to \$50 or even more (high-speed DSL or cable connections).

2. Website hosting

Pay a reputable web host for reliable, ad-free hosting services. Note that your web host may also include stuff like free use of an HTML editor; mailing list management software; autoresponders; website stats; and more. Web hosting is typically from \$5/month to \$50/month and up.

3. Domain name registration

A *domain name* is your address on the web, ie. onlinebusinessbasics.com is one of my domain names. You can prepay for one year at a time, or several years. If you prepay for several years, you won't have to worry about so often (if you don't pay up, your domain goes back into the pool of available names!). Typical prices are \$10-30/year for .com, .net, and .org domains.

- **Reserve for more than one year.** Some registrars offer discounts to people who reserve their domain names for two or more years at a time.
- **Don't just look at price - look for great service too.** It would be a shame to lose your domain just because your

registrar didn't notify you when your domain was about to expire!

4. Autoresponders

Autoresponders are email addresses that will automatically answer emails sent to it with a predefined message. Most free autoresponders display third-party ads within your message, which is why I recommend that you use a professional, ad-free autoresponder. Keep in mind that even if your web host does offer them as part of your hosting package, they might not be adequate. Autoresponders typically cost from \$10 to \$20 a month. Others are available for a one-time fee.

5. Mailing list management

Offering a free newsletter is a great way to keep in touch with your visitors. If you decide to start one of your own – and I highly recommend that you do -- you will need to find a way to manage your list and send mailings. Prices vary widely. Expect to spend at least a couple hundred dollars a year.

6. Marketing

There are many highly effective free or low-cost marketing methods. Even so, marketing is likely to be one of your highest expenses. A combination of free and paid advertising works best.

It's hard to say how much you'll spend; the only way to know what works is to experiment. You may find that you'll reach your income goals without spending any money at all on marketing - if so, all the better for you! On the other hand, you may find that you need to shell out extra money each month in order to try to reach your income goals.

7. Office supplies

Printer cartridges, toner, notebooks, etc.

8. Phone, voice mail, fax

Many home business owners start out by using their current phone line as a double for their business line/Internet access. However, if you get lots of phone inquiries you may want to get a second phone line or look into getting DSL service.

- **Use an all-in-one communications service.** These will usually provide you with voice mail, fax, email, and sometimes a personal 800 number all accessible from one account. Look for one with no monthly fees, hidden charges, and a "pay-per-use" philosophy. One service is investigate is [uReach](#).
- **You can also use a local service such as [Mailboxes, Etc.](#)** They offer the use of a mailbox, fax, and other business services for a fee.

9. Post Office Box

Some people prefer to have a separate mailing address for business purposes. You might consider this if you get a lot of business correspondence. Check with your local post office for details about how you can rent a PO box.

Other Costs

You may need to occasionally hire help, whether it's contract, temporary, or full-time. One way to do this is to hire a freelancer. Freelancers offer a wide array of services, including:

- Custom graphics
- Ghostwriting (articles, for example)
- Sales copy
- Website design
- Programming or scripts
- Bookkeeping
- Data entry, typing, or other clerical work
- Booklets, brochures, etc.
- Business or marketing plans

The freelance community I personally use offers a rating system so that you can view the qualifications of the bidder as well as feedback from their previous customers. I've been very happy with the service I've received. You'll need to register to participate; you can do so [here](#).



Startup Cost Summary

One-Time Costs

Computer System
Reference Books
Email Software
HTML Editor
Permits and Licenses
Registration Fees
Furniture
SE/Index Reviews
Ad Tracking Software
(may require recurring fees)

Recurring Costs

Internet Access
Website Hosting
Domain Registration
Autoresponders
(some available for a one-time fee)
List Management
Marketing
Office Supplies
Phone, Voice Mail,
Fax
Post Office Box

That Dirty Four-Letter Word Called 'Spam'

What's the dirtiest four-letter word you can think of?

On the web, it's [spam](#) -- the practice of sending unsolicited, untargeted mass commercial messages. There are serious consequences to spamming - plus it's poor business practice anyways. I mean, how often are you thrilled to see 238 new messages in your mailbox, with enticing offers such as:

- How to get free Viagra to cure my impotence problem
- How to lose 40 pounds in 2 days with no dieting or exercise
- Get in the "ground floor" of an exciting opportunity that will make me \$10000 in one month - no work or selling involved - I just have to cash the cheques!

You get the idea. I've even received repeated emails informing me that a sultry, sexy woman is looking for a husband just like me (I'm female!).

In all seriousness, spam can, and probably will, cause far more trouble than it's worth.

How Do You Know If You're Spamming?

Everyone has an opinion of what constitutes spamming and what doesn't. In a nutshell, you need to have someone's permission before you email them.

Spam works on the principle of numbers - the more people you email, the more sales you make. However:

Spam might make you a quick buck ... but it's no way to build a viable long-term business.

First of all, it's *untargeted marketing* -- spammers email a mish-mash of people, most of whom have no interest whatsoever in what you have to offer. Spammers hope that just by sheer numbers alone they'll make a few sales.

There are also many anti-spammers around who will take the time to track you down and report you to the proper authorities. You can get closed down by your ISP and/or your web host, lose membership in an affiliate program, even be charged "clean-up costs". And do you really want a reputation as a "spammer"?

Generally Agreed-Upon Rules of "Netiquette"

- **Don't harvest email addresses from message boards, classified ads, websites, etc.** You do not have the right to send your offer to someone whose address you found on a website - no matter how much you think your offer would interest him.
- **Don't indiscriminately post ads to message boards.** Message boards have rules - and moderators to ensure the rules are followed. Many boards will allow you to post a link at the end of your message... but beware: they don't look kindly upon someone who breezes in, leaves a link, and then disappears.
- **Don't add someone to your mailing list just because they've asked you a question.** It's okay to mail them a polite

follow-up that directly relates to their question ... but don't start bombarding them with offers.

- **Don't spam newsletter editors!** Subscribing to a publication does not give you the right to send offers to the editor.
- **Don't spam newsletter lists.** This is related to the above. I get loads of "offers" which state,

"You are receiving this information because we belong to same opt-in List. If you no longer wish to receive messages, you'll have to unsubscribe to the list."

These spammers hope to get access to my entire list of subscribers by spamming my newsletter email address. Believe me, there is NO WAY any self-respecting editor would subject their subscribers to a constant barrage of spam.

- **Don't indiscriminately send offers to other webmasters.** You may have downloaded their free eBook, ordered some advertising, or somehow done business with them. That doesn't mean they're interested in any "hot new opportunities" or "incredible new products".

So What's NOT Spam?

- **Using autoresponders to capture prospect's email addresses.** An autoresponder is an email address that's set up to automatically reply to any inquiries with a predefined message. For example, you could put up a link on your site that says, "Top 10 Considerations Before Adopting a Dog! Click here to have this information emailed to you" on your website. Your visitor clicks on the link, sends off an email, and your autoresponder replies with the article.

Good autoresponders allow you to send follow-up messages as well. Be sure that every message contains a link where your visitor can unsubscribe.

- **Mailing to your own opt-in newsletter.** Many successful online businesses run a free newsletter of some sort. Provided your subscribers have all explicitly requested to join your newsletter (you cannot just add them because they've communicated with you at one point or another), then you can

mail them an offer every so often. It's one of the "perks" of having your own list!

- **Use of ezine advertising.** This is when you pay an editor to run your ad in their newsletter. You still have to be cautious, though - you want to make sure the editor has a strictly opt-in list!
- **Following up with a prospect.** If someone asks you a question about your product, it's okay to send a nice follow-up email a few days later. Just don't add them to any 'list' and do not continue to bombard them with offers. Include a copy of the original email inquiry with your follow-up message.

Spam is a very touchy subject. There are plenty more "rules" I could print ... but the fact of the matter is, everyone has a different definition of spam. It's better to be cautious if in doubt!

Responsible Email Marketing: 4 Tips on Choosing a True Opt-In List

Direct email marketing is extremely effective. Ezine advertising and the use of follow-up autoresponders are both commonly used. Another way to market directly through email is to purchase a targeted list of prospects.

Opt-in is also sometimes referred to as **permission marketing**. It's exactly what it sounds like: someone must first explicitly request information from you before you send it to them. This differs from **opt-out**, where someone sends you their offer first - and then asks disinterested parties to remove themselves from the list.

You definitely want to use the opt-in method of marketing. Here are a few measures you can take to protect yourself from bad lists:

1. Don't Purchase Email Addresses from Questionable Sources

By "questionable sources", I mean spam emails you get in your own mailbox. A big clue that the email addresses are useless is a statement like, "2 million SPAM-FREE addresses for only \$99!". Heck, **they're spamming you!** Is that a shining example of their "spam-free" addresses?

The other big red flag is websites hosted on free domains, offering email address lists. Spammers regularly use free domains - that way, if the web host closes them down, they haven't lost anything. They'll just open up a new one.

2. Don't Assume the List is "Opt-In", Just Because Someone Says It Is.

Most people are honest and like to assume everyone else is the same way. Unfortunately, there are scamsters out and about, trying to make a buck and not caring how they do it. One way is to claim that their list is opt-in, even when it's not. Do your own research.

3. True Opt-In Lists are Not Cheap.

There are legitimate services where you can rent an opt-in list of targeted email addresses, such as PostMasterDirect.com. These addresses are not cheap; they typically go for \$0.15/each and up. In fact, a minimum order with PostMasterDirect is a whopping \$1000 - far beyond the means of most beginners!

This is a far cry from the cheap lists which are filled with addresses harvested from the web. I've seen 14 million addresses advertised for a mere \$200. Ask yourself how and why these people can afford to give away their list for such a cheap price ... ? Probably because they use commercially-available software to "harvest" addresses from all over the Internet.

Of course, you don't have to rent a list -- you can choose instead to *advertise in an opt-in newsletter*. That way the editor has already done the hard part: finding subscribers and building a relationship with them.

4. Test the List: Subscribe Yourself.

Have any doubts about the newsletter or email list that you want to advertise with? Subscribe yourself to the list first and see how it's handled. If you can't find a place to subscribe, then forget it: you may be automatically added to the list by corresponding with the owner, submitting a link to his site, etc.

Otherwise, submit a subscription request yourself. List managers use either a [single opt-in](#) or a [double opt-in](#) method of confirming

subscriptions. **Single opt-in** simply means that you send in your subscription request and you're added to the list.

Double opt-in is the "safer" method. It works like this: you send a subscription request. The list manager emails you back at the address you specified, asking you to "verify your subscription". You then have to email them back using the same address. This helps to ensure that you are subscribed with both your knowledge and your consent.

Targeting Your Audience

It always surprises me how many "Internet malls" pop up online. You know the type: sites that sell everything from egg beaters to nutritional supplements, from Internet marketing manuals to online dating services.

Internet malls are nearly useless. In the "real world", malls are helpful: they give you a variety of stores to choose from so that you can do your shopping all at once.

On the Internet, surfers have the ability to specifically search out what they want. They're not looking for a "mall" ... instead, they use search engines or directories to go to the websites that offer whatever it is they're looking for. **"Location" is not a big deal on the Internet; another website is only a click away.**

You stand a much better chance of doing well online if you select a target market, and keep both your website content and your products and services tightly focused on that target market. A web surfer searching for specialty pet beds, for example, may also be tempted to buy other pet products featured on your pet lovers website.

By creating a highly targeted site you'll be able to concentrate on drawing visitors who already have a high level of interest in what you have to sell. That means more money for you! It's far easier to sell specialty pet beds to a pet lover than it is to sell bookkeeping software to a pet lover!



Examples of Target Markets

Your **target market (or target audience)** is simply a specific group of people with the same interests or needs. For example, your Internet business could cater to:

- Poodle breeders;
- Single moms;
- Computer game junkies;
- Fitness enthusiasts;
- Comic book collectors;
- Orchid lovers;
- "Cheapskates".

Target markets are as endless as your imagination!

4 Suggestions for Choosing a Target Market

Your choice of a target market will dictact everything you do online: what you write, which products you offer, where you advertise, etc. Here are a few suggestions on generating ideas for a target audience.

1. Choose a market related to your job skills.

What skills have you picked up through education or your current line of work? Can you market these skills online? For example,

- **Administrative assistants** may have superior organizational skills that they can use to offer online planning or reminder services.
 - **Programmers and engineers** may be able to write custom scripts and sell licenses for their use.
 - **Construction workers** may be able to create a series of tips booklets on "inside information" prospective home owners should know before selecting a builder.
-

- **Stay-at-home parents** may be able to offer child-care tips, information on how to evaluate a daycare, or advice on finding the right school.

Everyone has a unique set of skills and experiences! Think about whether or not you could enjoy continuing to do this type of work while self-employed on the Internet.

2. Choose a market related to a passion or an interest.

Are you a hobby gardener? A fan of Rhythm 'n Blues music? A proponent of wiping out work-at-home scams?

One thing to be aware of is that turning a hobby into a business may "ruin" it for you ... you may not like the feeling of being "forced" to come up with new content, new products, etc. You may simply prefer to keep your hobby exactly that: a hobby.

Then again, you may adore it - imagine, getting paid to do what you love! I know several people who have turned their passions into businesses, and not only do they make money, but they also have a good time while they're at it.

3. Choose a market that will fill an unanswered need.

Can you think of a product or service that you wished existed ... but you haven't been able to find it anywhere? If so, chances are that others have as well. The question is whether or not there's a market large enough for you to tap into and make a decent profit.

4. Choose an existing market - and improve on what's offered.

If you take a look around the web, you will find millions of websites that claim that they have the answer to finding a work-at-home job. If you were to try and break into this market, you could "specialize" a bit more: do you want to cater to work-at-home moms? Work-at-home *dads*? Freelance writers?

Once you've decided, you'll have to take a look at what others are offering. Can you offer something unique or improve on what all the other sites are doing? Can you offer better service, more personalized service, "extras" that no one else has, a unique point of view?

The more saturated your market, the harder it will be to make money. Put another way ... if the [supply](#) of sites, products, and services to your target market far outweighs the [demand](#) for it ... you will be faced with much stiffer competition.



Can You Stick With It for the Long Haul?

Obviously there's a whole lot of work involved in starting and building a business of any kind. When you're in the process of choosing your target market, think about whether you'll be able to:

- **Offer regularly updated content of interest to your audience.** Fresh, content-rich sites attract repeat visitors. Do you have the motivation, knowledge, and interest in writing articles or searching out information of interest to this audience?
- **Make a decent profit** - are there good [affiliate programs](#) available, or do you have the knowledge and desire to create new products of interest to your audience?
- **Sustain your interest and motivation.** There's no point in starting up a site whose theme bores you. Pick something that interests you, so that you'll be much more likely to stick with it through rough periods.

Everyone's entitled to make mistakes or change their minds. But wouldn't it be easier to pick a market you'd enjoy catering to, and be able to stick with, then to pour your heart and soul into a business that you later give up?

Is the Internet an Ideal Medium for Your Target Market?

The Internet offers an amazing opportunity for the "average" person to make money selling products and services (whether his own, or those of another company's). However, not all products will sell equally well online.

Information products such as books, reports, newsletters, and so on sell very well online. Most people surf the web in search of information - if you have something that answers their needs, you'll find someone willing to pay for it.

You can probably create an information product for most target audiences. That's assuming you **want** to create an information product! Some people prefer to sell "tangible" products, something you can hold in your hand.

These are called **hard goods or tangible goods**. Hard goods that you can find at your local mall will be harder to sell online. For one thing, if your visitor can simply swing by the mall on his way home from work and pick up your product, why would he bother to order it online and be forced to pay shipping charges? Secondly, why should he wait to have it shipped to him?

That's not to say that all hard goods are difficult to sell on the web. If you offer something unique that can't be found locally, you probably have a better chance of making sales online.

For example: Some Internet businesses sell dog food. The price of the food may be competitive -- even cheaper than your local store -- but when you add in shipping charges for such a heavy package, it's not too likely that you'll save any money at all! Plus you'll have to wait for the food to arrive, when you could just go to the store and pick it up yourself -- it's cheaper and faster.

And, of course, there's the obvious: **don't pick a target market that's not likely to be on the Internet**. For example, you'll have a much harder time if you target a bunch of retired folks who are terrified of technology, or low-income families who may not have access to a computer. Common sense should guide you here. :-)

A Comparison of Money-Making Options

No matter what anyone says, **no business is "right" for everyone**. We're all unique and we all have a unique set of skills, interests, talents, and experiences. It's up to you to find your special "niche". Don't believe someone who tells you that what they've got is a "guaranteed" road to success – particularly since "success" depends in part on your personal attributes (how hard you work, how fast you learn, how motivated you are, etc).

Whatever you choose, give yourself the chance to make it work! Many people spend a great deal of time and energy hopping from one latest-and-greatest money-making program to the next – yet never actually make money while they're at it. This is common in the 'instant riches' mentality of the Internet ... **However, business is business, regardless of whether it's in the 'real world' or on the Internet.** Work hard, put forth your best effort, and give it a chance.

Below you'll find a basic description of several ways to earn an income online. None of them are "perfect", but you may find that one option appeals more to you than the others.

Affiliate Programs

Description:

Affiliate programs are a popular option for beginners. You don't need your own product or service; instead, you sell another company's products or services in return for a commission.

Advantages:

- **You only have to concentrate on one thing.** Marketing is your only job. You don't have to think about inventory, billing, shipping, or anything else. It gives you a chance to "learn the ropes" of Internet marketing without worrying about other stuff.
- **Start-up costs are lower.** While I still recommend that you have your domain and use professional web hosting services, you won't have to cough up the cash to handle issues such as inventory, billing, or shipping.
- **Extra income.** Even if you already have a product or service of your own, adding a few good affiliate programs to your site (or

promoting them to your opt-in newsletter) can bring in a decent income if you're consistent.

Disadvantages:

- **You have to share the profits.** You're working on commission, so you only get a percentage of the profits. Sometimes it's as low as 5%, but on average it's between 15% and 30%.
- **You're at the mercy of a company.** For any number of reasons, a company may terminate their affiliate program – which leaves the affiliate scrambling to replace the income. Many affiliate companies have also continuously decreased their commission rates -- you may be receiving a 40% commission one day, but the agreement could change and you could be receiving 10% the next. If you don't accept the agreement then you usually have no choice but to terminate your affiliate status.
- **The company has the right to terminate your affiliate status** if they believe you have violated one or more of the terms of the agreement.
- **You may be restricted in what types of marketing you can do.** For example, your affiliate agreement may state that you are only permitted to use company-approved ads or banners. Even if you know that these tools are not the most effective, you cannot use anything else unless you obtain explicit permission.
- **You rely on the company for your pay cheques.** Some companies haven't paid out, ever (despite owing affiliates commissions), others pay out late - sometimes months after they were supposed to! As you can imagine, this can cause a lot of stress to affiliates.

Where to Find Affiliate Programs:

There are affiliate programs available in every possible category imaginable – for sites catering to business, hunting/camping, travel, jewelry, kids, beauty, gifts, and so much more. You should be able to find something that's a good fit for your target market. An excellent place to do your research is at [Associate-It.com](http://www.associate-it.com), <http://www.associate-it.com/>

Remember that although you're looking for specific things (generous commissions, real-time tracking, residual income, etc), **you still have to test which products appeal to your audience.** It may turn out that a program that pays 5% commission has products that sell far better than a program that pays 50%.

Don't be afraid to drop unprofitable programs and replace them with something better. But give it a reasonable chance first - you need a fair amount of traffic (I'd say at least 100 unique visitors per day) and consistent promotion (within your ezine and/or articles, for example) in order to make an educated judgment about whether or not the product will "work" with your audience.

More information on affiliate programs is available later in this manual.

Purchasing Resell Rights

Description:

Some people just plain don't want to develop their own products. Maybe they lack the time, or they don't have any ideas. Whatever the reason, it's possible to purchase "resell rights" to a product - that means you buy the rights to sell the someone else's product.

Advantages:

- **You keep 100% of the profits.** The product is "yours", so whatever profit you make is yours to keep.
- **You don't have to suffer through the difficulties of creating a product yourself.** No technical worries, no development costs ... you just find a quality product and purchase the rights to sell it.

Disadvantages:

- **The market may be saturated.** Unless you buy exclusive rights to the product (typically very expensive), you can bet that there are others within your market selling the exact same thing. Initially you may be able to sell a lot of copies... but when your product starts appearing everywhere you care to look, you'll probably find your sales slowing down.

- **You'll need to handle product delivery.** How and where do you keep inventory? How will you process orders online? How will you ship the product, through whom, and at what cost? How will you handle customer service, damaged goods, and returned goods? These are just some of the questions that go with the territory. Purchasing resell rights gives you the product - but it doesn't give you the means to SELL the product.
- **You are responsible for creating and testing all marketing materials.** With affiliate programs, you're often given text ads, articles, banners, and other promotional materials to help you get started. When you purchase resell rights, it's usually all up to you. You create and test the ad copy. You write the articles. You create the banners. Marketing becomes your sole responsibility.

Where to Find Products with Resell Rights:

If you're surfing around one day and find a product that's a good fit for your target market, you may want to inquire about purchasing resell rights. Note that many people are willing to sell *non-exclusive rights* (you can resell the product, but so can others).

Realize that you may take someone by surprise with your inquiry. :-)
Do your research before you inquire and determine what is a "reasonable" price to pay. Set a maximum price you're willing to pay as well. Then, if the product owner is willing, you can start negotiations. If required, consult with a legal professional to draw up a contract.

! [FreeToSell](#) offers an extensive package of information products for people in the Internet marketing/business area. Some infoproducts you have full resell rights to, while others you have full giveaway rights (that you can use as bonuses or premiums for your own customers).

Creating Your Own Product

Description:

The type of product you can create is as unlimited as your imagination! Online, the most popular products are digital products - anything that can be accessed instantly. This includes eBooks, software, games, newsletters, and membership sites.

You're not limited to digital products, of course. Many people successfully sell "hard" goods as well - for instance, "real" books on every topic imaginable, and specialty products such as handmade jewelry.

Advantages:

- **You keep 100% of the profits.** No sharing with anyone, unless you choose to! :-)
- **You control the quality of the product.** Unlike with the purchase of resell rights, you create the product and therefore have the power to make sure it meets your own quality standards.
- **Satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.** You put your love, sweat, and tears into creating a product that you can be proud of!
- **You know the product intimately.** The people who are most successful at earning money online are those that have first-hand knowledge about the product they're selling. And you can't get any closer to the product than if it's your own!
- **You can get others to sell it for you.** In other words, you can start your own affiliate program! Having a team of affiliates selling for you is a powerful way to expand your sales reach.
- **You have leverage!** You can use your product to negotiate joint ventures with other businesses. Joint ventures are potentially very profitable. They're discussed in more detail later in this manual.

Disadvantages:

- **Product creation can be very expensive.** You need to survey your target market, do your research, assemble or purchase the tools and materials necessary to create the product. You'll need to develop and test marketing materials. You have to find people who can critique your product and provide constructive criticism. You get the idea - product development can be a long process.
- **You're responsible for EVERYTHING.** That includes inventory, billing (online orders, credit card processing, cheques, etc), shipping, customer service, refunds, product updates ...

- **You have to live with the potential of rejection or failure.** Not everyone will love or want your product. Some may even outright hate it. You can't please everyone (and shouldn't try to) - but criticism is always difficult to take, particularly when it's directed at something you've poured your heart and soul into. There's even a chance that your product will never flourish, in which case you'll have to let it go and start over again with a new idea.

How to Get Started:

Not every product is going to be as easy to create as others. Please be sure to check with the appropriate authorities about product regulations, zoning, etc. You may also want to talk to a qualified legal professional about issues directly relating to your product.

- **Information (digital).** "Infoproducts" such as eBooks are wonderful -- they don't cost much to create, and they can be delivered automatically. You don't have to worry about shipping or inventory. Write about anything you're experienced with: how to pick a contractor, how to negotiate for a new car, how to find a financial planner that's right for you, how to research a daycare center before enrolling your kids, where to find the best Bed & Breakfasts in your state or province ... there are countless possibilities! Remember that most people come online to look for information -- give them what they want!
- **Software.** Are you a programmer? Design and develop a program that solves a problem or provides pleasure/entertainment, and you've got a winner. I've seen simple software sold successfully on the 'net -- stuff like label creators, "sticky note" programs, even funny little animations.
- **Specialty items.** I've seen custom scratching posts for cats, handmade beaded jewelry, specialized clothing (for example, a picture of your baby on a t-shirt with a balloon-caption with a clever saying), and personal caricatures created from photographs.
- **Videos, audio tapes, or (printed) books.** Are you a motivational speaker? Create a tape. Are you an accomplished dog trainer? Create a video demonstrating some simple dog-training techniques. Are you a carpenter? Write a simple "how-to" book on build a deck, complete with illustrations.

Offering a Service

Description:

There are loads of people who make money by offering services online. They range from web researchers, to graphic artists, virtual assistants, and programmers.

Advantages:

- **Potentially faster start-up time.** Many people offer services in an area for which they already have the necessary skills.
- **Repeat business.** If customers are happy with your service they're likely to come back. For example, let's say you're a graphic artist and you specialize in logos. You promptly create a fantastic logo for me at a reasonable price. The next time I need another logo done I'll go straight back to you.
- **Customer referrals.** Encourage happy customers tell their friends about your service. You can help them along by offering a discount for their next order for every new customer they refer.

Disadvantages:

- **Your income is limited by your time.** Services tend to be customized. For example, when designing a logo you have to take into account the suggestions of your customer, his or her site design colors, any wording or special images she'd like to include, and so on. You'll need to be prepared for all types of customers; some will naturally insist on more personal attention than others.
- **You'll need to take care of all the technical and logistical details.** Once again, how to take orders and how to fulfill them are good examples. Another, of course, is how much do you charge? Most people want to offer competitive rates ... but there are some very successful service providers that deliberately charge very little for their services - and on the opposite end of the spectrum, those that charge more for something unique that they can offer (fast service, experience, a high profile, etc).

Some businesses start off by offering their services either for free or for discounted rates. This helps them to establish a client base and testimonials, which can be used in their marketing materials.

How to Get Started:

If you have a specific marketable skill or talent, you may be able to market it on the web. [Freelancing](#) may be able to help you to build a reputation. A heavily-marketed website centered around your chosen service will also help you to generate more clients. What types of services can you offer online? Here are a few ideas ...

- **Graphic artist.** There are always people looking for someone to create professional logos, clipart, "virtual" covers, etc. Most people don't have the ability to do this stuff by themselves (myself included)! Some people specialize in logos only. Others in eBook covers only. Others in buttons/backgrounds. There's lots of opportunity here.
- **Web researcher.** Companies of all sizes occasionally require help searching the Internet for content, tools, or other resources. If you like to surf and you know how to quickly and effectively find what you're looking for, this may be something to consider.
- **Consultant.** Do you have lots of proven experience with creating effective presentations? Or writing business plans? Whatever your area of expertise, you may be able to market yourself as a "consultant" - you talk to your clients about their needs, their resources, etc. and then advise them on what to pursue next.
- **Web Designer.** There is plenty of demand for web designers, and not just for the "business" market. If you like to create websites and are good at it, consider picking a specific niche market -- for example, you could target young families who want a personal website that shows off the new baby. Get a membership to a royalty-free clipart site such as [ArtToday](#) and save lots of family-oriented / baby-oriented clipart. You'll then have a "pool" of niche-specific resources to draw from.
- **Freelance writer.** Freelance writers do all sorts of things: ghostwrite articles, contribute regular columns, write business plans, press releases, newsletters, and much more. If you love to write and have background or experience in a specific field, freelance writing may be a good choice for you.
- **Virtual assistant.** Many small businesses require part-time help -- you could offer a variety of simple services such as regular web updates (for example, formatting and posting new articles); editing/ proofreading of newsletters and sending them

out on schedule; and answering email inquiries (customer support).

- **Programmer.** There are plenty of people who prefer not to have to get into the "technical" side of things -- writing scripts or databases or any type of application that requires the dreaded "programming" word. You could write custom scripts - or even offer to install the client's own scripts for a charge.
- **... the possibilities are endless!** Any type of service that "solves a problem" is a good choice for consideration: save your customer time, save them aggravation, entertain them ... there's lots of opportunity!

You'll need to do some research into how much to charge for your services. Once again, the [freelance marketplace](#) can give you some idea of the "going rate" for your particular service.



Types of Freelance Jobs

[Accounting & Finance](#)

[Administrative Support](#)

[Business Strategy](#)

[Graphic Design and](#)

[Multimedia](#)

[Legal](#)

[Software & Technology](#)

[Web Design &](#)

[Development](#)

[Writing & Translation](#)

[Personal](#)

[Miscellaneous](#)

Joining a Business Opportunity

Description:

"Biz Opps" are everywhere you look online. This is where I'd say you have to exercise the most caution; there are plenty of misleading opportunities, some of which are outright scams. But here and there you'll find some legitimate opportunities. They aren't for everyone, but one of them could possibly be right for you.

Advantages:

- **The product or service is already created for you.** You avoid all the expenses of testing and development.
- **You theoretically have the support of the company and/or your upline.** Many business opportunities claim that the company will provide you with tools and/or support to help you succeed. People who join [multi-level marketing](#) organizations may be told that they'll have the support of their [sponsor](#).
- **You're often given a fully-functioning website.** The site's already created and tested for you, and sometimes even includes the necessary technology to accept orders online.

Disadvantages:

- **You're often given a fully-functioning website.** Yes, this very same thing is a disadvantage as well. Companies offering a business opportunity typically sell the exact same website to hundreds or thousands of business opportunity seekers. That means you ALL have precisely the same site – there is nothing original to capture someone's interest.
- **The company and/or your upline may not support you at all.** The company may not have the resources to provide you with the help you need; it's very difficult to provide one-on-one personal help to thousands of associates! Your sponsor, too, might not be able to help you either – if he or she hasn't been successful with the opportunity herself, then she can't very well mentor anyone else...
- **The market may be oversaturated.** What often happens is that someone will join the "hottest" new business opportunity ... tell a bunch of friends or advertise it elsewhere ... and as the word spreads, more and more people jump on board. You can easily have hundreds of thousands of people promoting the exact same opportunity!

Where to Find "Biz Ops"

"Biz Opps" are everywhere you look. The problem is, there are so many scams that it's difficult to determine what's legitimate and what's not. Read the article, [7 Important Tips on Investigating a Business Opportunity](#) for details.

Many of the business opportunities you'll find are **multi-level marketing (MLM) programs**. In very simplified terms, how it works is this:

- You get paid a commission on any products/services you personally sell.
- You can choose to recruit others to be a part of your "downline". You receive an "override commission" on any sales your downline makes as well.
- Your downline members may choose to recruit others in order to form their own downlines. You receive an override commission on their sales as well.
- ... and so on.

Please be aware that some pyramid schemes operate as thinly-disguised MLM. Pyramid schemes basically pay you to recruit others -- there's no real product. Make sure that there's a solid product (**Mary Kay Cosmetics** is a well-known example of a legitimate MLM) and that you are able to make a decent income **without** recruiting anyone.

I'm not a real big fan of MLM. It seems to me that usually only the very few people at the top of the organization make any decent money. Most people fail. **This doesn't apply to everyone - a few people make good money with MLMs.** That being said, here are some places to get hype-free information about MLMs:

- <http://www.mlmmatchdog.com/>
- <http://www.mlmmatch.org/>

I am not saying that all MLMs are scams, because I certainly don't believe that. All I'm saying is **please be cautious**.

So far, the best place I've found for a list of MLM opportunities is MLM.com. There's only minimal information about each company ... so once you find something that interests you, I suggest getting some feedback from people who have first-hand experience with the opportunity. A great place to do this is MLMForums.com.

The Importance of Setting Goals

If you talk to successful business people you'll find that they set goals for themselves and then strive to achieve them. Writing down your goals may help them seem more "concrete" to you. Here are a few tips:

- **Set both long-term and short-term goals.** Long-term goals help you keep the "big picture" in mind. Short-term goals keep you focused on working towards your "final" goal.
- **Make your goals realistic, challenging, and achievable.** An impossible goal will only discourage you, and an overly-simplistic goal won't drive you to do better. Set goals that will require you to work hard to meet them -- but that will also be realistically achievable.
- **Set measurable goals.** How will you know whether or not you've achieved your goals unless you can measure that achievement? For example, don't set a goal of "learn HTML" -- be more specific: " Learn HTML well enough to create my first simple web page in two weeks."
- **Acknowledge the consequences of not reaching your goals.** For example, let's say you set a short-term goal to create a survey that you can send to a newsletter, whose editor is currently running a 2-for-1 ad special for this week only. If you are unable to meet your goal of creating the survey by the end of the week, then you'll have to pay full price for your ad in the future.
- **Understand the benefits of reaching your goals.** Will you experience a sense of independence from earning your own income? Will you feel a sense of accomplishment and pride because you can help with household expenses? Take a few moments to think this through for both your short and long-term goals.
- **Take action!** Thought and analysis are both necessary... but nothing will happen if you don't ACT upon it!
- **Notice and reward your efforts.** What's working well, and have you been achieving most of your goals? If not, why not, and how can you motivate yourself or revise your goals to make them more achievable? Whenever you meet or surpass a goal, be sure to give yourself a "pat on the back" for a job well done!

Remember that goals aren't set in stone! As you progress, you'll find that you have to refine your goals - for example, you may work extremely hard and find one particular ad that seems to consistently pull well. You're making sales like crazy! In that case, you could refine your goals upwards to make it more challenging.

Keep your reasons for starting a business firmly in mind. You can expect to experience temporary setbacks in any type of business, and even failure isn't uncommon. But by remembering your reasons WHY you wanted a business to begin with, you may find it easier to continue working towards your goals.

"There is no failure except in no longer trying."
(Elbert Hubbard)

Basics of Domains: Getting Your 'Address' on the Web

Just like businesses in the 'real world' have physical addresses, businesses on the Internet must have 'cyber-addresses' so that people can find you. That's where getting your own [domain name](#) comes in.

An Introduction to Domain Names

What's a Domain?

Your domain is simply your address on the web, the "www.yourcompany.com". It's what people type into their web browsers when they want to visit you.

The Who and Why of Domains

"Who needs a domain?" is easily answered: anyone who is serious about doing business online (hopefully that's you!). There is nothing that screams, '**AMATEUR!**' more than a domain that looks something like:

http://www.freeprovider.com/users/a_to_d/yourname/index.html

Your own domain provides a number of advantages, such as brand recognition and credibility. You're a business, after all, and you want to look professional - not like some hobby get-rich-quicker or a fly-by-night scam artist. Don't underestimate the power of credibility; if you look and act like a serious business, you are much more likely to earn the trust and respect of your visitors. People tend to buy from those they trust.

Why Can't You Start With a Free Domain?

You can. However, there are a few potential roadblocks you can run into if you start on a free domain and then move to your own later on:

- **Your ideal domain name could be taken.** Domain names go fast - especially .com names - and by the time you're ready, yours might already be gone!

Of course, a domain name by itself will not "make or break" a business. But I think most people will agree that a catchy, short, and memorable name can help your business.

- **It will be difficult to make sales from a free website.** You simply don't have credibility when your URL is 75 characters long, filled with dashes, slashes, and other strange characters, and your website is littered with ads from your free hosting provider. This is particularly true of websites that claim to be able to tell you the secrets of saving or making money – why should the visitor believe that you can do either, if you can't even afford to pay a few bucks for your own domain name?

Finally, it will be more difficult to get listed in the major indexes, which are great sources of targeted traffic. If you browse human-reviewed directories such as [Yahoo](#), you'll find very few sites hosted on free domains.

Tips on How to Choose an Effective Domain Name

Get ready to fire up those brain cells! Try to select a domain name that:

- **Is easy to say and to spell.** This is very helpful when you -- or someone else -- is mentioning your site to others. Try saying your domain name out loud before making a decision to purchase it. Would a casual listener be able to figure out how to spell it?
- **Does not contain hyphens.** Aside from being hard to type, hyphens are hard to remember and difficult to convey in speech. For example, let's say my company is called "ABC Credit Repair". I could register the domain [abccreditrepair.com](#), easy

enough to remember. But what about abc-creditrepair.com or perhaps abc-credit-repair.com? Most people won't remember where the hyphen(s) is supposed to go.

- **Is not likely to be mistaken.** For example, a domain called shoppe.com vs. shop.com is confusing - you would have to actually explain to someone how to spell your domain.
- **Is not confusing.** For example, does your name include a 0 (zero) or an O (the letter 'O')? Or does it have an I (capital i) or an l (small L)?
- **Ends in .com, if at all possible.** Sure, there are plenty of other extensions - but when people think of the Internet, they automatically think of '.com'.
- **Does not violate a trademark!** Don't register a domain name that's going to get you into legal trouble, such as McDonalds.com. One place to search for trademarks is at MarksOnline.
- **Is easy to remember.** Using acronyms can be tough on customers. For example, if you're running a business called, 'Antiques Auction Online', go for something like 'antiquesauction.com' or 'antiquesonline'. 'aao.com' is meaningless and difficult to remember. Try also to keep your domain name as short as possible; a short URL is more memorable.



Getting Help! Brainstorming Domain Names

Many domain brainstorming tools are available online. They'll automatically come up with a number of suggestions for you, and they may trigger some original thoughts of your own.

- [NameBoy](#) - you type in a key word or two, and

the advanced search for better results.

Is Your Domain Name Already Taken? If your domain name is already reserved by someone else, consider adding a prefix to the name. For example, "business.com" could become "eBusiness.com". The most common prefixes are "e" (as in the previous example) and "i" (as in "iVillage.com").

Registering a Domain

You can reserve a domain from any number of places on the web. They generally range in price from around \$10 a year to \$35 a year. Here are a few places that will register a domain for you:

- [GoDaddy](#) (my favorite)
- [000Domains](#)
- [123Domains](#)
- [CanReg](#), .CA domains only.

It's a very simple process. You just check to see if the domain name you want is available. If it is, you prepay for a year or more, and usually within 24-72 hours, the domain is yours.

You have to pay for it every year, unless you reserve for more than one year at a time. Some registrars offer discounts if you reserve for several years.

The Basics of Hosting Your Website

This section is about an important decision that will affect your website and profits: choosing the right website hosting company. A [web host](#) is a company that provides you with server space and makes your online business / domain accessible to the world. They're the ones that make it possible for someone to type "www.yourdomain.com" into their browser and see your website.

14 Crucial Considerations When Choosing a Web Host

Web hosts typically cost anywhere between \$10/month for the most basic hosting package, to around \$40-50/month and up.

You may be aware that you can get free hosting. The reason it's "free" is because the hosting provider typically pays its bills by selling advertising on your website. In other words, your website will probably display a big ugly banner (or an annoying pop-up window) advertising someone else's company or products.

I strongly recommend paying for a good web host. This will give you:

- **Better customer service:** Free hosts are not all that inclined to help you if you run into problems; you're getting the service for "free", after all!
- **Credibility:** Hosting on a free site makes a business look amateurish and lacking in credibility. Would **you** trust a company that apparently can't afford to pay a few bucks a month to a web host?!
- **Features and flexibility:** You'll have a lot more control over your website when you pay for web hosting service - little extras and benefits the hosting provider adds to your package to make you (or keep you) a satisfied customer.

One thing I want to emphasize is to take a look at a number of factors when choosing a web host - do **not** make price your only consideration! You may suffer the consequences of lost profits if you

choose a company that offers cheap hosting, no service, and poor reliability. Some things to look for are:

1. Fast, reliable connection to the Internet.

Your site must load fast - one of the major reasons visitors click away from a website is slow loading time. Reliability speaks for itself; if your visitor can't even reach your website, there's no way you'll make a sale!

2. Excellent uptime.

If your web host's servers go down, then your website also goes down! That translates to lost profits. On the web, you usually only have one opportunity to make an impression; blow that opportunity and your prospect typically won't come back. Find a web host with an excellent uptime record (at least 99% uptime or better). Sign up for a trial if you can, and then monitor your site for uptime or downtime. One tool that will do this for you is [NetMechanic](#).

3. Site/data backups.

It would be pretty devastating to lose all your hard work. A web host that performs regular backups provides an extra measure of protection "just in case." Some will provide you with a utility to do your own backups.



Backing Up Your Files

You should be performing regular backups of your files as well. There are a number of devices that will help you do this. Check with your local computer store and inquire about tape drives, CD-writers, or zip drives.

I backup my files once a week, and after every major revision. Once you get into the habit of doing it, you barely have to think about it.

4. Plenty of storage space.

How much you need will depend on what you envision your site to be. Make sure you leave room for growth; be sure to have more than enough space for both your current and your future needs. This includes your normal web pages, graphics, scripts, and anything else you may want to use for your website.

It's hard to say how much space an "average site" uses. That depends on the length of the web pages and the number and size of the graphics used. One of my sites has nearly 200 pages and uses about 5 MB. It does not have any graphics except for my logo. Another one of my sites uses 7 MB for only 50 pages or so, but it has lots of pictures. It's a judgment call as to how much space you'll need.

Keep in mind that there's no such thing as 'unlimited space'. There is **always** a limit to the amount of space a web host can offer. This is not a bad thing - you just be sure that it's enough to cover you and your future needs. Storage space by itself is not a deciding factor. If you are concerned, ask your host how much they charge for additional space.

5. Adequate transfer space.

Everytime someone views a web page, they're actually downloading data. Read the fine print in the contract to see if you are limited to a certain percentage of system resources. I've seen estimates that the average user needs anywhere from 50 to 150 MB a month for their website traffic. Web hosts may charge you extra if you go over the transfer limit. Look for a hosting package that gives you more than you need (with a comfortable margin).

6. CGI bin.

Many web hosts will provide you with some standard CGI scripts for things such as counters, forms, and passwords. Check with your prospective host to see what types of "standard" free scripts they offer for your use.

Also make sure you have the ability to create and upload your own CGI scripts, what web hosts typically refer to as your own "cgi-bin". You should not be restricted to what the web host offers. Ask questions like, Can you install these scripts on your

own without requesting permission from your host? Will your host charge you for each script you install?

You might be thinking, "I don't know how to program my own CGI scripts, so who cares whether or not I have my own cgi-bin?" One of the nice things about the Internet is that there are countless CGI scripts available. You can easily learn to install simple scripts yourself, or hire someone to do it for you.

7. Secure server capability.

Secure servers allow you to transmit pages in an encrypted format. This is necessary if you plan on selling something directly from your website (you'll need it for accepting credit cards, if you don't use what's known as a [third-party processing company](#)). Look for a web host that offers secure server capability for low or no additional costs.

8. Autoresponders, email aliases, and mailboxes.

How many of each you'll need depends on your business. Don't be swayed by offers of "unlimited email accounts" - you probably won't need them.

As a home business owner you are most likely going to be the sole employee for quite some time. So what use would you have for 100 email accounts? You can use something called an [email alias](#) instead. An alias allows you to set up "fake" addresses, such as sales@yourdomain.com or info@yourdomain.com ... but in reality, these aliases are simply your main email account. That means that any email sent to these aliases will automatically be sent to your main account.

An [autoresponder](#) is extremely important for online business owners. It's simply an email address that you can set up to respond automatically with a preconfigured message. For example, instead of manually emailing a report to everyone who requests it, let your autoresponder handle it for you instead. Many hosts offer simple autoresponders with no follow-up capability. These are OK in some instances. In most cases, expect to purchase an autoresponder outside of your web hosting package.

9. Mailing lists.

Many web hosts offer a feature where you can create your own mailing list, a handy feature for when you want to start your own newsletter! Note that there are often restrictions on how many lists you can create, and on how many addresses can be on each list.

When you're first starting out on the web, this is a convenient little feature if your host offers it to you for free. That means you might not have to pay for mailing list software of your own if money is tight. I still recommend a professional list host or autoresponder to manage your list (more on that topic later).

10. Visitor demographics.

Analyzing your traffic is an important part of doing business online. Your web host may offer some demographics - the more, the better! Look for number of page views, number of unique visitors, referrers (where your visitors are coming from), browsers, and other such information. Again, a host that offers good site demographics can save you from purchasing another service.

11. Unlimited, free, and responsive customer service.

Make sure you can get the help you need, when you need it. It can be very frustrating if you run into a problem and can't find anyone to help you! With a good web host you won't need support services very often, but when you do you want to be able to contact someone right away.

I recommend contacting a prospective web host with questions *before* you sign up for their services. That way you'll be able to get an idea of how promptly they respond to your concerns, and how helpful they are.

Prompt service isn't enough, though. Support staff should be qualified, trained, technical professionals who know how to talk to customers.

12. Web-based interface.

Most web hosts will offer a web interface for you to do administrative tasks, such as setting up autoresponders, email

aliases, uploading or downloading files, and so on. An easy-to-use web interface can make managing your site a breeze!

13. Money-back guarantee.

You should be able to try out your web host and get your money back if you are unsatisfied with them for any reason. Most web hosts offer a 30-day money-back guarantee.

14. No minimum contracts.

Are you required to 'lock-in' a contract for a year, two years, or more? Look for a host that will let you pay month by month if that's what you prefer.

Finding a Host

Compare a number of web hosts with each other, and see who offers the best value for your money. Sketching out a simple chart is helpful to read information "at a glance". For example:

	<u>Web Host #1</u>	<u>Web Host #2</u> ...
URL	www.webhost1.com	www.webhost2.com
Prices	\$12.95	\$15.95
Space	10 MB	50 MB
Transfer Limit	2 GB	2 GB
Email Accounts	10	5
Autoresponders	Not available	Unlimited
... (etc)	... (etc)	... (etc)

I would also suggest that you contact each host that is a contender for your business. With a good web host it's not too likely you'll need customer service very often ... but if you do, you want to make sure that they respond quickly, courteously, and with helpful information. **If you can, get recommendations from others as well.**

There are a number of places where review web hosts, including:

- [Your local Yellow Pages](#)
- [Web Host List](#)
- [Web Host Directory](#)
- [TopHosts.com](#)
- [The Web Host Industry Review](#)

The Basic Types of Online Marketing

Consistent marketing is absolutely vital to the success of your business. We all market to some extent -- but to *thrive* and not just *survive* depends on many types of marketing, each of them important in their own way.

The 4 Types of Marketing that are Crucial to Every Business' Success

This is a brief introduction to the *types* of marketing you can expect to do. You can find information on various marketing techniques elsewhere in this manual.

Targeted Marketing

Who is your target audience, what do they want, and how do you reach them? Understanding your audience is the first step to a successful marketing campaign. There are lots of ways to reach your target audience, including:

- **Search engines and major indexes.** Visitors search by key phrase or category... if your site appears within the first page or two of the search results, then these targeted and interested prospects find *you*, rather than you having to find them. Well worth it!

Don't forget about the pay-per-click search engines, too. There you can bid on specific key phrases to draw your audience to your business.

- **Ezine advertising.** Let another business do the hard work of compiling a list of opt-in subscribers who are eager and interested in a particular topic. Depending on the quality of the newsletter, this can present you with an excellent opportunity to reach your target audience for a very small cost.

- **Joint ventures.** Find businesses that offer complementary products or services, and propose a mutually beneficial partnership. JVs can be an extremely powerful way to boost your profits -- often without having to incur any out-of-pocket expenses.
- **Offline advertising.** Remember that a great many people are still in the "real world", rather than in cyberspace!

Permission Marketing

"Spam" -- unsolicited email -- can cause reactions ranging from minor irritation to outright rage. You don't have to spam in order to get business; people acknowledge that there are products and services that they're willing to receive information about. The Internet has proved this to be true; how many times have you willingly signed up to receive a newsletter? By doing so, you're giving the business permission to email you. Now *you* want to do the same thing!

- **Opt-in newsletter.** Most prospects need to be exposed to your product or service multiple times before they're open to making a purchase. In order to follow-up with your prospects, you'll need a way to contact them -- and their permission to do so. Offering a free newsletter is one way to capture their email addresses for exactly this purpose.

Your newsletter should be used to offer valuable information and not sales pitches, of course. Over time, your readers will come to "know" and trust you; they'll also become more familiar with your products.

- **Product or service updates.** Haven't you ever signed up to receive product or service updates? I know I have --
 - **Virus updates** from one of the leading anti-virus software companies. They often send out product information, offers, special deals, etc. and I'm happy to receive them.
 - **Product updates** -- for example, from the [Zone Alarm firewall software](#). They also send out special offers and such, along with information about computer security.

... and that's just the beginning. You have your own set of interests and no doubt there are some things you want to know about -- new CDs? Dog toy specials? Coupons or savings? Whatever the case, it's your job as a business to get your prospect's permission to send them more information.

- **Autoresponders.** Offering free reports, stories, email courses, articles, etc. via autoresponder is another great way to keep in touch with your prospects. Just be sure to follow-up; a *series* of emails is far more effective than just one single message.

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing has to do with the way you treat your visitors, prospects, and customers. The goal is to try to make the person feel comfortable, as if you are actually in a one-on-one relationship.

- **Opt-in newsletter.** Newsletters are a great way to stay in touch with your prospects. Write it for them, on topics that interest them -- and encourage feedback. Not only does this give you the opportunity find out what your readers/prospects are actually thinking, but it also gives you a way to invite the prospect to buy.
- **Answering email.** One of the most frustrating things is to have your email go unanswered -- or answered after too long of a waiting period. Customer service has become increasingly important to a growing number of people.

Be aware that some people think that email is "instant"; they don't realize that real people have to read and answer their message. For that reason, let your visitors know when they can expect to hear from you (24-48 hours seems to be pretty standard for a lot of online businesses). Then do your utmost to keep to the schedule.

- **Answering the phone and returning calls.** Similar to above, relationship marketing all boils down to treating your customers with respect. Answer your phone promptly and politely, and return missed calls quickly.

Confidence/Credibility Marketing

Prospects have to trust you and have confidence in your products or services before they're comfortable in making a purchase. So how do you inspire confidence before they've even had a chance to try your product or service?

- **Basic, old-fashioned common-sense.** Imagine visiting a site that sells information on the basics of financial planning. Now imagine that the site is presented against a neon blinking background filled with animated dollar bills falling from the "sky". At the top of the page a headline screams, "Make 1 Million Dollars - Fast!"

Your built-in "scam radar" goes off. "Hmmm," you think, "It sounds tempting, but if it sounds too good to be true..."

Use what's appropriate for your audience. In the example above, people looking for financial planning advice are typically looking for solid advice from qualified individuals who are themselves successful at managing their money. The headline looks too much like a "get-rich-quick" deal, and money falling from the sky looks downright "scammy".

- **Testimonials.** Testimonials from satisfied customers are a great way to show prospects that you have happy customers. It's one thing for *you* to say that your product or service is wonderful -- but when *someone else* says it (someone who has nothing to gain from his endorsement), it holds a lot more credibility.

Be proactive in gathering testimonials. You may very well have lots of happy customers -- but that doesn't mean they'll let you know! Ask.

- **Articles, columns, or interviews.** When you hear or read an ad, you automatically know that the advertiser is trying to sell you something. You don't know the quality of the product or service and you assume they're in it for the money (which, of course, they are -- they have to be if they're going to stay in business!).

But when you read an article from a news site or hear an interview on a radio, you're far more likely to perk up and listen. They're usually educational, interesting, and/or entertaining...

and so most people are more open to taking a look at what that person or company has to offer.

Articles, columns, and interviews all help your business to build credibility as a "leader" in your area. With credibility comes confidence; people prefer to buy from those they trust. It's wonderful if you can get published on other sites or in other publications other than your own -- it's an implied endorsement.

- **Referrals.** There's nothing quite so strong as a referral from a trusted friend or contact! Encourage customers to refer others to you; you might even want to offer incentives for doing so.
- **Other forms of "viral" marketing.** Viral marketing spreads the word about your business through a network made up of your target audience as well as other businesses that complement your own. A good example of viral marketing is the use of free eBooks; they can be given away to spread throughout the 'net, thus helping to build recognition for you and your business.

Summary of Marketing Techniques

In this section you'll find a quick summary of free, fee, and "real-world" marketing techniques that you can use to promote your online business. Use it as a quick "reference" when you're in a hurry!

39 Effective Marketing Techniques to Promote Your Online Business

There's no "secret" marketing technique that will magically skyrocket your business to instant success. Instead, every business is responsible for testing and refining various techniques until he or she has developed a solid, effective base that produces the desired results. Remember that what works for one business may not work for another. Likewise, another business may have poor results with one method, but

Be sure to track all of your marketing campaigns! Don't waste your money guessing at what works; find out for sure what does (or doesn't), and then refine your efforts. If you don't have an ad tracker, try [ROIbot](#) for \$1, or purchase the excellent [AdTrackz](#).

Part 1: Free Online Marketing Techniques

1. [Build and use your own opt-in list.](#) Having your own list of interested prospects is one of the best ways to build your business! Offer a great newsletter for free, and then -- *when appropriate* -- market your products and services to your list. When you provide your subscribers with fresh, interesting, and relevant content, they come to "know" you and trust you. Trust plays a large role in buying online.
2. [Contribute to newsgroups or discussion boards.](#) This is a great credibility builder; you can establish yourself as a helpful member of a community. Other members of the community who come to know and respect you will refer you to others.

3. **Niche directories or search engines.** Find all the highly-targeted directories and SEs for your market, and then work to get listed. You'll be surprised at how many niche sites there are! [Beaucoup](#) and [FinderSeeker](#) are good places to start.
4. [Targeted reciprocal link exchanges.](#) Trade links with other businesses in your market so that you can "share" traffic and build your "link popularity", a factor that more search engines are taking into consideration.
5. [Endorsed mailings to other lists.](#) Find the editor of a great newsletter, and offer your product or service to him for free in return for a review or an endorsed ad to his list. Endorsements from the editor can far outperform regular "ads", since they come from someone they know and trust (the editor).
6. [Testimonials.](#) It's fine for you to say that your product or service is wonderful... but there's far more "punch" when *someone else* says it! Testimonials show prospects that you have happy customers and helps them to make the decision to buy.
7. [Use autoresponders.](#) Autoresponders are special email addresses that you can set up to automatically return a message to anyone who writes to it. You can use them to follow-up with "hot prospects" ... it has been proven time and time again that autoresponders can dramatically increase your profits!
8. [Ad swaps.](#) Swapping ad space with another editor that caters to your audience is a great way to get extra exposure for "free" (no out-of-pocket expenses). Plus it's one way to fill up any remnant ad space you may have in your newsletter.
9. **Join a webring.** Link to other sites like yours and build an online "community." Try [Yahoo's Directory of Web Rings](#).
10. **Offer coupons or gift certificates.** It's easy to create a "coupon" to post on your web site. You can also just provide prospects with a coupon "code" which they can enter directly into the order form.
11. [Make good use of referral marketing.](#) Ask happy customers to refer prospects to you. In this busy day, more and more people are willing to rely on a trusted friend or contact's advice -- it saves them the time necessary to do all the research themselves.
12. [Write and distribute articles in your area of expertise.](#) Again, a great credibility-builder. You provide great information; people

who appreciate what you have to say are much more likely to click on your link in your author's byline. Plus articles are often archived on websites for visitors to refer to time and time again! Great promotion technique.

13. **Become an "expert"**. If you like to write and have the time to do so, consider partnering with a high-traffic site within your niche market and offering to write a regular column or article. For example, you could write a regular humor column on parenting -- in exchange, your author byline is displayed for readers to click through to your site. You establish credibility and get exposure; your partner site and their readers get great content.
14. [Use a "Recommend-It" or "Refer-A-Friend" script.](#) These scripts let visitors send your URL to friends.
15. [Make it easy for others to link to your site.](#) Consider adding a "Link to Us" section where you provide the HTML to link to your site. Visitors can then cut & paste the code into their web pages.
16. **Hold contests.** For example, every month you could give away one of your products to a lucky subscriber to your newsletter. Or instead of asking people to subscribe, you could ask them to answer a simple survey (the quicker it is, the more likely people will answer). For instance: ask prospects to tell you how they heard about your business. That way you collect valuable marketing information and they get entered into a draw for your product.
17. **Use a signature.** Also known as "sig files", a signature is usually from 3-7 lines long. It's a brief blurb about your business along with your URL and/or contact information. Put a signature on every piece of email you send out, as well as on any message board posts (if appropriate).
18. [Give away a free eBook or report.](#) eBooks and reports can be excellent viral marketing tools. You can offer them as a "premium" to other businesses within your niche, so that they can give it away to their own customers or subscribers. You can build a very effective network of people who promote your business for you!

Part 2: Excellent Fee-Based Online Marketing Methods

1. [Search engines.](#) Web surfers typically use the large search engines such as [Google](#) to find the information they want. If you

can manage to get a good ranking for some of your top key phrases, you'll often get a steady stream of traffic. If you're lucky, this traffic will continue to come without any extra effort from you. **Note: many major search engines have started charging a "review fee". Some still allow free submissions, but with no guarantee of a review or listing.**

2. **Major indexes.** [Yahoo!](#), [Open Directory](#), and [Looksmart](#) are a few well-known indexes. Getting a listing in these can result in a fabulous amount of traffic -- for some people, it can even be a very *significant* amount of traffic!
3. [Pay-per-click search engines](#). With these search engines, you literally pay a certain amount of money for every click they send your way. The more you bid, the higher you'll rank for your search term and the more visible your link will be. The largest and most popular PPC SE is [Overture](#).
4. [Ezine advertising](#). Although this takes a fair bit of practice and experimentation, ezine advertising is potentially one of the best and most profitable ways to promote your business online. The editor has already done the hard work of putting together a list of opt-in, interested prospects; you just take advantage of it.
5. [Direct email campaign from a reputable list broker](#). There are companies on the web that specialize in building permission-based email lists, targeted to each subscriber's area of interest. This is true "opt-in", unlike the endless stream of spam email that implores you to purchase "30 million addresses for only \$99!" A typical price for opt-in lists ranges from \$0.10 to \$0.75 per email address.
6. [Press releases](#). Your newsworthy press release could generate loads of publicity for your business. If you're not comfortable doing these on your own, professionals are available to write them for you -- plus they'll be able to send them to the appropriate media contacts.
7. **Advertise on a targeted website.** Find complementary but non-competing sites and check their rates for advertising. Banner ads are the most common type of advertising permitted; however, they're usually not very effective. Text ads or endorsements are far better... if you have to use a banner ad, create one that looks like text -- one that "blends" into the look-and-feel of the site.

8. [Mini-sites](#). These are very small sites (typically around 3 or 4 pages) that are absolutely focused on selling one product. There's usually no free content; just a sales letter, perhaps a FAQ and some contact information. Mini-sites are an excellent way to tightly focus your prospect on doing just one thing.
9. **Experiment with some of the promotional services offered online.** You'll find loads of websites that offer promotion help. The only way to know if they'll work for you is to try them (and track them!). Generally speaking, services that offer to submit your site to a gazillion "search engines" aren't worth it. Similarly, classified ad sites and FFA pages typically don't give good results either. Before you shell out the cash for these types of services, ask around for first-hand experiences with the service.
10. **Hold conferences.** Want to become an "expert"? A great credibility builder is to hold either a web or phone conference for your visitors. This is an effective promotion method for people who sell "how-to" information. For example, let's say you sell a book on "How to Hire a Contractor Without Getting Ripped Off". Set up a conference, publish the date/time on your site, and then open it up to questions from your visitors. Give enough information to be helpful, but don't give it ALL away; you still want these visitors to buy your book!

Part 3: Marketing Techniques for the "Real World"

1. **Business cards.** Leave a few in the local library or other local businesses where prospects gather; include a card in your postal mail; leave a stack in the local library or grocery store, hand them out to people who can help you, etc. Order the excellent [Business Card Breakthroughs](#) for tips on designing an effective business card.
2. **Direct mail.** Print up flyers, brochures, catalogs, coupons... there's all sorts of things you can send through the mail. At [eLance](#), you can hire professionals at competitive rates. They can create pretty much any type of direct mail promotional items for you.
3. **Use your car.** How much time do you spend driving (or, unfortunately, sitting stuck in traffic)? Take advantage of this opportunity by placing your URL on your car for everyone to see! [Web Decals](#) is one place to find custom-printed decals that quickly and easily attach to your car's windshield.

4. **Newspaper advertising.** Have a product or service that you think would do well in the papers? Purchase a classified ad through one of the many services available online. Remember that classifieds are usually extremely short; you'll need a punchy, compelling ad that fits into just a few lines. [Nationwide Newspapers](#) offers classified advertising in over 8000 newspapers across the United States. [U.S. Media Inc.](#) specializes in many types of 'offline' advertising, including newspapers, radio, TV, magazines, and more.
5. **Advertise in trade magazines.** Get to the "heart" of your target audience by advertising in a trade magazine with a loyal audience. [U.S. Media Inc.](#) lists a wide variety of magazines and trade publications; contact their reps for more information.
6. **Participate in trade shows.** Get exposure by networking with others in your industry. Visit the [Trade Show News Network](#) to search for trade shows for all types of industries worldwide.
7. **Visit your local Chamber of Commerce.** They may be able to offer you additional suggestions on where you can promote your business locally.
8. **Send out postcards.** Postcards are short, attractive, and readers can easily see your information "at-a-glance." Don't forget to display your URL! [Extravalue.com](#) is a great place to get professional, quality cards at very reasonable rates.
9. **Put your URL on every piece of printed material that leaves your office.** This includes brochures, business cards, flyers, faxes, labels, letterhead, invoices, cheques, envelopes, and anything else you can think of.
10. **Promotional items such as notepads, pens, mugs, etc.** Imprint these items with your URL. Give some away as gifts to your best clients. You can even sell them online! [iPrint](#) is one place you can find "do-it-yourself" promotional items, including t-shirts, golf balls, pens, mugs, clocks, tote bags, and much more. And at [CafePress.com](#) you can upload your artwork, set your prices, and you're ready to sell.
11. **State your URL on your voice mail message.** Say your standard spiel, then add something like, "For more information on <your product>, visit our website at [www.MyDomain.com](#)." [uReach](#) is a service that offers all-in-one communications service that includes voice mail, email, and faxes.

The Basics of Ad Tracking and Website Stats

In order to best market to your audience, you have to understand them first. Website stats or demographics will help you to understand the “surfing habits” of your visitors, while ad tracking will show you which of your marketing campaigns are giving you the best results.

Why Tracking Plays a Critical Role in Online Business

One of the most essential but overlooked parts of online marketing is doing some simple tracking.

All too often people run various promotions and don't bother to track the results. Without knowing which promotions brought in the best results (visitors and sales weighed against cost, time, and effort), it's very difficult to refine your marketing. It's just too easy to waste your marketing dollars!

Tracking will show you which promotions work and which web pages or articles are the most popular ... and it shows you which ones are losers. Even bad feedback is helpful - it tells you how you can improve your site or your ads to better serve your customers. It takes just a few minutes to add tracking capabilities to your website and to your ad campaigns. And it can mean a world of difference to your bottom line!

Important Statistics that Can Help You Boost Profitability

Let's take a look at what types of tracking you can do and how each one will help you. This section is divided up into **1) Website Statistics**, and **2) Advertising Statistics**.

This is by no means a complete list of all the types of statistics you can track; it's merely a starting point. Here you'll find an explanation of the most common and/or important stats.

Website Statistics / Demographics

- **Page views and unique visitors.** **Page views** are the number of times a web page is viewed on your website. Each time your page loads, you have one page view. This is a good way to keep track of how much overall traffic your website is getting.

Page views are sometimes confused with a **hit**, which is a request for an 'object' on your website. For example, a web page with 2 graphics on it will generate 3 hits: 1 for the HTML page + 1 for each graphic.

The other standard website statistic is the number of **unique visitors** to your site. For example, if someone visits your site and views 5 pages, that is still only one visitor. When you compare the number of page views against the number of unique visitors, you'll be able to see how many pages the average visitor views before leaving your site. This is one indicator of the quality of your content (or of your visitors – your goal is to get **targeted** traffic, not just “traffic” for the sake of getting traffic!).

- **Repeat visitors.** Does your website offer something that keeps people coming back for more? Ideally this is what you want. The more often someone visits your site, the more of a "relationship" you develop with them. They get to "know" you and trust you. Visitors who are comfortable with you are more likely to purchase something. A good stats program can keep track of how many repeat visitors you get over the course of a month or a year.
- **Who are your referrers? Where are your visitors are coming from?** How do they find your site? Is it primarily through search engines, links, newsletter ads? Are there specific search terms through which most of them are finding you? Is there a directory that's giving you a lot of traffic?

Your stats service should be able to provide you with a list of referring websites, and even search terms. Knowing where your visitors are coming from gives you a better idea of places where you may want to "step up" your advertising.

For example, let's say you get a good amount of traffic from Yahoo!. If sponsoring a site isn't too expensive, you may want to try it for a month or two just to see if it will bring about an increase in profits.

- **Which web pages are most popular?** Are there specific pages which most of your visitors tend to go to? Knowing which ones they are will help you optimize your navigation and content. By developing more of the same type of content, you can encourage repeat visits.

This particular stat can also help you to sell your advertising space more effectively. For example, let's say that one page of your site provides information on natural pet food choices. This page is by far one of the most popular on your site. You may be able to sell advertising space on this particular page to a pet food company that manufactures natural pet foods by letting them know that a large percentage of your visitors will view that page.

- **What paths your visitors take through your website.** In other words, what pages do your visitors look at and in what order? This helps you to determine whether your site is achieving its goal - for example, your goal may be to lead your visitor to your ordering page. At what point do most visitors lose interest? This type of information will let you see if your visitors are leaving your site prematurely.
- **How many page views per visitor.** This is a good indicator of how interested your visitors are in your site content. Do most of them dig deeper into your site, or do they leave after viewing the home page? If most of your visitors view very few pages, then you might have a navigation problem; you may not have enough content; your sales copy may need work; you may be attracting the wrong types of visitors (ie. you are not attracting your target audience); or perhaps your site design could be improved.
- **Entry and exit pages.** **Entry pages** are the web pages from which your visitors first enter your site. For example, maybe most of them come in through your "pet stories" page instead of your home page. **Exit pages** are the web pages from which your visitors leave your site.

These two stats will help you to improve your navigation and/or content. For example, if your most popular entry page is also your most popular exit page, then you may want to modify your navigation to encourage visitors to browse deeper within your site.

- **Browsers.** Track which browsers and browser version your visitors are using. If you find, for example, that most of your visitors are using older browser versions then you may want to design your web pages with that in mind.
- **Time spent on site and on each page.** Do people enter your home page and leave 4 seconds later? Or do they hang around and take a look at what you have to offer? For example, if most of the visitors to one particular page barely glance at it, then perhaps rewriting the page may help to increase interest.
- **Operating systems.** Do your visitors use Windows 95 or 98? Windows 3.1? WebTV? This is valuable information when you're designing web pages, software, or eBooks for your visitors. If the majority of your visitors use Windows, for example, then you want to make sure that everything you offer can be viewed or run by Windows users.
- **Single access pages.** These are web pages that are both the entry and exit pages. If one specific page appears to be a common single access page then it could be that the navigation is confusing or that the content or writing does not encourage the visitor to explore.

Advertising Statistics

- **Click-Through Rate:** The number of times a reader or visitor clicks on the URL or email address within your ad. For example, if 100 readers from a newsletter of 10000 click on your URL, then your click-through rate is $(100 / 10000) = 1\%$. With ad tracking software, this is usually referred to as [hits](#).

Some trackers will break down the number of hits by hour, and/or summarize by month or by year (instead of simply displaying the number of total hits). This is a handy feature that will allow you to spot trends.

- **Conversion Rate:** The number of visitors that you convert to customers. For example, if 100 people visit your site and you make 2 sales, then your conversion rate is $(2 / 100) = 2\%$. Some ad trackers allow you to integrate with an order form so that you can calculate your conversion rate.

- **Number of Unique Visitors:** How many of the "clicks" or "hits" from your campaign were unique? This is good information to see how many people are interested enough to come back.

Tracking Your Website and Advertising Links

First of all, you're going to need to find an ad tracker and website stats program that you like. Then spend a little time and get all your links coded, both on your website and in your ads. Once you're set up and running, you'll find that tracking your links becomes just another habit. It takes just a few seconds to set up a new link! Some examples of how to use your website stats program and your ad tracker are:

- **Get your website stats/demographics program to track each page of your website.** Then you can see how long people spend on each page, the path they choose to navigate your site, etc... all the stuff we talked about previously.
- **If you have ordering links to affiliate program products from several different places on your website(s), create a separate tracking URL for each of them.** For example, let's say you're selling ProductXYZ from 3 different pages on your site. You'll need to create 3 tracking URLs, one for each page of your site. Do this for every affiliate product you sell. This way you'll know exactly where your traffic is coming from.
- If you use [autoresponders](#) in your sales process, **create a separate tracking URL explicitly for use in your autoresponders.** Edit your autoresponder messages to include *only* this URL. This will tell you how effective your autoresponder messages are.

Note that you may want to have a different tracking URL for each of your autoresponder follow-up messages. The advantage to this is that you'll know which one of the follow-ups is generating the best response.

- **Create a unique tracking URL for every ad campaign.** This includes newsletter ads, ad swaps, editorial announcements to your newsletter list, articles you've written that are picked up by editors, and so on. Keep in mind that a redirection URL is much shorter and easier to remember than your tracking URL!

Note that you usually don't need to create tracking URLs for things like search engines or link exchanges. A good website stats service should be able to tell you who your referrers are.

How to Make Effective Use of Your Ad Tracking Results

The simplest ad trackers basically just record how many hits and unique visitors come from a particular marketing campaign. This will show you which one of your ad campaigns is drawing the most traffic - for example, was your ad in ABC Newsletter better received than the ad in XYZ Newsletter?

Setting Up A Tracking URL

Because there are lots of different ad trackers on the market, I can't give you specific step-by-step instructions. Instead, I'll quickly explain how ad trackers work and **in general** how they're set up.

Ad trackers give you a **tracking URL** -- a special address that automatically records the number of hits and unique visitors that visit that URL.

This tracking URL leads to your **destination URL** -- the URL you actually want your visitors to see.

Example:

Let's say I want to track the number of hits I get to [The Newbie Club's First Website Builder](#) -- an excellent guide that shows beginners how to create a website in just 2 days using free tools and resources. My destination URL is my affiliate URL:

<http://newbieclub.com/builder/?byhb>

Here is my actual tracking URL, using the [AdTrackz](#) ad tracking software. Your tracking URL will be different, depending on which ad tracker you choose. This URL is used for tracking response from the email campaigns I run.

<http://buildyourhomebiz.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?builder>

What Happens Now?

Whenever someone clicks on my tracking URL, it records the hit and automatically redirects my visitor to my affiliate URL. I can check my ad tracking stats at any time to see how many people click on my link as a result of my email campaigns.

So How Do You Use This Information?

Let's work through an example. Let's say I'm running an ezine ad campaign. I purchase top sponsor ads in 3 comparable ezines:

- **Marketing 123** has 10,000 subscribers. Ad cost: \$100
- **Marketing ABC** has 20,000 subscribers. Ad cost: \$150
- **Marketing XYZ** has 50,000 subscribers. Ad cost: \$300

Now remember, all of these ezines cater to the same type of audience, and I run the exact same top sponsor ad in each of them.

What I need to do now is create a tracking URL for EACH ad:

- **Marketing 123** is given the tracking URL
<http://buildyourhomebiz.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?onetwothree>
- **Marketing ABC** is given the tracking URL
<http://buildyourhomebiz.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?abc>
- **Marketing XYZ** is given the tracking URL
<http://buildyourhomebiz.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?xyz>

In other words, the ad I place in Marketing 123 will direct visitors to click on <http://buildyourhomebiz.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?onetwothree>. The other two ezines will similarly use their own tracking URLs.

Okay ... the ads all run in their ezines, and the results come in. **The ad tracker records the following results:**

- 75 unique hits from Marketing 123
- 350 unique hits from Marketing ABC
- 300 unique hits from Marketing XYZ

There are two things we can calculate from this:

1. Click-Through Rate (CTR)

This is the percentage of readers that respond to your ad. You calculate it by dividing the number of unique hits by the total number of subscribers:

CTR = Unique hits recorded by your ad tracker / number of subscribers

- CTR (Marketing 123) = $75/10000 = 0.75\%$
- CTR (Marketing ABC) = $350/20000 = 1.75\%$

- CTR (Marketing XYZ) = $300/50000 = 0.6\%$

The Marketing ABC ezine is by far the most responsive ezine out of the three, with nearly 2% of readers clicking on the link. Compare that with the Marketing XYZ ezine with a pitiful 0.6% response -- you may not want to bother with this ezine in your next campaign (unless you're testing out a different product).

2. Cost-Per-Click (CPC)

CPC is how much you pay to get a visitor your website.

$$\text{CPC} = \text{Cost of marketing campaign} / \text{Number of unique hits}$$

- CPC (Marketing 123) = $\$100/75 = \$1.30/\text{visitor}$
- CPC (Marketing ABC) = $\$150/350 = 43\text{¢}/\text{visitor}$
- CPC (Marketing XYZ) = $\$300/300 = \$1.00/\text{visitor}$

By far, the best 'bang for your buck' is again the Marketing ABC ezine since each visitor costs you less than half of what it does for the other two ezines.

How much are you willing to spend to get someone to your site? That depends on a lot of things, including:

- **Your conversion rate** - the percentage of visitors your site converts into paying customers. Generally speaking, the higher your conversion rate, the more you can afford to spend.
- **Your profit per sale.** Obviously you can spend more if you earn \$100 per sale than if you earn \$10 per sale.
- **Residual or back-end sales.** For example, although you may only make \$10 per sale, that might be recurring income -- in other words, you may make \$10 PER MONTH PER SALE. If people tend to renew their subscriptions or memberships, then you might be willing to take a loss during your first month.

Website Stats/Demographics

- [WebTrends Log Analyzer](#) (pricey but comprehensive)
- [AXS Visitor Tracking System](#) (free, CGI script)
- [AccessProbe](#) (free demo, \$39.95 to register)
- [WebLog](#) (free, CGI script)

- [HitBox](#) (several different options)
- ...and, of course, don't forget to ask your web host if they provide website stats/demographics as a part of your hosting package!

Ad Tracking Software

- [Hypertracker](#)
- [AdMinder](#)
- [AdvertisingResults.net](#)
- *[ROIbot](#)
- *[AdTrackz](#) -- This is the ad tracker I use. I love it for its simplicity, and for its "sub-campaign" feature -- very convenient to track multiple campaigns for the same product! This feature isn't offered in any of the other trackers I've tried. A one-time fee and it's yours.



How to Cloak Your Tracking URL

Tracking URLs are usually long and difficult to remember. For example, one of the tracking URLs I use to indicate that someone subscribed after reading one of my articles is:

```
http://tracking.globill-systems.com/cgi-bin/adtrack.cgi?parent=211567&fromurl=2
```

By "cloaking" your tracking URL in a [redirection URL](#) you can advertise a shorter URL. Whenever I advertise, I use my redirection URL which is:

```
http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/article.html
```

This redirection URL automatically routes the visitor to my tracking URL, which records the hit. The tracking URL sends the visitor along to the appropriate web page (in the above example, it would send my visitor to my subscription page).

information.

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<META HTTP-EQUIV="Refresh" CONTENT="0;
URL=http://www.your_tracking_URL.com/">
<TITLE></TITLE>
</HEAD>

<BODY>
</BODY>
</HTML>
```

All you have to do now is upload it to your server and you're done! You can advertise your redirection URL instead of a tracking URL.

The Basics of Copywriting

A persuasive sales letter helps you to convert more prospects into paying customers!

Copywriting Tips and Pointers

Here are a few basic tips on copywriting - stuff I've learned and use on my own sales materials. The next part of this section lists some of the excellent resources available to you from the true "masters" of copywriting.

Focus on benefits, not on features.

Readers want to know, "What's in it for me?" For example, the specialty pet bed you're selling might have a durable polar fleece lining. That's a *feature*. The benefit is that it will keep your pet warm, snuggly, and happy on cold nights. Another benefit would be that it saves you money because it can withstand considerable wear & tear from your active pet.

Focus on your customer - not yourself.

Who can resist a conversation about themselves? ;-)
Prospective customers want to hear about how your product is going to help or benefit them personally. The words "you" and "your" should be used far more often than "I" or "me" in your sales letter and ads.

Businesses so often drone on about themselves – you know the type: "We're a 20-year company with an excellent track record and we've won awards ABC and XYZ for 7 years running..."
Enough, already! Tell me how your products or services are going to help *me*.

Use emotionally-charged words.

Strong words that evoke images and emotions are great at getting a prospect to respond to your ad. Later in this section you'll find a list of "words that pull".

Be ruthless - edit out all unnecessary text.

A tightly-focused sales letter leads your prospect to complete one action. That could be signing up for your newsletter, filling out a form, or ordering a product. Don't try to sell everything within your sales letter; concentrate on getting your prospect to do just **one** thing.

Don't deliberately mislead or misrepresent.

Be honest about what your product can offer. Misleading claims will only result in dissatisfied customers and an increase in refund requests -- not to mention the damage to your reputation!

Go easy on the CAPS and exclamation marks.

You have probably seen too many ads that look like,

!!!! AUTOMATED HOME BUSINESS!!!! WORK FROM HOME
IN YOUR UNDERWEAR WHILE YOU MAKE THOUSANDS
EVERY MONTH!!!! NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!!!!

CAPS or the occasional single exclamation mark are wonderful for emphasis. Just don't overdo it!

Use fresh, original ads.

Yup, that means you have to write 'em! This is particularly true if you're promoting affiliate programs. Many affiliate programs provide you with pre-written ads that you can use in your promotions. This is fine, but if there are a lot of affiliates, it can get pretty tiresome to see the same old ad, day in and day out. This can decrease its response rate dramatically.

Please note: If you are promoting an affiliate program, please be sure to read its advertising policies. Some programs will require that you submit any ads you write yourself for approval *before* you use them.

Write like you talk.

Use everyday language. You're not trying to impress anyone with perfect grammar, complicated words, or to show off your education. Quite frankly, no one cares. Write your copy using the same language you would use if you were actually talking to your customer.

You may find it helpful to pretend you're talking to one specific person. Pick anyone - your spouse, your neighbor, your dog. This little trick can help you to write a sales letter that sounds much more "personal". When your customer reads it, it will sound more like you wrote it with her in mind.

Let it flow.

Give your creativity free rein! Write down everything that enters your mind. Don't criticize or edit or discard anything. You can make changes later.

Even after you've done this once, don't rush right in to edit it. Do it again! Just sit down and write ... add more to your copy, anything and everything you can think of. Once you can't think of any other benefits, *then* it's time to edit.

Make your copy easy to read.

Stick with short sentences and paragraphs. Use white space and headlines to break up the text into easily readable "chunks". And use bullets; they're great for emphasizing your product benefits in a concise, readable way ... plus people will return time and time again to re-read these lists.

Focus on one product or service.

A dedicated sales page for each product works much better than trying to sell 15 different products all on the same page. Let your reader concentrate on one thing at a time.

This isn't to say that you can't list your different products on the same page. Many sites use their home page to display their variety of offerings to visitors. However, the difference is that this type of page is meant to generate *leads*, not sales. Get the reader's attention and direct them to the appropriate sales page.

Focus on getting the visitor to do one thing.

This goes with the last point. Don't try and get your visitor to purchase your product and sign up for your newsletter all on the same page. Do you want her to order? Subscribe to your ezine? Download a trial copy of your product? Put your efforts into getting her to perform just that one action.

Be unique, original, and personable.

Unless you have an extremely tight, niche market, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of other websites offering the same thing. Inject personality into your writing. Tell the reader how your product is different from all the others out there. Why should he order yours instead of going to the competition? How is yours unique?

Although injecting your personality helps your sales letter to stand out, be cautious when using humor. The Internet truly is a global marketplace; what's funny to one person may not be funny to another.

Use credible testimonials.

You've probably seen testimonials that look something like:

"I love your system! In one month, I've made \$7,000 and that was only working 5 hours a day! Thanks so much. You've changed my life."
- C. Thomas, Tampa, FL.

Maybe the testimonial is true, but it **looks fake**. Remember that it's your visitor's *perception* that counts.

Testimonials can give credibility to both your site and product - but use the name and email address or phone number *with the author's permission*, or provide his/her URL, company name, or job title.

So how do you get testimonials?

- **Some are unsolicited** - your customer may be so thrilled with your product that he or she just has to write to you to tell you how happy she is. Write back, thank

her, and ask for permission to post her testimonial on your website.

- **Ask.** I have seen business owners email their customers and ask for testimonials in exchange for a gift. I'm two minds about this; on one hand, it seems like bribery to me (maybe some people give testimonials just for the free gift? I don't know) ... on the other hand, I know that sometimes people just need an invitation or a little "push" before they'll give their opinions. The free gift is a show of appreciation.

I personally prefer to wait until a customer emails me with a question or comment that shows how much he appreciates my product or service. I answer the email thoroughly ... then ask for a testimonial.

There's a whole different section dedicated to testimonials later in this manual.

Don't talk "down" to your reader.

Don't talk to him like he's an idiot. Questions like, "Wouldn't you like to be trim, fit, and full of energy?" are useless. We all know the answer, including your reader.

Be believable.

"!!! I MADE \$10,000 IN ONE MONTH WORKING JUST 3 MINUTES A DAY! REPLY NOW TO GET THIS LIFE-CHANGING INFORMATION!!!"

Totally unbelievable, and downright "scammy". Don't make false claims. Your reader isn't dumb and these types of obvious lies are insulting. Maybe you'll make a few sales... but I can guarantee that your customers will be angry with you for lying, once they find out! "Once a liar, always a liar" - don't put your reputation on the line. Stick to the truth.

Write targeted ads.

Your product or service may be useful to various groups of people. For example, let's say you offer a clerical service online where you can do typing, create presentations, etc. and then deliver the finished product electronically.

One sales letter could be written specifically towards small businesses that need temporary help. Another letter could be rewritten to appeal to university students, who are looking for a quick way to get their term papers and lab reports typed up.

These targeted web pages could then be advertised in the appropriate medium -- for example, small business directories online in the first case, and university campuses for the latter case. Each audience will think that your service is perfect for *them* because you wrote it with them in mind.

Be specific.

Don't say, "Product XYZ helped me lose a lot of weight!"

Say, "Product XYZ helped me lose 18 pounds in 6 weeks!"

Exact information is much easier for people to understand. Your reader will know exactly what to expect when she orders.

Be as complete as you can.

Try to anticipate any objections your reader may have to ordering your product or service. Then address each of these objections within your sales letter.

Instead of a sales letter that makes your reader think, "WHY I should I purchase this product?" ... try to create one that makes him think, "Why SHOULDN'T I buy this product?"

Use deadlines, if appropriate.

A very popular and effective technique to get the reader to order *now* is to put a deadline on the offer. It creates a sense of urgency, a thought that, "If I don't order now, I might miss out forever." Make sure your sales copy clearly indicates what they'll miss out on if they don't order immediately.

I've used deadlines with great success when offering a limited service, such as advertising discounts (I can only run a certain number of ads in each newsletter). Some businesses even choose to use a script that automatically sets the deadline to "today's date" – so it doesn't matter *when* someone views the sale page; the "deadline" will always be "today".

Include a "call to action".

Never assume that your prospect knows what to do next. Tell them what you want them to do - how to order, email you, visit your website, whatever it is you want them to do.

Use a post script (P.S.)

Reading online is hard on the eyes. People tend to scan the page looking for something of interest ... and one of the things they do most is to scan to the bottom of the page looking for the price of your product. That means that one of the first things they'll see is your P.S.

Use your P.S. to either re-emphasize the strongest benefit, summarize your offer, or throw in an extra bonus.

Give clear ordering instructions.

Don't assume that your visitor knows what to do. Tell him what options he has for ordering your product, and how to use them. If you take any sort of payment information online (credit card numbers or online cheques, for example), emphasize that they will be using a secure server that ensures that their information is protected.

Note: If you don't have a secure server, you need to get one - many people are not comfortable ordering online unless they're confident their information won't be stolen. Secure servers encrypt information before it gets sent out.

Not sure whether you have a secure server? Check the status bar located at the bottom of your browser. You'll either see a small (closed) padlock or an unbroken blue key.

Offer bonuses.

I'm sort of two minds about this one. Many big online marketers suggest offering loads of bonuses - so much so that the bonuses end up being worth more than the actual product! The idea is to overwhelm the reader with added value, and give her a little push to order.

Although this is probably obvious to you, I'd be remiss in my duty if I didn't point out that any bonuses you offer should be of

high quality. Don't add a bunch of junk; your customer will associate that junk with your product, and you wouldn't want that, would you?

I've tried offering a ton of bonuses before. **For me**, it didn't work. When I finally ran a survey asking why, several people said, "If your product's so good, then you shouldn't have to add hundreds of dollars of extra stuff."

This was only one tiny little experiment that I ran well over a year ago, and I've yet to repeat it. Try it yourself and track the results to see what works best for you.

Explain how and when the product will be delivered.

This is particularly useful when your product can be delivered electronically. Emphasize that your customer will get "instant delivery" - it's quick, convenient, and there are no shipping costs. People have come to expect fast delivery.

Consider offering a guarantee.

Many businesses swear by guarantees. By removing the customer's "risk", you're also removing any objections they have to making the purchase.

On the other hand ... I also know other businesses who do **not** offer a guarantee. The reason? They sell information products - once someone has read and "digested" the information, then it's "theirs" forever. It isn't like purchasing a physical product and then returning it for a refund. An information product is read and absorbed, and even if you choose to refund a purchase that product may still remain on your customer's computer, to be referred to whenever she likes.

Spend most of your time on your headline.

Your headline is by far the most important part of your sales copy. A good headline will capture your prospect's attention and "force" her to read the rest of your copy.

Naturally, your headline isn't going to appeal to everyone. And you don't want it to. Write your headline to appeal to a specific target audience; those are the people you want to read your ad.

Always come up with several different versions.

Never use the first sales letter or ad you come up with. Copywriting is hard work; come up with dozens of variations of ads and sales letters - and particularly headlines!

Learn From the Masters! Copywriting Manuals and Tools

I've never believed that there is one true copywriting manual, tutorial, or tool that's "best" for everyone. Either it "clicks" with you or it doesn't. One may bore you or confuse you, while another may make you say, "I can do that!".

Read as much about copywriting as you can. Like everything, it's a learning process ... and wouldn't you be thrilled if you learned one little trick that increased your profits by 20%?

Take your time, absorb as much as you can, and put it to use - nothing will work for you if you don't take action! Remember that you need to track the results of each sales campaign so that you know what works and what doesn't.

Special Reports and Position Papers

By Jay Abraham

Highly recommended! This is a set of free reports that provide an astounding array of information. These reports are written by the 'masters' of selling and copywriting. Pay particular attention to the following reports:

- [The 100 Greatest Headlines Ever Written](#)
- [37 Million-Dollar Headlines: A Collection of the Most Powerful, Attention-Getting and Effective Headlines](#)
- [How Good Headlines Can Build Your Business](#)
- [How To Create a Unique Selling Proposition](#)

Instant Sales Letters

By Yanik Silver

The Instant Sales Letter package is a set of sales letter templates that you can use as a basis for your own copy. It's a "fill in the blanks" type of thing that's quick and easy to use, a great solution for people who have trouble writing. You will find many testimonials on the website to help you make a decision.

Please remember that these are only *templates*; you will need to customize them for your own business.

Make Your Words Sell!

By Joe Robson and Ken Evoy

This manual is part of popular [Site-Sell!](#) series. MYWS! offers a series of step-by-step instructions and lots of examples to make learning easier. It even walks you through one complete example using the steps explained in the manual.

The writing itself is light, entertaining, and easy to understand. At the time of writing, MYWS! is selling for around USD \$20 (it's dynamically priced; the price changes according to demand).

Push Button Sales

By Marlon Sanders

Marlon Sanders has an excellent reputation far and wide as one of the best Internet marketers and copywriters around.

The Push Button Sales Letter is a piece of software that guides you through the copywriting process. You basically answer questions, fill in the blanks, or even add your own creativity (while following Marlon's guidance). You follow a step-by-step process that shows you exactly how to write copy.

What I've heard so far has been good - excellent, really. It claims to offer a quick way to create a sales letter that's "100% customized for your business, product, or service".

Power Words - Words that Pull!

Here's a handy list of descriptive "power words" for the times that you just can't seem to find the "right" word!

New Product

Announcing
Discover
Finally

Modern
New
Novel

Presenting
Revolutionary
Today

Money/Savings

Bargain
Best Deal
Discount

Fortune
Liquidation
Lowest Price

Make Money
Reduced Price
Wealth

Product "Attractiveness"

Appealing
Attractive
Beautiful
Captivating
Charming
Classic
Colorful
Distinctive

Dramatic
Elegant
Exquisite
Fascinating
Flattering
Glamorous
Intriguing
Lavish

Magnificent
Ravishing
Scenic
Sensational
Spectacular
Striking
Stunning

Product "Usefulness"

Durable
Handy
Helpful
Informative
Instructive

Powerful
Practical
Reliable
Reversible
Serviceable

Useful
Versatile
Washable
Workable

Product Quality

Astounding
Authentic
Better
Brand
Characteristic
Choice
Durable
Excellent
Exceptional
Exclusive
Famous
Fantastic
Fine

First-Rate
Genuine
Great
Grade
Incredible
Imported
Improved
Limited
Marvellous
Noted
Outstanding
Personalized
Rare

Remarkable
Rugged
Selected
Special
Surpass
Superior
Terrific
Uncommon
Unique
Unparalleled
Unsurpassed
Valuable
Wonderful

Product Endorsement

Accepted	Commended	Popular
Acclaimed	Endorsed	Praised
Admired	Guaranteed	Proven
Approved	Honored	Recommended
Certified	Notable	Tested

Act Immediately

Act Now	Limited Supply
Act Fast	Order Now
Be The First	Order Today
Don't Delay	Pay Later
Don't Put It Off	Rush Name for Details
For a Limited Time Only	Send Today
Get Started Today	While Supplies Last
Last Chance	

Miscellaneous

Absolutely	Fascinating	Quickly
Announcing	Gift	Remarkable
Amazing	Hurry	Revealing
At Last	Immediately	Revolutionary
Bargain	Improvement	Sale
Challenge	Interesting	Save
Compare	Introducing	Secrets
Complete	Lifetime	Sensational
Convenient	Magical	Stirring
Easy	Miracle	Successful
Easily	Now	Suddenly
Enlightening	Offer	Wanted
Entertaining	Provocative	

The Basics of Making Money with Affiliate Programs

Many people know that they want an online business of their own, yet have no product or even a product *idea*. That's where affiliate programs come in – you can promote another company's product or service in return for a commission. It might just be the "starting point" you're looking for!

An Introduction to Affiliate Programs

Affiliate programs are run by companies that allow you to sell their products and services in return for a commission. For many people, affiliate programs are a nice way to get started online. Why?

- They provide a way for you to make money online even if you don't yet have a product or service of your own to sell;
- You learn how to market on the Internet - an extremely important skill if you're going to be successful online;
- They handle everything from shipping, handling orders, billing, and inventory to customer service. That leaves you free to concentrate on just one thing: advertising. And that's more than enough for someone who's just learning!

Affiliate programs are by no means perfect. But they can at least give you the opportunity to get some "hands-on" experience with online marketing!

The Affiliate Program Primer

Affiliate programs can be a great source of income - whether you bring in a few hundred a month or a few thousand. However, it's not as easy as some people would have you believe. Here's a quick primer on what they are and how they work.

How They Work

The company handles everything for you except marketing. That means they often (but not always) provide you with a website that's set up to take orders, and they'll handle inventory, billing, shipping, and customer service.

It's your job to sell the company's products or services. In return you will receive a commission, typically between 5% and 50% of the gross sale.

There are three main types of affiliate programs:

Pay-Per-Click

This type of program usually pays you a few pennies for every unique visitor that clicks on your affiliate link.

It is generally a lot harder to make a decent income from a pay-per-click program. Unless you have an extremely high-traffic site, you could be waiting an awfully long time before you see any money (and even then, it probably won't be much)!

Pay-Per-Lead

Some affiliate programs pay you simply to get someone to download something for free, fill out an application, sign up, or do something similar. They're paying you for a [lead](#) - a potential customer that they can follow-up with and hopefully make a sale.

Referral fees for pay-per-lead programs are usually higher than the pay-per-click ... And because your visitor doesn't actually have to buy anything, you could have a better chance of earning a referral fee than you would in a pay-per-sale program. Often times, though, the "lead" must fill in an application form before you earn your commission. Examples are affiliate programs for mortgage brokers, insurance agents, etc.

Pay-Per-Sale

Pay-per-sale programs are exactly what they sound like: for every sale you make, you are paid a commission. It's a real temptation to sign up for affiliate programs that will pay you a

huge sum for each sale ... just remember, if your commission is so high then the price of the product itself must also be high.

Often times it's a lot easier to sell lower-priced items than high-ticket items. Many people won't hesitate at spending \$20 or \$50 online, but they definitely pause if the product costs \$500!

To make a decent income using pay-per-sale programs, you will need a fairly high-traffic site. Because you are asking someone to buy something, you need to send more visitors to your affiliate site to make one sale than you would for a pay-per-click or pay-per-lead program.

The Pros and Cons of Promoting Affiliate Programs

Like with any opportunity, the sale of affiliate products and services has some good points -- and some bad points.

Advantages:

- **You only have to concentrate on one thing.** Marketing is your only job. You don't have to think about inventory, billing, shipping, or anything else. It gives you a chance to "learn the ropes" of Internet marketing without worrying about other stuff.
- **Start-up costs are lower.** While I still recommend that you have your own professionally-hosted domain, you won't have to cough up the cash to handle issues such as inventory, billing, or shipping.
- **Extra income.** Even if you already have a product or service of your own, adding a few good affiliate programs to your site (or promoting them to your opt-in newsletter) can bring in a decent income if you're consistent.

Disadvantages:

- **You have to share the profits.** You're working on commission, so you only get a percentage of the profits. Sometimes it's as low as 5%, but on average it's between 15% and 30%.

Note that this also impacts the types of marketing you can do. Because you're working on commission you have less flexibility with the amount of money you can spend on marketing.

- **You're at the mercy of a company.** It's happened before: companies have terminated their affiliate programs, leaving all their hard-working affiliates to re-build another business from scratch. Many affiliate companies have also continuously decreased their commission rates -- so while you may be receiving a 40% commission one day, the agreement could change and you could be receiving 10% the next. If you don't accept the agreement then you typically have no choice but to terminate your affiliate status.

The company also has the right to terminate your affiliate status if THEY believe you have violated one or more of the terms of the agreement.

- **You may be restricted in what types of marketing you can do.** For example, your affiliate agreement may state that you are only permitted to use company-approved ads or banners. Even if you know that these tools are not the most effective, you cannot use anything else unless you obtain explicit permission.
- **You rely on the company for your pay cheques.** Some companies haven't paid out ever (despite owing affiliates commissions), others pay out late - sometimes months after they were supposed to!

In my opinion, affiliate programs are an okay way to get started on the web. Eventually, however, I sincerely believe that affiliate programs are better left as a "secondary" source of income that supplements your own product or service.

The reason is simple. When you promote affiliate programs as your main line of business, the affiliate company is in control of your "destiny" -- they determine how much you make (ie. your commissions) ... and even whether or not you'll be in business (ie. they can terminate the program). You may spend a great deal of time, effort, and money to build an excellent affiliate business -- only to lose it later. When you sell your own product or service, you make these types of decisions for yourself.

That's *not* to say that affiliate programs aren't worth the trouble -- I still promote them myself! They're still a good way to "learn the ropes"

of Internet marketing, and to create additional streams of income to supplement what you already have.

Strive for multiple streams of income. A number of small pay checks might not seem like much by themselves... but add them together and you can create a solid income!

5 Common Myths about Making Money with Affiliate Programs

When I first started online I dreamed of how much I would make: \$1000 a month with this affiliate program, \$2000 with that one ... and hey, since they told me all I had to do was put up a few links and banners, I was expecting sales pretty much right away.

If this were true, we'd all be rich instead of struggling to find a way to make money online.

The unfortunate fact of the matter is, many affiliate programs go for "quantity" - they try to attract as many affiliates as possible, rather than trying to attract **motivated** affiliates. So to appeal to the mass majority, they tell you a number of things that are ... well, somewhat misleading, shall we say.

Myth #1: Just put their banners on your website and start making money immediately.

Reality: Unless you have a high-traffic website with a target audience that's interested in that particular product, you **won't** make money immediately. Period.

And if you **do** have a high-traffic site with a targeted audience, you still might not make money. It's very dependent on how well you "pre-sell" your visitor on the product; the visibility of the sales copy; your credibility with your visitor; and many other factors.

In short, it is **never guaranteed** that you will make money at all - let alone make money immediately.

Myth #2: Their "proven" ad copy is all you need to make sales.

Reality: Affiliate programs sometimes spend a great deal of time testing and re-testing ad copy until they find a few ads that are "winners".

For the affiliates that are the first to start promoting, these ads **might** make them some money - if they can get the **right** people to read the ads!

You see, this "proven ad copy" is proven for a particular target market. If you place the ad in front of an audience that's not quite your target market (or they're just plain unresponsive for whatever reason), you won't make a sale.

But as more and more affiliates join up, there are more and more people using the exact same ad. It gets tiresome after a while. Selling successfully online requires you to learn how to write fresh, original ad copy.

Myth #3: They do 99% of the work; you do the marketing.

Reality: The company will handle billing, payment, inventory, shipping, customer service, and pretty much everything except marketing.

Marketing is **your** job - and it's a tough one! While the company might handle all the "logistical" details, you still have the hardest part ahead of you. You will need to learn how to write effective advertising copy; locate targeted audiences; get traffic to your website; track your ad campaigns; experiment with new ideas; and test your ads' effectiveness.

So if marketing really is only "1% of the job", it's the **hardest** 1%!

Myth #4: Their two-tiered program will significantly boost your profits.

Reality: A [two-tiered program](#) is one in which you can optionally recruit others to join your affiliate "downline". If anyone in your downline makes a sale, you get a percentage of the profits.

Potentially you could make a bundle off your downline. But is it likely? No.

Affiliate programs often promote two-tiered systems as a way to earn extra income with "no additional work". This is garbage. First of all, the vast majority of affiliates never make money (don't know how, lack of motivation, any number of reasons why).

Secondly, as the "sponsor", you often have to provide support to your downline - tips on how you've made money, answers to questions about the program or the products ... this is plenty of work and can really eat up your time.

Don't count on your downline to make you rich. Concentrate on your own efforts; if your downline just happens to make sales, it's just a nice bonus!

Myth #5: The product "sells itself"!

Reality: No product "sells itself" - even if it's the super-duper-all-in-one-master-gadget that everyone in the whole world needs.

Unless **you** convince the buyer that he or she wants it - persuades them that somehow this incredible gadget will somehow make their lives better - you won't be seeing any sales.

No product, no matter how good or useful it is, will sell itself. The selling is entirely up to you.

This isn't meant to discourage you; quite the opposite! I hope that it's given you a clear view of what to expect so that you can work with it.

Choosing an Affiliate Program

Affiliate programs are not all created equal. There are thousands available, and more cropping up every day. Here are a few important tips to think about when you're choosing an affiliate program:

The Product or Service.

Be sure to choose an affiliate program that offers a product or service that your target market will want. It's also important that you pick something you really like and believe in! It's a lot easier to be enthusiastic about promoting a product or service that you truly think is valuable, than one that you're only pushing to make a few bucks. Your reputation is at stake; if you wouldn't purchase the product yourself, don't expect others to either.

Value to the Customer - and to Yourself.

If the product you offer is high-quality, professional, and available at a decent price, your customer is much more likely to be a happy - and repeat! - customer. It will also make it easier for you to sell. Word-of-mouth recommendations *do* get around!

If you have a newsletter of your own, you're probably going to be approached by people who want you to become an affiliate. I recommend that you review a copy of the product first before you agree to promote it to your customer list.

Commissions.

Is it a flat rate per click-thru from your site to their site (typically, \$0.01 to \$0.05 per click-thru)? Is it a flat rate finders' fee per registration or 'lead', eg. \$1 per lead? Is it a percentage of gross sales? A percentage of net sales? There can be a huge difference between gross sales and net sales. A commission of 20% or more is usually considered generous.

Does the program offer [lifetime commissions](#)? If someone buys from your affiliate link, then later returns without using your link, will you still get credit for the sale?

How about [residual income](#) or [commissions on back-end products](#)? For products such as website memberships or subscriptions that are re-billed on a regular basis, ask if you'll continue to receive a commission for as long as that person remains a customer ("residual income"). Similarly, find out whether you'll receive commissions on any future products that customer buys from the same company (commissions on "back-end" products).

Minimum Payment Thresholds

Some affiliate programs pay every week, others quarterly, others anytime in between. Check if you need to generate a minimum commission before they send you your check. If, for example, you get paid a 10% commission and the average product sale is \$20, that means your average commission is \$2. Now let's say the company pays you when your commissions reach at least \$100 -- you could be waiting an awfully long time before you see your money!

The Tracking System.

Do they offer some method for you to track your commissions? You want to be able to see how many click-throughs from your site to theirs you've generated, as well as how many sales you've made so far. The more information, the better: it will help you test different setups to find out what works best. Stats that are updated in "real-time" (ie. as they occur) are best.

The Contract.

I was going to list a bunch of typical affiliate program contract clauses ... but the gist of it is that if you sign up as an affiliate, you must agree to their terms. If you don't agree your only recourse is to not sign up (or to terminate the contract, if you are already an affiliate).

Read the contract carefully. One of the things you should pay particular attention to is any **exclusivity** requirements. Some programs may require that their affiliates not promote any other program that is in direct competition with their own. For example, a bookstore affiliate program may require that they are the only bookstore that you promote.



Changing Commissions and Contracts

Most affiliate contracts will state that they have the right to

doesn't happen very often.

However, it **can** happen, make no mistake about that. I am an affiliate for one company that cut their commissions by a **staggering 66%!** Be aware that commission cuts **can** happen, so don't rely on just one source of income.

Affiliate programs can also terminate the program altogether. In the years I've been online, many affiliate programs have come to an end for a variety of reasons. That's another good reason why you should strive for *multiple streams of income*.

A Quick Word on the Self-Replicating Website

You have no doubt seen [self-replicated websites](#) everywhere - even if you didn't realize what they were. If you join an online business that provides you with your very own website, you are more than likely to receive an exact duplicate of the site from which you signed up. That's all a self-replicating website is.

Now, you may have read opportunities that claim that because they're giving you your very own website, they've already taken care of most of the work: the website has already been created for you, potential customers can browse the site, the programs are in place to take orders, the company will handle all billing, inventory, etc.

Sounds simple, doesn't it?

It's not. The plain fact of the matter is, you still have to know how to promote the site. If prospective customers can't find the site then you can't very well expect to make sales.

You can have the most skillfully designed website in the world, with the most sought-after products and the easiest, most convenient online ordering system imaginable ... but without traffic, you have nothing.

That's not to say that the stuff other than traffic isn't important. They're also an integral part of a successful online business. It's a

combination of several things that will help your business become a success.

Locating Affiliate Programs for Your Target Market

You'll probably want to re-evaluate your affiliate programs every so often. It's a constantly changing process: some programs will work for you, others won't. You pick up new ones and discard the ones that aren't worth your time or effort.

There are several places you can look to get opinions about various affiliate programs. You probably don't need to visit more than one of these sites; just pick the one that's easiest for you to use and start looking.

- Associate-It.com
 - AssociatePrograms.com
 - Refer-It.com
 - AffiliateFind.com
-
-



Where to Locate Brand-Name Products

Some people feel "safer" buying brand-name products. QuinStreet offers hand-picked, quality products that are very well known such as:

Hooked on Phonics - great for websites centered around families or children

Balducci's - would fit in nicely on sites related to cooking, recipes, food, etc.

Quicken - excellent for family, money-saving, or financial tips sites

QuinStreet commissions are quite generous. After you've signed up with them (which is free, of course), you simply login and select your merchants.

1. **As you browse through the list of affiliate programs, make a list of the ones that interest you.** I recommend that you actually visit the websites and take a look around. If the site looks unprofessional or makes unreasonable claims, you could have a much more difficult time making sales.

Make a few notes about what each program you're considering has to offer. Compiling this information into a chart may make for easier reference.

- Commission rate.
- Lifetime commission, residual income?
- Additional products? Do you have the opportunity to sell the same (satisfied) customer another product? It's much easier to sell to a loyal customer than it is to find a new one.
- Product price (is it affordable?)
- Value - does it offer what it says it does, plus more?
- Is there instant access to the product?
- Does the program offer you stats? Are they real-time? Your stats will help you to keep track of which promotions are working and which need to be replaced.
- Is there a monthly minimum you have to meet, and if so, what is it? There's a world of difference between \$10 minimum and a \$100 minimum.
- Market saturation. Go to [Google](#) and run a search for your affiliate program. If it comes up with hundreds of thousands of web sites, you know that there's a lot of people trying to make a buck with the very same program. That means more competition!

2. **Select one or two affiliate programs to begin with.** I know it's tempting to choose more, but you'll be spreading yourself too thin if you do. Once you're able to sell you can add more slowly. Or if you've put in a consistent effort and find that your audience is simply not interested in that particular product, then drop it and choose a different one.



Consolidate Your Commissions and Get Paid More Often

Many affiliate programs pay you once your commissions have reached a certain level. For example, their minimum payment threshold may be \$100. If your commissions for the month are only \$50, they're held over until the next month – or until your total is \$100. This can be difficult and discouraging, especially to beginners.

One way to get paid more often is to join either [QuinStreet](#) (mentioned earlier) or [Commission Junction](#). Commission Junction offers a consolidated interface to over 1500 merchants - you pick and choose which ones you want to join. If your combined total from **all** the programs you've joined is at least \$25 at the end of the month, you'll get paid.

Another excellent option is to join [Clickbank](#). Clickbank sells all types of digital products. They're also a credit card processor. I've used them in both capacities (as a credit card processor and as an affiliate) and they've been consistently reliable. Sign up, then browse through the marketplace for products/services that fit your site.

4 Critical Requirements for Making Affiliate Sales

Whatever you may have heard, you *cannot* slap up a few banners and place a few ads, and instantly start earning gobs of money. The vast majority of people do not make much from affiliate programs - if anything at all! I know this from personal experience: by looking at the sales of all my downline members in the past year, I've noticed that there are only a handful that consistently make sales.

Having said that, it *is* possible to make a solid income from affiliate programs each month. It takes time and effort, but affiliate programs **do** work! I'm living proof. In my experience, there are four critical elements to making sales ...

1. Your Own Domain, Professionally Hosted

You can purchase a domain for less than \$10/year, and I've seen hosting for as low as \$5 a month ... so there's no excuse not to make these important investments. You can easily spend more than that on a dinner out!

A domain and professional hosting both play key roles in building your credibility - and your credibility is a key part to making sales!

2. Content and Credibility

Once you have your own domain, the next step is to offer valuable content, specifically of interest to your target audience. Two common ways to do this are:

- **Build a content-rich site based on one theme.** (your affiliate programs should fit this theme) Your content will help you get listed with the big indexes such as Yahoo! - they're big sources of traffic. Plus a content-rich site will keep your visitors coming back. This will help to build **trust and credibility**, two things that are vital to making sales.
- **Build short "mini-sites" to promote one specific affiliate product or service.** These are dedicated pages, with the focus on getting the visitor to click through to your affiliate link. I've had some great success with simple articles – for example, my entire site could be one or two great articles on, say, the effects of aging on dogs. Then I could include a recommendation, links, or editorial-style ads to an affiliate program that sells heated pet beds.

3. Focus

By "focus" I'm talking about concentrating on **just one or two affiliate programs** to start with. It's tough enough to make money online, but if you choose too many programs - no matter how great they sound! - you're going to end up spreading yourself too thin.

Pick a program or two that show the best promise. Preferably they cater to a large audience where there are not too many

competing products. You want to look for good commissions, too, and a payout level you're comfortable with.

For example:

Choice #1: An affiliate program that pays 5% to 10% commissions, where the average purchase price is \$20, with a minimum monthly payout of \$100. You'll be working forever before you see a check!

Choice #2: An affiliate program that pays 25% commission, where the average purchase price is \$40, with a minimum monthly payout of \$50. That means 5 sales a month will get you check!

Believe me, getting that first wonderful check - holding it in your hands! - is an **incredible motivator**.

4. First-Hand Knowledge ("Buy the Product!")

How do you know you're selling a quality product unless you've used it yourself?

Top affiliates are often the ones who know the product - that means they've bought it, used it, and know what it offers. They can answer questions about it, and they know how it can benefit their target audience.

No one ever wants to believe that buying the product yourself is a necessary part of being a successful affiliate.

True, there might be a few rare folks who are good at selling something for which they don't have first-hand knowledge; but for many people, buying the product is one of the first steps to selling it successfully ...

- You'll be able to knowledgably answer most questions about the product.
- You'll **know** without a doubt the quality of the product. Offer high- quality products and you are much more likely to generate repeat customers (more profits!).
- You'll be able to offer a personal testimonial. This is one of the most powerful techniques for increasing sales.

Don't expect others to want to buy a product you wouldn't buy yourself. If you're short on cash, you can always attempt to make a few sales first ... and then purchase the product once you make enough in commissions to do so. Note that some people spend far more on ineffective advertising that it would cost them to invest in the product that they're selling!

You're also going to need a good dose of **motivation** and be willing to **work hard!** I was online for 3-4 months before I saw my very first sale ... persistence is definitely a very necessary part of building an online business. [My friends call it, 'pig-headed stubbornness', but I prefer my wording ;-)]

How to Maximize Profits with Your Sponsor-Downline Relationship

Some affiliate programs are **two-tiered**, meaning that you can recruit others to join your **downline**. You become their **sponsor** and offer guidance, and in return, you earn a percentage of any sales they make.

Don't depend on your downline to make you rich. Concentrating on your own efforts is much more likely to yield results.

However, that doesn't mean you can't profit from your downline! Placing a prominent link on your website in order to recruit people is a good, passive way of building your downline without any extra effort.

For example, on one of my websites, I have a separate page that lists my top affiliate programs. From that page alone, **I've recruited well over 1000 people** into various programs in about two years.

The unfortunate part is that most of them probably won't sell anything. However, it took me only an hour or two to write up the web page and stick it on my site. Otherwise I've basically ignored it, and I make a few extra bucks every week off my downline.

Keep in mind that some sponsors either can't or won't help you. Likewise, most people in your downline will probably never make a sale. That **doesn't** mean you should give up! There are a few ways to maximize your profits with a minimum of time.

As a Sponsor ...

- **Consider sending a 'welcome' email to your new downline member** and offer tips or insights on how to make money with your affiliate program. For most people, the first few weeks in an affiliate program are the most critical.
-
-



Using Email Templates to Save Time

Type out a "standard" email to be used whenever you are notified of a new recruit. Then just cut and paste the text into your "welcome" email and personalise it. Here's an example. You'll need to change the text in red.

Dear Dan,

My name is John Smith and I'm your ABC Program sponsor. I just wanted to welcome you and give you a few tips on how to promote the program.

First, I suggest getting familiar with the product. Browse the website and get to know what benefits the product can offer. You may also want to purchase the product yourself, if you haven't already, so that you have first-hand knowledge of it. It's up to you.

Secondly, I've set up a 'help' website with information on how I've personally made sales. This is stuff that's worked for me, and hopefully it can help you too. You can find it at <http://www.yourhelpdomain.com/>.

If you have any questions please let me know.

Best Regards,
John Smith
mailto:john@somedomain.com
<http://somedomain.com/>

- **Be helpful, prompt, and courteous when answering your downline's questions.**

Note that there will always be people who won't bother to read your answers to their questions, and will continue to ask the same questions repeatedly. I usually send back a polite but firm email telling them that the answers they seek are in my last email or on a certain web page. Don't allow yourself to be pulled into doing a lot of work for someone who chooses not to make an effort.

- If you have a lot of downline members, you may want to **create a special 'help page'** so that they can refer to it whenever they like. On this page, include information such as:
 - A brief overview of the product(s) and where to go to find more information. Some people may not realize that they have to actually know the product before they can sell it.
 - Where to sign on to view their stats. This is usually included in the affiliate program's welcome email, but some people don't bother to read it or they may have lost the email.
 - Tips on how to promote the program. The more detailed you can be, the less likely it is that they'll contact you repeatedly with the same or similar questions.
 - Links to other sites that may help them.

As a Downline Member ...

- **Read the information provided to you by your sponsor.** They've been working the affiliate program longer than you have, and may have insights that will help you get started faster.
- **Take the initiative to know what it is you're promoting.** It's your responsibility to read up on the product or service being offered (purchasing it yourself is even better - you'll be able to provide a personal endorsement).
- **Be considerate of your sponsor's time.** If you can find the answers you seek from the company website, take the time to do so. Keep your questions short and concise, and make sure you read your sponsor's answers. Do not ask the same questions repeatedly,

and be sure your questions are not already answered in a previous email or on the company website.

- **Be specific!** When you email your sponsor for more information, tell them exactly which program you're referring to (your sponsor may be involved in several) and what information you're looking for.
- **Take responsibility for your own efforts!** While it's nice to have a supportive sponsor, it is ultimately up to you to learn what you need to know in order to make money.

7 Highly Effective and Affordable Promotion Methods

These are the promotion methods I've personally used with great success. Forget about all the "old" stuff like classified ad sites or banner ads!

1. Automate It!

Consider using a follow-up autoresponder for your short ads. I've run ads in newsletters advertising my website URL and an autoresponder address. Most people won't buy from a single visit to a website. Your autoresponder gives you the opportunity to follow-up with prospects and convert them into paying customers. Use a URL that goes either directly to your affiliate website, or to a page on your own site that "pre-sells" the prospect on the affiliate product.

I've found that writing up a separate sales page for each specific affiliate product tremendously improves my conversion rate. As an example, visit <http://homebasedwork.com/employer/workathomejobs.html> . The purpose of this page is to establish credibility and trust – and then get the visitor to click on my affiliate link.

2. Exclusive Mailings and Sponsor Ads

Ezine advertising is a very cost-effective way of reaching a group of targeted subscribers. Exclusive mailings (also called solo ads) and sponsor ads typically get the best response. More on ezine advertising is available later in this manual.



The Secrets to Getting Cheap Ads

1. There are a few **ezine ad auction websites** where editors auction off their "remnant ad space" (unsold ad space) to the highest bidder.

I've picked up ads for \$50 that normally go for hundreds of dollars. And if you're just starting out and don't have a lot of extra cash, you can often get ads for under \$10. It's a great, affordable way to test your ads. [Ezine Ad Auction](#) is a good place to look.

When considering an ezine, make sure you read it first. Some ezines will have archives of previous issues; if they don't, email the editor and ask for one. Ad auctions are cheap but you still don't want to throw away your money!

Keep in mind that the editor is not required to sell you the ad unless your bid meets their [reserve price](#) (the lowest price they'll accept for their ad). Don't lose hope if you don't meet their reserve - many editors will sell anyways.

Also remember that it's buyer beware! If your gut feeling about an ezine tells you not to purchase, then don't. Auction sites only bring together buyer and seller; they don't handle payment or ensure that the newsletter editor actually runs your ad. Nor do they have any control whatsoever over whether or not the editor runs an [opt-in](#) list.

2. **Barter!** Sounds old-fashioned, but it works very well. If you have something of value to exchange with an ezine editor, then you may be able to get an ad for "free". That means no out-of-pocket expenses! For example, you may be able to trade:
 - o Advertising space if you have a high-traffic website.

- Ezine ads in your own newsletter.
 - Any special skills you have. For example, if you're a graphic artist you could offer to create a professional logo in exchange for some ezine advertising. Or you may offer to "ghost-write" an article in exchange for an ad (assuming you have good writing skills and a knowledge of the topic at hand).
-

3. Articles

Write articles of interest to your target market and submit them to newsletter editors or websites that cater to your audience. Include a casual reference - within the context of your article! - to a product you're promoting. Alternatively, add a link to your affiliate program at the end of the article within your "bio".

I 've personally found that a "casual" reference to an affiliate product works better than a die-hard sales pitch. For example, let's say you write an article about grooming a dog. *Within the context of the article* you can "toss in" a quick mention of a dog brush you love.

4. Pay-Per-Click Search Engines

[Pay-per-click search engines](#) are exactly what they sound like: they're search engines where you can list your website in exchange for a specified payment for each visitor that clicks on your link.

For example, you could "bid" \$0.05 per click for the key phrase, "gift baskets". That means whenever someone types in "gift baskets" and clicks on your link within those search results, you pay \$0.05. Take a look at [Overture](#), the most popular PPC SE, to see how they work.

Note that most pay-per-click search engines require you to deposit a certain amount of money before they start sending traffic your way.

5. Personal Endorsements

This is a very effective method of increasing your profits - particularly with the people you've developed a relationship with, such as subscribers to your newsletter. But it also works on a website, providing that your site has credibility.

In order to provide a personal endorsement you'll obviously have to have first-hand knowledge of the product. Come up with an attention-grabbing headline and then display your testimonial. Make sure your testimonial speaks to your target audience - focus on the benefits that matter to **them**.

6. Use a Redirection URL to Advertise Your Affiliate URL

Your coded affiliate URL is probably big, long, and ugly. It immediately brands you as an affiliate (for those "in the know") and some people will deliberately bypass the affiliate tracking code in your URL so that you won't get your commission. Others may simply remember the affiliate company's URL, but not your coded affiliate URL.

These are a couple of reasons why you want to use a [redirection URL](#). This special URL simply hides your affiliate URL while making it shorter and easier to remember.

To create a redirection URL, create a new web page. I usually give it the name of the affiliate program I'm promoting. The HTML for that web page would look like:

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<META HTTP-EQUIV="Refresh" CONTENT="0;
URL=your_affiliate_url">
<TITLE></TITLE>
</HEAD>

<BODY>
</BODY>
</HTML>
```

Replace the text in **red** with your actual coded affiliate URL.

Once you're done, upload the page to your server. Now when you advertise the affiliate program, you would direct people to the URL:

http://www.yourdomain.com/your_redirection_page.html

Again, replace the text in **red**. Please remember to test your redirection URL before you start advertising with it!

7. Signature Files.

Commonly called **sig files**, these are just a few lines you attach to every email you send out or, *if appropriate*, at the end of messages you post on a message board (each message board will have its own set of rules). It's sort of like your business card; you can use it to attract new visitors to your website.

Because sig files should be short (most people use around 3 to 7 lines), *don't* use them to try to sell something. Use them instead to **generate leads**; leave it up to your website or autoresponder to do the selling. Here are a few quick tips on creating a sig file:

- **Create a simple divider** that will help to set it apart from the rest of your email. Use "clean-looking" symbols, such as = or ~ or _ .
- **Include your name, email address, and website URL.** Make sure you start your URL with "http://" and your email address with "mailto:" so that they'll appear as clickable links for most people.
- **Left justify and format to 60 characters per line.** Yes, that means you'll need to add hard returns at the end of each line. Some email programs automatically "word-wrap" lines of a certain length; this can make your email hard to read.
- **Keep it clean, simple, and professional.** The layout of your sig file should be neat, easy to read, and there should be no spelling mistakes or typos. Don't do anything fancy; certain email programs may not display your message exactly as you intended.

- **Tailor it to suit your needs.** For example, you may want to use one sig file for message boards; another for your existing customers; yet another for a "hot prospect".

3 Ways to Use Your Website

Here are a few ways you can experiment using your website. I'd recommend leaving it one way for *at least* a month so that you have a good period of time for results to appear (you can get away with less time if you have a high-traffic site).

Top Left or Bottom Right Corners.

I've read numerous studies that state that the top left corner of your screen and the bottom right corner are the two places to which your visitors' eyes are naturally drawn. For me, the top left corner has worked extremely well while the bottom right corner has done pretty much nothing. Test it on your own site to see what works for you.

Although most affiliate programs provide you with [banners](#) (graphical ads), I've found that they don't work very well. People **know** that banners means: someone is trying to sell you something. Most people don't much like that, so they either ignore them or they click away.

There are many different methods of using this space. For example:

- Offer a brief description and a direct link to your affiliate site.
- Offer a brief description and a link to a more detailed page on your own site with the copy that "pre-sells" your visitor on buying the product. Your detailed page would, of course, contain links to your affiliate site.
- Put up a form on your site offering a free report. The visitor types in their email address and sends the form, and your [autoresponder](#) (there's that word again!) instantly sends them the information. Your affiliate program is casually mentioned at the end of the report.

Experiment to see what works best for you. You don't have to pick just one technique; maybe a **combination** is your key to making more sales!

Recommended Links with a Personal Endorsement.

Some webmasters find that a "Recommended Links" or "Recommended Resources" section works well. If you use this approach, make sure you truly do endorse the products or sites you list! You're putting your reputation on the line, so make sure whatever you put on the "recommended" list is worthwhile.

If you can offer a personal endorsement (which requires you to purchase and use the product, of course), all the better. Stress the benefits to your audience, and then back it up with examples of how the product helped you personally.

Embedded Text Links.

Try sprinkling casual references to your affiliate program throughout your content-rich website.

For example, let's say you're selling dog grooming tools through an affiliate program. Within an article on your site about spending quality time with your pet, you might mention that many dogs come to enjoy some quiet grooming time. That would be a perfect place to quietly insert a link to your affiliate program, within the context of your article.

With these types of links, don't go for "hard sells". In other words, don't come on strong. People know a sales pitch when they see one; if they're on your site reading your great content, you don't want to scare them away. Just a quick reference is often enough to spark their interest. For example:

"blah blah blah Many pets enjoy some quiet grooming time. Experiment with different types of brushes to see what feels best for your pet. My own Pookums really enjoys the [ABC Doggy Brush](#).

blah blah blah ... (continue with the rest of the article)"

Embedded text links are great; you've already established your credibility by providing solid information, so your prospect is more open to taking a look at products that you recommend.

How to Start Your Own Newsletter

You may have noticed that most successful online businesses publish a newsletter of some sort. They vary widely in content and publication schedule, but they're there.

I know that for me personally, offering a free newsletter has been one of the most lucrative things I've done online. This section will show you what it takes to start one of your own.

The Pros and Cons of Life as a Newsletter Editor

One thing you'll find as your online business grows, is that there are no "black and white" answers about what's "right" and "wrong". What works for one person or one target audience may not work for another. Here are a few things to think about before you begin your quest to start a free newsletter...

Advantages:

1. **You build credibility.** Turning out a high-quality ezine gradually establishes your reputation as an "expert" in your field.
2. **You keep in touch with and develop a relationship with your visitors.** People who know and trust you are much more likely to buy from you - providing you treat them right, of course, and are selective in what you recommend.
3. **You can leverage your list for joint ventures.** There are always people looking for someone with a list of contacts where they can promote their product or service.

As an editor, you have that magical list of contacts. You may be approached with products or services to review; if you choose to endorse them, you may be offered a "cut" of the resulting profits. You'll also be able to swap ads with other editors - a

great way to advertise your products with a new audience, without spending any out-of-pocket money!

Joint ventures can be extremely profitable. For this reason alone, I wouldn't hesitate to offer a free newsletter.

4. **Your list provides you with an additional income stream.** Traditional methods of making money with your free newsletter include selling advertising space and sending out your own ads to your list.

Using your list to promote your own products is acceptable and even expected ... however, there are downsides to it too. We'll discuss this more later on.

5. **Return traffic to your website.** Encourage your subscribers to re-visit your website by displaying your website URL in each issue of your newsletter - or add a "What's New" section that links back to your site. This helps to remind people about your site and "brand" the URL in their minds.
6. **You gain additional exposure.** There are various newsletter directories on the web, and plenty of places where you can submit your articles. If you publish your newsletter (or selected articles) on your website as well, you can a) add content quickly and easily, and b) link back to your site from all the sites where you've submitted your article.

This will get your website URL out to the visitors on other sites - and increase your "link popularity" with the search engines. Some search engines will look at how many other sites link back to yours in order to determine your ranking.

Disadvantages:

1. **Newsletters can be extremely time-consuming.** Writing articles, researching resources and tools ... all that stuff takes time. Yes, you can recycle content from other writers - but your subscribers are there because of *you*. Give them at least some fresh, original content and solid information. It gets tiresome reading the same article in 6 different newsletters.

And it's not just the research and writing that's time-consuming. Even if you use a [list manager](#) to handle your subscriptions automatically, there will be people who completely ignore even the simplest instructions. Instead, they'll write to *you* with

subscription requests - and you'll need to handle them manually.

2. **You'll get a lot of people with the "something-for-nothing" mentality.** You may find that a certain percentage of your subscribers only signed up because your newsletter is free. They may never buy anything from you, ever.
3. **You will need to answer questions and provide support.** One popular expression is, "10% of your customers represent 90% of your work". My own experience shows that this is all too true!
4. **Some people will never read your masterpiece - and you'll always lose subscribers.** You slave away to create the best newsletter you know how to ... but you lose subscribers anyways!

This is something that shouldn't bother editors, but it does. Unless you're losing a great many subscribers consistently -- which probably indicates that your newsletter isn't delivering as expected -- then it's perfectly normal to lose subscribers. Some email addresses bounce; your newsletter may no longer interest your visitor (it's okay; people's priorities change); perhaps your subscriber is simply too busy to read it. Regardless of the reason, every newsletter will receive unsubscribe requests.

5. **Spam, spam, spam.** Occasionally you may get the odd person that believes that just because they're your subscriber, they have the right to email you offers, opportunities, chain letters, etc.
6. **You will put up with abuse.** You've probably heard that in order to work online, you need to develop a "thick skin". Oh, so true. The unfortunate fact of the matter is, there are plenty of people on the web who can be extraordinarily rude and abusive - even though they'd never behave that way in the "real world".

5 Questions to Ponder Before You Publish

Every newsletter is different. It depends on the personality of the editor, the needs of the subscribers, how much time you have, and more. Here are a few things to consider ...

1. What Type of Newsletter Will You Offer?

With a **focus** newsletter, each issue concentrates on one particular theme. There can be "how to" information, tips, resources, a Q&A, and so on.

Resource newsletters, on the other hand, require much less writing. They typically offer a list of useful tools, websites, or other resources with just a brief 1-2 paragraph description of each.

You don't have to pick one over the other; if you prefer, you can combine the two. If you're going to go with a straight resource newsletter you can still consider giving each issue a particular theme. For example, in one issue of your cooking newsletter you could offer a list of helpful resources specifically on cooking and nutrition for diabetics.

2. Where Will You Find Content?

I recommend writing at least some of your newsletter content yourself. Subscribers "identify" with the editor; they come to know and trust them and are able to pick out their writing style. Plus fresh, original content is a good seller. If you've ever subscribed to a bunch of free ezines in the same area, you'll know how tiresome it gets to see the same article reprinted 5 times!

Occasionally you may need to reprint articles in order to save time and keep your sanity. Later in this section I'll show you where you can get content.

If you're writing a resource newsletter, most of your time will be spent doing research.

3. Will You Eventually Sell Advertising?

Do you plan to sell advertising in your newsletter to generate a supplementary income stream? If so, figure out where your ads will go. Note that for best exposure and value for your future advertisers, you should **not** put a giant clump of classifieds at the very bottom of your newsletter.

If you do plan to sell advertising, it's a good idea to get your subscribers "accustomed" to seeing ads.

General rules of thumb: 1. The fewer ads, the better; 2. Ads placed unexpectedly throughout the content of the ezine are more likely to be read.

4. **What Will Your Publishing Schedule Be?**

Ezines take a heck of a lot of time to write and compile. Once you have a format in mind, write up one or two issues to get a good feel for how much time it'll take you to create each issue.

Most editors publish on a regular schedule. Ezines that come out irregularly may confuse subscribers into thinking that you're spamming them - or they may simply ignore you because they don't remember who you are.

You basically want to publish often enough so that your readers get to know you ... but not so often that they get annoyed with a seemingly never-ending stream of email. On the other hand, only commit yourself to what you can handle. Weekly and bi-weekly publishing schedules are common.

5. **Email or Web-Based?**

There are two basic types of newsletters. The first is an "ezine", or electronic newsletter that's usually sent out in plain text format through email. The other type is sometimes referred to as a "webzine". Webzines are HTML newsletters published on a website.

What type you choose is a matter of preference – both your subscribers' preferences, and your own. Here's a brief comparison of the two ...

Email Newsletter

Quick and easy to format.

Since it's sent in plain text format, all you have to do is add in some white space and a few lines for readability.

Note that you can publish email newsletters in HTML format; however, many people

Web Newsletter

Formatting your newsletter is time-consuming.

You need to add some HTML in order to publish it on the web.

refuse HTML messages or their email software cannot handle them properly.

Only your current subscribers can read your newsletter. Since your ezine is delivered directly into their mailboxes, they are the only ones who will see it (unless you also archive it on the web).

People may be more likely to read your ezine. By delivering it straight into their mailbox, people may be more inclined to read it because it's right at their fingertips. They may even print it out to read later on.

No graphics, no bold or italics ... It's harder to emphasize something when you're using plain text. On the other hand, because you don't have to deal with all types of HTML issues, it's quicker and easier for your subscribers to read your newsletter.

Anyone with an Internet connection can read your newsletter. You can put a link on your website publicizing the latest issue, or an archive of previous issues.

People may be more likely to read your ezine. (Didn't I just say that?) Some people prefer to read a nicely formatted newsletter and don't mind doing so online.

Visually appealing. You'll be able to better draw your readers' attention to specific items in your newsletter. On the other hand, you have to be careful not to add too many "extras" - you still want your page to load fast, or risk losing someone's interest.

I don't recommend sending HTML messages through email. It's possible, of course; but *not everyone has email software that can read HTML, and others choose not to allow HTML messages.* My opinion is: text is for email, HTML is for the web.

If you can't decide, try it both ways. Remember that online business is all about testing! For example, you could email out a plain text version containing a few "teaser" sentences about each article. Include a coded tracking link so that your reader can view the article online.

This way you'll be able to see exactly how many people read the newsletter. Just because they're signed up for it doesn't necessarily mean they'll read it! Plus you can see which articles are the most popular. This is a good way to tailor your content to better fit the interests of your readers.

Note, though, that some people may find it too inconvenient to have to connect to the 'net in order to read your newsletter. This is where plain text emailed newsletters may hold the advantage.

Where to Find Fresh Content

I recommend writing at least some of the content yourself so that your subscribers are treated to something "fresh", rather than "recycled." Even if it's something as small as a short editorial, it will give your newsletter its own unique "voice"!

Article Banks and Distribution Lists

An easy way to get fresh content delivered to your mailbox is to simply list your ezine in the various directories (covered later in this section) and indicate that you accept article submissions. The downside to this is that you may get flooded with submissions, many of them unusable!

Another way is to subscribe to an article announcement list. Writers submit their fresh articles to these lists, the moderator checks them, and then sends them out to all subscribers.

And finally, there are "article banks" online where writers submit their articles and publishing guidelines. You can visit these banks to pick and choose the articles you wish to use.

A list of these services is available in the [Where to Submit Your Articles](#) topic in the section on [Getting Published](#).

Newsletter Writing Services

I *do* think that having my own newsletters is likely the best thing I've done for my online business... yet I also know how time-consuming it can be. If you're in need of someone to write your newsletter for you, there are many services available to you. Here are a couple; be sure to get samples of their work before coming to a decision.

- [eZynes](#)
- [Nine Buck Newsletters](#)
- Another option is to [hire a freelance writer](#). You can post your requirements with no obligation to hire.

Note that these types of services normally do *not* promote your ezine for you! You will still need to promote and build your subscriber base. Here are some things to consider before choosing a service:

- **Writing style.** Does the style represent the "tone" you want conveyed by your company? Is it engaging and clearly written?
- **Content.** Does the writer have in-depth knowledge of the topic? Will they brainstorm and research topics for each issue, or is this up to you?
- **Professionalism.** Is the content properly formatted, easily readable, and spell-checked?
- **Timeliness and reliability.** Can you depend on the company to deliver as promised?
- **Control and copyright.** Do you own the copyright to the ezine? Can you make changes to the content?
- **Consistency.** Will you always have the same writer working for you? This helps to maintain a consistent "tone" throughout each of your newsletters (without you having to "train" a new writer each time).

Creating a Format or Layout for Your Newsletter

Formatting your newsletter is an important part of online publishing. I've often seen amateurish-looking ezines that are one solid, unreadable block of text. Worse, they're filled with lots of special characters in an attempt to look "cool" or "cutesy". Better to keep it simple, neat, and easy to read!

Here are a few pointers on coming up with a "baseline" for your newsletter.

1. **Decide what you want to offer.** Your newsletter can have as many or as few elements to it as you'd like. Here's a short list to get your creative juices flowing. Be careful not to commit yourself to more than you can handle!

- Featured Article
- Useful Website Pick
- Reader Q&A
- Letter to the Editor
- Surveys or Polls
- Product Reviews
- Suggestion/Help Column for Subscriber Websites or Products
- Tip of the Day
- Interviews
- Inspirational Quote
- ...Anything else you can think of!

2. **Come up with a format.** It's easier to create a visually-attractive newsletter when it's published on the web using HTML. Tips for web publishers:

- Use small graphics sparingly to add visual interest.
- Emphasize words or sentences using **bold**, *italics*, or increased font size.
- Use plenty of white space for easier readability.

Plain text newsletters, however, require more thought. Here are a few pointers for a nicely formatted text newsletter:

- **Stay away from special characters.** Although you might think your masterpiece combination of `&*#@#@#@#*&` looks wonderful, your subscribers probably won't.
- **Use "dividers".** Create lines from the `_` or `=` or `--` characters, and then use them to separate the sections of your newsletter.
- **Use plenty of white space.** Email is hard on the eyes to begin with.
- **Format to 60 characters per line.** That means you'll need to press ENTER / RETURN after 60 characters. This prevents problems when email programs automatically "word-wrap", causing your beautiful newsletter to look like a third-grader created it.



How to Format Your Newsletters

The Manual Method:

This 60-characters-per-line thing for text newsletters can be a real pain. But it's a necessary task, so here's how you can do it.

First of all, you'll need just any old text editor. I use Notepad, the generic editor that comes with Windows.

Next, change your font to a fixed-width font such as Courier New. Then type in a string of 60 characters to use as your "ruler":

_____1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6

Use this ruler as a guideline for your text formatting. Before you reach the end of your ruler, press your RETURN/ENTER key to make sure each line is a maximum of 60 characters long.

An alternative:

Use the free [eZine Assistant Software](#), available to users of Windows 95/98/NT/2000. This handy little tool allows you to:

- Manage the content for all of your newsletters with ease.
- Keep track of your issues, the content for each, and when it was published.
- Instantly format your newsletter text with hard line breaks to your specifications.
- Promote your newsletter instantly using their eZine directory submitter.

-
3. **Write a couple of sample issues.** This will give you a good idea of what kind of time commitment you're looking at. Scale back if you have to!

By the way, don't be afraid to show your personality [I'm assuming you have a pleasant personality, of course ;-)]. The

Internet is so vast and so cold at times that a warm, unique *personal* touch is much appreciated.

Decide on a publishing schedule. How much time can you spare? Once a week or every two weeks are both common publishing schedules.

12 Things to Consider Before Choosing a List Manager

I know editors that manually add or remove prospects from their lists, and my question to them is ...

... **Why?**

Your time is better spent developing good content for your ezine or marketing your business, not doing mindless and repetitive tasks. That's where [list managers](#) come in. List managers automatically handle subscribe and unsubscribe requests for you. They're a huge time-saver! Here are a few pointers on what to look for in a list manager.

1. **Unlimited Messages and Message Size.**

Are you limited to a certain number of mailings, and are you charged for any over the limit? As for message size, nothing's worse than having to try to cut down your newsletter to make it fit the size requirement. Look for a list manager that will allow messages of unlimited size - or at least messages so large that it makes no difference to you.

For example, my own text newsletters are approximately 500 lines of 60 characters each, from start to finish (including all formatting, white space, etc). They usually range in size from 15k to 18k. My list manager allows me to send messages of up to 30k in size – for me, that's reasonable.

2. **Price.**

Think about the entire package - do you pay a simple annual fee that covers absolutely everything? Or do you pay-per-message (or blocks of messages)? Are there any additional fees for the use of special features (for example, automatic archiving your messages on the web)? If you exceed the number of messages

sent per month (or if your messages exceed the allowable size), how much extra do you pay?

3. Automatic Handling of Undeliverable Mail.

Email addresses change all the time. It's time-consuming and tedious to have to manually remove undeliverable mail; be sure your list host automatically removes most "bad addresses" for you.

4. Option of Using a Double Opt-In System.

Single opt-in means that someone sends you or your list manager a subscription request and they're added to the newsletter list.

Double opt-in is the "safer" method. Someone must first send a subscription request to your list manager. The list manager emails her back and asks her to verify her request. She has to respond to the verification notice before she's added to the newsletter list. This helps to ensure that subscribers are only added with their knowledge and consent. It always helps to protect you from spam complaints.

Double opt-in also helps to "qualify" a subscriber; someone who takes the time and makes the effort to respond to the verification request is more likely to be interested in what you have to offer. Remember that you want a *responsive* list, not just a big one!

5. Message Archive.

Will your list manager automatically archive all your messages on the web? This is a good way to allow current and potential subscribers to read previous issues. Potential advertisers will probably want to see a copy of your ezine as well.

6. Flexible, Easy-to-Understand Subscribe Options.

Some people are more comfortable with email, others with websites. If you can offer people the option of using either method to subscribe, you'll be able to increase your readership more quickly.

7. Unsubscribe Link in Every Email.

As always, provide a way for your subscriber to remove herself from your newsletter list. Note, though, that not everyone will follow the instructions. You'll get the occasional unsubscribe request sent directly to *you* (in which case you'll have to manually remove them from your list). Some list hosts will automatically embed an unsubscribe link within each message. With others, you have to set it up.

8. Subscriber Demographics.

Understanding who your readers are is a big step to providing information that's relevant and useful to them. Check to see if your list host allows you to collect demographic information about your subscribers, such as gender, occupation, Internet experience, and so on. This is also good to know if you ever decide to start charging for ads placed in your ezine in the future; advertisers like to know this stuff!

Privacy is a big concern. Here are a few suggestions to help balance the concern for privacy with the collection of demographic information:

- **Only ask for relevant information.** I don't know about you, but I absolutely will not sign up for a newsletter that wants my birthdate, household income, marital status, and other nosy, "none of your business" bits of information.

The other types of information often considered "standard" are:

- **Gender:** Women and men relate differently.
- **Age Group:** Very useful, especially when combined with gender information. For example, if you see that your subscribers are primarily women between the ages of 25 and 49, you can safely assume a good percentage of them are moms. Use this information to target your articles directly to your audience.
- **Job:** This one makes me a tad uncomfortable ... however, it's useful info. You'll be able to see if your audience is primarily professionals, retirees, unemployed, stay-at-home parents, etc ... each group has different priorities and interests (speaking in generalities, of course).

- **Keep the list short.** People hate answering long surveys. The longer it takes, the more likely it is you're going to lose them.
- **Make the questions optional!** Don't try to force people to give up information they're not comfortable disclosing.

On my web-based signup page for my free newsletters, I explicitly state a couple of things to try to make my visitors feel more comfortable:

1. The **reason** I'm collecting this information (to provide better service, ie. articles that better suit their needs).
2. My **privacy policy**, which is simply that I won't disclose their information to anyone. Period.

One final note: collecting demographics information will probably cut down your subscription rate. Many people simply won't bother to fill in the form.

9. **Reliability and Service.**

Talk to others and find out if they've ever experienced any problems: message delays, list server downtime, any mailing list problems. Also find out what type of support you'll have. Are they prompt in responding to requests for help or problems? Hopefully you won't have any need to ask for support if your list manager is working smoothly ... but just in case, it's good to know you can get help when you need it.

10. **Import Capability.**

If you have a previous list you'll want the ability to import your old subscribers into your new list (assuming that you have their permission to do so!). Likewise, there may be occasions where you need to add a number of subscribers – an import capability gives you an easy way to do so.

11. **Customized Welcome and Goodbye Messages.**

It's a nice touch to get a "personal" email from the editor when you join a list. You can also offer an unadvertised free bonus if you like, or add a small byline for another one of your products.

Same thing goes for the goodbye message. Thank the person for trying out your newsletter. Ask for feedback. Most people

won't bother, but those who do can give you valuable insight into *why* they're unsubscribing.

12. Scheduling Capabilities.

It's nice to be able to write your newsletters in advance, and then simply input them and tell your list manager to send them out on a certain date/time. It frees you up to do other stuff - plus you won't be prone to forgetting.

List Managers/Hosts to Consider:

- [Yahoo Groups](#)
- [Topica](#)
- [ListChannel](#)
- [SparkList](#)
- [ListBuilder](#)
- [OptInLightning](#)
- [Ezine Manager](#)

Note that many businesses also use [autoresponders](#) to manage their lists.

How to Create Your Newsletter Listing

Here are the most common bits of information you'll need when you promote your newsletter. Take some time now to get it all ready. It will save you from thinking "on the fly" when it comes time to list your ezine.

1. The Name of Your Newsletter.

There's no right or wrong way to come up with a title for your newsletter. Here are a few sample templates. Come up with a descriptive phrase for your newsletter, and then add one of the following:

- Reporter
- Informer
- Bulletin
- Examiner
- Gazette
- Weekly
- Online

- Wire
- Spotlight

For example, "Pampered Pooches Online" or "The Busy Cook Bulletin".

You may want to check to make sure no one else is using your newsletter's name (you can do so by visiting any of the large ezine directories online).

2. Your Newsletter Description.

Write an enticing, well-written description between 2 and 5 sentences long. Your description should be informative and accurate - don't deliberately mislead anyone or you'll just end up with a bunch of uninterested subscribers. Remember, you're going for *quality* subscriptions!

Make it interesting! Your description should capture your prospect's attention and persuade them to subscribe. People won't necessarily subscribe just because it's free; there are loads of "freebies" available online.

3. Will You Accept Articles?

Although I encourage you to write your own content, there may be times when you're simply too busy. This is where article submissions from other writers can help. In return for an author byline, you can reprint their article in your own newsletter.

You may receive a lot of article submissions if you state that you accept articles. You'll get some garbage too - sales letters thinly disguised as articles, plus just plain shoddy work. On the other hand, you'll also get some absolutely fantastic work - stuff that you can reprint or that may trigger some ideas of your own.

Your options if you choose to indicate that you will *not* accept articles are to either a) pick up articles from the many article banks online like [Idea Marketers](#), or b) subscribe to an article announcement list such as [Article Announce](#).

4. Ad Swaps?

Will you accept ad swaps from other editors? Ad swaps are a great way to increase your exposure without having to spend any out-of-pocket money.

The downside? You may end up getting swamped with swap requests. An option is to list your ezine as *not* accepting swaps ... but then *you* build your own list of editors who accept swaps. Then you'll be able to pick and choose your swap partners.

5. Free Ads to New Subscribers

Some editors will offer one free ad to each new subscriber. This is an incentive to try to build up their subscription base as quickly as possible.

I did this myself and would never do it again. This is my personal opinion only; it's just that the quality of subscribers I got from offering free ads tended to be very poor. Plus I continued to get 'free ad' requests well over a year after I'd started charging for ads!

6. Subscription Instructions.

You'll be asked to enter email and possibly web addresses where prospects can subscribe and/or unsubscribe to your newsletter. *Make sure you test these addresses yourself, first!* It would be a real shame to promote your newsletter only to discover much later that your subscription links didn't work ...!

9 Highly Effective Options for Promoting Your Ezine

1. Submit to Ezine Directories.

There are a number of directories on the web where you can list your newsletter and its details. These directories can get you a few new subscribers so don't give up the opportunity! Listings are usually free.

Naturally, your listing will become out-of-date after a while. Stay organized! Keep a file of each directory, its URL, and the last time you submitted an update. Some directories will remind

you periodically that you should update your listing, but don't count on it. Try to update your listing at least once a month.

- [BestEzines.com](#)
- [Book of Ezines](#)
- [Book of Zines](#)
- [Cumuli](#)
- [DIY Search](#)
- [Ezine Ad Source](#)
- [Ezine Depot](#)
- [Ezine Directory](#)
- [Ezinehub](#)
- [Ezine Links](#)
- [Ezine Search](#)
- [Ezine Universe](#)
- [Ezine World](#)
- [EzinesPlus.com](#)
- [Inkpot's Zine Scene](#)
- [Lifestyles Publishing Directory of Ezines](#)
- [Low Bandwidth](#)
- [MarketersMarket.com](#)
- [Marketing-Seek.com](#)
- [NetterWeb.com](#)
- [New Jour](#)
- [Newsletter Access](#)
- [Publicly Accessible Mailing Lists \(PAML\)](#)
- [Published.com](#)
- [TopEzineAds Directory](#)

2. Use Announcement Lists.

There are a number of mailing lists available where you can announce your newsletter. This is a simple way to pick up a few new subscribers. Be sure you pay attention to each list's submission guidelines; your announcement may not be mailed out if it doesn't conform to the rules.

- [New List](#) - This list has been known to produce some spectacular results in the past, so make sure you come up with a great description before you submit - you only have one opportunity!
- [The Other New-List](#)
- [Promote Your Ezine](#)

3. Advertise in Other Newsletters.

Try swapping ads with other editors or webmasters. Editors with new lists of their own are usually more than happy to do a swap. If the editor has more subscribers than you do, then you may want to offer to run their ad multiple times in exchange for one run of your own.

For example: you have 50 subscribers. The other editor has 100. He runs your ad once; you run his ad twice.

Note! You don't have to trade ads in your newsletter. For example, if you don't have any subscribers at all, but you have a website with decent traffic, you can try bartering an ad on your website in exchange for an ad in an ezine.

4. Contribute to Message Boards.

There are discussion groups on practically every topic imaginable. Find one that interests you and become a contributing member. Depending on which board you join, you may be able to leave a link to your newsletter at the end of your posts.

Be sure to read and abide by the rules of the board.

Breaking the rules may get you banned from posting. You can start your search for appropriate boards at [Network54](#).

5. Use Your Signature File.

[Sig files](#) are sort of like an "online business card". It's typically a 3-7 line message attached to the end of every email you send. One use of a sig file is using it to promote your newsletter.

Here are a few quick tips on creating a sig file to promote your newsletter ...

- **Create a simple divider** that will help to set it apart from the rest of your email. Use "clean-looking" symbols, such as = or ~ or _ .
- **Write an enticing description of your newsletter.** Tailor it to suit the interests of the person you're writing to.

- **Provide both an email subscription address and a subscription URL.** Make sure you start your URL with "http://" and your email address with "mailto:" so that they'll appear as clickable links for most people.
- **Left justify and format to 60 characters per line.** Add a hard return at the end of each line to ensure your email is easy-to-read for everyone.
- **Keep it clean, simple, and professional.** The layout of your sig file should be neat, easy to read, and there should be no spelling mistakes or typos. Don't do anything fancy; certain email programs may not display your message exactly as you intended.

6. Put Subscription Boxes on Your Website.

Don't just put a subscription box on your home page, but on **every single page of your site**. Some webmasters have also had good results with pop-up subscription boxes. Most people say they hate them - but on the other hand, I know a lot of webmasters who have significantly increased their subscriptions just by using pop-ups!

Pop-ups can be used in many different ways. I'd recommend that you only pop up a subscription box when your visitor leaves the site or on select pages. Otherwise it can get real annoying, real fast ...

7. Arrange for Newsletter Co-Opts.

A [newsletter co-opt](#) is when you partner with other editors in your niche to promote each other's publications.

The two most common ways to run newsletter co-opts are:

- **Promote all newsletters together on the same page.** You place your partner newsletters along with yours on your home page. They do the same.
- **Promote your partner newsletters on your confirmation page.** On your confirmation web page (the page that's shown after someone subscribes to your newsletter) or confirmation email, you display your partners' newsletter descriptions and subscription links. They do the same for you.

Send the editor a nice note. Introduce yourself and your ezine, tell them where you found their listing, and ask if they'd be interested in an ezine co-opt. Emphasize the benefits of an ezine co-opt (more exposure to different audiences = more subscriptions, no out-of-pocket expense) and provide your contact information. You can find other editors at:

- NetterWeb.com
- [Lifetypes Publishing Directory of Ezines](#)
- [SubscriberDrive](#) (ezine co-opt program)

8. Get Published.

Write, write, write! **Editors are always looking for good articles that are available for reprint.** If you're going to write articles for your own newsletter anyways, why not distribute them to other editors within your niche market?

At the end of every article, put your [author byline](#). This is a short description (usually around 3-7 lines) about your website and/or newsletter. Include a subscription link to your newsletter. More on writing articles is available in another section of this manual.

Another option is to write a free eBook and make it freely available. Once again, another big topic for another time. One simple way to create an eBook is to simply compile a group of your own articles and make it available for download. Include subscription links to your own newsletter throughout the book.

9. Pay-Per-Subscriber.

Due to a tight budget, most beginners don't go this route. However if you do have the extra cash this is something you may want to investigate.

There are several services online that will help you to build your subscriber base quickly. They have heavy promotion budgets and will find you *opt-in* subscribers - for a fee. You typically only pay for the subscribers themselves; you don't have to pay for any advertising. In other words, if they don't give you subscribers, you don't pay them.

WARNING: Some services will pay affiliates to help promote your newsletters. That is, the affiliate gets paid for every email address that they can get to subscribe. *Be very careful about*

using services that pay affiliates to get your subscriptions! I used to use one myself, and the number of fraudulent addresses I received was downright ridiculous.

Regardless of what service you choose, keep a sharp eye on the *quality* of subscribers you receive. Beware of services that seem to give you a disproportionate number of free email addresses, such as from Hotmail or Yahoo. In my experience, most of the undeliverable messages come from these addresses, whose owners have full mailboxes or who have switched email addresses.

I've seen prices for pay-per-subscriber services ranging from \$0.10/subscriber to \$0.85/subscriber. Here are a few to investigate:

- [Ezine Central](#)
- [Ezine Place \(ListOpt\)](#)
- [WorldWideLists.com](#)

When would you ever consider using these services?

- If your site doesn't get enough traffic to draw subscribers.
- If you cannot afford the time necessary to attract new subscribers.

It's not necessary to use pay-per-subscriber services; it's just something to think about. One way to do it is to re-invest some of your online income back into your business - pay-per-subscriber services is one option. **Be cautious, though; the quality of your subscribers is more important than the quantity!**

An Editor's Primer to Paid Advertising

Before we get started, let's take a quick tutorial.

There are three basic types of ads (and lots of variations in between): sponsor ads, classified ads, and exclusive or solo ads.

- **Classified ads** are just your regular ads. They're short, usually placed throughout the newsletter or at the very bottom in one big heap (not recommended).

- **Sponsor ads** are typically placed at the top of each issue for highest visibility. They're usually longer than classifieds, and tend to draw a better response rate. You can put more than one sponsor ad at the top but it diminishes the value to the advertiser - and to your subscriber, who's forced to view more ads.
- **Exclusive mailings** or **solo ads** are completely separate mailings from the regular newsletter issue. The only thing in the mailing is the ad itself. Many editors permit exclusive mailings to be quite long. I've found solo ads to be by far the most effective of the three main types of ads, provided that the editor doesn't send too many of them out.

Here's some "food for thought" before you start selling ads:

1. Number of Ads Per Issue.

For both your advertisers' and subscribers' benefit, you will want to limit the number of ads you publish in each issue. Your subscribers will appreciate more content and fewer ads; your advertisers will appreciate better exposure for their ad.

The number of ads in your newsletter will help determine what price you can reasonably charge for ads. Obviously no one wants to pay a premium price if their classified ad is going to be mixed in with 50 others!

In my own newsletters, I run one top sponsor ad, 2-3 mid-sponsors or classifieds, and a strict *maximum* of 1 solo mailing per week (and preferably only 2 per month). Some publications run more, others less – there's no real "standard".

2. Ad Placement.

Where ads are placed is an important factor in response rates. Better response rates = happy advertisers = repeat customers!

Do not clump ads together in a section that everyone will ignore. You've probably seen newsletters which dump all their classifieds in a jumbled heap at the bottom, with a big title that says, "CLASSIFIED ADS". How terrible for the advertisers!

Some suggestions:

- One sponsor ad, plus no more than 5 classifieds placed at key points throughout the newsletter.
- Sponsor ads only; one each at the top, middle, and bottom of the newsletter. If you have a short newsletter, you could just use the top ad, or just top and bottom, or just one middle ad.
- Exclusive mailings are something else altogether. Some subscribers absolutely cannot stand them and will unsubscribe. And if you mail them out too often, you'll get a lot of unsubscribes!

I'd recommend no more than once a week - maybe twice, but that's pushing it. Too many will probably both anger your subscribers and give poor response for your advertisers.

When you're thinking about ad placement, try to think as an advertiser - where would you like your ad to be displayed for best visibility? Some advertisers believe that ads that take you by surprise work well (for example, ads placed in the middle of an article).

3. Free Ads for New Subscribers?

Often times, editors will offer free ads to new subscribers as a way to encourage people to sign up. It's touted as a great way to build your subscription base, fast.

You'll always get people who subscribe to your newsletter just to get the free ad. They aren't interested in your content at all, and probably won't read it - except to scan it to see if their ad was published.

You're looking for *quality* subscribers, not quantity.

On the other hand, perhaps some of the people who initially signed up for free ads will become loyal subscribers after reading your newsletter.

Here's a suggestion: if you decide you would like to offer free ads to help build your subscriber base, try this ... in each issue of your newsletter, put a special "code" somewhere within the content (you can change the location in each issue, if you like). Ask your subscribers to provide you with this code when they

submit their free ad. Then at least they'll have to read part of your newsletter in order to find the code - and you may convert some of them to loyal readers!

4. **Ad Rules and Restrictions.**

It's up to you if you would like to set ad rules. I do, to ensure that every advertiser is treated equally. Common rules include:

- **Maximum ad length** - classifieds are usually shortest, followed by sponsor ads and then exclusive mailings. Most ezines set classifieds to somewhere between 3 and 5 lines long, including URL and/or email address. **Example:** 5 lines of 60 characters each.
- **Types of ads accepted.** It's best for everyone if you only accept ads targeted to your audience. Most editors state that they don't accept ads for porn (unless they have an adult mailing list), violence, hate, racism, chain letters, pyramid schemes, or any other illegal or offensive product, service, or opportunity.

Some editors ask that interested advertisers first email them their ad copy for approval. If approved, the advertiser is sent a URL at which they can submit their payment.

- **Shady claims.** You'll find that a lot of advertisers are promoting business opportunities. I explicitly state that I will not allow income claims or income guarantees in the ad copy. The way I see it is, no one can possibly know whether YOU will personally succeed with a particular opportunity.

I also don't allow statements such as, "Borrow \$150,000 and never have to pay it back!". It sounds downright scammy.

- **Competing ads** - will you allow scheduling of competing ads within the same issue? I try not to; it decreases response rate for the competing advertisers. However, this can become very difficult - some opportunities or products are extremely popular and you may find that you get a lot of ads for the same thing. Consider this before you decide if you want to offer a "no competing ads" guarantee.

Clearly state your ad rules and indicate that the editor reserves the right to edit ads as necessary. If you must modify an ad, make sure you let the advertiser know - and indicate that she is welcome to submit changes to you if she isn't happy with the ones you've made. Include your ad rules at the bottom of your email.

5. "Add-Ons".

If you have a web-based newsletter, you may be able to offer a few "perks" - for a fee. Keep in mind that you still want to offer your advertisers great value, so you don't want to charge for every little thing such as a **bold** headline.

Be creative! You might offer ads in "highlighted" boxes to draw attention to the ad; a small graphic to go along with the ad; and whatever else you can think of. A small charge for these "add-ons" would add a little extra to your wallet, and it doesn't take much more effort on your part.

For text newsletters, if you have most of your subscribers' names, offer advertisers the option of "personalizing" their ads.

6. Prices and Packages.

The best way to determine appropriate prices for your ads is to look at other newsletters within your niche market. You can find a list of ezines at the [The Netter](#) or at the [Lifestyles Publishing Directory of Ezines](#) (note: there is a membership fee of around \$40, for access to a very detailed, comprehensive listing of ezines).

Most newsletters calculate ad prices on a "per-CPM" basis. This simply means they charge a certain price for every 1000 subscribers. Check with other newsletters in your own niche to see what types of ad rates are reasonable.

Considering offering multi-ad packages for a discounted rate. People love a good deal - and by selling multiple ads all at once, you're saving yourself scheduling time and anxiety about whether or not your ads will sell out. I usually discount multi-ad packages somewhere between 10% and 20%, depending on how many ads they're buying.

Another consideration is *if* or when you want to put a "cap" on your ad rates - or at least slow it down (ie. decrease your CPM

rates). This might be a good idea if, for example, your advertisers are primarily stay-at-home moms who may not have a lot of extra cash on hand.

The “perfect” price balances your available ad space with the orders you receive for them. For instance: I used to offer ads for only \$5 in one of my newsletters, the [Netpreneur’s Notebook](#). It was the wrong price – because they sold out far too quickly! I was booked 10 months in advance, and it would have been more except that I stopped accepting orders. I kept raising the price until ads book no more than 2-3 months in advance.

7. Discounts for Subscribers and Previous Advertisers

Do you want to offer subscribers a discount on ads? You probably don’t need to if you sell very low-priced ads... they’ll sell anyways, and a discount would only cut into your already-tiny profit margins (remember that you’ll have to pay processing fees if you’re taking credit card orders - see point #8).

If you find, though, that your ads aren’t selling well you can offer a discount to your subscribers - for a limited time. The limited time offer encourages your subscribers to order immediately.

Consider offering permanent subscriber discounts once your ad prices get more expensive.

You may also want to offer your previous advertisers a discount on their future orders. This helps to build loyalty - and selling to satisfied, repeat customers is far easier than finding new ones!

8. Payment Options.

I strongly recommend that you accept credit card payments online. They’re convenient and most people don’t want to go through the hassle of sending a check through the mail. When they want to order, they want to order *now!*

I’ve only ever had two people who preferred to pay by check. You can make a snail-mail option available if you like... but accepting credit cards is crucial.

The company I use is [Clickbank](#). I've been with them since I started and they've always performed flawlessly. Note that Clickbank also offers an online check feature for US customers.

Please be sure you fulfill your ad orders promptly. With [Clickbank](#), you set up a "thank-you" page that's displayed to your customer after she orders. On this page I recommend that you provide a form for her to automatically enter her ad.

If you want to see an example of a working form, you can find one at <http://buildyourhomebiz.com/nn/nntopsponsor.html>. This form is one that's actually in use for my paying advertisers, so please don't fill it in! :-)

Next ... schedule your customer's ad and then **email her back with a confirmation**. In the confirmation email, state:

- Her ad run date(s).
- Her ad copy, for her records.
- Information on how she can subscribe.
- A "thank-you" for her business and invitation to contact you if she has questions.
- Your contact information.

I'm always surprised to find editors that don't bother with this simple step. It's important for your customer's peace of mind and her satisfaction with your service.



A Sample Confirmation Email

Hi Jayne,

This email confirms your order of two top sponsor ads, scheduled to run in the Netpreneur's Notebook Ezine on April 14 and April 28, 2002. Your ad will run as follows. Please review it for accuracy.

=====[Begin Ad]=====
blah blah blah

=====[End Ad]=====

Jayne, I sincerely appreciate your business. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Best Regards,
Angela Wu
mailto:angela@buildyourhomebiz.com
http://www.buildyourhomebiz.com/

Ad Planning and Preparation

Even if you're not yet ready to sell ads (ie. your subscriber base isn't yet large enough), you should still:

- Determine what types of ads you want to sell.
- Figure out how often you want to send solo mailings (if applicable).
- Come up with a set of ad rules.
- Decide whether or not you want to offer free ads to new subscribers.
- Come up with a list of editors that may be interested in ad swaps.
- Get organized! See the tip below.

Doing this now will get your readers accustomed to seeing ads in your newsletter. And even if you don't *sell* ads, you can still send *your own* ads to your list! That's one of the benefits of being a list owner! I've gotten some exceptional results by sending "editorial-style" solo mailings to my list.

Organizing and Scheduling Ads

It's absolutely critical to be organized when you sell ads. People are paying for your service and have a right to expect that their ads will run as scheduled (barring problems beyond your control, such as list host downtime).

There are lots of ways to get organized. I use a spreadsheet (created in Microsoft Excel) to organize all my ads. Here's a snapshot; explanations below.

[Click here to view the snapshot](#)

(you will need to be connected to the Internet)

- **Issue date** - if you look across the bottom of the image, you'll see a series of dates like Jan 8, Jan 22, Feb 12, Feb 26, etc. Each of these dates corresponds to the date that an issue of my ezine is supposed to go out.

You'll see that the Feb 26 date is highlighted in this example. We're looking at the worksheet for the Feb 26 issue; any ad that's scheduled to run on this date will be entered on this worksheet.

- **Date ordered** - the date the ad order was placed. This is *not* the scheduled run date, which is the "issue date" noted above.
- **From** - the name and email address of the advertiser. I always keep track of this so that I can quickly and easily pull up their names and contact information later on, should I need to get hold of them.
- **Confirmation #** - the "receipt number" that's given to them by my order processor. I use this number to check details about their order, if need be.
- **Ad type** - what type of ad they ordered (sponsor, classified, solo, etc) and how many. If you look at the first entry, you'll see "Classified - 2 of 4". That means the person ordered 4 classified ads, and in this example, the Feb 26 ad is the second ad of the four.
- **Advertisement** - the entire text of the ad. I keep a copy here, as well as in my email box and in my newsletter issue (yes, I prefer to err on the side of caution!) "just in case."

This is how I organize my ads... there's nothing saying you have to do things the same way. We're all different, so use whatever's comfortable and convenient for you. :-)) I also keep a "master list" of all advertisers, which simply track their name, email address, and type of ad ordered. I send time-sensitive advertising discounts to this list every so often – it shows the advertisers that I value their business, and generates a quick "burst" of revenue.

REMEMBER TO BACK UP YOUR FILES!

Save them to a disk, CD, or whatever you have. These are your customers; they've paid for a service and you need to deliver! Losing that entire file of advertisers and their ad copy would be devastating!

Some Final Tips on Selling Ads

- **Don't be afraid to sell to your previous advertisers.** It's easier to sell to a happy advertiser than to try to find a new one. On the page on which my advertisers enter their ads, I place a small checkbox that asks if they'd like to be notified about ad specials. You can see an example [here](#). (this is a live form, so please don't submit it!)

I contact my advertisers a few times a year to offer them exclusive discounts. I usually make the discount available for a few days. The advertisers love a "good deal", and it never fails to bring in a quick boost in profits.

- **Send a copy of the ad to the advertiser for review.** Proofread the ad, and do any necessary editing. Then save a copy for yourself, and send an identical copy of the ad (cut & paste it into the confirmation email). This gives the advertiser the opportunity to check it and make revisions, plus you'll both have a record of how the ad should run.
- **Check the advertiser's URL.** Make sure the URL works! Occasionally someone will mistype it. Check it when you're proofreading the ad, and again a day or two before you run it. A few times I've discovered that the link has changed – so I fire off a "high priority" email to the advertiser with a note to check their URL.
- **Consider making your latest ezine issue available by autoresponder.** Some people prefer not to subscribe themselves, but they want to see a sample issue. They can either email you to request it, or you can place an email link for them to receive it by autoresponder.

The Basics of Autoresponders

Autoresponders are one of the best ways to save time while increasing your profits. If you don't have one, you're working much too hard!

What Are Autoresponders?

Autoresponders are special email addresses which automatically reply to any email sent to it. The way they generally work is this ..

- You pick a name for your autoresponder.
- You set up a series of messages and indicate when each message is to be sent out (immediately, 3 days after the first message, 10 days after the first message, etc). This could be a series of free reports, a sales letter, whatever you like.
- You put an email link on your website or in your advertising that tells people to email your autoresponder for more information on a certain topic (whatever topic you chose for your messages). Some autoresponders will also allow you to install an interactive form on your website so that your visitors can simply type in their email address to have the information sent directly to them.
- Your autoresponder receives each request and automatically emails back your first message.
- Your autoresponder continues to send your follow-up messages at the intervals you indicated.

An example is the Online Business Basics 'free report series', which you may have already seen. Every couple of days, a new report is emailed directly to the recipient's mailbox – and it's all done automatically!

I can tell you that without a doubt, autoresponders have been the single best tool I've found for increasing my sales.

Why Use Autoresponders?

Do you follow-up with prospects? If not, you're losing out on sales. It's been shown time and time again that most people need repeated exposure to the same product before they buy. Imagine if someone's interested in your product - it's something she desperately wants but she leaves without buying. Why? Maybe it's because ...

- She wants to wait until she receives her next pay check.
- She's too busy at the moment.
- She hears the boss coming her way.
- She didn't have her credit card handy.
- She has other expenses to cover at the moment, but means to come back later.
- The dog's barking to be let outside.
- Dinner's burning and she leaves to go take care of it.
- She wants to do a little research first.

...there could be any number of reasons why she won't order right away. But what if she forgot to bookmark your site, forgot the URL or forgot the product name?

You want to catch your prospect at the time that SHE'S ready to buy.

Manually following-up with prospects is way too much work - take it from someone who's tried it! That's what autoresponders are for. They provide your prospect with the initial contact and more information as required. Then if your prospect has more questions, she can contact you directly.



Using Your Autoresponder Address As A "Reply" Address

Don't use your autoresponder address as your "reply-to" or contact address. Many autoresponder services will discontinue your service for doing so; your contact address should **always** be one where you can be contacted directly. In other words, someone should be able to contact a real, live human!

How to Choose an Autoresponder

Autoresponders are not all created equal. Most autoresponder services offer a free version or free trial. Use these first to test each autoresponder and see which one best fits your needs.

1. **No size limit.** There's nothing worse than coming up with a great sales letter, only to have to edit it down.
2. **Quick response.** Your autoresponder should reply to a request within a few seconds. This seems obvious -- yet when I first started using autoresponders, the one I used took *days* to respond!
3. **Ability to send follow-up messages.** It usually takes multiple follow-ups before you can close a sale (the "magic number", according to some experts, is 7). Your main message is sent out immediately. Three days later, for example, a follow-up message could be mailed out automatically, and two days after that a third message could be mailed out, and so forth.
4. **No limit on the number of requests.** If someone requests a message from your autoresponder, then they should receive it. Period.
5. **Notification of requests or a record of requests.**
6. **Cost.** There are plenty of "free" autoresponders available, but they're usually "free" because a third-party ad is placed within your message to pay for it. In other words, "free" isn't really free! The autoresponder company has bills of its own to pay, and they do so by selling advertising. The two most common ways it will affect you are:
 1. An ad for someone else's product or service will be displayed at the top of every autoresponder message. Obviously this is no good. You don't want to distract your prospect from your own offer.
 2. Your messages are ad-free, but you must agree to receive ads from the autoresponder service. This doesn't impact your own sales process, but you may find it annoying.

You can upgrade to "professional" autoresponders for a fee. This will give you ad-free messages and usually more features.

Also note that some autoresponder services charge you a monthly fee for the use of one autoresponder. Others allow you to create unlimited autoresponders. Still others can be purchased and installed on your own server, where again, you can create as many autoresponders as you like.

7. **Reliability.** The most obvious reliability issue is that everyone who requests your information should get it. Some of the reliability issues you want to look at include:

- **Will the autoresponder reply to every email within a few moments?** I've used autoresponders in the past that would take *days* - and I'm not exaggerating! - to send a reply to my request.
- **Will the autoresponder reply to requests that occur within moments of each other?** In other words, if a whole bunch of people request information within a matter of seconds, will they all get their information?
- **Does the autoresponder dependably send out follow-up messages when they're supposed to go out?** (not one day later, or earlier, or even not at all ... but right on time)

Reliability is something only you can test for yourself. You may want to sign up for the free version of the autoresponder (most services allow you to try them out first) before you make a decision.

8. **No Long-Term Commitment.** Unless you're dealing with a reputable company that's been in business for a long time, you probably don't want to commit to a long-term contract. Businesses come and go all the time on the Internet, and there's no guarantee that the autoresponder you've chosen will be around in the long term.

Of course many autoresponder services offer discounts if you book for longer terms. For example, you may save 20% off your total bill if you buy a 1-year contract instead of simply paying month-to-month. Only you can decide if you want to take the risk; ask around to get opinions.

Note that with some autoresponders you may not be able to get a refund if you're dissatisfied. If they offer a free trial first, *use it* before you pay! I've heard that some services will not refund you because the free trial shows you exactly what you're going to get; it's your responsibility to check it out first.

9. **Broadcast Feature.** Autoresponders are sometimes used for mailing lists, such as newsletters. The broadcast feature lets you send a message out to everyone in your database whenever you like. For example, you could use it to announce updated versions of your eBook or new products. Most autoresponders now offer this feature.
10. **Tracking Capabilities.** It's nice to know where your subscribers are coming from -- for example, is it your home page? Your reports library? This information will help you to optimize your marketing efforts.
11. **Reports or statistics.** How many people are at which stage of your follow-up process? If you see that a large number of people unsubscribe at a certain point in the follow-up process, you'll be able to improve that message to try and prevent this from happening.

Autoresponder Services

Here are a few options to research. The ones I've used personally and recommend are indicated with a *.

- *[WorkYourLeads](#) - unlimited autoresponders for a low monthly fee.
- *[GetResponse](#) – monthly fee, long-term discounts available.
- [AWeber](#) - monthly fee, long-term discounts available.
- [QuickTell](#) - unlimited autoresponders for a monthly fee.
- [AutoresponsePlus](#) - one-time fee plus optional installation.
- [Black Belt Powersponder](#) - one-time fee plus optional installation.

How to Test Your Chosen Autoresponder(s)

You're going to need to be organized for this, so get ready! Grab a notebook or open up a file on your computer so that you can take notes.

First of all, sign up for a few free autoresponders from various services. Write down your login ID and password for each. You're going to test each one of them to see how well they fit your business needs. Here's what you want to do ...

1. **If you only have one email account, get another one.** This is handy for testing purposes; you can get a free account from a number of places such as [Hotmail](#) or [Yahoo!](#).
2. **Create a series of follow-up messages.** These are messages you're going to use for testing - they don't have to be your real sales letters (unless you feel like creating them now). Don't make them crude or unprofessional; there's always a chance someone may mistype a request to an autoresponder and get yours instead!
3. **Insert the exact same series of follow-up messages into EACH autoresponder.** In other words, each autoresponder should send out the same messages at the same intervals. If your chosen autoresponders offer a personalisation feature (highly recommended), make sure you personalise each message (both the subject line and within the body).

What to Look For

When running these tests, use your second email account to send out the requests. This will help to keep your primary email account clean and available only for business, plus it'll come in handy for a couple of the tests below.

These are only a few tests you can run. You can also test out tracking capabilities (if available) and any other feature offered by your autoresponder.

- Send a request to each autoresponder. How fast does each autoresponder respond?
- For each autoresponder, send a series of requests in quick succession. Do you receive a reply for every request?

- Does each follow-up message from each autoresponder show up on time?
- Reply to a message from each autoresponder. Do you personally get the inquiry? **All replies to your autoresponder should go directly to you** so that you can follow-up with your prospect.
- Are all names and email addresses written to an accessible database that you can download if you choose to?
- Does the personalisation feature work reliably?
- Subscribe two or more of your OWN email addresses (don't use anyone else's, please!) to each autoresponder. Use your autoresponder's broadcast capability. Do you receive your autoresponder message at all subscribed email addresses? Is the message delivered in a timely manner?
- Is there an automatic removal / unsubscribe link at the bottom of each message? Does it work? You may want to do this as your very last test, so that you can run all the others uninterrupted.

7 Profitable Ways to Use Autoresponders

Autoresponders aren't just for sales letters. In fact, most people are turned off by an obvious, strong sales pitch. People don't like to feel like they're being forced or pressured into buying - it's a fast way to turn them away! Instead, if you can provide them with something of value, you may be able to make them *want* to buy. Here are a few ways you can use autoresponders ...

1. Distribute a Newsletter.

Many good autoresponders have two important features that are perfect for distributing newsletters: a personalisation feature, and a broadcast feature.

You can send out personalised issues to each of your subscribers - wouldn't you be more likely to read something that's directly addressed to you? And it's not just the subject line, either ... you could use your subscriber's name at strategic points throughout the newsletter ...

... including in advertising. This is a unique benefit you could offer to your paying advertisers (if you choose to accept them): the ability to address their ad directly to each subscriber.

By the way, using an autoresponder to send your newsletters can end up being much cheaper than using a dedicated list manager. For example: you can get wonderful, feature-laden, reliable autoresponders for \$20/month. Many list hosts charge upwards of \$30/month for a set limit of messages – the more messages you send, the more you're charged!

2. Automate Your Sales Process.

The sales copy on your website should be good enough to convert some of your prospects to paying customers - you have as much space as you need, and the use of graphics and text formatting to help you emphasize important points.

But what do you do when you're placing an ad in an ezine, for example? You only have a limited amount of space to talk about your product. With short ads like these, your objective is to generate **leads**, not make a sale.

By advertising your autoresponder address (instead of your URL), you have multiple opportunities to convert your leads into sales. *A good series of follow-up messages will increase your chances of catching your prospect at the time that he's ready to buy.*

3. Use Them to Distribute Your Articles.

Writing articles and making them freely available for reprint is an excellent way to build credibility, drive more traffic to your site, and increase sales.

In return for reprint an article, editors will print your "resource box": a short description of you and your product or service, with a link back to your website and/or email address. People who enjoy your article will often click on your URL.

You could also write a few articles and post them on your website. Then save the article in an autoresponder and give your visitors the option of receiving the article in their email box. This is convenient for busy people - and if one of them happens to be an editor that wants to publish your article, then you just got some easy free publicity!

Another way to use your autoresponder with articles is to include the autoresponder's address in your resource box. That way you capture your prospect's email address, instead of just sending them to a website.

Writing and distributing articles is another topic all in itself. You can find it through the [Table of Contents](#).

4. Send Advertising Information.

If you sell advertising on your website or in your newsletter, you can set up an autoresponder to send this information automatically to a prospect's email box. This is convenient for your visitor and she'll have it available whenever she wants to refer to it (instead of trying to remember your URL). Set up your autoresponder to follow-up with her.

By capturing her email address, you can also send her notifications of any special advertising deals you have available. This is a very powerful way to build customer loyalty and improve your bottom line. A few times a year I offer limited-time ad discounts, and it never fails to create both a quick boost in profits, and convert more first-time advertisers into loyal customers.

5. Distribute Free Reports.

People love free stuff. By offering free reports to your visitors, you give them a taste of the type and quality of information you can provide. People who like your report will be more inclined to purchase something from you in the future.

Do NOT make your free report a disguised sales pitch for your product or service. People will easily see through it and you'll have lost a potential customer by not providing what was promised!

Offer a genuine, value-packed article or report. At the end of the report, or integrated within the content, you can write up a brief description of your product with a link back to your website.

6. **Distribute an Email Course.**

This expands on the idea of providing free reports. Why not offer a mini-course by email? Every day or two, send another chapter of your course (or another free "bonus" report).

Once again, the key is to provide value -- *not* a sales letter! Let your content do the selling for you. Within each report, write a paragraph or two tying in it to your product, and invite your prospect to visit your site for more information.

Note that the "P.S." is a very powerful part of your message. People tend to "scan", rather than "read" every single word on a page ... however, most people *will* read the P.S. - so use it! Re-emphasize one of the strongest benefits or provide an additional incentive to purchase your product or service.

7. **Offer a Trial Version of Your Product.**

If you're selling an eBook, software, course, or website membership, you may be able to offer trial versions to interested prospects. Many people are the "careful" type; they prefer to see what type of information they're getting before they pay for the full version.

In this case, you can capture their email addresses by offering them a free trial from your site. Your autoresponder provides them with instructions on how and where to get their free trial ... and then follows-up with them at appropriate intervals to try to persuade them to go with the full deal.

8 Pointers on How to Set Up Your Autoresponder

The content of your autoresponder messages is obviously the important part. However, proper formatting and setup are also necessary if you want your prospects to read and respond to your messages.

1. **Plain Text or HTML?**

Although many email programs these days can read and display HTML messages, there are still many that don't (or may not display them properly). Even if they do, some people choose not to accept HTML messages. Plain text autoresponders are your

safest bet if you want to make sure everyone is able to read your messages.

2. **Format Your Text Properly.**

Most email programs will automatically "word-wrap". That is, after a certain number of characters on one line, the email program will add a hard return and put the remaining characters on the next line. This can turn your carefully-written messages into an unappetizing and unprofessional mess:

```
    blah blah blah yakkity yakkity blah blah
    blah blah
    yakkity yakkity blah blah blah blah
    blah
    etc etc etc
```

Format your emails to 60 characters per line. I normally do this in a simple text editor such as Notepad (which comes with Windows). Use a fixed-width font such as Courier New, and then at the top of the page type your "ruler":

```
_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6
Use this ruler as a guideline for your text formatting.
Before you reach the end of your ruler, press your RETURN/
ENTER key to make sure each line is a maximum of 60
characters long.
```

Then once you've created and formatted your message, simply cut & paste it into your autoresponder.

Many people prefer to use software that will automatically format your messages for you. Try the [Ezine Assistant](#) software, a free download.

3. **Try to Keep Your Sentences and Paragraphs Short.**

It's difficult to read long, unbroken paragraphs of text. Can you imagine how terrible it would be if this section was one giant paragraph on the use of autoresponders?

Keep your readers attention by using short sentences. Your paragraphs should be around 3-4 lines ... or alternate longer paragraphs with shorter ones.

4. Use White Space for Easier Readability.

Reading text on a screen can be hard on the eyes. Ease eye strain by using lots of white space for emphasis and easier readability.

For example, the simple use of an extra blank line can help the reader differentiate between paragraphs or sections. People won't be inclined to read your whole message if it's all mashed together. Take a few minutes to space your message out nicely.

5. Remind Your Visitor How They Got On Your List.

Don't start your message with the phrase, "This is not spam!". That's the mark of doom. Most Internet-savvy users assume that any message that starts with that phrase IS spam, and many automatically discard messages that contain that phrase.

You don't have to include a reminder in every single message, unless perhaps there are long delays between messages. These reminders can take lots of different formats; here's one sample...

```
It's been about a week since you requested our
free series of reports on How to Take Charge of
Your Life Using Positive Thinking. I just wanted
to check in with you and see if you had any
questions for me. In the meantime, I'd like to
offer you a complimentary copy of our eBook. It's
called ... < etc... >
```

6. Don't Forget Your URL!

It sounds obvious, doesn't it? But you'd be surprised at how many times I've received autoresponders that completely fail to provide me with the website URL. Don't expect your visitors to remember how to find you! *Tell them.*

7. Make Sure All Replies Go Directly to YOU.

If your prospect opens your autoresponder message and hits the "reply" button, their email should go to *you* - not back to the autoresponder!

I can't even begin to tell you how maddening it is when someone hasn't properly set up their autoresponder to do this.

Imagine, a potential customer is interested enough in your product to send you a direct inquiry. Instead of receiving a personalised reply from you, she gets another series of the same autoresponder messages! She won't be happy...

8. Keep Records of All Requests.

Some services will automatically forward you a copy of requests sent to your autoresponder. If not, you may be able to configure your autoresponder to send you copies. Ask your autoresponder service if you're unsure.

I recommend that you keep a copy of every single request sent to your autoresponder -- just in case you are accused of spam, you will have evidence of the request.

The Basics of Accepting Credit Cards Online

Setting up your website to accept credit card orders doesn't have to be a complicated process. It can be done quickly, easily, and without incurring a lot of fees!

How to Process Credit Card Orders Without a Merchant Account

There is no doubt about it: accepting credit cards online can significantly boost your sales.

It saves your visitor the hassle of writing out a check, finding an envelope, addressing it, finding (or buying) a stamp, and physically dropping the letter in the mail. Plus paying by credit card in real-time means that you can offer your visitor **instant access** to many types of products or services - a great incentive to impatient web surfers!

However, there's a whole lot of hype about the necessity of getting your own merchant account. When you're just starting out, this can get you in a whole lot of financial trouble.

How? Merchant accounts are just plain expensive. There are application fees, setup costs, transaction fees, statement charges, and other hidden charges. You pay your merchant account expenses every single month - regardless of how much you sell ... or even *if* you make a single sale. What a great way to get into debt fast ...!

There is another way to accept online orders. They're called [third-party credit card processors](#). These companies handle your credit card transactions for you in return for a cut of your profits. They take a bigger commission than a merchant account would; however, **you don't pay a single thin dime unless you make sales**. In other words, if you make nothing, you pay nothing.

You can rest easy knowing that you will never have to struggle to pay your credit card processor. When you make a sale, that sale is automatically credited to you, minus the company's commission.

I've been using third-party processors for several years now. It's heaven! The trick is to find one that's reliable and with reasonable fees, one where you'll still have a decent profit margin.

When you do your research, consider all factors - not just fees - to find a company you're comfortable with. You may find that you're willing to pay higher fees in return for more features and reliability!

12 Criteria for Choosing a Third-Party Processor

There are numerous third-party credit card processing companies that you can choose from. Their fees and policies can vary significantly. Here's what to look for:

1. **Setup fee.** Is there a one-time cost for setting up your new account (to make your account "active")? Don't be put off if there is; I use three third-party processors that charge a small setup fee, and it's been well worth it.
2. **Transaction fees.** For every transaction the third-party processor handles for you, they take a percentage of your sale. Their "cut" is debited at the point of sale. The remainder is your profit. I've seen transaction fees that range from about 5% to around 30%.
3. **Check processing fees.** This is the amount, if any, deducted from your earnings each pay period as a charge for the company cutting you a check and mailing it to you. Some companies offer additional settlement options such as wire transfer or direct deposit. Check into any associated fees.
4. **Reserve.** This is the amount held back from each pay check as a "slush fund" against future refunds, returns, or chargebacks. What percentage do they hold as a reserve, and for how long? It's typically around 10%, held for 6 months before being released back to you.
5. **Pay frequency.** How often will they mail you a check for your earnings - and *when*? For example, do they mail a check for the previous period's earnings 10 days after the end of that

period, 30 days later, etc...? The way I see it is, it's my money and I'd like to have it in my hands as soon as possible.

6. **Reliability.** This is where it helps if you can talk to other customers (posting on appropriate message boards is one way). Your customers should be able to order anytime - and that's hard to do if your processing company experiences problems on a regular basis!
7. **Backup server.** If your third-party CC processor's main website goes down, do they provide a backup server so that customers can still order from you? This is a nice "extra" - but the only CC processor that I know of that offers this service is [GloBill Systems](#).
8. **Customer service.** Will they handle billing and payment inquiries for you? Do they have a toll-free number for your customers? Note that they obviously cannot handle inquiries specific in nature to your product or website. That's still something you have to do.
9. **Other ordering options.** For customers without credit cards (there's a surprisingly high percentage of them), can you offer an online chequing or telephone ordering option? Is there an additional fee for these services?
10. **Easy online management.** Can you change product prices, website settings, etc. yourself at any time of the day? Or do you have to email the company first and wait for them to do it for you?
11. **Restrictions and limitations.** For example, is there a minimum monthly sales quota you must reach? Is there a maximum product price you can set? Does the company restrict what the type of content you can sell? Read through their terms and conditions of use thoroughly to make sure you understand any restrictions or limitations on your account.
12. **Webmaster support.** Can you get prompt, helpful, and courteous service if you need it?



Disadvantages of Using a Third-Party Processor

Fledgling businesses can't afford to spend a lot ... that's why third-party processors are such a great solution. But that doesn't mean that it's a perfect solution:

- **Their "cut" of the profits can be significant.**
Most of the third-party processors I've seen take up to 20% of your gross sale. Plus they hold a "reserve" – which means a percentage of your income can be held back for months at a time!
- **You rely on the company for your pay check.**
Sure, they all have a payment schedule -- but what if they're late? Or what if they go out of business?

I personally like the convenience of third-party processors and am willing to pay the fees. Ask around for recommendations before you decide on which company to use.

Other Payment Options

It is *vital* to accept credit cards. Shoppers are impulsive and you're losing out on a big market if you don't take credit cards. However, not everyone has a credit card, so I suggest you offer at least one other option. Other options you can consider are:

1. **PayPal.** This service is widely used by online merchants. You can send or receive money through email. Find out more at <http://www.paypal.com/>.

Note: Please read the review of PayPal later in this section. There have been many horror stories from merchants, and it's as usual, it's best to make an informed decision.

2. **Regular old postal mail.** Some people don't have credit cards, have maxed out their limit, or just aren't willing to send credit
-

card information over the Internet. You can offer the option of "snail- mailing" a check or money order.

3. **Online checks.** This is a wonderful alternative to postal-mailing a check. The customer types in their checking account information on a secure order form and it is automatically processed (although it may take up to 10 days for the check to 'clear'). No postal mail required! Everything is done online. I would probably say that this is the next most important payment option – although many people do not have credit cards (or space available on their cards), but they have a chequing account. Note that online check services are usually only available to US customers.
4. **Telephone orders.** Some payment processors will offer a toll-free telephone ordering system for the convenience of your customers. It may be included as part of your package, or you may have to pay extra if you'd like to offer this option. Check with your processor if you're unsure.



Make Sure Your Order Form is on a Secure Server

A [secure server](#) helps to protect the customer's personal information by encrypting it (translating it into a "secret code" that's hard to crack). Check your third-party processor's ordering form. It's secure if you see one of the following:

- **A closed gold padlock** near the bottom right of your browser window. The form is *not* secure if the lock is open.
- **An unbroken blue key** at the bottom of your browser window. The form is NOT secure if the key is broken.
- **The 'https' prefix.** "Normal" web pages are prefaced with "http". "Secured" web pages that use something called SSL will change to "https".

order form, go elsewhere. If in doubt, contact them and ask. People feel far more comfortable when they feel their information is protected.

Third-Party Processing Companies

Here are several third-party processors to investigate. Please be sure to read their terms and conditions; they usually have rules as to what types of products and services they will handle. Ask around for first-hand experiences before you make a decision.

- [Clickbank](#) – **recommended!** Clickbank handles products that can be delivered electronically. Some of the “highlights” include: a “built-in” affiliate network; the ability to set different prices for multiple products on the same account (and they don’t even have to be on the same website!); and excellent customer service. I’ve been using Clickbank for a few years now, and they’ve always been very reliable.
- [GloBill Systems](#) – **recommended!** GloBill handles membership sites. They offer a built-in affiliate network; ad tracking capabilities; a low reserve; plenty of stats; and excellent service and support. I’ve been very happy with them.
- [Digibuy](#) – **recommended!** Primarily used for software and eBooks. Has some neat features like the ability to set a download link to expire automatically after a certain number of days or download attempts... plus you can offer coupons to your customers – their discounts are calculated at the point of sale. Again, great service, very prompt and friendly.
- [Revecom](#) – **recommended!** Offers a built-in shopping cart system and customer management system (you can even email all of your customers through your web interface!). Revecom will handle both the sale of tangible and intangible products. It’s unique in that you can choose to charge in USD, GBP, or the EURO.
- **Other processors:** [CCNow](#), [Propay](#), [IBill](#), [Verotel](#), and [PayPal](#)

Quick and Dirty Introduction to Mini-Sites

Mini-sites are gaining in popularity. They're small, usually 2 or 3 page websites that are tightly focused on doing just one thing, whether that's generating leads or making a sale.

A few years ago it seemed as if everyone was aiming to build content-rich websites. You know the type: tons of useful articles, tools, a newsletter, and more.

Large, content-rich websites are wonderful, and you can build a loyal following and plenty of traffic if you're willing to put in the time, money, and effort. **Content-rich sites are good for building repeat traffic** -- and we all know that with repeat traffic, you gradually build credibility and trust ... two ingredients that help to persuade a prospect to become a customer.

But mini-sites can be highly effective too. True -- you might not necessarily build as much repeat traffic -- but that doesn't mean that you can't build credibility and trust. Mini-sites are meant to be focused on getting people to do one thing (such as buy your product or give you their email address). Remember that offering your visitor more choices isn't necessarily better! With a mini-site, you give your visitors only one thing to focus on; it "unburdens" them from having to make too many decisions.

Examples of How to Use Mini-Sites

- **Generate leads for your business opportunity.** If you're involved in any sort of network marketing or MLM, you can create a mini-site specifically designed to get leads. Follow-up with these leads to see whether or not they're interested in joining you.
- **Get new subscribers for your newsletter.** A newsletter is a great way to build your business, long-term.
- **Promote your own products or services.** Create one mini-site for each product or service.

- **Promote a joint venture.** Do you have a special arrangement with another business? Use your mini-site to offer your "special deal" to prospects.

6 Tips on Creating an Effective Mini-Site

1. **Get your own domain.** It will add professionalism and credibility to your offer.
2. **Keep it short.** 2 or 3 pages is usually sufficient. For example, one format is to use your home page as the sales page... then add a page for "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)" and a contact page.
3. **Follow the rules of good copywriting.** Say what you have to say, and not one word more or less. Keep your mini-site as focused as possible.
4. **Tell your prospect what you want him or her to do.** Don't assume. Offer a powerful reason why she should act NOW.
5. **Track everything!** Know where your visitors are coming from, and how many convert into paying customers. Know which marketing campaigns are producing the best conversion rate. Track as much as you can so that you'll KNOW what's producing results!
6. **Automate as much as you can,** provided that it's appropriate (remember that some things, such as customer service, cannot be automated). Autoresponders can follow-up with your prospects for you... and order-taking (and possibly delivery, depending on what you sell) can be automated as well. Don't spend your time on these activities if you don't need to; your time is better spent marketing your mini-site.

Test your mini-site rigorously. Track your results, tweak it, and test some more until you have a mini-site that produces the results you want. Then you can start promoting it more heavily.

By the way... it can be very tempting to build a ton of mini-sites all at once. Don't. Focus on one first. Work with it until it becomes successful ... and then start building another. It's far better to have one successful site than 10 unprofitable ones!

The Basics of Networking Through Online Communities

Online support communities such as [message boards](#) and [discussion groups](#) are vastly popular. These places offer us a way to get support from others, to offer and get advice, and just to interact with people who share our interests. They're also a great place to promote your business ... *if you do it right*.

Why Participate?

Message boards and forums can be a great place to network and "indirectly" promote your business. You see, message boards and forums are there for a specific purpose. Most of them have [moderators](#), whose responsibility is to enforce the rules of the board.

Rules, you ask? Yes, rules. Every message board will have its own set of rules and you'll do well if you read them, abide by them, and show respect for the other members of the community.

By becoming a contributing member of a board or a list:

- **Others get to know you.** They may come to appreciate your help and support, and may be more inclined to visit your website and purchase something from you. People buy from those they trust!
- **You help others.** They, in turn, may refer friends to you. What goes around, comes around!
- **Some search engines index message board posts;** if you leave a link to your site in your post (*if or where it's appropriate*), your link popularity will increase. Link popularity is one factor some search engines consider when they determine how high you'll rank for a particular key word or phrase. The higher you rank, the more traffic you'll get.

10 Pointers on Using Online Communities for Promotion

Each message board or forum will be different. They'll have different groups of people, a different set of rules, and different ways of interacting with the other members of the community. Here are a few tips to help you get the most of message boards ...

1. **Read the rules.**

Know them. Respect them. The host or moderator of the board has the discretion to remove your posts or ban you entirely.

2. **Lurk.**

When you find a group that interests you, hang around for a while. Read other people's posts. See how they interact with one another. Get a feel for what type of behavior or messages are appropriate for that particular board.

You may find that you dislike the people who visit the forum - or the way they interact with each other. So be it. Find another one where you'll feel more comfortable.

3. **Contribute.**

Share information, advice, and your experiences. Try your best to be helpful whenever you can.

By the way ... when you post information, focus on providing *information* - not a self-promotional message, unless someone asks you directly about your product or service.

4. **Post a link, if appropriate.**

If the forum permits you to leave your link, then do it. Come up a catchy headline that will help to persuade people to click through to your site.

Make sure you leave a tracking URL! This URL will let you know how many people are visiting your site from your message board efforts ... and if you choose, you can even set up a number of tracking URLs to show you which one of your posts is drawing the most interest.

By the way, I know that there are forums that do not allow links. Ever. Everyone has an opinion on whether or not these forums are worth your time. Personally, I may occasionally drop in and scan the postings for a useful tidbit or two of information ... but I won't post. Responding to a post can take an awful lot of time, and if I'm not permitted to network/make contacts, then that time - from a *business* point of view - has been wasted.

5. **Don't "cross-post".**

"Cross-post" refers to posting the same message on several different boards. Many people visit a number of forums regularly, and to see the same message on every single one of them - well, it's annoying.

There aren't any hard and fast rules as to how many boards is "acceptable" for you to post the same questions or comment ... from my own experiences, it seems like most people don't mind seeing the occasional cross-posted message on a couple of different boards.

6. **Don't launch personal attacks.**

Sure, you can disagree with someone ... but disagree - respectfully! - with his or her ideas, opinions, or comments. Don't attack the person! It's counter-productive and doesn't do any good. You represent your business. Make a good impression!

7. **Stick around.**

Don't enter a forum with the intention of posting your link and then disappearing. It's bad manners!

Besides, it's also not very effective. To build credibility, respect, and trust, you need to become a "regular" contributing member of a forum.

8. **Be honest.**

Some people have tried some really stupid tricks (sorry, but that's what they are) in an attempt to drum up business through message boards. It doesn't work! **Don't:**

- Pretend to be someone else and post messages under their name.
- Use an autoresponder address as your email address.
- Answer your own posts under a different name, to post a message that puts your product in the best possible light.
- Use any other less-than-ethical trick!

9. **Don't spam message boards!**

There are submission services available that claim to submit your ad to "ad-friendly" message boards. Stay away! I've seen some pretty disastrous results from these services (as a third-party; I've never tried it myself). Many of the boards they submit to are *not* ad-friendly.

10. **Avoid advertising boards or lists.**

Don't bother to waste your time with boards or groups that indicate that blatant advertising is permitted. People visit these groups to post ads, not to read them.

[Network54](#) is a great place to start looking for appropriate message boards.

Starting Your Own Discussion Group

Before you run off and start your own message board, ask yourself if you're willing to devote the time and effort needed to promote it. This includes:

- **Getting people to visit.** Like everything else online, you need to be able to persuade people to drop by.
- **Convincing people to post.** There are many people who much prefer to "lurk" rather than speak up. Can you find people who are willing to post messages and offer advice and support? Will they become board "regulars" that will keep the place lively and interesting?
- **Participating.** Are you willing to contribute to the success of your board by posting messages and moderating? (you can ask others to moderate if you like, but in the beginning you probably won't have enough traffic to warrant additional moderators).

- **Moderating.** It's best to have you or someone you trust moderating your board to ensure that inappropriate posts are not allowed to remain. Do you have the time to do this? Every so often it seems like there's a spate of people who seem deliberately bent on causing trouble on a board. This can become very stressful for the moderator/ owner.

You can start your own message board by either hosting it on another company's servers, or by installing a script on your own server. There are many services available online; here are a couple:

- [Network54](#) - build your own customized forum, free of charge. Setup takes about five minutes.

Your free forum "pays" for itself by displaying an ad on your board. You can upgrade to their "Plus" forum if you would like your board to be ad-free.

- [WebBBS](#) - this is a shareware program, which means you are expected to register it if you decide to use it. A registration fee applies.

I've heard mostly good things about WebBBS. Apparently it's easy to use and has plenty of features, including the option of running your board as a moderated board.

Note that this is a CGI script, so you're going to have to know how to install it yourself or find someone who can do it for you. Be sure to read the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions).

Teleclasses, Seminars, and Online Chats

Most people tend to be social creatures; we love to interact with others. Your online business isn't limited to just email and a web page -- there are a number of services that give you the ability to conduct 'classes' or create audio files for your customers.

Teleclasses, seminars, and online chats are great to use as 'add-ons' or for single product sales. For example, you could:

- **Offer it to paying subscribers.** Run a subscription site? Regular teleclasses or web conferences can add value to a subscription and allow you to charge more.
- **Offer it bundled with your current product/service.** For example, let's say you sell dog training videos. You could include a gift certificate (or a coupon) for one of your web conferences on dog training problems.
- **Sell it alone!** Produce a number of scheduled conferences and sell registrations.

It's not all fun and games, of course; holding seminars, classes, etc. requires lots of planning, preparation, and promotion as well. You'll need to decide whether the extra work involved is worth the potential pay-off.

Tips on Holding Teleclasses and Web Conferences

Teleclasses are basically teleconferences; you, the host, and all your participants call a conference number and are connected together.

A web conference, on the other hand, is conducted through each caller's browser. You enter a 'conference room' where you can interact with other members of the conference -- the main difference is that with a web conference, you can 'share' files, ie. you have the ability to

view things instead of just *hear* them. Here are some tips on conducting teleclasses or web conferences:

- **Be aware that callers usually absorb the cost of the call.** People calling long-distance will be charged their regular long-distance fees when they call into your teleclass. You should make this known up-front so that there are no nasty surprises.
- **Set a schedule.** Publish a schedule in advance so that people have time to register (and tell others about your class!).
- **Invite guests.** You don't have to do everything yourself -- consider inviting guest speakers or experts to help you run the teleclass.
- **Consider using a moderator.** A moderator's job is to keep the class 'on track' -- that is, he or she will make sure that you cover everything you're supposed to cover, while ensuring that all the other stuff that's not on the agenda is minimized (to be used for the next teleclass, perhaps?).
- **Don't make your classes too long.** It's hard to listen to someone talking for long periods of time, and there's lots to absorb. Plus there are the long-distance cost of calling into the class to consider! Many businesses find classes of 1-2 hours is optimal.
- **If you can, consider 'muting' the participants** if you're doing a 'lecture-style' class (ie. you're doing most of the talking, along with your guest(s)/moderator). Background noise can be annoying.
- **Open the 'floor' for questions.** You can run a discussion-style class where everyone can participate whenever they like, or a lecture-style class where callers can ask questions at the end of the class. Suggest a format: for example, each caller that has a question can state their name, then ask a brief question. Keep it concise so that the class can keep moving and others get a chance to talk as well.

Note that sometimes callers may be a little shy about speaking up. You may want to ask a colleague or friend to start things off by asking one of the more frequently asked questions you get about your topic. Often times that will 'break the ice' or spawn off related questions.

- **Capture email addresses.** As you know, getting a prospect's email address is one of the most important things you can do; it gives you permission to keep in touch with them.

When customers register for your teleclass – you can ask people to register, rather than 'drop in' -- get their name and email address at the very minimum (many businesses also ask for postal address). State your privacy policy, and indicate that this information is required so that you can send each participant the details of the class along with any 'materials'. You can also follow-up with them as appropriate, such as announcing future related teleclasses.

- **Consider offering a workbook or worksheet.** To make it easier for participants to follow along in the class and to make notes, you can create a simple workbook for them that they can print out and use. The workbook doesn't have to take long, but to the customer, it's 'added value'.

The best format for your workbook is probably PDF; everyone can view it using the free Adobe Acrobat Reader.

- **Remind the registrants.** People are so busy these days that most will appreciate a quick reminder about the teleclass. Provide a brief summary, the number to call, and the start time and end times. Be sure you state the time zone as well -- this is the Internet, and your participants could be calling from all over the world. If it's a toll call, remind them that long-distance charges apply.
- **Consider creating a tape or a RealAudio file.** See the next section for more information.
- **Consider creating a transcript of your conference.** Customers can read through it at their leisure, instead of trying to 'keep up' with the conference.

Recording Your Class for Convenience - and Profit!

Most people are familiar with the [free Real One player](#). Because it's free, it's a convenient way for businesses to provide audio files to their customers without having to go through the process of creating a tape or a CD and then sending it through postal mail. Real audio files can be instantly downloaded from a website.

Why do some businesses choose to create and distribute a real audio file?

- **Saves long-distance callers from huge fees.** If you have customers calling from overseas, for example, toll charges can really rack up fast. A real audio file would allow them to 'listen' to the conference as if they had been there.
- **Time zones.** Again, overseas customers might not be able to attend the conference due to time differences.
- **It's "easy" on the customer.** The real audio player is free, and once they download your file, they can easily listen to it from their computers.
- **"Added value."** It shows that you've gone the "extra mile" for your customers.

If you want to create a real audio file, please be sure to research what you'll need to create one BEFORE you advertise it to your customers. [HTML Goodies](#) offers a great tutorial on real audio and how it works.

Teleconference and Web Conference Tools and Sites

- [BridgeRentals.com](#)
- [Mr. Conference \(EasyConference\)](#)
- [PhoneBrain.com](#)
- [Conference Calls Unlimited](#)
- [PlaceWare Web Conferencing](#)

The Basics of Creating and Marketing eBooks

They're cheap to produce and instantly downloadable... which means high profit margins for you, and instant gratification for your customer!

How to Use Free eBooks to Build Your Own Marketing Network

eBooks are a hot item these days ... people love them because they can be instantly downloaded, and for us online business owners, free eBooks give us a very powerful opportunity to promote our businesses.



What's an eBook?

For starters, you're reading one. :-) The "e" in "eBook" stands for "electronic". In other words, an eBook is an electronic book that can be read on your computer - and most of the time, you don't need to be connected to the Internet in order to do so.

However, an eBook usually contains links to websites. The reader would need to be online in order to view the information on these sites. These eBook links (and the way in which you market your eBook) are what you'll use to draw customers to your ordering link. More on that later!

This first section is about [creating free eBooks for traffic and profit](#). Yes, I did just say "free" and "profit" in the same sentence. :-) Free eBooks are a great promotional tool because:

- **People like free stuff.** When they download and read your eBook, they'll be exposed to any ads or site branding you place inside.
- **You can use them in exchange for testimonials.** Put out a high-quality eBook, and you're sure to get testimonials from people who love it. Ask for permission to display these on your site; it helps to build your credibility.
- **They get passed around - a form of viral marketing.** Encourage others to offer it on their own sites, or tell their friends where to download it. It's extra promotion, for free!
- **You can choose to sell advertising.** If you plan to promote your book heavily, and you have a high-traffic site, you can consider selling ads within the book. Naturally you wouldn't want to clutter the content with too many ads ... but a couple on each page (at the top and bottom) are often seen, and it'll bring in some extra income.
- **You can use your free eBook as a "lead-in" to your "real" (paid) product.** Once people see the quality of your work, they're more inclined to take a look at what you have to offer (although you'll still need to persuade them to purchase!). You've "proven" yourself through your eBook.

Later in this section you'll find some pointers on promoting and delivering your new eBook. Because it's free, there are many webmasters willing to add it to their sites! What a great way to get some extra exposure with little extra work.

Easy Ways to Create a Free eBook

There are countless free eBooks available online, pretty much anywhere you care to look. Good eBooks are saved and re-read or kept for reference. Bad eBooks can be deleted with a simple "click" of the mouse.

Your eBook should offer genuinely valuable content - it should NOT be a sales letter! If you entice people to download your eBook by offering them useful information, you can bet they're going to feel "tricked" if they open up your eBook only to find a cheap advertising pitch.

The goal is to encourage visitors to download your book, keep a copy, and refer it to others. So be sure to create something that you would keep yourself.

On the other hand, **don't give EVERYTHING away**. Great content is definitely a necessity, but if you give away too much then the reader won't have any incentive to return to your site or buy anything from you. Give away carefully selected content ... but offer the real "meat" of your content only to paying customers.

Use What's Already Available to Create Your eBook

Creating an eBook doesn't have to be a long, involved task. In fact, you don't even have to write it!

You may already be familiar with the free Online Business Basics eBook. Although it's fairly long - over 60 pages - putting together the content was a simple task that only took me a couple of days. Here are a few easy ways to create a free eBook:

- **Put together a compilation of your own articles.** Do you have a newsletter or do you submit articles to other editors? Then simply select the best of them (and those relevant to your topic of choice, of course) and you've got yourself an eBook!
- **Get a lot of questions? Compile them into an eBook.** You may find that your readers/visitors send you a lot of questions ... if so, put them together into an eBook along with the answers and distribute it freely. This will do a couple of things for you: you'll be providing great content (answers to common questions) ... and you'll decrease the number of emails you have to answer. Things to think about:
 1. Ask permission if you want to use names, email addresses, or other personal information.
 2. Remember that everything you (or anyone) write is automatically copyrighted upon creation. That means any message board posts, emails, etc. belong to the author. You can only quote small bits under the "fair use" clause.

The bottom line? Either ask for permission ... or rewrite the questions if they're long or complex (short phrases cannot be

copyrighted). You can even make up your own list of questions and answers if you like.

For more information on copyrights, visit the [US Copyright Office website](#).

- **Use bits and pieces of your website.** You may have articles, tips, columns, Q&A sections, etc. on your website. Why not pick a few choice tidbits from your site and compile them into an eBook? You can modify them slightly to make the eBook "flow" better, of course.
- **Use other people's articles.** Many writers are more than willing to give you reprint permission in exchange for the extra exposure it brings their business. Many fine eBooks have been created this way; they're simply a compilation of articles from various authors, with a "Forward" or "Introduction" written by the editor. **You will need to request the author's permission if you choose to go this route.**

Mix and match any of the tactics above to quickly create a free eBook of your own. This is exactly how I created the free Online Business Basics eBook, and it took no time at all! [In fact, the formatting/layout of the book took far more time than putting together the content!]



Sample Letter to Request Reprint Permission

Dear Stacey,

My name is Angela Wu and I'm the owner of a pets travel website called Pet Friendly Canada, <http://petfriendly.ca/>. I recently came across your excellent article, "How to Help a Carsick Dog Enjoy Travelling".

I'm currently in the process of creating a free eBook with tips about vacationing with pets. With your permission, I'd like to reprint your article in this book. Of course I would give you full credit, with your copyright notice and resource box attached.

This eBook will be heavily promoted and will hopefully result in increased traffic for all authors involved. I will send you a copy when the eBook is complete, which are you free to distribute to your own guests.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I look forward to your reply.

Best Regards,
Angela Wu
mailto:angela@petfriendly.ca
<http://petfriendly.ca/>

Don't forget to link back to your own site and product! Sorry to yell, but the point of creating a free eBook is to brand your business, increase traffic, or make more money. So where appropriate, put links back to your site or refer to your paid products (whether they're your own, or they're affiliate products - it doesn't matter, so long as the link fits within the context of the article). Suggestions on where to put links:

- **On the cover page.** Display your business name and URL, possibly even your logo and contact information. Many eBook creators put a brief statement that says something like, "This free eBook has been made available to you from" - followed by all your business information. Don't forget to make the links "clickable"!
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If you are reprint another person's articles, please don't change their links to your own unless you have discussed it with them first.

- **In an "Additional Resources" section.** Some authors will include an extra section, usually at the end of the eBook, where
-

they point the reader to other tools or sites that the reader may find helpful. Place links here - they can be to certain pages on your site, to affiliate products, anything you like. Don't **only** put links to your own stuff, though ... then it starts to look like a cheap advertising trick.

- **Use a dedicated sales letter at the end of the book.** Is your free eBook a perfect lead-in to one of your products? If so, consider writing a one-page sales letter to place at the end of your eBook. Most readers will not have a problem with this if the rest of your eBook has provided great content.

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- [Connection Team](#) - personal development, health and wellness, and business.
- [Encyclopedia of Online Marketing](#) - Internet marketing.
- [Family-Content.com](#) – family-oriented and home business articles.
- [Free-Content](#) (announcement list) - small business.
- [Hits 'n Clicks](#) - Internet marketing.
- [iBoost](#) - marketing.
- [InternetDay](#) - Internet marketing and online business.
- [MakingProfit.com](#) - business/marketing.

- [MarcommWise](#) - marketing.
- [Marketing-Seek.com](#) - business/marketing.
- [Opportunity Update](#) - business/marketing.
- [Self Improvement Online](#) - personal growth and self improvement.
- [UltimateProfits.com](#) - business/marketing.
- [Womans-Net.com](#) (syndication network) - recipes, health/wellness, business, search engines, and website development.
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eBook Compilers and Creation Software

The Two Basic Types of eBooks

You will need specialized software in order to create an eBook. There are basically two types of eBooks:

- **An .EXE file.** These eBooks require Windows (usually 95/98/2000/NT) with Internet Explorer version 4.0 or higher to be installed. You create HTML pages (using whatever editor you like), which are then **compiled** into an eBook. Many users prefer this format; it looks very much like what they'd see using their browsers.

However, there's bad news too. By requiring that Internet Explorer 4.0+ be installed, users with earlier version of IE won't be able to read your eBook, and others just don't have IE installed. The other problem is that you're also shutting out Mac users who cannot read EXE files at all (without specialized software).

Check your website demographics/stats to see what percentage of your visitors you'd be "ignoring" if you chose to publish in EXE format.

- **A .PDF file** will run on most systems. A company called Adobe produces and distributes a free PDF reader called the [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#). Pretty much anyone can download it and use it to view PDF files. That means you reach nearly all computer users with this format.

The downside: many people are uncomfortable with this reader - they find it hard to use and/or read, and it can be confusing to download. Plus the Adobe Acrobat compiler which produces the PDF file is expensive - far more than most online beginners can afford to shell out. However, there are other more affordable options available (see below).

Which format should you use? There's no "right" answer. I personally use PDF because nearly everyone can read it. Some businesses create ebooks in both formats and allow visitors to select whichever one is most convenient for them.

Free eBook Compilers

Most budget-strapped beginners can't afford to pay much for additional software. So I've compiled this list of free eBook compilers for you to choose from. They're not nearly as "feature-rich" as the compilers you can buy ... but in a pinch, they'll do.

We're only concentrating on free eBooks for now. The security features that you can get with paid compilers are wonderful to prevent theft (and yes, people will steal your free eBook, or material from it) - it's up to you to decide how far you want to go to try to protect your work.

If you're creating an eBook that you plan to sell, that's another story altogether. Then I would highly recommend that you invest the dollars for a professional eBook compiler.

Here's the list. Pick whichever one you're most comfortable with; they mostly do the same things.

FREE HTML COMPILERS:

- [GoBCL](#) - GoBCL will convert documents to PDF or HTML right from your web browser. Within minutes it will email you the converted document. It can convert many types of documents, including TXT, DOC, XLS, and RTF. Unlimited document conversions for files under 5 MB. Requires Windows 95/98/NT or Mac OS 8.0 or greater, plus Netscape 4.04 or Internet Explorer 4.0.
- [SBookBuilder](#) - This HTML ebook compiler offers a variety of features, including optional print-disabling and password

protection. However, the write-up states, "Ideal for Ebooks and pages **without** links."

FREE PDF CONVERTERS:

- [GoBCL](#) - See previous section for description.
- [Create Adobe PDF Online](#) - Recommended! Adobe offers a free trial for their online PDF converter that will take a variety of file types, including .DOC, .XLS, .TXT, and .PS. You can also submit a URL and get back the PDF file. The free trial is limited to 100 MB and 10 minutes processing time. If you need more than that, monthly subscriptions are available.
- [HTMLDOC](#) - Takes HTML files and converts them into PDF format. Somewhat complicated to use, probably easier for people who are comfortable with "technical" stuff. The good thing is that there's tons of detailed instructions. Note that there are some restrictions on the HTML you can use. Runs on Windows or Unix systems.

Top-Of-The-Line “Professional” Compilers

There are loads of eBook compilers, many of which do an excellent job. Here are 3 of the most popular. Note that all of these compilers produce EXE files.

By paying for a compiler you get access to many advanced features that you wouldn't get otherwise by using a free converter. For example, you can password-protect parts of your eBook or brand them with a logo and/or business name and URL. Although I don't think purchasing one of these packages is "necessary" for free eBooks, they're definitely very handy -- and they're also a good idea if you plan to sell your eBooks.

- [E-ditor](#). Free demo available. This software offers video tutorials to help you come up to speed quickly. Create as many eBooks as you like! E-ditor offers some neat security features as well. For example, you can password-protect parts of your eBook, which allows your visitor to download the entire book ... but she'd need to buy access to the protected parts. A great marketing strategy!

You can also "burglar-proof" your eBook - make it work on one computer! Note: this particular feature should *not* be used for free eBooks ... you **want** people to pass it around!

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- [Activ E-Book Compiler](#). Free trial available. This is a solid eBook compiler that does everything you need it to do. It's got customization features, security features, branding options, and even a built-in search engine.

The great thing, though, is the "Re-branding" feature. You can offer other webmasters the opportunity to customize your eBook with their own link (in only the ways you specify, of course) -- which is a great encouragement for them to offer it to their own visitors! Great promotional tool.

A Cheap Alternative to Adobe's PDF Software

[Adobe's PDF software](#) is far beyond the means of most beginners. An alternative is the [Easy PDF](#) software, by Visage Software. Available for users of Windows 95,98, NT 4.0, and NT 2000, Easy PDF has a lot of powerful features, including the application of links/hypertext to the finished document (many of the free PDF converters will not allow you to do this).

Layout and Formatting Tips

The content of your eBook is important, but how you format it is also vital. An ugly, hard-to-read layout makes a bad impression and most people won't bother to try to decipher your eBook. Here are a few general tips for laying out your eBook ...

- **Break up the text into easily readable "chunks"**. Use headings, subheadings, and plenty of white space.
- **Use graphics for interest, where appropriate**. This is particularly nice if you have a long eBook. Don't overdo it, though ... remember that graphics increase the file size of your eBook, which means it will take longer to download.

- **Be consistent.** Choose a simple, easy-to-read font and font size for headings, subheadings, normal text, etc. and stick with it.
- **Make sure Internet links are obvious.** I've seen eBooks where the creator has changed links to some fancy font or a different color. Use the normal blue, underlined link to represent links to the Internet - people will know that these are links.
- **Check your links.** Do your best to verify all links before you make your eBook available for download.
- **Offer a Table of Contents.** It makes it easier for people to find what they're looking for.
- **Add navigation links.** This is easier if you're creating an HTML eBook ... add navigation links back to the "main menu" or Table of Contents, or add Previous Page or Next Page links.

Your Pre-Promotion Checklist

Always check your eBook carefully before you make it available to others. Here's a checklist to help you ensure that everything's ready before you begin some heavy marketing ...

- **Does your eBook offer real content?** Content-rich books are much more likely to be read and passed around. Books that are really only a sales pitch tend to be deleted.
- **Have you run a spell-check?**
- **Do all your links work?**
- **Have you generated a Table of Contents?**
- **Are all of your navigational links or bookmarks in place?**
- **Is your eBook laid out in a clear, easy-to-read format?**
- **Do you clearly indicate that your eBook may be distributed freely?** You'll need to do so, so that readers know that they're welcome to spread it around. If you would like to impose conditions on how your book may be distributed, be sure to state those clearly as well. For example, you might say: "This eBook may be freely distributed with permission from the author."

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- **Do you have your autoresponders ready?** If you're going to collect email addresses in exchange for your free eBook, then you're going to need a good follow-up autoresponder with broadcast capabilities. This will let you repeatedly follow-up with your readers.

12 Easy eBook Promotion Strategies

The great thing about distributing free eBooks is that you can find lots of people who are willing to give it away because it adds content to their sites, or because it's a nice little "gift" they can offer to their visitors.

For **you**, this means extra free promotion with no effort! Your "network" of eBook distributors does the promotion for you.

You'll still have to promote on your own, of course. Remember that the only promotional efforts you can control are your own! Luckily, with free eBooks, the effect "snowballs" - if you work hard in the beginning to get your eBook out all over the web, you'll find that more and more people will download it and/or pass it around.

Your eBook must contain real, valuable content. People who throw together an eBook that's primarily a sales letter, or littered with ads, are doing us all a disservice. The more garbage that's available, the less willing people are going to be to download eBooks - even if they're free.

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some traffic back to his own site ... and you'll benefit from the added exposure.

One product that offers a branding solution is available from <http://www.ebookedit.com/ebrandit.html>. Branding is also included as a feature in most of the professional eBook compilers. The most affordable option is the [Activ E-Book Compiler](#).



Selling Branding and Redistribution Rights

Some businesses make money from their eBooks by selling certain types of "rights" - the more you pay, the more flexibility you have. For example:

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Offer the eBook to your new and existing customers as a bonus or gift. Let others know that they're welcome to do the same. There are many people who want quality products to 'bundle' with their own as an added bonus ... and if they can get them for free, so much the better. :-) It's good for you too because you'll have others promoting your eBook for you.

4. Announce It.

Some websites and newsletters specialize in announcing new products. Many of these services are free, so be sure to take advantage of them!

You can also place ads in targeted ezines to announce your book. I always prefer to ask the editor first, if he or she would announce it to their subscribers - usually in exchange for a free branded copy.

Otherwise, you can either place free ezine ads or even purchase some in targeted ezines.

Purchasing ezine ads can get expensive, and it takes practice. Carefully consider whether or not you're willing to spend the money to promote a free eBook. It may result in a lot of downloads ... which *might* eventually lead to more sales. But your "front-end" (immediate) profit would be \$0.

5. Offer It To Other Editors/Webmasters.

You may have already developed relationships with other editors or webmasters within your niche market. For example, if you write articles, you'll have a list of editors who accept article submissions.

Offer your eBook to them, and give them suggestions on how to use it to their benefit (as a 'bonus' or 'gift', as extra content for

their site, etc). If your contact list is small, you may want to brand the book for them to encourage them to distribute it. Otherwise charge a nominal fee to cover your time if they would like the eBook branded with their own URL and logo.

6. Submit to the Search Engines.

Create a "sales page" for your eBook in proper search-engine fashion (complete with META tags, keyword density, etc) and submit the page to the major SEs. The [Search Engine Watch](#) website offers excellent information about search engine optimization.

7. Cross-Promote: Exchange eBooks or Links.

You may come across another webmaster in your target market that offers a complementary eBook. Why not approach him or her and ask to promote each other's work?

Naturally, you'll want to review his eBook (and he'll likely want to review yours). Once you're both satisfied, then there are many ways you can help each other. This includes:

- Bundling your books together for download. You can do this by using a "compression" utility such as [WinZip](#).
- Putting a link in each eBook to your "partner's" download page.
- Listing your eBooks on each other's websites and/or newsletters.
- Anything else you can think of!

As always, when you approach someone with a proposal, let him or her know how it's going to benefit them. Also provide her with the relevant details about your eBook (title, brief description, when published, etc).

8. Promote It In Sig Files.

Signature files are sort of like your online "business card". They're small ads, typically around 3-7 lines long, that you can attach to things like:

- The end of every outgoing email.
- The end of message board posts, *if appropriate*.

- In your "resource box" when you write and submit articles.

Because sig files are short, do **not** use them to try to sell something. Use them instead to **generate leads**; leave it up to your website or autoresponder to do the "selling."

9. Display a Tag Line In Your Newsletter.

If you have an opt-in newsletter of your own, consider putting a small blurb at (or near) the top of each issue indicating where subscribers can pick up your eBook.

Loyal subscribers may already have a copy ... but new subscribers come in all the time, and they'll appreciate the pointer.

10. Surf - and Submit.

You probably spend at least a few hours a week surfing the web. When you come across a website (catering to your target market) that carries a selection of eBooks, submit your own if the site accepts submissions.

If a submission link isn't available, write the webmaster a **personalized** email (for example, mention one particular part of his or her site which you enjoyed) ... and give her the specifics of your book:

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- A brief description
- Format (EXE, PDF, etc)
- Download URL

Please **don't** send your eBook as an attachment. Viruses are always a real threat on the Internet, and most business owners will probably delete your email without looking at it.

11. Create a Mini-Site.

A "mini-site" has one purpose only: to attract more potential customers. To create a mini-site, you would register a domain (for example, the name of your eBook or variation of it). On that site, all you do is write up the "sales" copy for your eBook. The sole purpose is to get your visitor to download your book.

If you're asking why I keep referring to "sales copy" - your eBook is free, after all - it's because you still need to "sell" your visitor on downloading your eBook ... free or not. Everyone's so busy these days - why should your visitor give up his valuable time, or give you his email address, unless you give him a good reason to do so? That's where your "sales pitch" comes in. Tell him WHY and HOW your free eBook will benefit him.

You can also use the URL of your mini-site in your promotions. That way visitors won't have any other "distractions" - they're simply there to download your eBook. Period!

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If you've used articles, quotes, tips, etc. from other authors, provide them with a copy of your eBook and encourage them to distribute it freely to their own visitors. You might want to brand each eBook as an extra "thank-you" - it also helps to provide them with an incentive to promote the book.

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2 eBook Announcement Services

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3 Other Promotion Possibilities

1. **Freeware or Shareware Directories.** There are many places that will list 'free stuff'. Not all of them take eBooks, though, so you will need to read their submission guidelines. A list of places to start looking is http://dmoz.org/Computers/Software/Freeware/Download_Locations/.
2. **Software Directories.** Most of these sites are primarily for software programs, but some will accept certain types of eBooks. The biggest and most well-known are [Upload.com](#) and [Download.com](#).

3. **Send a Press Release.** One place that welcomes press releases about eBooks is eBookBroadcast.com.

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Please read submission policies and guidelines for EACH site!

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Another service is [eBook Broadcast.com](#). eBook Broadcast.com features press releases on new ebooks, publisher announcements, and handhelds news.

The Basics of Ezine Advertising

An [ezine](#), as you may already know, is an email newsletter. Advertising in ezines can be extremely effective -- both in terms of results and in terms of cost! You can easily reach thousands of subscribers for just a few pennies per prospect.

Ezine Advertising – an Easy Road to Riches?

The great thing about ezine advertising is that the newsletter editor has already done a lot of the work for you: he or she has already built a group of [opt-in subscribers](#) (people who explicitly requested a subscription). Plus the editor has worked at developing a relationship with his or her list - loyal subscribers are much more likely to read the ezine and thus read your ad.

That's not to say that ezine advertising is the easy road to riches. It's not. In fact, it takes a lot of practice, experimentation, and testing on an ongoing basis if you want to make good money with it.

Note that ezine advertising can get *very* expensive. I recommend that you start off slowly: advertise cheaply, in small newsletters - *or better yet, in your own opt-in newsletter* - until you find an ad that "works". Then you might choose to use some of the profits from your sales to re-invest into more ezine advertising.

It's very easy to waste money on ezine ads. Take your time, do your research, and do plenty of testing before you roll out a big advertising campaign. Once you find ads that work and ezines that are responsive to your product, then you can gradually start stepping up your campaign. Remember to track your results -- it's the only way to know what's working!

How to Select the "Right" Ezine

Ezines are not all created equal. Even if you find a cheap ad, you're still paying for it - and there's no point wasting money! Here are a few things to look for before you pull out your wallet ...

1. Target Audience.

I cannot stress this enough: only advertise in ezines that cater to your specific market.

It doesn't matter if you can reach 100,000 people for \$20 ... unless these subscribers are your target audience, you're wasting your time, effort, and money.

Just imagine: 100,000 subscribers for a "freebie-of-the-day" newsletter - and you're advertising a specialty product that costs \$100. How much response do you think you're going to get? *It's not a "bargain" if it doesn't give you results.*

2. Opt-In List.

Pick your ezines carefully and do everything you can to ensure that they only collect opt-in subscribers. One thing you should do is subscribe to the newsletter yourself – that way you can see first-hand how the subscription process is handled.



The Difference Between Opt-In and Opt-Out

Opt-In means that someone specifically requested a subscription to the newsletter. **Double opt-in** requires the person to verify his or her subscription before she's added to the list. This helps to ensure that everyone is subscribed with both their knowledge and their consent. Both methods are acceptable.

Opt-Out has another name: **spam**. It occurs when someone is added to a list although they didn't request it. If they don't want to be on the list, they have to explicitly unsubscribe. This is precisely the type of list you *don't* want to get involved with!

3. Content vs. Ads

You've probably seen ezines that are nothing more than one giant mass of advertisements or disguised sales letters. These are far less effective than a content-rich ezine where the editor works hard to provide high-quality information.

Once again, the best way to judge the quality of the ezine is to subscribe. You can also view the past issues archive, if they have one, or email the editor for the latest issue.

4. Number of Ads

The fewer ads, the better. An ezine that runs only 3 ads per issue will provide your ad with far higher visibility than one that runs 30 ads per issue.

If you're promoting a popular product or opportunity, you may also want to ask the editor if he or she will run competing ads. The less competition you have, the better.

5. Placements of Ads

Ad placement plays an important part in response, but is often overlooked. A classified ad, for example, that's placed at the bottom of the ezine along with 20 others is far less effective than one that's placed by itself within the content of the ezine.

6. Publishing Frequency

This is a hard thing to judge: how frequent is too frequent, and what's not frequent enough?

In my experience, I've found that ezines that are published once a week or once every two weeks give the best response. More than once a week has given me poor results. I suspect it's because people become immune to all the email, and may delete it without reading it.

You may find different results. As usual, testing your ads and your publications will show you what works.

7. Publication Day

By publication day, I mean, "What day of the week is the ezine published on?"

Many people subscribe to several free ezines on the same topic. If most of those ezines go out on the same day (resulting in an email overload), then you may find that you get better response from an ezine that goes out a few days earlier than most.

8. Past Issues Archive

You'll get additional free exposure if the ezine editor archives the newsletter somewhere on the web. Your ad will be seen by subscribers who go to read past issues, or interested visitors who just want to see what the ezine is all about.

This is a nice little "perk" - but don't focus too much on it. In reality, it might get you a few more clicks but probably nothing significant.

9. Your "Break-Even" Point

This is what it all boils down to. Consider how much you paid for your ad, how many subscribers it's going to reach, and how much profit you make from each sale. What type of response do you need to break even?

For example: Let's say you pay \$10 to advertise in a newsletter with 1000 subscribers. You make a profit of \$10 off of every sale. To break even, you would need 1 person to buy your product.

Is this realistic? It depends heavily on your ad copy and on your sales letter (on the website or autoresponder that you direct the visitor to). Let's say 1% of the visitors click on your ad link. I've heard an estimate that "average" [click-through rates](#) (if there's such a thing!) usually vary from around 0.5% to 3%, although this varies widely.

Anyhow, 1% of 1000 subscribers is 10 people. Out of those 10 people who visit, you need 1 of them to purchase. That's a 10% [conversion rate](#) (1 divided by 10 = 10%).

This sounds rather high; strong sales copy *might* give you this conversion rate ... or if you're using an autoresponder, you may have a better chance of converting your visitor into a sale.

This isn't to say that it won't work! Quite the contrary. Your job is to test it to see if it does work; however, doing this type of analysis will help to ensure that you make an *informed* decision about whether or not to pursue a particular ad campaign.

I've had click-through and conversion rates too low to even measure, and as high as 4% and 8%, respectively. Let me emphasize it again:

The ONLY way to know what works is to TRACK YOUR AD CAMPAIGNS!

Calculate your break-even point and make an educated choice on whether you'd like to pursue the ad campaign.

10. Customer Service

Look for an editor that is responsive and prompt. You should always be given a copy of your ad so that you can review it. The editor should also send you a notification of your scheduled run dates. It can be stressful when you've paid for an ad and don't hear anything back from the editor!

10 Ezine Advertising Success Strategies

Here are a few tips to help you improve your ezine ad results. Again, I'll say: track your campaigns, because what works for some people may not work as well (or at all) for others. Likewise, something that doesn't work very well for one person may work wonders for another!



Is Your Sales Copy Up to Par?

into paying customers.

The cold, hard fact is that you may have the most incredible ad that generates hundreds or even thousands of "click-throughs" -- but if your site does a poor job of "closing the sale", then your chances of running a profitable ezine ad campaign are pretty slim.

1. Track Every Campaign.

It takes just a few seconds to set up a special tracking URL and it can make a world of difference to how successful you are!

2. Don't Try to Sell Anything.

Yup, you read that right. In a short ad, your objective is *not* to try to sell something; rather, your objective is to **generate leads**. Pique your reader's interest enough to get him or her to click on your link ... but let the sales copy on your website or in your autoresponder do the selling for you. If you use *solo ads* or *exclusive mailings*, the situation's a little different: you normally have much more room for your ad copy, and you can "go for the sale!".

By the way, I'd recommend **not** using "cheap" or misleading tricks just to get the click. You want **qualified** prospects to click on your link - not just someone who's curious or bored! Don't deliberately misrepresent your product; you'll just end up with annoyed visitors.

3. Experiment.

It's hard to know which ads are going to get the best response until you actually try it. Come up with a variety of ads and target them specifically for one particular ezine audience.

For example, let's say you sell a booklet with a bunch of exercise tips. If you're advertising in a newsletter focused on weight-loss, then emphasize how these exercises can help boost your metabolism and help you to burn more calories (ie. lose weight!). If the newsletter is targeted towards fitness beginners,

emphasize the benefits of these exercises (more energy, better health) and how simple they are for anyone to do.

Another thing to try is to write up ads that are informative, rather than an obvious ad. Or offer a free report by autoresponder and use that as a lead-in to your main sales pitch. Be creative! The possibilities for experimentation are endless.

4. Take Advantage of Auction Sites.

[Ezine Ad Auction](#) can provide you with a cheap source of ezine ads. This auction site allows editors to sell off their "remnant ad space" - in other words, unsold ad space. Don't be put off by the fact that these editors have to resort to auctions to sell their space; there could be any number of reasons for doing so and some quality ezines are available.

Note that auction sites only bring together editors and buyers. It won't intervene in case of a problem. Please exercise due diligence... and remember: *No matter how "cheap" an ad is, it's not a bargain unless it gets results.*

5. Use Autoresponders.

Again, because most ezine ads are so short, the purpose of your ad is to generate a *lead*, not a sale.

Most people include a URL to their website within their ad. This is fine (remember to track it!), but it gives you only one opportunity to try to make the sale - and as you may already know, few people buy anything immediately.

By using a follow-up autoresponder address in your ad you'll have multiple opportunities to make the sale. I've had great success with this ... however, it's important to note that many people prefer to visit the website right away. This is why I usually include both my URL and an autoresponder address in every ad.

Experiment until you find out what works best for you.

6. Try Ad Swaps or Barters.

Another great way to test your ads cheaply is to arrange a swap or a barter. The most conventional way to do this is for those of you who have your own ezines. Approach other editors within your niche market and ask them if they'd be interested in a swap. Give them all the information they need to make a decision:

- The focus of your ezine.
- Circulation.
- Demographics, if you have them.
- How many ads you run per issue.
- What type of ad you'd like to swap (classified, sponsor, exclusive).
- Ad rules, if any.
- Include your own ad to save time.

If the editor you approach has more subscribers than you do, you can offer to do a "parity swap". For example, if you have 50 subscribers and she has 100, you would run her ad twice in your ezine in exchange for 1 ad in hers.

Bartering is also a great way to test your ad cheaply. If you don't have a newsletter, try offering something else in exchange for an ad. For example, if you're good at creating logos you could barter a logo for an ad.

7. Don't Just Go for Ezine Size.

Strangely enough, my own experiences have shown that the larger the ezine, the worse the response. I don't know why this is; as I said, it's only my experience and yours may differ.

Here's an example. Over the course of several months I purchased a number of ads in two ezines, one with 20,000 subscribers and the other with 50,000. I spent several hundreds of dollars on them with the expectation that I would at least be able to recoup my cost.

Wrong! I got less response from both of them put together than I got from ezine ads I ran in newsletters with less than 5000 subscribers -- and they all catered to the same audiences.

You're looking for a *responsive audience* - a big audience doesn't necessarily mean that it's responsive.

8. Sponsors and Solo Mailings Do Best.

There are three general types of ezine ads (and many variations in between). **Classified ads** are just your regular ads. They're short, usually placed throughout the newsletter or at the very bottom in one big heap.

Sponsor ads are typically placed at the top of each issue for highest visibility. They're usually longer than classifieds, and tend to draw a better response rate. Some ezines will group several sponsor ads together at the top; I've personally found this decreases my response rate. Ezines may also choose to run only "sponsor-style" ads throughout - typically one at the top, one in the middle, and one at the bottom.

Exclusive mailings or **solo ads** are completely separate mailings from the regular newsletter issue. The only thing in the mailing is the ad itself (plus the editor's header, subscribe/unsubscribe information, etc). Many editors permit exclusive mailings to be quite long. The number of solo ads sent out is important; if a subscriber gets 5 solo ads a week from one ezine, he or she is likely to delete it automatically without reading it. Look for solos that go out once a week, maximum.

9. Repeated Exposure Tends to Give Better Results.

Running an ad once isn't enough. Most people will not respond the first time they see an ad; they need time to think it over, do research, wait for their next pay check, or any number of other reasons.

Run your ad in the same ezine at least a few times. You may be able to get a good deal on advertising if you buy multiple ads. Ask the editor if he offers any multi-ad discounts; the worst he can say is "no"!

10. Start Small ... Expand Only When You're Ready.

Like I mentioned earlier, ezine advertising can very quickly become an expensive venture. Start slowly, advertising in small or affordable ezines ... track **everything**. Once you know what works you can gradually start rolling out bigger campaigns.

Research, Subscribe, and Prepare

Before you begin your ezine ad campaign, research several ezines in your target market. I'd suggest you look first to the [auction site](#) mentioned earlier in this newsletter, for affordable places to test your ads. Other places to look include:

- [NetterWeb.com](#) - a free list of ezines, organized into categories.
- [Lifestyles Publishing Directory of Ezines](#) - this is a great service, basically a comprehensive, searchable list of ezines that offer advertising. Membership costs around \$40 at the time of writing ... however, **some advertisers offer advertising discounts to members**. Depending on where and how much you advertise, you could easily recoup your costs through ad discounts.

Once you've found a few ezines that sound like they target the audience you want to reach ...

- **Subscribe.** You'll be able to see first-hand how the editor collects email addresses. If there's no obvious way to subscribe to the newsletter, be cautious – it's hard to know whether the list is opt-out or opt-in.
- **Read it!** Check the ezine for some of the criteria discussed in this section. For example, is it content-rich? How often is it published? How many ads are published? Where are they placed? .. and so on.
- **Create several ads.** Never go with your first attempt! Try different headlines, different ad bodies ... keep at it until you've created several that you can choose from and/or edit later on.
- **Create tracking URLs for each ad.**
- **Setup an autoresponder**, if you're going to use one. This is a big job ... but take your time! First impressions count and sloppiness isn't going to get you a sale.

The Basics of Reciprocal Linking

Share traffic with other sites and slowly but surely increase your own traffic!

Why Link?

[Link exchanges](#) or [reciprocal links](#) are an important part of your online marketing campaign. It's basically a "link swap" between you and other websites; you publish a link to their site, and they'll publish a link to yours. This will help you primarily in three ways:

1. **More traffic.** Web surfers that come across your link while visiting another site may click on over to yours.
2. **Link popularity.** In other words, how many other sites link to yours? Some search engines use link popularity to help determine how well you rank in their listings. The higher you rank for a targeted key phrase, the more visitors you'll get.
3. **Valuable resource.** Choose all of your links carefully. If you can provide a great list of links to carefully selected quality sites, visitors will come back to you time and time again because they know they'll be able to find what they're looking for.

Quite frankly, reciprocal linking can be very tedious and time-consuming. Later in this section you'll find a list of automated tools to help you.

Linking strategies are basically either [proactive](#) (you go out and actively seek out link swaps) or [passive](#) (you provide content and the means to link back to your site, but wait for others to approach you). Obviously the passive approach is much less work ... but to be really effective, you'll need to do some of both.

Link exchanges are an ongoing task. You'll never be "done", just continually growing! The main thing to remember is to try and make it

a habit. Even if you only work on reciprocal links for an hour a week, over time, you'll start to see results.



Warning about Using Reciprocal Links

Please remember that the point of all your efforts to draw traffic to your site is so that people will browse *your* site and buy *your* products and services.

Make sure you don't stick a whole bunch of links to other sites on the key areas of your own - you'll just be encouraging your visitors to leave! In other words, don't place outside links on the pages you've dedicated to selling your own products or services.

Reciprocal Linking Strategies

No one site can provide every bit of information on a particular subject. It's not a bad thing to link to another site; but be sure you pick quality, content-rich sites or those that genuinely offer something of value to your target audience. **Be selective about which sites you link to.**

Here are a few strategies. As usual, you'll need to evaluate them and decide whether or not they are appropriate for your own site. One suggestion is to try everything when you first begin. Track your results. Then concentrate on the strategies that yield the best results and discard those that are less effective.

1. Set Up a Separate Links Page.

The last thing you want to do is link to a bunch of other websites from key areas on your own site (for example, the home page). Why turn your visitors away as soon as they find you?

Create a separate page solely for links. You can create categories if you like, or create a separate links page for each category of links if your list gets too long.

2. Consider Offering "Sponsored" Links.

Sponsored links are links that are placed in a prominent spot on your website. For example, a link from your home page can be considered a sponsored link. Same goes for a link on any of your high-traffic pages.

If you find a particularly good site - that does not directly compete with yours! - you may want to swap sponsored links. Check with the site owner to get his or her traffic stats; if your site is getting 100 visitors per day while the other site gets less than 20, then are you willing to give up your valuable web space "real estate" for this link?

I suggest that you post very few sponsored links, if you choose to post any at all. Be selective.

3. Automate Additions and Changes.

This is probably not a big worry if you don't have that many links. If, however, your links page is large with several different categories, considering automating it. There are tools available online that will do this for you (for a fee). It will save you the hassle of manually adding or editing links.

4. Take Link Requests.

Put a form on your website for others to submit requests for reciprocal links. Then make sure you have your own link code available on your website, so that your visitor just has to cut & paste the HTML to their own site.

If you're approaching someone directly, make sure you put your link information in your email. This will help to decrease the number of emails you have to send back and forth.

The downside to this approach is that you may end up getting a lot of spam: people sending you their "offers" or link requests for sites that are obviously not qualified.

When you *send* a link request, take a couple of moments to visit the site. A personalized, genuinely warm email is more likely to get a favorable response than one of those generic emails that say, "Hi, I visited your website and think we should trade links".



Sample Reciprocal Link Request

Hi Jennifer,

My name is Angela Wu, and I'm the owner of a website called BuildYourHomeBiz.com. I just visited your website, <<http://www.yourwebsite.com/>>, and wanted to say that I particularly liked your write-up on the best HTML tutorials online. Would you be interested in swapping links? We both cater to the Internet home business market; by posting reciprocal links I can send some of my traffic your way, and vice versa.

I've included my link information below. Your link has been added to my directory and can be viewed at <http://buildyourhomebiz.com/>.

Thanks for your consideration, Jennifer. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Best Regards,
Angela Wu
mailto:angela@buildyourhomebiz.com
<http://www.buildyourhomebiz.com/>

=====[Link Information]=====
blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah
=====[End of Link]=====

5. Take Links That Complement Your Site.

This probably goes without saying, but to be complete I'll state it here. Trade links with sites of interest to your target audience. There's no point in having a giant mish-mash of unrelated links; your visitors aren't likely to be interested in the feeding habits of ground squirrels if they've visited your site for parenting information.

6. Personalize, Personalize, Personalize.

I cannot emphasize this enough. Visit the website personally. Try your best to find a name and the proper email address. Pick one particular page on the website and comment on something you've found there (see the sample reciprocal link request above).

This approach shows the other person that you've taken the time and effort to actually visit their website and take a look around. It makes you stand out from all of those annoying link requests which are nothing more than auto-generated.

7. Consider Providing a Link First.

Have you found an excellent content-rich site that you know your visitors would appreciate?

Link to it. Write up a description, post the link to your site, and then approach the other of the other site with a reciprocal link request. Include the URL of the page on which you've posted her link, and invite her to write you back if she'd like to make any changes.

This strategy has worked very well for me in the past. It shows that you've personally reviewed his website and that you are willing to provide a "goodwill gesture" of linking to his site even though he has not linked to yours. If the site is worth linking to, then it's worth linking to even if you don't get a link back.

8. Make It Easy for Others to Link to You.

Try putting a link on your site that says something like, "Link to Us". On that page provide text links, banners, buttons, or a combination of them. Provide people with simple instructions - go so far as to give them the HTML they'll need, so that they can easily "cut & paste" it onto their web page. Show them what the link will look like so that they can choose the one that's most suitable for their site.

9. Stay Clear of Automated Submission Services.

These services are usually called [link exchanges](#). The most common scenarios are:

- You put a snippet of HTML on your website which automatically rotates a link (or list of links). Other websites that are part of the program do the same. Your link is supposed to get a lot of "coverage" this way.
- Automated submission software blasts your link to hundreds or even thousands of "Free-For-All" and classified ad websites.

My personal experience has shown these services to be nothing but trouble. For me, they have been completely ineffective and all they seem to do is flood my mailbox with a never-ending procession of spam.

However, if you want to try it for yourself, make sure you open up a free email account (for example, from [Hotmail](#) or [Yahoo!](#)). **Don't use your primary email address when using these automated services.** Your free email address is the one you should use with these link exchanges, since you're likely to find your mailbox flooded with "confirmation emails" and spam.

10. Consider Creating a Directory of Reviewed Links.

Practically every 'net-savvy person knows about Yahoo! - it's reputation as the best directory online comes from the fact that they use humans (rather than software "robots") to review each website. Only sites that offer unique or valuable content are added to the directory.

You could do the same [on a smaller scale, of course :-)]. Review the content found on each of the sites you link to. You'll find that your site will gradually get an ever-increasing flow of return traffic. People will come back to get reliable information on the sites they need, with a minimum of effort.

Automated Tools for Reciprocal Linking

There's no way around it: requesting reciprocal links *cannot* be 100% automated - but there are a few tools that can make it easier while saving you time.

[Zeus](#)

What Does It Do? Zeus does a ton of stuff, more than I can mention here. Visit their website for a complete list of benefits.

One of the handiest features, though, is its ability to ferret out a pool of qualified, theme-matching, reciprocal link prospects. You can then email an individually-personalized reciprocal link request to each website's webmaster.

Please remember ... *don't* blindly use Zeus to send out reciprocal link requests. Let Zeus do the work and find prospects for you - but YOU still need to personally visit each site and see if it's a good fit. Zeus is only a tool; it cannot take the place of your mind and your judgment.

Price: Free sponsored version available, with several restrictions. See below for additional notes. PRO version available.

[Web Ferret](#)

What Does It Do? You type in a key phrase (something that people might use to find your site, or complementary sites), and Web Ferret checks a bunch of search engines and returns the results. Very convenient.

Price: Free. PRO version available.

[LinksManager.com](#)

What Does It Do? Complete automation software to handle the management of your links pages. Some of it's features include:

- Import your current link pages without retyping or recoding.

- Visitors can add or edit their links without your intervention - they just have to wait for your approval. No coding or FTP necessary.
- You won't have to worry about installing anything; Links Manager works from any browser with an Internet connection.
- Dead link checker finds and flags dead links listed on your links pages.
- Reciprocal link checker searches the net to verify that your link or banner exists on all websites listed on your links pages.

The Links Manager does a whole lot more than that, too. Visit their website for a complete list of benefits.

Price: Free for the first 30 days. After that, you can continue to use it for a monthly fee.

The Basics of Improving Your Conversion Rates

Online businesses always seem to be in a struggle to get more traffic to their sites. But by improving your *conversion rate* – the percentage of prospects you turn into paying customers – you can become *more profitable* with the *same traffic!*

Same Traffic, More Sales!

Most often, we focus our efforts on increasing the traffic to our websites: we struggle to find new ways to get visitors, labor to optimize our search engine positions, and purchase advertising ...

Yes, it's important to have a decent amount of traffic. But the other thing you can do to build your profits is to **improve your conversion rate**.

Your **conversion rate** (CR) is the number of visitors that turn into paying customers. Here's a simple example: on one of your web pages, you sell a dog training video. Out of every 200 unique visitors, 1 person buys. That gives you a conversion rate of: 1 buyer divided by 200 visitors = 0.5% (one half of one percent).

Now imagine if you improved your conversion rate to 1%. With the **same** number of visitors, you would make 2 sales - no extra effort involved in getting more traffic!

Below are a few suggestions on how to test and improve your conversion rate. Remember that online marketing is not an exact science; you will have to test it rigorously, no doubt about it! To do so, you will need an [ad tracker](#).

Improving your conversion rate is definitely something you want to try. Getting traffic is tough - and time-consuming! - but **if you can increase your CR, you still make more money with the same amount of traffic you already have**.

8 Practical Ways to Test and Improve Your Conversion Rate

One marketing technique may work wonders for someone, but that doesn't guarantee that it'll do the same for you. The only way to really know what works for YOUR products and YOUR target audience is to experiment. Testing and experimentation are crucial to increasing your profits.

As you track your efforts, you'll discover what works well and what doesn't. Discard anything that gives you poor results and try to improve on stuff that performs well. **Save EVERYTHING - even your old sales pages!** You may discover that your new copy kills sales. If it does, you can easily restore your old copy.

Here are a few suggestions on improving your conversion rate. Adapt them for your own use, and naturally feel free to be creative and come up with your own methods! You'll never know if something works unless you try it.

1. Targeted, Judicious Use of Popup Windows

[Popup windows](#) are new browser windows that appear on top of the window you're currently viewing. They can very quickly get annoying, so use them sparingly.

Use them to get new subscribers for your newsletter, to present a special discount or offer, or to make available a free report or eBook. There's lots of ways to use them; be creative!

I would NOT recommend a popup on every page! Instead, try one of the following ...

- Use a popup that only appears the first time someone visits your site.
- Use a "delayed" popup that appears after a visitor has had some time to view your site.
- Use a popup that only appears when someone leaves your site.
- Use popups on only select pages.



Code to Popup a Window As the Visitor Leaves Your Site

There are a lot of ways to create a pop-up window. Here's one, using a scripting language called JavaScript. In this particular example, the popup window appears when your visitor leaves your home page.

1. **Create a page for whatever you want to offer in your popup window.** It could be a subscription to your newsletter, a discount, a free eBook, etc. Upload the page to your server.
2. **Copy & paste the following code to your home page.** [Note: you don't have to put it your home page, but that's usually the most visited page of a site] You want to place the entire block of code just above your closing `</HEAD>` tag. Please do not try to type in the code; use your mouse to copy & paste the code to your web page.

```
<!--PopUp Script-->
<SCRIPT LANGUAGE="JavaScript">
var exit=true;
function exitwindow()
{
var url =
'http://www.yourdomain.com/yourpage.html';
var win = 'toolbar=0, directories=0,
menubar=0, scrollbars=1, resizable=1,
width=475, height=500';
if (exit)
open(url,'windowname',win); }
</SCRIPT>
```

3. **Modify the above code as needed.** Replace the text in **red** with your own information. "Width" and "height" are the width and height of the popup box, in pixels. Change these to whatever you like.
4. **Modify your `<BODY>` tag.** Make sure the tag looks like,

```
<!--Modified Tag to Work with Popup Script-  
->  
<BODY onUnload="exitwindow()">
```

You're done! Now everytime your visitor leaves your home page, a popup window box will appear. Make sure you test it to be sure it works!

2. Experiment with Different Price Points

Change the price of your product (increase it or decrease it) and see what impact it has on sales. Even if your sales drop, you may still come out ahead when it comes to profits.

How? Let's say you sell an eBook for \$49.95. You pay 15% in transaction fees, for a profit of about \$42.45 per sale. On average you get 30 sales a month. That gives you a profit of \$1273.50 for the month.

Now let's say you raise the price to \$79.95. With the 15% transaction fee, you have a profit of \$67.95 per sale. Even if your sales drop to 20 a month, you still come out ahead with a profit of \$1359.00!

Note that your sales may not drop at all. Many people underprice their products, when customers are willing to pay much more for it. Sometimes it even HELPS to increase your price because of the "perceived value" - for example, a \$1.99 product may seem "cheap" while one that sells for \$19.95 may imply that it's "higher quality".

Of course, you don't want to keep changing your price whenever the whim strikes you. Most people start with an "introductory price" or offer a "limited time special." Think through your pricing strategy and consider what effect it will have on your current and future customers.

3. Test Different Sales Copy.

This is the most obvious thing you can do to improve your conversion rate: improve your sales copy. For example, what's the optimal length for your sales copy? Should you break it up onto a series of pages or keep it all together on one page? Are there testimonials you can use to help persuade visitors to buy?

Be sure to make backups of your previous work; if you find the new copy kills sales, you can always go back to the previous version.

4. Experiment with Site Design.

For example, consider:

- **Adding a select image or two.** Do you sell an eBook? Or perhaps offer a newsletter? You can get a custom "virtual cover" designed for you (try Lori Taylor-Hutcherson at [eBook-Cover-Graphics](#)). Or do-it-yourself with the [eCover Generator](#).
- **Moving your navigation bar.** The most common places to put a navigation bar are at the top of your web page, or in the left margin. You can also place it in the right margin, add a second navigation bar to the bottom of the page, or provide a pull-down navigation menu.
- **Simplifying your page.** More choices is not necessarily better. Try removing some of the "clutter" to help your visitor focus more on what you'd like him to see and do.
- **Making your page more visually attractive.** For example, use black lettering on a light background (this is easiest on the eyes). Use HTML TABLES to properly layout your site. Limit your use of different fonts and colors, but at the same time use SOME color to add visual interest.

5. Experiment with Site Navigation.

Navigation is a big part of your visitor's experience - and a big part of your sales success! Confusing sites will frustrate your visitor and more than likely cause her to leave. I once found a site that offered a neat tool that I wanted -- I was ready and willing to input my credit card number, but after about 5

maddening minutes of trying to find the order page, I simply gave up. Make your navigation clear, clean, and obvious.

Here are a few experiments you can try:

- Decrease the number of clicks required to get to your ordering page.
- Change the flow of navigation so that your visitor always ends up at an ordering page.
- Place your ordering links in the most prominent areas of your site.
- Modify your site so that the home page is your sales page; put all your free content "deeper" within your site.

6. Test Different Types of Links or Ads.

Not all ads are equal! Experiment with:

1. Short ads versus long ads.
2. Ads within the (left or right) margins of your web pages.
3. Text links within the context of an article.
4. Text link with a personal recommendation of the product.
5. Text link that leads directly to an affiliate sales site, vs. one that leads to a page on your own site that "pre-sells" the affiliate product. To pre-sell a visitor, you write up a page that shows him or her why the product is so wonderful, and how it will benefit him. When he clicks on your affiliate link -- to be taken directly to the affiliate website -- he arrives in an "open" frame of mind. He's interested in the product or service and is more open to buying. An example of a page that "pre-sells" a product is <http://homebasedwork.com/employer/workathomejobs.html>.
6. Long sales copy on one page versus long sales copy broken up onto a series of connected pages.
7. Text link included within an interview of the product developer or owner.
8. Text links within a FAQ page (Frequently Asked Questions).

You get the idea. Personally I've had the best results with:

- Long sales copy on one page.
- Personal endorsements with a text link.
- Text links within the context of an article.
- A dedicated page that "pre-sells" an affiliate product.

This doesn't mean that you'll have the same results. The only way to know? Test it!

7. Test with Autoresponders.

Test response rates between direct links to your sales page and the use of a follow-up autoresponder. Sometimes people just need an extra 'push' or a reminder to order.

I've found that most people don't buy on their first visit to a website. They read it, mull it over, take a look at other sites and other options. Then they return and possibly buy.

On the other hand, I've also found that for time-limited offers, sending the prospect directly to a sales page works very well.

Personally, my highest conversion rates come from my series of reports sent via autoresponder. It outperforms everything else I've tried -- ezine ads, one-time endorsed mailings, you name it.

8. Boost Your Credibility.

People buy from those they trust. On the web, the only tool we have to communicate with our visitors is a website. Is there something that you can do to reassure your visitors of your credibility? Here are a few tips ...

1. **Provide solid content - free.** You don't have to give away everything ... but if you provide some great information, it will keep people coming back. Plus others may link to you and you'll gradually develop a reputation as someone who knows what you're talking about.

For example, one great way to provide content while promoting your business is to create a free eBook and offer it to other editors or webmasters within your target niche. Invite them to give it away to their own visitors...

this will create an entire network of people promoting your business for you!

2. **Give your visitors a way to contact you.** And when they do write or call you, answer them promptly, courteously, and helpfully.
3. **Display credible testimonials.** Those testimonials you see that say,

'Your book is great! I'll buy anything you put out in the future - A. Robson, Tampa, FL'

... are useless. They look like they've been made up (even if they're NOT, it LOOKS like they are - and it's the perception that counts). Display an email address or a website URL, a job title or company name... it helps to connect the testimonial with a real person. Don't forget to ask permission to use testimonials!

4. **Be up-front and honest.** Don't misrepresent a product or mislead your visitors. If you always present yourself with integrity, people will spread the word. Personal referrals are the best way to gain a new customer.

The Basics of Joint Ventures

If you could make some extra money each month simply, easily, and with very little work, wouldn't you? Joint ventures can help you do exactly that.

What's a Joint Venture?

Joint ventures can be extremely profitable. You basically team up with another editor or webmaster in your target market for a mutually beneficial project. This section is going to be a quick primer on JVs to help get your creative juices flowing.

It can be something as simple as an ad swap in your newsletters, or it can be a much more complex arrangement. Regardless, JVs - as they're often called - are a great way to widen your audience while helping each other.

My own JVs have been both short and long-term. **Short-term JVs** have been responsible for generating "bursts" of income. **Long-term JVs** tend to require more negotiation, more attention to details and logistics. They start off slowly, but pick up momentum over time.

I love JVs. The simple ones, such as ad swaps, can result in a quick income boost with very little work - literally just the few minutes it takes to schedule an ad and get set up. The more complex ones result in a gradual rise in income. They take more work to get going initially, but once set up, there's again very little extra work to do.

By the way ... **one of the absolute BEST "bargaining chips" available is having your own established opt-in newsletter.** No kidding, my newsletters have been responsible for a good 95% of my JVs -- and most of the time, *other people approach ME*. This means I don't have to do the "legwork"! I still do when there's a business I specifically want to partner with ... but otherwise it's just a matter of deciding which JVs I want to pursue.

Professionalism On the Web

Business is business, regardless of whether it's conducted online or face-to-face. Courtesy and professionalism are required; how you present yourself is a direct reflection on your business.

- **Introduce yourself.** Don't assume the other person knows who you are.
- **Greet the other person.** A simple "Dear _____" or "Hello" or even "Hi" is just fine. Don't assume the other person is a man; I don't know how many times I've received email beginning with the words, "Dear sir"! Use the other person's name, if at all possible.
- **Be courteous.** We can't see each other when we write email; try to express yourself clearly in your writing. Sometimes a request sounds rude if it's not phrased properly.
- **Don't make demands.** No business is under any obligation to partner with you. Most small or home businesses are open to possible new JVs, but they can't possibly accommodate everyone! Ask nicely and you're more likely to get a favorable reply.
- **Take the time to browse their site.** Know what they sell and how your businesses can help one another.
- **Use the right email address.** Personally, I get extremely annoyed with people who simply pick up the first email address they find on my site - even if it's an autoresponder! Find the appropriate address for a real person.
- **Personalize.** If you know the site owner's name, use it. Also mention something specific about their website so that they know you actually visited it. For example, if she sells gourmet coffee, mention a specific package or offer she has on her site. This helps to differentiate you from all the spammers who generically say, " I was on your website, <http://www.yourwebsite.com/> , and think you've done a great job."
- **Spell check your writing.** It's difficult to read text that's riddled with spelling errors.

- **Get to the point.** Everyone's busy these days; be concise. Leave a link for further information, or even set up an autoresponder where your email recipient may request details.
- **Be specific.** People are often involved in several things at once. When you write to someone, tell them the name of the opportunity, product, proposal, or whatever it is you want to use in your JV.

Tell your potential JV partner exactly what you're proposing. Too often I get emails that say, "I have something you might be interested in. Can I call you?" Please ... tell me if it's a business opportunity, a joint venture, an affiliate program, or something else -- that way I can quickly make a decision on whether or not we should connect.

- **Don't spam.** Nobody appreciates junk mail. You certainly don't want a reputation as a spammer!
- **Follow guidelines.** Businesses may request that you send certain information along with your proposal. For example, writing articles and offering them to others with reprint rights is a great way to get some free advertising. Each newsletter editor will have article guidelines. One of my own is that sales letters are definitely not welcome ... and yet every week someone attempts to spam me a poorly written, thinly disguised ad that they're trying to pass off as an article.
- **Answer your email.** I know, I know; it sounds obvious but you'd be surprised at how many online businesses ignore email or don't answer them in a timely manner. That's not to say that every single email requires an answer, but use your judgment and promptly answer email from businesses you've already agreed to JV with.
- **If you must send attachments, virus-check them first.** Viruses are a very real threat these days... it's better not to send attachments at all, but if you have to, let the recipient know your intentions.
- **Sign your emails.** Don't just abruptly end your letter. At the very least, sign your name at the end of your email. Display your contact information: at the very least, provide your email address. You may also choose to leave your phone number and/or postal address too.

6 Profitable Joint Venture Arrangements

Joint venture agreements are as limitless as your imagination. Here are a few common ways to profit from joint ventures.

1. Ad Swaps

This is probably the most common of JVs. You and another newsletter editor within your target market agree to publish each other's ads. This is a good way to increase your exposure without paying any out-of-pocket expenses.

If the two of you have different circulations, you may want to offer a "parity swap" -- the editor of the smaller ezine runs the other editor's ad until he or she has received the same number of exposures.

For example ... let's say you have 100 subscribers and another editor has 500. She would run your ad once, while you run her ad 5 times. Some tips on requesting an ad swap:

- **Personalize each email.** Address the editor by name, if possible. Use his or her name in the Subject line as well.
- **Provide all the necessary information within your email.** Make it easy for the editor, and save her time. Give your name, your publication's name, circulation, description - and your ad. Tell her what type of ad swap it is (classified, sponsor, exclusive) and let her know how many ads run in each issue. Let her know what your own ad guidelines are.
- **Approach editors of smaller newsletters.** New editors are often eager for ways to increase their subscription base.
- **And, of course, make sure you only approach targeted newsletters.** No point swapping ads for your pets newsletter with a newsletter targeted to comic book collectors.



Sample Ad Swap Request

You're welcome to use this as a template -- please be sure to adjust it for your own newsletter.

Dear Lois,

My name is Angela Wu and I'm the editor of a newsletter called the Netpreneur's Notebook. I'm contacting you today to request a possible ad swap with the ABC Marketing Report.

The Netpreneur's Notebook caters primarily to eBusiness beginners with a circulation of 9000+. I run 3 ads per issue: 1 top sponsor ad plus 2 mid-sponsor ads, placed at key locations throughout the content. I'm proposing a one-to-one swap for mid-sponsor ads.

This is a great way for us both to increase our exposure at no cost! If you're interested, please reply with the details of your ezine and your ad. I will send you a confirmation and a run date upon receipt. My own ad is included below for your convenience, should you decide to use it.

Thanks for your time, Lois, and please feel free to drop me an email if you have any questions.

Best Regards,
Angela Wu
Editor, the Netpreneur's Notebook
mailto:angela@buildyourhomebiz.com

=====[Begin Ad]=====

blah blah blah

...

=====[End of Ad]=====

It takes time to build up a list of responsive and interested editors. Once you have the list, though, it's a simple matter to email them every couple of months with another ad swap proposal.

2. Affiliate Programs

Do you have your own product? If so, one way to set up a JV is to start an affiliate program of your own.

If you've ever sold an affiliate product, you already know how it works. You sell another company's products or services in return for a commission. When you have your OWN product, you make the same offer to others: they can sell YOUR product or service in return for a commission.

One common way to JV with others is to offer a commission rate above and beyond what "regular" affiliates get. For example, let's say the commission rate you offer affiliates is 25%. You can approach another editor or webmaster within your target market and offer her a 40% commission instead, if he agrees to promote and/or endorse your product to his list.

3. Royalties / Profit Sharing

Let's say you love to "create" stuff. You have loads of ideas and customers love your products. But the problem is, you don't have a lot of customers because you don't care for marketing (or don't know how to market).

One example of a JV is to engage in a profit-sharing venture with a marketer. You do all the creative stuff. He or she does all the marketing. Your marketer gets a percentage of your profits. Marketing is tough work; I've heard of businesses giving up more than 80% of their profits to their marketer! (the rationale behind it is that nobody would know about the product without marketing. No visitors = no sales)

Another example is a variation between an ad swap and an affiliate program. Ask someone who has an extensive list within your target market (it can be online OR offline) if they would be willing to slip your ad (online) or your flyer (offline) into their newsletter or mailing. In return, you'll share the profits with them 50-50 (and/or split the costs of the mailing, if you're using direct mail). Again, this is a win-win situation - you both make extra income that you wouldn't otherwise have.

4. Newsletter Co-Opts

This is another common JV. Editors display subscription boxes to each other's newsletters. Again, this is a popular approach to widening your audience without having to pay for it. Typically editors will do one of the following:

- **Display a joint subscription box on their websites.** The subscription box lists all the ezines taking part in the co-opt, usually with a checkbox beside it. The visitor checks the box if he or she wants to subscribe to that particular ezine. There are software solutions for this type of JV available all over the web; one of them is [Master Subscriber Pro](#). With Master Subscriber Pro, you pick who your JV partners are.

Another service is [SubscriberDrive](#). This one you *don't* get to pick who you want to co-opt with; you just place a snippet of HTML on your page and the script does the rest.

- **Use the "thank-you" page to invite subscriptions to their "partner" ezines.** The "thank-you" page is the page the visitor is taken to after he subscribes to the ezine. The editor places a small blurb that says something like, "Please subscribe to these other fine ezines" and then lists the subscription information for the other ezines taking part in the co-opt.

Please note that not every list host will give you the ability to edit or create your own thank-you page.

5. Discounted Products / Services

This JV can only be used if you have your own product or service. Contact a webmaster or editor within your target market (or a complementary market) and offer her *customers* a special discounted price on your own product or service.

I emphasize the word "customers" above, because I personally wouldn't want to make the offer to just website visitors (ie. people who are *not* paying customers). Why? Simply because I think your own customers who are paying full price may be a little upset if they were to find out that they could have gotten your product cheaper elsewhere.

Let's look at a couple of examples ...

- **Example 1:** You've written and are selling a book on a "common-sense" approach to weight loss - it's all about how to motivate yourself, your own experiences and struggles.

Who are good potential JV partners? Anyone selling low-fat recipe books, fitness books or tapes, exercise manuals, registered users of weight-loss forums, etc.

- **Example 2:** You sell web design services. Potential JV partners include any site that sells Internet services (NOT web design, though, since you would be their direct competitor) - web hosts, list hosts, Internet business sites ... you could even talk to your local Internet Service Provider and ask to include a flyer or brochure to their customers for discounted web design services.

You don't have to target only Internet services, of course. There are lots of people who use the web for pleasure -- for example, ask the webmaster of a family-oriented or reunion website if she'd like to offer her customers discounted personal websites.

You get the idea. :-) Be creative! There's opportunity everywhere.

By the way, "customers" can also mean "subscribers". You may want to offer your JV partner's opt-in subscriber list a limited time discount for your product / service.

6. "Barter" Agreement

Perhaps you have a special talent, one that you can use as a "bargaining chip" for JVs.

For example ... let's say you're good at creating graphics - customized buttons, backgrounds, clipart, etc. You could propose a JV in which you create the graphics for a website, in exchange for a continuous prominent link and recommendation on both the site and in each issue of the newsletter. Your JV partner gets quality free graphics; you get referrals.

The above example is oversimplified in order to illustrate the point, of course. You would need to work out the details of the JV with your partner.

JVs are excellent for expanding your business and your income.

I think that too many people online attempt to do everything themselves. We're all connected online and NOBODY - I don't care who it is - can know or provide everything to any market. By helping one another you'll be able to tap into opportunities you would not otherwise have. So don't be shy! If you have trouble crafting a JV proposal, try Yanik Silver's [Instant Sales Letter](#) package.

Important Considerations for JV Proposals

This is a list of some things to think about when you're figuring out a JV. It's by no means a complete list, but it's a start. Each JV will have it's own issues to deal with - and simpler ones such as ad swaps won't require this type of in-depth analysis.

Obviously it would be cost-prohibitive -- and probably unnecessary -- to draw up a formal legal agreement for simple JVs such as ad swaps. But if you're thinking of entering a more complicated JV where you and your "partner" have made special arrangements, a written agreement is a good idea as it can protect both you and your partner. By clearly laying the terms of your JV you're less likely to have misunderstandings or disagreements about your arrangement. Consult a qualified legal professional about your particular situation.

Specifics of Your JV

- **What are you expected to do?** What is your partner expected to do? Clearly set out the duties, obligations, and responsibilities of each partner.
- **Is there a timeline you need to meet?** Are you expected to perform certain tasks within a specific time frame? How often? Are you solely responsible for these tasks or will you be working with someone else? How will you coordinate the timing of your tasks with those of your partner's?

For example, let's say you and another site jointly publish a newsletter. Your partner is responsible for writing an article; you are responsible for locating links of interest related to the article topic. When will you expect your partner to provide you with a topic and/or the article so that you can do your part?

- **What is the duration of the JV?** Is it a "one-shot" deal, such as a single ad swap? Is it meant to run for a few months while both of you assess the effectiveness of your partnership? Or is it to run indefinitely, until one of you terminates the JV?
- **Decision-making and control issues** - who makes the final decisions on marketing? Content? Web design? This type of thing is particularly important when you're "sharing" content or web space.
- **Termination and rights to materials.** Who can terminate the agreement, and for what reasons (any reason at all, or only for a violation of the terms of the agreement? Who decides whether or not a violation has occurred?)? If the agreement is terminated, who owns the rights to the materials used in your JV? This can include sales letters and other promotional materials, articles, eBooks, etc.

Money Matters

Note that not all JVs are done directly in exchange for money (for example, they may be used to get referrals or leads instead). If it is for money, then you'll need to consider ...

- **How much will you be paid?** Is it a percentage of gross profits or net profits? Is it a certain dollar value per sale or subscriber? Is there an opportunity for residual income? For example, let's say you partner with someone to sell subscriptions to a Dog Training newsletter. Customers can choose to renew their subscriptions each month -- will you continue to get a 'cut' of these profits?
- **Revenue-sharing that indirectly results from your JV.** For example, let's say that your JV drives traffic to your partner's site and the visitor buys a different product than the one that you've been promoting in your JV. Chances are, those profits will *not* be shared between you. If this type of thing may be an issue in your JV, be sure to discuss it with your partner.
- **What "counts" as a "sale"?** What happens if you referred someone to the website, but that person didn't buy until his third visit? Will you be paid? [this is something that affiliate programs often deal with]

- **How long will you be paid for?** Is your JV meant to handle a series of one-time mailings? Is it a for a 3-month "testing period", or will it run indefinitely?
- **When will you be paid?** Are there minimum commission levels required for payout? Or will you always be paid every week (or two weeks, month, etc) for sales made the previous week? What's the time frame for being paid -- will you always be sent your payment within a week of the last pay period? Will you be paid everyday?
- **How will you be paid?** By check, PayPal, wire transfer, direct deposit? Are there any processing fees associated with your payment? Who is responsible for any fees incurred for converting funds to your own currency (if applicable)?
- **How will your sales, subscribers, and/or referrals be tracked?** Is there a reliable way for you to see how well your JV is working out for you?

You may end up compromising with your JV partner on some issues. It's not always possible to come to a complete agreement. You'll need to decide what's so important to you that you will not compromise on it, and what's open to negotiation.

Before You Propose a Joint Venture ...

Please make sure you have your proposal ready. Know what you're going to offer, put into place any technical details that you need to. In short, make it as simple as you can for someone to say "yes" to your proposal and get set up quickly.

Note that after your initial contact there's usually some negotiation. An **endorsed ad** from an editor to their newsletter list usually works very well - but in order to endorse a product, the editor needs to have seen it or used it.

To make it easier you may want to state up-front that you will provide JV partners with a complimentary copy of your product for review.

I've found that the best JV partners are those that have established ezines and/or high-traffic websites. For simple JVs such as ad swaps, you might as well find 20 or so good potential partners while you're looking anyways. You can find other editors at NetterWeb.com or use the [Lifestyles Publishing Directory of Ezines](#) (membership required).

Beginner's Primer to Search Engines

Chances are, you've used a search engine to find what you wanted online. Examples of search engines include [Google](#) and [MSN Search](#). You simply type in a search term, and the SE returns a list of matching sites for you to browse through. **This is why search engines are such an important part of your marketing: they deliver TARGETED visitors who come LOOKING FOR YOU.**

Search engines each have their own methods for determining the relevance of your site. This is what will determine whether your site is listed in the top 10 for your key phrases ... or whether it's listed, for example, #19835 out of the 3 million search results.

A few search engines still offer free submissions, but more and more, they're all moving towards paid inclusion. That means you pay the SE a fee to have them review your site. It doesn't necessarily guarantee that your site will be *indexed*, though, and even if you're listed you're not guaranteed a good position for your search phrase(s).

Search engine submissions are something you should budget for. You might also want to budget for a *search engine optimization (SEO) expert* to optimize your site for you. Assuming you use a reputable service, this greatly increases the chance that your web pages will be ranked in the top 10 or 20 listings of search results for your selected key phrases. If you're willing to put in the time and effort, you can learn to optimize your site yourself – see the resources at the end of this section for details.

Basic Search Engine Optimization Tips

Many online business owners now choose *not* to spend too much time on search engine optimization. Instead, they choose to use the [pay-per-click](#) SEs instead (covered later in this section). Here's why:

- If you find that you don't a good ranking with the search engines, then you have to start all over again.
- If you do rank well, someone may come along and copy you - and shove you further down in the listings. Or the search engine may decide to change its relevancy algorithms and you may drop out of sight.

That being said, making the initial effort to get a good search engine listing can pay off. When I first started online, I took the time to optimize my site. It was painful and tedious, but I got a top 10 ranking on several of the major search engines for several of my key phrases. I haven't touched it since, but I still continue to get a few hundred page views from the search engines every day.

NOTE: SE algorithms change all the time... later in this section you'll find the sites and tools you need to actually keep 'up-to-date' with them -- if you choose to do so.

Here are some things that play a role in how well your site ranks:

META Tags.

META tags are special HTML tags that describe the web page but do *not* affect how it's displayed. Instead, the information provided in the META tags is used by some search engines to help determine how you rank and what your listing will look like.

Whatever you put in your META tags will not be seen by visitors who are reading your web page. However, SEs might use some or all of your META tag information when providing a description of your site.

There are many types of META tags. The two that most concerns the SEs are the "keywords" and "description" tags. These tags are placed between your <HEAD> and </HEAD> tags. Here's an example.

```
<META NAME="keywords" CONTENT="Your list of key
phrases">
<META NAME="description" CONTENT="a brief
description which includes some of your primary key
phrases">
```

When choosing your key phrases, try to be specific enough that you're not competing with a gazillion other sites ... but general enough so that you actually get some traffic!

Choose multi-word key phrases instead of single keywords. Single keywords are hyper-competitive and it's not likely that you'll do well with them.

For example, trying to optimize your page for the keyword "business" is hopeless. Google brings up over 85 MILLION listings! On the other hand, "work at home moms" is a popular search term but the competition is much less fierce: around 11 thousand listings.

Key Phrases Within Your Content.

Make sure you have all your important key phrases within the first paragraph or two of your page. It'll help to show the SEs what your page is all about, and hopefully improve your position.

Do NOT "word spam"! For example, don't write something like:

Work at home jobs are fantastic. Many people are looking for work at home jobs, and there are many work at home jobs to be found on the Internet. You just need to know where to find these work at home jobs. MyWebsite is a fantastic place for finding work at home jobs.

Sounds ridiculous, right? And the SEs won't be impressed either. Try integrating your various key phrases to produce something that sounds good and won't get penalized:

[Work at home jobs](#) are becoming increasingly popular. Corporate downsizing, family obligations, and a host of other reasons are turning more people towards another alternative: [working from home](#). But how do you go about finding [home based jobs](#)? MyWebsite is here to help. We offer an up-to-date [home employment](#) forum ... [blah blah, etc]

Be sure to use your key phrases throughout your web page. This shouldn't be hard, since your selected key phrases should accurately describe your content!

Title Tags.

The HTML TITLE tags appear between the <HEAD> and </HEAD> tags.

```
<TITLE>Your page title, with your key phrases  
included.</TITLE>
```

Your most important key phrase(s) should be included in your title, so long as it still makes sense. The text you place within this tag is what will be displayed in the title bar of your visitor's browser.

Headline Tags.

Headline tags are typically placed right after the <BODY> tag. They look like:

```
<H1>Headline with primary key phrase</H1>
```

Once again, you can use this tag to your advantage by using your most important key phrase(s) within this tag. You don't necessarily have to use it for a headline; you can also use it to emphasize your opening sentence.

ALT Attribute.

The ALT attribute is part of the IMG tag, the tag used to display graphics on a web page:

```
<IMG SRC="http://www.yourdomain.com/image.gif"  
ALT="short description, including your key phrases">
```

People who have the graphics capability turned off on their browsers will see whatever text you put in the ALT attribute instead of the graphic itself. Include at least one key phrase here.

Links to Your Site.

Some of the major search engines calculate how many links you have to your site from others (ie. your [link popularity](#)) - and crawls those pages too, so that your "ranking" is also affected by the content of the sites on which you are linked.

In any case, reciprocal linking can bring you more traffic: from search engines, from return visitors to your site, and from visitors from other websites.

Don't Get Fancy.

Search engines are looking for content. Unless you have a real reason to use frames, *don't*. Frames split a page into several different "sections", each with its own HTML source. SEs tend to have a difficult time reading and indexing framed pages. Unless you know how to use the NOFRAMES tag properly, it's best to leave frames alone.

The same thing goes for Flash (a type of animation technology) and splash images (a large graphic, usually divided into smaller images which the user can click on to be taken to specific sections of the site). SEs need *text* to index; the better you accommodate them, the more opportunity you'll have to improve your SE position.

Don't Submit Affiliate Sites.

If you're an affiliate for a company (you get paid a commission to sell another company's products/services) then you have a coded "tracking URL". This special URL allows the company to track your sales, and may look something like:

<http://www.affiliatecompany.com/?id=12345678>

Anything with a question mark (?) in it will not be accepted by the search engines, so don't waste your time (or your sanity!) trying to get it listed.

What you should do is create a separate sales page for each of your affiliate products and upload it to your own domain. "Pre-sell" the reader so that he or she clicks on your affiliate link in an open frame of mind. Optimize this sales page for key phrases that are *specific* to your affiliate product. Then submit this one page to the appropriate search engines for indexing.

Optimize Specifically For ONE Web Page.

Let's say you sell a number of products on your site, including a book of weight loss success stories. You also sell fitness videos, weight loss books, and more.

When you're optimizing your web pages, optimize just for the one particular page you're working on. Let's use the example above ...

The weight loss success stories page is specifically about ... well, *weight loss success*. So optimize that particular page for key phrases such as "weight loss success" and "weight loss success story". Your weight loss book page could be optimized for terms like "weight loss book", "weight loss tip", and "weight loss plan".

Be Patient – and Prepared to Pay.

Many of the major search engines now ask for a "review" fee. This guarantees that your web page will be reviewed and possibly indexed quickly.

Some SEs still accept free submissions... but there is no guarantee that they'll even visit your site, let alone index it! If you choose to use free submissions, follow the guidelines for each search engine.



Techniques to Stay Away From!

Please don't try to "trick" the search engines into ranking you higher! SEs are becoming more and more sophisticated every day. They can penalize web pages if they detect "spamming" - this can include (but isn't limited to):

- **Overly repetitive use of a keyword or key phrase** in an effort to try to propel the page to a better position.
- **Putting key phrases within comments.**
- **Submitting the same web page using different URLs**, eg. <http://yourdomain.com/> and <http://yourdomain.com/index.html> .

sure to read each SEs submission policy.

- **"Hiding" colored text on the same colored background.** For example, putting white text on a white background. Some people "hide" their keywords on their page to try to boost its relevance.
- **Using keywords that are not relevant to your content.** For example, some people try to get a good listing for the word "sex" (or other related terms). They know that this is a popular search and so they figure they can get more exposure that way. Don't do it! Someone looking for adult content is not going to be interested in a nutritional supplement business opportunity. It's just plain annoying.

My advice is to learn how to optimize properly, and stay away from these types of "unethical" practices. If you don't want to fiddle with search engine optimization, you can either:

- Hire someone to do it for you. If you need a recommendation, email me – you'll find my address in the 'About the Author' section.
- Aggressively use pay-per-click search engines instead. This is covered later in this section.

Pay-Per-Click Search Engines

Getting targeted traffic is one of the most challenging parts about running an online business. Most of the stuff we do takes time, instead of the instant results we want!

However, there's one method that can help to give you an immediate boost in traffic and sales ... and that's the use of [pay-per-click search engines](#). You literally pay for your ranking for a particular search term.

The highest bidder for a particular key phrase is the #1 listing; the second highest bidder is the #2 listing; and so on.

You **only** pay for actual clicks on your link ... so if no one clicks, then you don't pay. Most pay-per-click search engines require you to deposit a minimum balance in your account. Each time someone clicks on your link, your account is debited.

For example: let's say you bid \$0.10 per click for the search term, "gourmet treats". The next day, out of everyone that searches for "gourmet treats", 10 people click on your link. That means you pay $\$0.10 \times 10 = \1 .



PPC SEs are a relatively "cheap" way to get targeted traffic. Don't be afraid to spend money in order to make money! If you could make \$2 for every \$1 you spent in advertising, wouldn't you do it?

Many small business owners like you and I spend hundreds, if not thousands *every month* by advertising on PPC SEs. They've tested their results and know which headlines and keywords work best for them.

Approach PPC SEs with the knowledge that you're going to be *investing* in promotion. **So long as you get a decent return for your dollar, be willing to make the investment.**

How to Maximize Your Results from the Pay-Per-Click Search Engines

If you've ever read up on how to do search engine optimization - with the META tags, ALT tags, keyword density, etc - you'll find the simplicity of PPC SEs a relief. You research your keywords and place a bid. Typically, the PPC SE will review and post your listings within a few days.



WARNING! Stay Away From ...

... Any PPC SE that pays surfers to click! The quality of the clicks is low, since the surfers are generally only trying to make money (and aren't interested in what you have to offer) ... but YOU are paying for those clicks!

1. You don't necessarily have to be the #1 listing.

Just try and get within the top 10 or 20 listings. Use the search engine or one of the tools described below to find out which key words are the most cost-effective. For example, you may find that "gardening supplies" may require you to bid \$0.25 to get a #5 ranking, but "gardening tools" may let you get the same ranking for \$0.10.

Remember that you only **pay for clicks**. So even if you can only afford a #30 listing, you still only pay if someone clicks on your link. Thus it's not necessarily a "bad" thing to pick up these lower-ranked listings anyhow ... heck, I figure that if someone is that determined to find my site, then he or she is more likely to be a targeted visitor, anyways. :-)

2. Track results for EACH PPC SE.

Each PPC SE will provide you with different quality clicks. You can track results by using different URLs for each listing. A simple way to do this is by using an ad tracker such as [AdTrackz](#) or [ROIbot](#).

3. Write a title and description for each key phrase.

This is extremely time-consuming, but my personal experience shows that it works better than having one generic title and description for every key phrase.

You can save time initially by writing a description that covers your entire website, and link your bids to the main URL. However, this tends to result in less targeted traffic.

Once your bids are online and producing traffic, you can adjust the titles and descriptions for each bid. How much you do will depend, of course, on how much time you have to spend on this activity. Track your results; if you find that different titles and descriptions don't produce a whole lot of difference in your bottom line, then don't do it. If it produces a significant difference, try doing 5 or 10 a day. You'll gradually start to see the results.

4. Send your visitor to a direct-sales page.

This ties in with the above tip. Instead of listing your home page, where you may offer dozens of choices, list a specific page on your site that is designed to get the visitor to do one thing - whether that's buy something, download a free trial, or subscribe to your newsletter. You're paying for clicks, after all, and you don't want to 'waste' them on a too-generic page that doesn't convert visitors into customers.

For example: let's say you sell individualized hand-crafted jewelry. You could bid, for example, on the search term, "hand-crafted silver bracelets". Instead of pointing your visitor to your online catalog (where all your jewelry is listed), point her to the direct sales page for the bracelet.

5. Be open to using different PPC SEs.

One of the PPC SEs where bids can easily get very expensive is Overture. I've seen bids that are more than \$5/click! This is far beyond the modest advertising budget of most home business owners.

Bid on the same term on several of the smaller PPC SEs. They don't get nearly as much traffic as Overture, but together they can get you some targeted clicks. So long as you continue to profit from them they're still worth the money.

6. Go for "quality clicks".

Generic search terms can be a dangerous drain on your marketing funds. Let's say you have a region-specific business, such as a dog training school in Chicago. You only take local clients.

If you bid on the generic search term, "dog training", you will attract people who don't live in your area. They click on your link - and you pay for that click.

Remember that with PPC SEs, you pay for every single click - regardless of whether or not that visitor is targeted. Try to balance being specific enough to attract the *right* visitors, and being generic enough so that you actually get some traffic.

7. Monitor your positions.

One disadvantage with the PPC SEs is that anyone can outbid you at any time, and instantly "bump" you from your position. You'll need to monitor this from time to time, to ensure that you're still getting the best possible results from your listings.

You can do this manually (very tedious) or you can pay for the use of an automated tool. You'll have to make this decision based on how much time you have and what type of budget you're working with. See the next section for a list tools that will help you with the PPC SEs.

8. Bid on loads of key phrases!

Many of the businesses that get the best results are the ones that bid on hundreds - even thousands! - of key phrases. You never know what search term people are going to use, so the wider you spread your "net" the more traffic you'll get.

Of course, only use targeted search terms. If you can't come up with 100 good, relevant search terms for your product, then don't try to force it. :-)

9. Calculate your Return on Investment (ROI).

Your ROI is ultimately what will determine how effective your marketing campaign is. Calculate your ROI by checking your website stats.

If you're promoting an affiliate program, you'll have to look this information up on their affiliate stats page, if available.

Anyhow ... Find out the average **unique** monthly visitors your website gets. This is NOT the same as "hits" or "page views".

Please check the Online Business Dictionary at the end of this manual for clarification.

Once you have that number, determine how many of them become customers. Use this figure along with the average cost your product/service to come up with a good estimate of how much each visitor is worth.

Here's a simple example to illustrate the point: Let's say you sell an eBook that gives you a profit of \$30. 1 out of every 100 visitors buys your eBook ... that makes the cost per visitor \$0.50.

This is called your **bid cap**. Say you bid 20¢/click. That means 100 clicks would cost you \$20. If we use the above example, 1 person buys the eBook. Your overall profit would be \$10.

Your bid cap is not a hard and fast limit; you can and should refine or adjust it as necessary. You may find that the quality of the clicks from the PPC SE is very high and your conversion rate increases, or you may find the exact opposite. Use it only as a guideline for the maximum limit you want to place on your bid.

10. Get your visitor's email address!

Direct some of your PPC traffic to your newsletter subscription page or to your autoresponder. Few people will buy something from you right away. By capturing your visitor's email address, you can gently sell to her time and time again.

11. Use key phrases - not key words.

Single words such as "business" are hyper-competitive, and the bids are likely to be extremely high. That's one reason not to bid on single key words.

The other is that surfers are becoming more "savvy" - instead of typing in a single key word, which returns a gazillion search results, they type in a more specific key phrase. By doing so the search results are much more targeted to what they're looking for. They don't have to wade through endless listings to find what they want.

So bid on multi-word key phrases. For example, instead of 'jewelry', choose 'handcrafted jewelry'.

12. Bid only on RELEVANT search terms.

This almost goes without saying ... you're paying for clicks, so make sure you're paying for *quality* clicks!

Useful Search Engine Tools and Websites

Here's a list of the best tools and sites I've found for optimizing and learning about SE positioning. Which tools and sites you choose to use/visit is up to you. You don't necessarily need them all. It depends on how much "in-depth" knowledge you want.

[Danny Sullivan's Search Engine Watch](#)

This is a very in-depth and up-to-date site on search engines. If you're looking for something related to SEs, chances are you'll find it here. Handy bits to check out include:

- Article on [Checking Your URL](#) on various SEs to see whether or not you've been indexed.
- [List of major search engines](#), including MP3 search engines, kid-safe engines, and more. Great place to look if you've got a specialty site.

[Overture's Search Suggestion Tool](#)

Use this tool to brainstorm key phrases. Type in a general term to get a list of key phrases that include that term. For example, if you're selling handcrafted jewelry online, type in the term, "jewelry". Overture's tool will return to you a list of related key phrases and how many times they've been searched for in the previous month.

Carefully search this list to look for more specific key phrases that you may want to target. Remember that very popular single keywords such as "jewelry" are far too general; the competition is incredibly fierce and chances are you won't be able to manage a decent SE position. **Choose multi-word key phrases.**

Tool Tip: Don't get too specific when you're using the suggestion tool. You want the tool to find as many related terms as possible. So instead of asking it suggest terms related to "Durable hand-crafted fleece pet beds", ask it to suggest terms related to simply "pet bed".

[WordTracker](#)

WordTracker is similar to the Overture Search Suggestion Tool. However, it goes a little further - you type in your key phrase and it spits out a list of related, relevant key phrases and ranks them according to popularity. It also tells you how many competing sites use those key phrases. And finally, WordTracker tells you what your chances are of making the top 10 listings on the major search engines.

[Search Engine Forums](#)

This is a good place to visit if you're looking for first-hand experiences with the search engines! It's a series of discussion boards where people go to ask questions, share advice, post new information, or let others know what types of experiences they've had with a particular SE. Excellent for getting another perspective on SEs (everyone will have something to new to share).

[Professional Optimization Services](#)

There are many firms that specialize in search engine optimization. Just use any search engine to find them. If you would like a recommendation, please email me at the address found in the "About the Author" section.

[Pay-Per-Click Search Engines](#)

This excellent site tries to review all of the PPC SEs. There are nearly 100 at the time of writing, but you probably don't need to pay attention to more than the top 10.

[The Keyword Bid Optimizer](#)

This tool can be used to automatically monitor bids on the Overture, Ah-ha, and FindWhat PPC SEs. It does a ton of stuff ... but to point out a couple of its uses, it will:

- Identify keyword bidding opportunities by showing pricing gaps for your keywords (a money-saving opportunity!).
- Allow you to easily manage an unlimited number of keywords.
- Notify you of changes in your bid positions.
- ... and much more (visit them for details).

[Manage Bid](#)

Great concept! Their Auto-Pilot system automatically checks the position of your listings in every PPC SE, then increases or decreases your bid according to your instructions. This is so that your bids are always 'optimized'. It takes into account how much you're willing to spend, and will can even 'top up' your account if you choose. ManageBid will keep you informed of every action it takes.

The Basics of Getting Listed on Yahoo!

Yahoo is one of the major indexes, and getting your site listed within its online directory can help your site draw a steady stream of targeted traffic.

Yahoo! is responsible for a good 70-80% of traffic on two of my other websites. There is *no guarantee* that you'll get listed. But here are some tips to help ensure that your site is prepared before you submit to Yahoo for consideration.

The Yahoo! "Business Express" Fee

Yahoo! charges a non-refundable annual fee for commercial websites submitted to the following categories:

- Business and Economy/Business to Business
- Business and Economy/Shopping and Services

This fee, which guarantees an expedited review of your web site within seven business days, is optional elsewhere. Read Yahoo!'s suggestions on selecting a category, and submit to the most relevant category -- even if that means you have no choice but to pay the fee. Read the details about the Business Express service at <http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/busexpress.html> .

Yahoo! can potentially bring you a lot of extra traffic. And the fee guarantees you a review within 7 days, which means you could be drawing the extra traffic within just one week!

It almost goes without saying that you should follow Yahoo!'s site submission policies *exactly*. Don't give them a reason to reject your site outright!

19 Quick Tips to Make Your Site Yahoo!-Ready

Since your hard-earned fee only guarantees you a review and not a listing, you want to be absolutely sure you've done everything you can to help ensure your site is ready.

Remember that there are no guarantees. Each reviewer is different ... all you can do is try to make your site as high-quality as you possibly can. Note that Yahoo lists sites in alphabetical order in one or more categories. You won't be able to influence where you're listed – the title of your site is usually your company name.

1. **Get your own domain, professionally hosted.** This is particularly important if you have a business website; you want your reviewers to know that you're **serious** about your business. It's all about credibility!
2. **Make sure you don't have any "under construction" areas.** If they're not ready, then don't put up a link. Websites are constantly changing but you don't want to give your site an "unfinished" look.
3. **Have a professional-looking site.** That means it should not be cluttered with whirling, prancing animated graphics mixed with 14 colors and 8 different fonts. Keep it simple, keep it clean. Try to use no more than 3 colors and 2 fonts (for example, one for headlines and one for body).
4. **Clearly define the purpose of your site.** What does it do, what types of products does it offer? Who's it for?
5. **Make the title of your website very obvious.** Yahoo! clearly states that surfers should immediately know your business name when they visit your site. Your business name should be evident in your:
 - Logo
 - Title (between your <TITLE></TITLE> tags; this appears at the top of your browser)
 - Copyright notice
 - Heading on your first page (between the <H1></H1> tags)

6. **All your links should be working - and should link to relevant content.** Broken links are a definite no-no. Now you can either check your links manually by clicking on every single link on every single page ... or you can spend a few bucks and use [NetMechanic](#). NetMechanic offers an HTML toolkit that includes a link checker for an affordable price. They have a limited free trial version too.

All your links should lead to content that fits within the theme of your website. For example, if you have a pets website, don't have links that lead to weight-loss information or business opportunities.

7. **Your pages should be fast-loading.** That means no monstrously-large graphics, no complicated scripts that take forever to execute. It means all your graphics should have the HEIGHT and WIDTH parameters in place. [NetMechanic](#) also offers a graphics optimizer that can compress your images for faster load times. Yahoo! staff are very busy people ... make them wait too long, and you run the risk of being rejected outright.
8. **Spell check!** Run your web pages through a spell checker ... and then double-check them yourself. It's important to have an actual real, live human read through your pages; spell checkers only check for **spelling**, not **context**. Here's a little poem to help get the point across – enjoy!

"My Computer Now Has A Spell Check..."

- Author Unknown

Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea
It plainly Marx four my revue
Miss steaks eye can knot sea.
Eye strike a quay and type a word.
And weight four it two say
Weather I eye am wrong oar write
It shows me strait a weigh.
As soon as a mist ache is made
It nose bee fore two long
And eye can put the era rite

I am shore your pleased two no
Its letter- perfect awl the weigh
My chequer tolled me sew.

9. **Get rid of useless ads and banners.** It looks unprofessional, disorganized, and just plain ugly to have dozens of ads strewn all over every page of your site. You can use them; just use them **sparingly**. I've personally found that text links work better anyways.
10. **Don't use loud, bright, or inappropriate colors or backgrounds.** If your eyes begin to water (or you're forced to squint in self-defense), it's time to use another color scheme. Same thing goes if you're using a color scheme that is **hard to read**. Black lettering on a white background is always a safe choice. If you can't bear the very thought for whatever reason, use dark lettering against a solid light background.
11. **Don't make your page too wide.** Make sure that dreaded horizontal scroll bar doesn't appear on your site! Use HTML tables to lay your page out properly.
12. **Offer a valuable site.** Yahoo does its best to list only "quality" sites. Slapping up a few banners, a guestbook, and a picture of your dog just won't do it.
13. **Be sure your site has a theme.** Your site is going to be categorized by Yahoo!, so it's got to fit one particular audience. Don't have articles on tick-removal on cats, how to manage stress during the holiday season, and steps to create a home business all on the same site. Keep your content tightly focused.
14. **Try to make your site "stand out" from the crowd.** This is particularly important if you're submitting your site to a popular category where there are hundreds, even thousands, of websites offering the exact same thing.
15. **Put your contact information on every page as well as on a separate contact page.** Display a postal address, phone number, and email address. At the very least, put your city, state/province, and country. If your site is region-specific, then

- put down **all** contact information (street address, phone number, email address, etc).
16. **Prominently display your company name.** Remember that Yahoo! is going to determine the title of your listing by the company name. It should be displayed in both your logo, on your contact page, and in your copyright notice.
 17. **Make sure your site is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** Find yourself a reliable web host! Wouldn't it be terrible if Yahoo! couldn't access your site for review? You can monitor your site availability using [NetMechanic's Site Monitoring Tool](#).
 18. **Your site should be viewable on many types of browsers.** At the very least, check your site using Internet Explorer and Netscape, the two most popular browsers. Once again, [NetMechanic](#) offers a tool called "Browser Photo" that will show you what your site looks like in all the major browsers.
 19. **Compare your site with others in your category.** It is absolutely critical to take your time and select the category where your website would fit best. Once you find it, visit several of the sites listed. Is your site of comparable or better quality? Does your site offer something that the others don't?
-
-



Do You Have a Region-Specific Business?

If you sell products or services that are meant for people in one particular geographic region, then submit to the appropriate Yahoo! regional index first. The URL for their regional index is <http://dir.yahoo.com/regional/>.

If you get listed in the regional index, you'll still get traffic from Yahoo! searches - search results display **all** information from their database, which means that they'll find matching sites from both their main and regional indexes. Plus you'll benefit from getting highly-targeted visitors: for example, if you run a veterinary clinic in Spokane, Yahoo! surfers looking for Spokane vets can easily find you within the index.

It's much better to get a few highly targeted visitors than hundreds of visitors who are "just browsing"!

3 Suggestions for a Top-Notch Yahoo! Search Listing

Yahoo! is a very selective [index](#): each submission is carefully reviewed by an editor and then listed in a particular subject category. It's basically a directory of sites. Surfers can click on categories to find what they're looking for.

However, Yahoo! also has a search engine component to it. What that means is, visitors can type in a search phrase and in return they'll get a list of websites that match their search.

Ideally, you want your site to be at or near the top of any search results for your particular key phrases.

Here are a few suggestions for scoring well on Yahoo! searches ...

1. **Craft Your Listing Using Your Top Key Phrases.**

When you submit your site to Yahoo!, you will be asked for a description of your site that can be up to 25 words long. Do not use hype. Do not make claims like "the best site!" or "incredible deals!". Keep it descriptive or Yahoo! will reject or edit it for you.

If you can keep your description LESS THAN 25 words long, do it. Why? Because Yahoo! has the right to edit descriptions; the less you give them to work with, the less likely your listing will be changed. Make sure as many of your major key phrases are in it as possible - so long as your description is still readable!

Try to submit a one-sentence description. Two sentences run a higher risk that one of them will be omitted entirely. **Example:** One of my other websites caters to the work-at-home crowd - people who are looking for flexible jobs or opportunities. My Yahoo! description is below ... you'll see my top two key phrases highlighted in **bold**:

Features information on starting a **home based work** career, tips on **work at home jobs**, business articles, and more.

2. Choose Your Key Phrases Carefully.

The phrase you want is one that's searched for often, but for which there isn't a whole lot of competition.

For example, let's say you sell gourmet gift baskets for pets. What are your choices for key phrases?

- **Gift baskets** - lots of competition; nearly 800 listings!
- **Gourmet gift baskets** - hmmm, getting better. About 50 listings.
- **Gourmet pet gift baskets** - 1 listing only!

Now it might be tempting to think that "gourmet pet gift baskets" is the perfect key phrase. There's only 1 listing, after all, so doesn't that mean that you'll have much less competition?

Yes ... but how often do people type in the search phrase, "gourmet pet gift baskets"? I know that it's not too likely that I would.

"Gourmet gift baskets" might actually be the better choice of out of the above list. Then you can add one or two more key phrases such as "pet treats" or "pet lovers" (less than 10 matches and 5 matches respectively, at the time of writing). You would try to work these key phrases into your description - for example:

Offers **gourmet gift baskets** and **pet treats** for discerning **pet lovers**.

The more relevant key phrases you can stuff into your description **without being redundant**, the more likely it is that you'll be able to benefit from search traffic.

3. Get a Domain with That Includes Your Key Phrase.

Yes, once again, if you don't own your own domain you want to get one now. It gives your business some credibility.

If you browse Yahoo's directory, you'll see that there are very few sites listed that are hosted on free servers. These sites are often stale, or they "go out of business". If Yahoo! were to list these types of sites, they could very well end up with a directory cluttered with dead links.

So if you don't have a domain, bite the bullet and get one. If you can get a domain that includes all or part of your top key phrase, all the better. You want Yahoo! to see at least part of your key phrase first within your URL ... emphasize it by placing it in your description too, so long as you do not get redundant.



If You Can't Get Listed ...

Work at getting links to your site, and at optimizing your site for your key phrases. [Google](#) is Yahoo's search engine partner; if Yahoo! cannot find a match for your search in its own database, it will provide results from Google. This is the next best thing to being listed with Yahoo. You still benefit from Yahoo's traffic ... the downside being that you're competing with all the other sites in Google's database. Google regularly "spiders" the web; if there are lots of links to your site, it's much more likely to be found.

How to Start a Subscription Site

You may have noticed a gradual trend towards password-protected "members-only" sites. Many businesses -- from tiny home-based businesses run by one person, to large corporations -- are adopting the subscription site model instead of depending on advertising revenue.

Why a Subscription Site?

There are lots of different products and services you can offer, so why choose a subscription site?

- **Residual income - you can make a decent income WITHOUT a gazillion subscribers!** If your site offers what it claims (or more) and you can keep your customers interested, then you'll get a good percentage of renewed subscriptions. Let's look at what this means:

In your first month you sign up 10 members. During your second, you sign up 10 more -- plus 8 of your previous members renew their subscriptions. That's a total of 18 memberships. In your third month you sign up 15 members, and 15 of your previous members renew. Now you have 30!

Let's say you make a net profit of \$10 per member. You go from an income of \$100 in your first month, to \$180 in your second month, to \$300 in your third!

And that's EVERY month. It's not unusual to see free newsletters with 20000 or more subscribers ... but you only need a very small fraction of that in order to make a decent living from a subscription site!

Of course, there's nothing saying that you have to charge a monthly fee. Many sites charge annually, or on a "pay-per-view" basis.

- **Low-risk for your customers.** A monthly subscription fee lowers the “risk” for your customers: if they don't like it, they can unsubscribe right away. Many people are much more willing to risk \$20 (for a 1-month subscription) than risk \$100 for an annual subscription. This translates into more customers for you.
- **It's cheap.** Subscription sites don't have to cost much to build and maintain. Other than marketing costs and order processing fees, you don't need a whole lot more over and above what you would normally need to run an online business. Membership management software is probably one of the bigger expenses.
- **Billing, memberships, and order-taking can be automated.** There are a number of third-party companies that will handle your membership processing and (re-)billing automatically for you - it's all completely hands-free!
- **You can probably do most of it yourself.** Presumably you'd start a subscription site on a topic that's near and dear to your heart; one that you're knowledgeable about and/or have a passionate interest in. A lot of research can be done on the Internet or in specialty magazines or other publications you already read.
- **People pay more attention to you.** Strangely enough, even though people tend to want everything for free, they also tend to pay less attention when it IS free. By charging for your knowledge -- and, of course, giving solid information -- people pay closer attention because you now have "expert" status.
- **You open yourself up to future joint ventures.** Once you've established yourself as a credible "expert" in your field (a successful subscription site is one way to do it), others within your market may approach you to ask for some type of partnership. You help one another to expand both of your business "reach" -- a potentially profitable win-win situation that often doesn't require a whole lot of extra work.

Issues Around Running a Subscription Site (the 'Bad Stuff!')

- **People have come to expect everything for free.** Heck, it's the Internet, right? Everything should be free! This attitude is

- changing slowly ... but the prevailing attitude is still, "If I can get it for free, why would I pay?" It's YOUR job to provide an answer that your prospects will accept. **This is probably the biggest obstacle you'll face.** Try to find a tight, specialized niche market.
- **Customer support can be time-consuming.** People forget their user names or passwords, or when there's a temporary problem with the server you could get dozens (or even hundreds! gulp...) of queries from subscribers wanting to know what's wrong. And don't forget about the barrage of general emails that need your attention! That means you'll be making up for lost time later.
 - **It's a lot of work.** Residual income isn't "free"... you still have to "win over" your customers if you want them to renew their subscriptions. And, depending on how much and how often you charge, this could mean updating your site regularly so that they feel that the price is justified. The amount of time you spend on your site will vary depending on what you offer. The "cost" of your time and effort required to create a quality subscription site is an important consideration.
 - **Billing issues.** Once we get excited over the prospect of earning a residual income, it's tough when credit cards are declined and/or cheques bounce. But it happens -- you may pour your heart, sweat and tears into creating the best subscription site in your niche market... but occasionally there are times when it seems like everyone's having a bad month financially, and you'll lose subscribers.
 - **Getting started is tough.** It's particularly hard when you don't already have an established list of contacts (for example, a free opt-in newsletter for your target market). In the beginning you might only have a few subscribers ... but whether you have 1 subscriber or 1000, you still have to provide the same great content and updates.
 - **Competition is getting tougher.** Subscription sites are becoming more common... especially in the much-loved "make money on the Internet" area!

Is a Subscription Site Right for You?

Ask yourself:

- Do I have the time and the willingness to regularly update my site (if required)? And if I don't, am I willing to spend the money to get help?
- Will I enjoy updating the site -- or will it become unending drudgery?
- Am I able and willing to handle member inquiries such as forgotten passwords, requests for assistance, and general inquiries?
- Is there a niche in which I have both knowledge and interest? Is there a market for a subscription site in this area?
- Am I prepared to offer a good members site even if subscriptions are slow in the beginning? This could mean that you're spending hours upon hours every week working on your site -- even if you have just small handful of subscribers.

While subscription sites offer a great opportunity to earn a substantial residual income, it's still a business -- and as such it's not easy. **Marketing** your new site is absolutely vital... and until you're able to get your offer in front of a lot of the **right** people, you won't see a lot of subscriptions.

How to Find and Research Content

How much information should you provide each time you update your members site? This will depend on the type of members site you have, what your competitors are doing, how many resources you have available to you, and several other factors.

Chances are, there are competing sites. Why should someone PAY to access your site? How are you different? What can you offer that your competitors can't?

The biggest problem I've found with members sites is that there's still a very dominant feeling that everything on the 'net should be free. That's slowly changing, but it's still the general attitude. Many people won't want to pay for anything if they can get it for free!

Your job now is to decide what type of content you want to offer -- and how much. There are several types of content... for example, one is a **resource**, which are small blurbs or writeups plus a link. Another type is an **article**, much like this one. Some sites organize their information in **databases**. Use whatever is appropriate for your members site.

General Content Tips

- **Decide what types of things you want to include.** For example, will you include interviews? Reviews? Discounted offers? Links to the best places to find whatever niche information you're offering? Tutorials? Videos or audio? Case studies? A Q&A column?

Whatever it is you decide, take the time to come up with a solid outline of what you plan to offer. It's probably best not to leave it up to "whatever I feel like doing this week"! People are paying to access your site and they're going to want to know what to expect.

- **Give details.** One thing I find particularly annoying is to pay for something, only to get vague information that doesn't help me at all. For example... I was offered a book for review recently. It was all about promoting free eBooks. Problem was, it didn't tell me WHERE to promote them. It just said, "ezine directories and software sites are great places to promote your eBook". Not very useful!

Once again (and I know you're probably tired of reading it!), people are paying to access your site. Give them a reason why they should continue to want to pay.

For example... let's say your members site uncovers the best shopping deals online. Good things to note on your site would be:

- Name of the product
- Description of the product
- Regular price vs. sale price
- When the sale ends
- Where the product can be shipped to
- How it's delivered (electronic, physical)
- Expected delivery time
- Whether shipping costs are included or extra

- Direct link to the product description, review, or ordering page.
- **Be organized and consistent.** Last year I joined a members site only to find it to be a haphazard mess of confusing links. I spent way too much time trying to figure out how to get to the sections I wanted to see! Come up with an easy-to-use format for your members area so that your customers know what they can expect to find, and how to find it.

Where to Do Your Research

- **Start with human-indexed directories**, such as [Yahoo!](#) and [Open Directory](#). These directories are the best for ensuring that only relevant content is added to the each category. They don't contain all the garbage you often see in search engines.

If you're looking for specialty niche search engines, try [Beaucoup](#) or [Finder Seeker](#).

- **Automate.** Use "spy" tools to get automatic updates on what's going on in your niche market. One such tool is [SpyOnIt.com](#). You tell it what to look for, and it checks the web continuously for this information. It will contact you if it finds what you're looking for. [Tracerlock](#) is a similar service.
- **Check for press releases.** Many sites offer distribution services for their press releases. This way you'll automatically receive recent news for your niche market. Some of these sites include:
 - [Internet Wire](#) - Internet-related news.
 - [Business Wire](#) - business, technology, and entertainment news.
 - [eReleases](#) - all topics.
 - [PR NewsWire](#) - all topics.
 - [Internet News Bureau](#) - all topics.
- **Use [Overture](#).** This is a "pay-per-click" search engine, meaning that businesses pay for the privilege of being listed. Because it costs money and each listing is reviewed, the results for each search tend to be relevant.
- **Visit message boards within your niche market.** It helps to hear things straight from the mouths of your target audience! Plus often times, you'll find other businesses like yours visiting

the board to give advice or tips. [Network54](#) is a great place to start looking for appropriate groups.

- **Use the search engines.** I love [Google](#) – no matter what I search for, it consistently provides relevant results.

How Often Should You Update Your Site?

The more often you charge, the more often you may need to update your subscription site.

For example: if you charge a monthly fee, you can expect to update your site at least a couple of times a month -- preferably weekly, so that your readers feel as if they're getting their money's worth. If you charge an annual fee you won't have the same update obligations.

Still, updating your content and/or keeping it 'fresh' is necessary if you're providing content that changes often (website links, special "deals or discounts", etc).



It's a Judgment Call!

Every members site is different. As with every business decision, you'll need to assess both your needs and your customer's needs. Some of the following points may or may not apply to your particular type of members site.

What do I mean? Here's a concrete example. [Consumer Reports Online](#) offers a monthly subscription option. You may already be familiar with them; they publish loads of information on a monthly basis.

On the other hand, a members site like [AllRecipes.com](#) doesn't necessarily need any regularly scheduled "updates", so to speak; it's basically a big database of recipes. Subscribers pay to access "special collections" of recipes, such as "Cooking Light" or "Low Carb".

- **Too MANY updates may trigger "information overload".** This is particularly true for sites that offer any type of tutorials, lessons, or business materials.
- **Too FEW updates may result in subscribers feeling "ripped off."** Give your subscribers enough updated content so that they feel that they're getting *at least* their money's worth. This is particularly important for sites that offer information that changes often.

For example, a members site that offers tips on the best shopping deals on the 'net will need to be updated regularly so that all the "hot deal" links are valid.

So how do you go about deciding on how often to update your site? There are lots of ways to do this, but consider issues like:

- **How hard is it to find information in your niche?**

If you have a never-ending supply of resources, then you can afford to update more frequently because you'll have enough to last a long time.

If, however, the information within your niche is very limited... and you can't come up with updates yourself ... well, you might have to consider finding yourself a new market. You should probably aim to do *at least* a couple of updates every month.

- **How often do competing sites provide updates?**

There are two main pieces of information you want here: how often the major FREE newsletters within your niche send out mailings... and how often the competing MEMBERS SITES within your niche update their content. You want to try to match or beat the number of updates provided (with QUALITY content, of course!).

Now, there are always ways to update more often if you need to. For example:

- **Break up your content into separate updates.** If your updates are long and packed with information, you could consider breaking it up into smaller chunks and updating more frequently.

- **Offer different types of updated content.** You don't necessarily have to offer the same types of updates all the time. For example... let's say you run a members site dedicated to providing entrepreneurial people with sources of inspiration. In other words, you provide success stories and business ideas.

Now pretend you want to update your site twice a week. The first update could be an interview with entrepreneur. You basically have just have to come up with the questions and then publish the interview. The second update could be something you write yourself: for example, a business idea, complete with estimated startup costs or materials, pros and cons, a list of resources for further reading, and so on.

Creating and Writing Sample Content

Time is major factor when it comes to membership sites. In order to provide the absolute best content that you can, obviously you'll be spending lots of time in research and writing.

It's a good idea to write up some sample content to see what kind of time commitment you're looking at. Consider:

- **How often will you update your content**, and how extensive will each update be (a newsletter, an eBook, an article, new listings, etc)?
- **How long does it take to update your content?** For example, does your membership site offer weekly newsletters? Then research and write at least 2 or 3 issues, right from scratch. Does your site offer tips on the latest and greatest shopping deals? Then research and write up a few dozen.

How long does each update take you? Can you handle the time commitment -- and does it leave you enough time for the other aspects of your business, such as marketing and customer service?

- **Are you willing to pay for help if you CAN'T handle the time commitment?**

Please don't skip this exercise. Researching and writing sample content gives you a very good idea of the time commitment involved in

providing quality content. If it's too time-consuming, then you may have to reconsider what you offer -- and/or how often you offer it.

Deciding on a Subscription Model

There are lots of ways to charge for content, subscription-style. Choose one of the models below, or combine two or more to suit your audience. These are by no means the only ways to charge for subscriptions... spend some time on the web and you'll likely find other models as well.

"Basic" Subscription Site

This is the most common and easiest of the subscription models. Charge a regular fee to access members-only content, hidden behind a password-protected area of your site.

Advantages:

- **Easy to set up.** There are many third-party processing companies that can provide you with quick, simple re-billing solutions.
- **Easy for the customer to understand.** There's not much to it at all -- subscribe and they get access to the content. :-)
- **Easy to incentivize.** If you normally offer monthly subscriptions, you can offer discounts for customers who subscribe for 3 months or more (or whatever time frame you choose). You give your customers the option to choose whatever subscription plan is right for them.

Disadvantages:

- **People forget.** It happens; everyone's busy and they may not have time and/or forget to login to your members site. In that case, if they haven't been using it, they may ask for a refund -- or worse, issue a chargeback!

When you choose an order-processor/membership solution, I highly recommend that you find one that will notify members when they're about to be rebilled. This gives them to opportunity to cancel, if they want to, and it keeps them informed about subscription fees.

- **Customer may be uncomfortable with automated rebilling.** In fact, this very thing may prevent people from subscribing at all.

Premium Content

Some sites offer a limited amount of content for free. To subscribers, they offer full access to content -- and perhaps even something as simple as ad-free viewing.

Advantages:

- **Customer makes an informed decision on whether or not to subscribe.** As visitors to your site, they've had the opportunity to browse and read what you have to offer. They already know whether they like your "style" and enjoy your content.
- **You can build a loyal audience, which you may be able to "convert" later.** Your free content draws people back time and time again, to see what's new (assuming you update your site, of course! Or you have "sticky" tools -- interactive calculators are a good example). If they like what they see and want more, they may become paying subscribers.
- **Even if a customer cancels, you don't necessarily "lose" him forever.** If he liked your site enough to subscribe, he may continue to read or use the free content you offer. There could be any number of reasons why he cancelled -- lack of time, no money, who knows? At any rate, you're still "in touch" with him, and he may re-subscribe later.
- **Build traffic!** Because you offer some content for free, chances are more likely that visitors will refer others to your site. Some of those referrals may turn into paying subscribers.

Disadvantages:

- **Not enough incentive to subscribe.** "There's lots of free stuff, so why would I pay?" Give away too much free content and readers will be unwilling to pay. Give away too little and they might not have enough information or incentive to subscribe.

Voluntary Contributions

I've run into a few businesses that rely on the goodness and honesty of people. They figure that if someone likes or enjoys their product or service, they'll pay what they can to keep that product or service available.

I ran an informal survey of my subscribers not too long ago about whether or not people would pay for content -- out of the people who said they would, the majority was in favor of making voluntary contributions.

Advantages:

- **You only have satisfied customers!** You wouldn't make a contribution to a site that you hated, right? Anyone who contributes is going to be a happy customer.
- **Repeat business and referrals.** Happy customers become repeat customers, and the chances of them renewing their subscriptions for another year are excellent. Happy customers can also become great advocates for your business -- don't underestimate the power of referrals!
- **If a customer cancels, you don't necessarily "lose" him forever.** Again, since visitors can use your content/tools for free, even if they cancel for whatever reason, they'll probably stick around -- especially since they were happy enough to make a voluntary contribution at one point.

Disadvantages:

- **If people can get it for free, they may not pay.** This is always the big thing, isn't it? It helps to offer extra features or incentives to people who decide to make a contribution.

Pay-Per-View Options

Pay-per-view isn't really a subscription model; rather, it's typically used in conjunction *with* a subscription model. That is, a site that charges a basic membership fee for subscribers to access their content may also offer select content on a "per-view" basis.

Here's an example. A dog training website could charge a basic subscription fee. It could also choose to place the most commonly-requested "tutorials" -- say, the "How to Train a Dog to Walk on a

Loose Leash" -- into a smaller "package" and charge a small fee to view it.

Advantages:

- **You earn a few extra bucks.** Some people might not want a subscription to your whole site, but just want a small, specific piece of information. These are sales that you might not otherwise get without your pay-per-view option.
- **Potential new customer.** If the reader decides that he likes what he sees within his pay-per-view content, he may later decide to subscribe to your site.

Disadvantages:

- **A little more administrative work.** You'll have to manage the billing, delivery, etc. for the pay-per-view option separate from your regular subscriptions.

Successful Subscription Sites: What Are Other Businesses Doing?

Internet marketing/business sites aren't the only types of successful subscription sites -- there are plenty of niche markets for you to explore!

It helps to look at other sites to see the different varieties of subscription sites or "pay-for-content" sites available. They're not all the same, and a particular model may work better for your site than the others. Visit each of the sites below -- I've tried to list a combination of big and small sites -- and any others you can find, to see how they handle their subscriptions.

1. [Consumer Reports Online](#). This is an example of a straight subscription site -- visitors pay a monthly or annual fee in order to access all content.
2. [AllRecipes.com](#). One of my all-time favorite sites! This huge content-site offers thousands of recipes. Members can join for free to get a variety of extra features (including their own online "recipe box")... but then there's also a subscription option that gives readers access to various "premium

collections" of tested recipes, ie. "Low Carb", "Cooking Light" etc.

3. [Salon.com](#). Uses the "premium subscription fee" model; only paying subscribers have full access to certain columns, cover stories, art/photo galleries, and no ads!
4. [Wall Street Journal](#). Offers very limited free content. Only subscribers have access to full content. People who are already receiving the print version of the WSJ receive a discount on the online version.
5. [Cheapskate Monthly](#). Another straight subscription site that charges a small fee annually. Delivers both a paper newsletter and an online version. Great example of a 'consumer' newsletter that charges a very low annual fee, but which is very successful and caters to a large market.
6. [The Medical Letter](#), on drugs and therapeutics. Uses a regular subscription model combined with a pay-per-view or pay-per-item model. Visitors pay a small one-time fee to directly access only the article or item of interest.
7. [Tyler's Cottage Rentals](#) lists cottage rentals throughout Canada. Everyone can search the site, but there's a catch: only paying subscribers will have access to the contact information for each listing.
8. [SelfPromotion.com](#). At first glance, this might not seem like a subscription site -- but it is. The owner calls it a "share-service". You can try it for free, and if you like it, you pay what you think it's worth. Contributors get access to a whole bunch of neat tools to help you in your marketing efforts, and your promotion data is kept for one full year. To keep it, you need to renew your subscription each year.
9. [Dismal Scientist](#) - straight subscription site on economic analysis. Offers a regular month-to-month subscription fee, but also extended discounted subscriptions, multi-user subscriptions, and site licenses.
10. [Genealogy.com](#) - great example of a site that combines different subscriptions. They offer regular monthly subscriptions, as well as discounted extended subscriptions and 'combination' packages.

11. [Fashion Savvy](#) - here's a subscription site for women that shows them how to cultivate their own 'personal image'. Charges an annual subscription fee.

Pricing Tips

It's tough to know what to do when you're determining a price for your memberships. You've already checked out your competition (you *have*, right?!)... they're a great place to start.

Compare what your site offers to what your competitor's sites offer, and check the price of their memberships. You want to be competitive while *not* charging so little that you undermine the quality of your content! And, of course, you want to be sure that you can profit. :-)

HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU CHARGE?

There's no hard and fast answer to this question; basically, you want to charge what the market will bear.

The only way to know the "perfect" price is to test it! Test different price points; you may find that **even though you raise the price, your sales may not drop at all** -- they might even increase. In fact, you could still come out ahead:

- Let's say you charge \$9.95/month and your order processing fees are 20% (\$1.99), for a profit of \$7.96/month. You get an average of 10 subscribers per month, for a total profit of \$79.60.
- Now let's say you raise your price to \$19.95/month. Less your processing fees, you have a net profit of \$15.96/month. Even if your new subscribers drop to 6 a month, you still come out ahead with a total profit of \$95.76.

Price is often NOT a barrier! Remember that it's how prospects **perceive** you that counts... and a low-priced offer may raise the question in their minds, "Why is it so cheap? Maybe it's not any good."

Of course I'm not saying that you should go out and charge a ton of money if your product or service doesn't justify doing so!

Generally speaking: the more "common" the information provided within your members site, the less you can charge. The more specialized it is, the more you can charge.

For instance... a members site that offers new dessert recipes each week is pretty general; there are loads of sites where you can find free recipes, and goodness knows there are lots of recipe books in stores. Thus you'd probably do best to charge on the low end of the scale (eg. \$29.95 a year).

But let's say you instead offer dessert recipes for people with wheat or gluten allergies. This is much more specialized information and chances are you could charge more for it.

Your perfect price is simply what people are willing to pay.

REBILLING AND PRICING

One of the great things about subscription sites is that you can build a residual income from rebilled subscriptions. **How often should you rebill?** Once a month? Once a year? Every quarter?

As with everything, it's going to depend on what you sell. **If you sell low-end subscriptions** (like the above cooking site example), then you may want to charge annually -- it probably wouldn't be worth your time to charge on a monthly basis; the small monthly fee of \$4.95/month or whatever you charge would dwindle to practically nothing once you've paid your order processor their fees.

On the other hand, **if you have a highly specialized site** -- for, say, "professional orchid collectors" -- then you can afford to charge more. Let's assume you charge \$199/year. Some people will hesitate at the high price tag ... but if you ALSO offer a monthly price option -- say, \$19.95/month -- then you'll pick up the "price-sensitive" subscribers.

Order Processing and Site Security

Membership management is one of the issues with subscription sites. Naturally, it would be nice to be able to automate as much as you can so that you don't have to spend valuable time doing tedious administrative work. Specifically, member management issues include:

- **Password-protecting your members area.** Obviously you only want paying members to have access.
- **How to distribute user names and passwords.** This is one of the most tedious tasks, if you had to do it manually (which, thankfully, you don't!).
- **How to bill or re-bill your customers.** Many membership sites charge on a regularly basis (monthly or annually are the most common). How do you do this automatically?

There are a lot of solutions available to you. Some order processors (the companies that handle subscription sales for your website) will also handle site security for you (details below).

Be sure to look for a solution that allows for automatic distribution of user names and passwords. You definitely don't want to do this by hand! Plus you should have the option of manually adding, removing, or deleting members -- this type of thing is convenient, for example, if you want to offer a free membership to a potential business partner.

Please note: most site security solutions require you to have your own "CGI-bin." This is where you can install your own scripts. You'll need to check with your web host to find out whether there are any fees or restrictions on what you can install.



Password-Protection for Free Trial Memberships

want to do, here are a couple of options:

- [MemberSites.cx](#) - nominal one-time fee. No information on whether or not username/password assignment and distribution is automated; ask them if you're thinking of using them.
 - [Account Manager Lite](#) – free download! Automated user/member signup and lots of administrative options. There's also a "Pro" version available.
-

Order Processing Tips

Accepting credit card orders is a "must." Not doing so will likely result in a significant loss of sales; credit cards are convenient, fast, and most people have them.

Here are a few order processing solutions for a members site. Before you choose one, think about stuff like:

- **Webmaster customer service.** If you experience any problems with your account and/or you just need a little extra help, can you get some attention, FAST? Problems shouldn't normally occur... but if or when they do, it's important that you're able to get prompt assistance. Your members expect your site to run as smoothly as possible!
 - **Members customer service.** Does the company provide any sort of service to your members? For example, is there a way that your members can retrieve forgotten user names or passwords without contacting you directly? Will the company handle inquiries about billing issues? This type of help is very handy; it frees up your time to concentrate on more important business issues.
 - **Control over pricing.** Do you have the flexibility to set a number of different prices and/or length of memberships? This is a convenient feature - for example, you may make arrangements with another business to offer discounted subscriptions to your site.
-

- **Fees and reserve.** You don't necessarily want to look for the company that offers the lowest fees; balance the fees with reliability and service. A **reserve** are the funds that are temporarily withheld from your sales in case of future refunds or chargebacks. They're typically held for 6 months, and then credited back to you, if unused. I'm personally not keen on a high reserve -- heck, I earned the money and I like to have it in my hands as soon as I can.
- **Rebilling notification.** Will the company notify members when they're about to be rebilled? Doing so will help to avoid misunderstandings ... sometimes people forget that they've signed up for automatic rebilling.
- **Other payment options.** Credit cards are essential, of course, but there are many people who don't have them. An online chequing option is wonderful (people can type in their check information online -- it saves them from physically writing a check and sending it through regular postal mail). Some companies will also offer a toll-free telephone ordering service (that may be additional fees -- please check).
- **Restrictions.** Most companies have rules about what types of sites they'll handle. The most common restriction is against any type of adult site. If you have special needs or an unusual business, please check with the company first to see if you'll be able to work together.
- **Other features.** For example, is there an ad tracking feature you can use to analyze your marketing campaigns (and see which campaigns are producing RESULTS)? Will they handle an affiliate program for you? Can you email your members quickly and easily? Are you able to view histories of your signup stats, cancellations, refunds, and so on?

Many of the above features are important in that they help you to see "trends" ... for example, you might notice that most of your signups occur during the first week of every month. In that case you might want to step up your marketing efforts during that first week to try to boost sales even further.

Order Processing Companies

- [GloBill Systems](#) -- **recommended!** GloBill offers lots of features (including a built-in affiliate program, ad tracker, and lots of stats) and great webmaster support. Takes credit cards, online checks, and phone billing.
- [iBill](#)
- [Verotel](#)
- [Revecom](#) – offers the lowest fees I've seen so far. Can be used for tangible products as well. Shopping cart included with your account. Merchants can charge in USD, GBP, or the EURO. Note that Revecom currently doesn't handle membership management for you.
- [Membership+](#)
- [Member Pro](#)
- [NetBilling](#) – for people who already have their own merchant account.

Effective Ways to Start Attracting Paying Subscribers

Marketing plays a big role in the level of success you have with your subscription site. You'll find details on many marketing techniques by looking through the [Table of Contents](#). Here's how to modify some of those techniques specifically to promote a members site.



A Note Before We Begin...

Some of these methods won't do you much good until you have traffic or your own opt-in newsletter list. It's sometimes better to work on building these two things first BEFORE you begin promoting your subscription site.

people who expect everything online for free.

"Traffic" isn't everything... but a decent amount of traffic and your own opt-in list will help your promotional efforts significantly.

1. Use Your Opt-In Newsletter.

Building your own free opt-in list is undoubtedly one of the best ways to market online. Here are a few suggestions on how to use your list to generate interest in your new members site:

- **Announce it!** Send an exclusive mailing to your list to announce the launch of your new private site. An [exclusive mailing \(or solo ad\)](#) is a message that's sent out, all by itself, with no other content or ads. That way you can ensure you have your reader's undivided attention.

Tell your readers what's in it for them. Why should they sign up? How is it going to help them? To help get things off to a strong start you might consider offering an extra bonus or perhaps even a discount, just for subscribers.

- **Promote it!** In every issue of your newsletter, include a few snippets from your members area to help capture their interest. And at the bottom of the newsletter, place the headlines for your most recent update on your private site.

For example... you're the editor of a free newsletter that offers weekly cooking tips. You also run a private site that's updated with weekly dinner menus, focusing on quick, easy-to-prepare meals that use ingredients commonly found in people's kitchens. You always try to find creative ways to minimize the amount of time people spend cooking.

In your weekly issues of your free newsletter, you can tempt people with a small "taste" of what members get: you could offer Monday night's recipe... followed by just the headlines for the rest of the week. **Make sure the headlines are exciting!**

You want your reader's mouths to water in anticipation of seeing the next recipe. :-)

Of course, you can run other tips and hints as well, if that's what your audience wants.

- **Offer "specials" or discounts.** Every so often it's nice to give your readers a discount that's only available to them. They know who you are, they know the quality of your work, and they're much easier to convert to paying customers than a complete stranger would be.

Send out a time-sensitive discount. It's important that it's time-sensitive; this will create a sense of urgency and encourage them to sign up NOW, rather than waiting until "later."

If you don't have your own opt-in list, you should seriously consider building one. It's far easier to get people to sign up for a FREE subscription, then to sign up for a paid one. As you develop trust and show them the type of quality you're capable of producing, you can market your private site to them.

2. Work With Other Editors.

You're not restricted to using just your own opt-in list ... use the lists of other editors in your target niche as well!

- **Regular old ezine advertising.** Send out an exclusive mailing to a newsletter catering to your target market. It's even better if you **barter** for the ad or **swap** ads. This way you won't have to pay any out-of-pocket expenses.
- **Ask for testimonials.** Set up editors with a free subscription (see below) and ask for feedback. This will do a couple of things: you'll get valuable criticism from someone in your market; and you'll get testimonials that you can use in your promotions (ask permission!).
- **Send out endorsed mailings.** If the editor loves your stuff, then ask if he or she would be willing to personally endorse your site to his readers. Offer something in return -- an ad, a few free memberships to his subscriber list (he could run a contest to select the winners), discounted memberships for his readers, etc.

- **Give away an eBook.** More on this below... the general gist of it is, email editors and ask them if they'd like to offer their visitors a free gift (your eBook). It's free promotion for your private site!

3. Selectively Give Away Free Samples.

The key word here is **selective**. You don't want to offer free trial subscriptions to everyone; that brings in people who are just "curious", or the "freebie-seekers" who just can't turn down something free.

To help combat this problem, **ask for something in return to help "qualify" the prospect. This is usually his or her email address.** Have the prospect fill in a form to get access to your members site. High-priced membership sites can get away with asking for more information, and you can explicitly state that the request for a trial subscription must be "approved" first. Low-priced membership sites usually just capture an email address and add the prospect to a mailing list.

Either way, getting an email address allows you to follow-up with the prospect to try and convert him to a paying customer.

You can also contact other editors or webmasters in your market. But be careful! **You don't want to inadvertently give your direct competitors a look at what you're doing. :-)** Other editors and webmasters can give you some great feedback and are a potential source of testimonials.

4. Create and Distribute a Free eBook.

See the section on [The Basics of eBooks](#) for a tutorial on using free eBooks for traffic and profit.

Here's a quick summary of how it works:

1. **You create the eBook.** You don't necessarily have to write it all yourself, but make sure it offers valuable content.
2. **Add links back to your members site.** Throughout the content, where appropriate, you can point the reader back to your private site. You can also include your logo and URL on the

cover page and/or in the header or footer of each page... or on as a separate sales letter at the end of the book. It's up to you - just be sure that your eBook doesn't read like one big sales pitch. Great content is very important.

3. **Promote.** List your eBook on as many ezine directories and download sites as you can find. Place a write-up and download page on your own site(s) as well.
4. **Offer your eBook to others.** Contact other editors or webmasters in your market and ask if they'd like a copy of the eBook to offer as a bonus to their own visitors or subscribers. You may want to offer to customize the eBook with their logo and URL as a further incentive. The more people that take you up on your offer, the wider your "reach"! They get something valuable to give away to their customers, and you benefit from their traffic.

It's your very own marketing network - and it's free! This is a very powerful way to generate interest in your site.

5. Write Articles or Columns.

If you're writing a newsletter anyways, you probably have a whole store of tips or articles. Find a great site (in your target market) that has a decent amount of traffic, and offer to write a regular column or article in exchange for a link back to your site.

The site's visitors will get to "know" you and instead of being some faceless, nameless stranger, you can build your reputation for being helpful.

Likewise, if you prefer not to be stuck with a "regular writing schedule", just distribute the articles you write for your own newsletter to other editors. More about distributing articles is available in the section called [Get Published! Write Articles for Credibility and Profit](#).

6. Joint Venture with Other Businesses.

Propose "win-win" partnerships with editors and webmasters in your market. Find people who offer complementary (not competing) products... then try:

- **Discounted memberships.** You could offer their customers special membership rates, even if it's just for the first month.
- **Free trial memberships.** Similarly, you could offer their customers a 1-month trial membership -- but be sure to capture their email address in return, so that you can try to convert them to a paying member after the trial has expired.
- **Generous affiliate commissions.** If you run an affiliate program for your members site (some companies such as [GloBill](#) and [iBill](#) offer easy-to-use affiliate program solutions), then consider offering potential JV partners a generous commission that's over and above what you normally offer.

For instance, if you normally offer a 25% recurring commission, then offer your JV partner at least 40%.

- **Contests.** Offer ezine editors the chance to give away a free membership (you decide the length) to one of their subscribers in exchange for running your ad (preferably an endorsed ad!). If you have an affiliate program, you can also suggest to the editor that he or she use the affiliate URL within the ad so that he'll earn commissions off any sales he makes.

This gives the ezine editor a great bonus item to entice people to subscribe to his newsletter... plus you get extra exposure.

You'll need to work out the details of your proposed JV before you contact other businesses.

7. Use Your Headlines.

Place your headlines within each issue of your free newsletter so that readers know what they're missing if they're not members of your private site. You may also want to place them on the sales page of your site; it peaks interest and when people click on the headlines, they're taking to the members login page -- but they won't be able to get in unless they subscribe!

I've tried this myself with mixed results. It worked extremely well for a couple of months; after that, signups dropped drastically and I removed the headlines from my site. Be sure to put a tracking URL on your page to see how visitors are responding to this technique.

Note that you don't necessarily have to use the headlines for your site as the "enticement." In my own free newsletter, I don't promote the headlines for the subscription site -- I offer a series of 10 free reports that has proved both popular with the recipients for the content, and popular with me because of the excellent conversion rate!

Price Flexibility and Options in Promoting Your Site

Everyone will have their own "price sensitivity." Many people won't even bat an eye when spending \$20; others are open to spending \$100 or even more, so long as it's something they really want; still others may never want to spend money.

Provided that you still make a decent profit AND it's suitable for your audience, you can offer a number of flexible pricing options to help capture new subscribers.

Subscription Options

- **Monthly subscriptions** are great for people who are price-sensitive, or who don't want to make a big commitment without first seeing what you have to offer.

Be aware, though, that if you sell more commonly-available information (usually consumer information such as recipes or money-saving tips, etc), monthly subscriptions might not be a feasible option -- especially if you're only charging \$20/year! Remember that you have to pay transaction fees every time you take an order. Some order processors state that products or services that sell for under \$7 usually aren't worth selling through credit cards.

- **Long-term subscriptions** such as annual or semi-annual (every 6 months). Offer discounted subscriptions -- the longer the subscription, the higher the discount. Some people will appreciate the opportunity to save money while buying something they want.
- **Trial subscriptions.** You can offer trials for anything from a few days to a month - and they can be free or for a small fee. BUT... depending on what you sell, trial memberships are often not long enough to effectively "sell" the prospect on your site. And often times you end up providing a lot of support to people

who are only "curious" and not really in the market for your stuff.



My Experiences with Free or Trial Subscriptions

My own experience show that it was NOT worth it to offer trial subscriptions (except to other editors or webmasters - potential Joint Venture partners). I tried 3-day trials, 7-day trials, and even 1-month trials briefly. They were all miserable failures when it came to converting people to paying customers. This experience taught me a few things, such as:

- **Trial subscriptions aren't typically enough to convert "skeptics."** Some people simply don't believe that they should pay for anything; for instance, someone may look at a recipes site and think, "I can find these recipes elsewhere for free. I'd rather do the looking myself than pay money just to save some time."

Another example is from this site itself. One person who had a trial membership emailed me to say that she was going to find a business opportunity where she could "start making money right away, instead of doing all that other work"!

- **People who ARE truly interested will sign up** -
- trial subscription or not.

You will need to test this out for your own market.

Go ahead and offer various trials, and give it a chance to work. Keep track of how many of your trial subscribers are becoming paying customers -- if you have a high conversion rate, keep the trials. If you don't, dump them.

"Pay-Per-View"

Some people are only looking for specific bits of information. You can profit from this too -- even if they don't want a full membership to your site.

Let's take another look at our "cooking" example from above. Your cooking site offers weekly menus (and the associated shopping lists) to save the busy person time and hassle. Each week you post the menu headlines on your site.

Now a visitor drops in. She's frazzled because she has a particularly busy week ahead of her, and she's looking for quick and easy recipe ideas. She sees your menu headlines -- and decides she wants only one particular menu. You can give it to her using a [pay-per-view](#) option. **She gets exactly what she wants; you make a few extra bucks.**

Sales of Your Most Requested Content

Feedback from your members and from your website demographics will tell you what content is the most popular. You can always compile the most popular (and related) content into separate booklets and sell them.

Examples? You could sell small groups of recipes like:

- "Healthy, Delicious Desserts in Under 15 Minutes"
- "The 'Must-Have' Grocery List: What to Stock in Your Kitchen so that You Can Make Nearly Anything"
- "Easy Chicken Dinners for the Busy Cook"

An easy way to offer eBooks for immediate download is to use [Digibuy](#). Order taking and delivery are automated, and there are lots of great little features you'll find handy.

The Power of Testimonials and Referrals

You know you have a great product. But you created it, so naturally visitors will think you're biased! Use the power of testimonials and referrals to help you increase your conversion rate and thus your profits.

The Link to Conversion Rates and Testimonials/Endorsements

One of the most effective ways I've found to boost my [conversion rates](#) is to personally [endorse](#) or recommend a product/service - or have others endorse yours.

Your conversion rate is the percentage of visitors that become paying customers. I've found that, on average, a "regular" advertisement to a newsletter list brings about a 1-2% click-through rate (the number of readers that click on your link) and a similar conversion rate.

An endorsed ad, however, has brought me significantly higher rates: from 2-7% click-through ... and as high as a 5% conversion rate!

Of course, there are a lot of factors that influence what type of click-through and conversion rates you get ... but I have *consistently* found that all other things remaining the same (audience, ad copy, ad type, etc), endorsed ads outperform just "regular" ads.

In this section we'll take a look at how and where you can endorse your products ... and how to obtain and use testimonials, which are basically "other people's" endorsements of your product.

Endorsements work particularly well with people you've developed a "relationship" with - for example, you endorse a product to your newsletter subscribers ... or another editor endorses your product to his or her own newsletter subscribers.

These techniques work whether you're promoting an affiliate program or you're selling your own product/service. They take time - and work - to put into play, but the potential return is significant.

Want a "live" example? Visit the [Online Business Basics home page](#).

Over time, you'll eventually have a "file" of testimonials from which you can pick and choose. It's a very powerful way to establish trust and credibility!

How to Harness the Power of Testimonials

Think back over the years. Whenever you've eaten in a good restaurant, or bought something you've liked, chances are you've mentioned it to someone - your family, a friend, a co-worker. It could as simple as, "You should try the new seafood restaurant over on 4th Street. We ate there last Friday and had the most incredible shrimp dinner I've ever tasted."

That's an endorsement. It works in much the same way online. You simply tell people how a product/service has helped you personally (or what you like about it) ... those that know you will seriously consider what you have to say and may go take a look for themselves.



Rule #1: Be Selective About What You Endorse

Don't endorse just anything that comes your way - and that includes "joint venture" endorsements, where you're offered a commission on any sales you make or a flat-fee for your endorsement.

I personally know of one Internet marketer who I think endorses far too much stuff. I joined his newsletter, and knowing that he does well for himself, I purchased an eBook on his recommendation.

Well, the eBook sucked. Over the next while I realized that this guy appears to recommend pretty much

at all worth the money (in my opinion). He still provides good information, and is a genuinely nice man - but now I ignore his recommendations.

Be selective. Carefully pick and choose the products/services you sincerely believe will be of interest or help to your readers. That way, when you talk, they're most likely to listen.

Rule #2: Only Endorse Products/Service With Which You've Had First-Hand Experience

The question is, how can you endorse something that you've never tried yourself?

You can't. You may be able to provide an endorsement for the person who created the product/service (which is something entirely different). But don't "make up" or "hype up" a recommendation for a product you don't know. Knowing the product first is the only way you can be sure it's not "crap".

[Note: This is why I **always** recommend that affiliates always buy the product they're promoting - or at least download a trial version, if available]

Endorsing a Product/Service to Your Own Audience.

I've had my best results endorsing products to my own audience - although I've found endorsements to my newsletter list far outperforms endorsements on my website.

This in itself is a great reason to build an opt-in newsletter list of your own. See the [tutorial on starting your own newsletter](#) for more information.

ENDORSEMENTS ON YOUR SITE

I've personally found that it's best to have a dedicated sales page for whatever it is you're promoting. Hit your customer up with a list of benefits ... and while you're at it, provide an endorsement of how the product or service personally helped you. **Be specific.** Did you lose 50 pounds and keep it off for 2 years? Did your traffic increase by 60%? Detailed testimonials are much more convincing than a simple, "It's great!".

ENDORSEMENTS TO YOUR SUBSCRIBERS

If you have an opt-in newsletter of your own, you're sitting on a goldmine. Use your list to bring in some extra cash.

Exclusive mailings (also called solo ads) seem to work best most of the time, provided they aren't sent out too often. These ads are special mailings that are sent out apart from the regular ezine issues. I've generally found that the FEWER products I endorse, the BETTER response I get from my readers.

Note also that I've had good response through editorials. That way you won't need to send out an additional mailing, if your subscribers are sensitive to that type of thing.

Here's an example of the type of thing you can do in an editorial. I take somewhat of a "chatty" tone with my editorials ... but I'm usually more structured when I send out solo ads - they're very much "to-the-point" so that I can quickly capture the reader's attention. Track your results to see what works best for you.



Sample Endorsement - Editorial

A warm welcome to both our loyal and new subscribers!
Have you ever experienced the frustration of finding the right clipart, backgrounds, or other graphics for your

clipart sites, but with no actual clipart available!

If you're like me, this is enough to make you crazy. I'm happy to say, I finally found something that's helped me hang onto my sanity.

[ArtToday](#) is a membership site that gives you access to 1.2 million downloadable images. This includes clipart, photos, fonts, backgrounds, sounds, web art, and more. Their searchable database makes finding what you need a snap - and it's all royalty-free! Memberships start from a mere \$29.95/year for unlimited downloads.

These days, I'm free from those "free clipart" sites. :-) It usually only takes me a few minutes (instead of agonizingly long and fruitless HOURS) to find what I need from [ArtToday](#). I encourage you to check it out. I firmly believe it's one of the best values on the web:
www.arttoday.com

Endorsing Your Own Product/Service to Another Audience.

Obviously you wouldn't want to keep hitting up your visitors/subscribers every week for the exact same offer. To widen your audience, get another editor or site owner to endorse your product.

Now why would he or she agree to do so? Good question. Everyone's busy, and the person you approach may receive several such requests every day. You need to offer him something to entice him to work with you. Two strategies have worked particularly well for me:

- **Offer a complimentary copy in exchange for a review/testimonial.** Ask for permission to use his testimonial ... and then purchase an exclusive mailing/solo ezine ad from him and **use his testimonial in your ad** to his audience.

Even if the person does not want to give you a testimonial, you may get valuable feedback about your product and how it can be improved. I know it's tough to get criticism - but in the end, it can HELP you, so try not to take it personally. :-)

- **Propose a joint venture.** Offer a complimentary copy for his review - as well as a percentage of the profits made from the sales he generates from an endorsed solo mailing to his ezine audience.

In order to do something like this, you will need to have an accurate method of tracking his sales. If you sell digital products/ services, you can try [Clickbank](#).

Note that once again, I've had better success with an endorsement to a newsletter list than simply posted on a website. It's likely because the editor has already developed trust and credibility with his or her subscribers; thus his endorsement holds a lot of weight.

Below is a sample letter I email to other editors. You're welcome to use it as a template and modify it to suit your needs. Make sure you personalize each email with the editor's name (if you can find it) and something about his or her site and/or newsletter. I've found that this simple step greatly increases the chance that the editor will respond favorably.



Sample Endorsement Request

Dear Brian,

My name is Angela Wu, and I'm the editor of a newsletter for eBusiness beginners called Online Business Basics. I've been a subscriber to your ABC Newbie Marketer's Newsletter for well over a year now, and was wondering if you'd be interested in a joint venture.

I know your time is valuable, so I'll be brief.

Online Business Basics eBook and a **50% commission** on all sales generated by you. Commission tracking and payout is handled by Clickbank, an impartial third-party, so you can be confident that you'll be paid fairly.

In return, I ask that you send at least 1 personally-endorsed exclusive mailing to your newsletter subscriber. You're more than welcome to do further promotions as you wish.

Thanks for your time, Brian. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,
Angela Wu
mailto:angela@onlinebusinessbasics.com
<http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/>

Finally, be selective about who you approach. Don't start throwing free copies of your product every which way, in the hope that you'll find someone willing to help you out. Pick editors who have earned the trust of their readers.

FINDING OTHER EDITORS:

To find other ezines within your target market, visit the NetterWeb.com. I also recommend the [Lifestyles Publishing Directory of Ezines](#) - this directory is very comprehensive and easy-to-use, but it will run you about \$40/year.

I'd recommend that you view recent issues of the newsletters that you're considering. If that's not possible, subscribe. This is so that you can get a good idea of what type of "pull" that editor has with his or her subscribers ... and so that you can make an educated judgment on how well you think his subscribers will respond to your offer.

Endorsing an Affiliate Product/Service.

In order to provide a credible endorsement, you'll obviously have had to purchase and/or use the product that you're promoting. It's no secret that top affiliates are the ones who have bought the product themselves.

I use a personal testimonial when I endorse affiliate products/services.

The first technique above - endorsing a product/service to your own audience - can also be used for affiliate products/services. It's best done by sending an exclusive mailing to your subscribers. If you don't have an opt-in newsletter list (yet! You WILL start one, won't you?), try purchasing solo ads in reputable ezines in your target market.

How to Get Testimonials for Your Product

Testimonials add credibility to you and your product. If you can show that you have happy customers, new visitors are more likely to consider buying.

Affiliate Products/Services

If you're promoting a product/service for an affiliate program, you can simply use your own testimonial. How did the product help you personally? Obviously, in order to be able to give a personal testimonial you will need to have used or owned the product yourself.

When you write up a testimonial about the product, **be specific**. Tell your reader exactly HOW it's helped you (or entertained you, or whatever it is that it's supposed to do).

EXAMPLE 1:

"ABC Nutritional Supplements are great! I use them everyday and have never felt better."

... can be rewritten to read ...

"I've been taking ABC Nutritional Supplements for three months now, and I've never felt better! I have so much more energy that I've even started exercising! Now, at the age of 42, I'm fitter than I've ever been and as a bonus, I've even lost a few pounds."

EXAMPLE 2: Instead of ...

"The Super-Duper Traffic Generator has sent my hit counter spinning!"

... **use** ...

"In just one month, The Super-Duper Traffic Generator has started bringing me an extra 100 unique visitors a day - up from my previous 15 visitors a day!"

Make your claims verifiable whenever you can. For instance, in the second example above you could provide a link to your stats counter.

Please note: Some affiliate programs indicate that you must submit any ad copy you write to them for approval. Be sure to read your Affiliate Contract and/or Terms of Use.

Your Own Product/Service (Established)

If your product has been out for a while and you already have customers, then you have the means to get testimonials.

SOME TESTIMONIALS ARE UNSOLICITED

Your customer may be so thrilled with your product that he or she just has to write to you to tell you how happy she is. Write back, thank her, and ask for permission to use her testimonial in your promotions and on your website.

Note: When I do this, I always send her back a link so that she can view her testimonial as it appears on my site (and as it will appear in any future promotional copy), and offer to make any changes that she wants. This is just a simple courtesy; by showing your customer her testimonial, she can view it and "approve" it.

DON'T BE SHY - ASK FOR A TESTIMONIAL.

I have seen business owners email their customers and ask for testimonials in exchange for a gift. I'm two minds about this; on one hand, it seems like bribery to me (maybe some people give testimonials just for the free gift? I don't know) ... on the other hand, I know that sometimes people just need an invitation or a little "push" before they'll give their opinions. The free gift is just a show of appreciation.

That's something you'll have to work out for yourself. I personally prefer to wait until a customer emails me with a question or comment that shows how much he appreciates my product or service. I answer the email thoroughly ... then ask for a testimonial.

As usual, be sure that your testimonials are verifiable. Post your customer's name and contact information alongside the testimonial (with his or her permission, of course).

Your Own Product/Service (New)

This is the tough one. How do you get a testimonial for a relatively new product? You may not yet have customers (or enough customers) ... or perhaps your product/service is something that takes time before you show results (for example, a course on creating your own ebook covers).

There are a number of approaches you can take to get testimonials in this case ...

GET A "PERSONAL REFERRAL"

Ask colleagues, subscribers, or previous customers from another product line to attest to your integrity. For example, they could provide testimonials about how knowledgeable, helpful, and honest you are.

APPROACH A "COLLEAGUE" FOR A JOINT VENTURE

Find another "expert" in your target market and offer him or her a complimentary copy of your product for review. This has two advantages: you'll get constructive feedback about your product

from someone in your field ... and secondly, you may get a testimonial from it.

GIVE A PERSONAL TESTIMONIAL

Do a write-up on your own experiences with the product. Be as specific as you can and provide backup or supporting details or documentation.

A Few Tips on the Use of Testimonials

- **Use real testimonials.** Don't make them up; even skilled copywriters typically can't create a testimonial that has that "genuine" ring to it. If your customer indicates to you that she'll sign a testimonial that you write, send her a polite request that she write the testimonial in her own words. Indicate that it doesn't have to be a "formal" letter - just her thoughts on the product.
- **Don't "polish" or edit to an extreme.** Don't try to force a testimonial to "conform" to a certain style, or to make it sound like professional ad copy. It's much more convincing when it sounds like it comes from a real person.
- **Make them credible.** We've all seen testimonials that look like:

*"Fantastic! I made \$5000 in 14 minutes with your system.
Thanks!"*

- A.J., Minnesota

I'm exaggerating, of course ... but the point is, include a name, email address/website URL, and perhaps even your customer's state or province of residence. Similarly, you can add "credentials" such as the customer's company name, job title, etc.

- **Use long testimonials rather than short ones.** There are loads of testimonials that can be edited to read:

"...truly amazing..."

"...gorgeous...stunning..."

Use longer testimonials for more impact and credibility. For example:

"I was initially reluctant to order any type of jewelry online ... but I was thrilled when I got my bracelet! It's truly gorgeous, one of the most stunning pieces I own. Thank you so much for your wonderful catalog, and for your excellent service. I'll be back!"

- **Ask for specific testimonials.** General testimonials are fine, but when your customer can attest to HOW your product or service has helped, it makes for a much "stronger" testimonial. For example:

"I love your book!"

... is rather bland. A more effective testimonial would be:

"It's been six months since I purchased your highly motivating book. I started a new exercise program that I've stuck to now for 5 months and at 46 years of age, I have never been more fit in my life. I feel great, and as an added bonus I've even lost 10 pounds. Thank you so much. I love your book!"

- **Always ask for permission.** Ask your customer for permission to use her testimonial on your website and in all your promotional materials (ads, articles, press releases, etc). Here's a template; feel free to use and/or modify it for your own purposes. I always include the customer's original email in my response.



Sample Request for Permission

Dear Tina,

Thank you for your kind words; I'm happy to hear you're pleased with our service!

May I have your permission to use your testimonial in my marketing materials? You can see an example of how I use them on my home page, at <http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/>.

once again!

Best Regards,
Angela
mailto:angela@onlinebusinessbasics.com
http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/

- **If you use a copywriter, give them your "file" of testimonials.** It will help him create effective copy for you.

A Few Final Notes ...

Many people try to get testimonials from the "experts" in their field. The reason for doing so is primarily to add credibility to their offer.

However, you should also try to get testimonials from your target audience as well - the people you're trying to help, in other words. It shows that you have happy customers - and not just happy colleagues. :-)

You may also want to consider getting a "professional" testimonial - an endorsement from someone who works in your field. For example, let's say you're selling a new type of brush that's supposed to make the grooming of your dog or cat much easier. The brush is more gentler, softer, and yet still takes out loose hair while giving the groomer all the flexibility she may need.

You could offer professional groomers a free sample of your product and ask her to try it out. If she likes it, ask her for a testimonial. You can "sweeten the deal" by offering her a few samples that she can give away to the clients of her choice.

The cold faceless world of the Internet can make people hesitate to purchase; many people like to know WHO they're buying from. This isn't a big issue for well-known companies such as Amazon.com (the online bookstore) or Dell (computer manufacturer) ... but for us tiny home businesses, it can mean the difference between making the sale or not.

Referral Marketing

Selling to a repeat customer is much easier than selling to a first-time customer. Repeat customers already know the quality of your product/service ... first-time customers are taking a risk.

The risk for first-time customers is lessened when a friend or respected colleague recommends the product to them. This section we'll take a look at how to [build credibility](#) with your customers and use the power of [referrals](#).

This is probably one of the least used methods online. Most people work long and hard to get traffic, but don't use the power of their own customers! Most of us can improve our sales by encouraging our existing customers to refer others to us.

Referrals are very powerful! For example, I sell advertising in my newsletters. I hardly ever promote it; in fact, the most effort I've ever put into it is putting up a passive web page and listing my rates in a few directories.

Only a small percentage of first-time visitors to my ad sales page ever order an ad. However, nearly everyone who is referred to me by a previous customer places an order!

Referrals can give you a conversion rate that's FAR higher than what you would otherwise see. However, many business owners assume that just because you do a good job, referrals will happen automatically. This isn't true; people often need a little encouragement to send referrals your way. **It's up to YOU to take a more active role in making them happen!**

7 Ways to Encourage Repeat Referral Business

"Word-of-mouth" referrals are one of the best ways to build a customer base. Everyone's so busy these days that many are much more inclined to listen to the recommendations of a trusted contact, then to have to spend the time doing research. Here are a few quick ways to help encourage referrals.

1. Offer Discounts for Customer Referrals.

It's far easier to sell to someone who has been referred to you. That person is already interested and personally knows someone who is happy with your product or service.

Encourage your customers to send referrals your way. You can structure your discount in any way you choose. For example:

- **Offer a discount for each new referral your customer sends to you.** Depending on what you sell, you may want to offer a limited-time discount - or provide him with a "coupon" which he can use with his next order.

If you have a service that depends heavily on consultation with prospective clients, consider offering a discount to existing customers for simply putting you in touch with people who are interested in your services.

- **Offer something for free.** For every 1, 2, or however many referrals your customer sends you, you can offer her a free gift - for example, offer a free one-hour consultation, a free gift bag valued at \$50, a complimentary item from your product line up to \$30, etc.

One place you can encourage referrals is on your "thank-you" page -- the page the customer is taken to after he or she places an order. Use that page to thank him for his business ... and offer him a chance to earn a "referral discount."

Of course, encourage your newfound customers (the referrals!) to do the same: if they refer people to you then they will also earn a discount or gift. This type of offer helps you to both generate new customers AND keep current customers coming back!



Reward BEHAVIOR

don't make the mistake of only thanking or rewarding the referrer if his friend becomes a paying customer.

True, the referral didn't make you any extra money. But go ahead and thank the referrer for thinking of you -- so that he continues to send people your way. Someone he refers in the future might very well become a customer!

Your 'thank you' doesn't have to be expensive. It might be a simple note, a small gift, whatever is appropriate for your type of business. Let him know that you appreciate his efforts ... and he'll be much more inclined to keep sending referrals your way.

2. Turn Rejection Into Gold.

Your product or service will not be right for everyone. When a prospect lets you know that he or she isn't interested, send her a "thanks for your time" email -- along with a special offer she can pass onto her friends. For example, if you sell a service, you could offer a free half-hour consultation. Do you sell an eBook? Consider offering the download link to the first few chapters for free.

3. Follow-Up.

It is vitally important to stay in touch with your prospects, particularly when they're still "hot." When a prospect requests information, follow-up and ask if they have any questions. Offer free, valuable information to keep their interest. Give away "freebies" or "coupons" if it's appropriate for your product/service.

Keeping in touch will help the prospect remember who you are; help you build credibility and a "relationship" with your prospect; and help convert some of these prospects to customers. Most people do not buy on a first visit; they need time to think things over, look at options, and so on.

You should also stay in touch with CURRENT customers!

Like I said earlier, current customers can become repeat customers -- and that's much easier than trying to convince someone to try one of your products for the very first time.

There's lots of ways to keep in touch. Send out a free newsletter. Occasionally offer a surprise bonus or gift. Whatever you do, communicating with your customers (or prospective customers) is a great way to keep your business in their minds.

Naturally you don't want do all your follow-ups manually! Autoresponders will relieve a great deal of the time burden from you.

Note: Autoresponders are not always appropriate. Use your good judgment on when personal service is required. And please ... don't abuse follow-ups. Always provide a way to unsubscribe and don't send a barrage of sales letters. Treat your customers/prospects with respect.

4. Become an "Expert."

Find a high-traffic site within your target market and offer to write a column or otherwise become a contributing writer. Within your proposal provide relevant information such as:

- Your name and contact information.
- Your qualifications and/or samples of your writing. For example, "I've been working in the fashion industry for 10 years now and have written a variety of articles on maternity fashions. You can see some of my work at ..."
- What you propose to do: an opinion column? A Q&A column? How often will you contribute?

Please keep in mind that this will likely be a free service on your part -- you get "paid" from the extra publicity your writing generates.

5. Get Syndicated!

Articles give you instant credibility - instead of a blatant ad, you're implicitly considered an "expert" because you're offering valuable information.

There are lots of small syndication networks on the web, along with a few huge ones. Even getting syndicated on a small network will generate more interest for your product or service. This is something I do on a regular basis ... after my article is run, I typically see a significant jump in traffic for the next week (usually at LEAST 15% higher, and sometimes as much as double the traffic, depending on where I get published).

It's also handy because many sites offer one of those "Send this article to a friend" features. An article that "clicks" with your audience is sure to generate a lot of interest ... and that interest can result in more sales!

6. Run Giveaway Contests.

Everyone loves the chance to win! You can offer free memberships, gifts, consultations, discounted services, whatever you think is appropriate.

To encourage referrals, offer customers the opportunity to earn extra chances to win for every person they refer: "For every new subscriber you send to our newsletter, you'll receive an extra entry in our Monthly Advertising Giveaway!"

7. Use Testimonials.

Customer testimonials work like referrals. A prospect sees that someone like himself is happy with your product or service -- it helps to persuade him to take another look. If a lot of people like him are raving about your product, then chances are he'll like it too.

Referral Marketing Tools and Resources

Here are a few simple tools and resources that you can use to help boost your referral marketing efforts.

Refer-A-Friend Script

[Birdcast by BigNoseBird.com](http://Birdcast.by.BigNoseBird.com) is an excellent Refer-A-Friend script, and it's totally free. It even keeps a log for you so that you can see how often it's used. Please read through the

available documentation to make an informed decision on whether the script is right for you.

Birdcast a CGI script -- so you'll need a web host that allows you to install your own. The script comes with installation instructions; some configuration is required.

If you don't have your own CGI-bin, then try [Web Recommend](#). It's a free, customizable service and all you have to do is cut & paste a snippet of HTML to your web page. The downside is that third-party ads will be displayed on the page where your refer-a-friend script resides.

Syndication Networks

Send out a recent article! If you're an ezine editor you've probably already written at least one or two ... and if your article is chosen for syndication, it can mean a significant boost in traffic and some extra sales to go with it.

- [Womans-Net](#) - reaches an audience of 100,000+. Accepts articles (400-1200 words) on General Business, Small Business, Women in Business, Web Site Development, Recipes, Health/Wellness, Search Engines, and Crafts.
- [IdeaMarketers.com](#) - simply create a "writer's account" and post your articles to the site. Editors look through new submissions and pick the ones they'll feature in their various "channels." Accepts articles on most subject matters.

Do You Sell an eBook or Software?

If the answer is yes, then [Digibuy](#) offers an excellent automatic billing/delivery option for you. This third-party processor allows you to accept credit card orders, and the only thing you pay is a per-transaction fee. In other words, if you sell nothing, you pay nothing. It takes just a few minutes to set up and you're ready to go!

My experience with Digibuy is very positive. They're extremely reliable, customer service is absolutely wonderful, and they've always paid on time.

Okay, okay, so how does it relate to referral marketing?
Digibuy gives you the option of offering coupons. You can

configure a whole list of different coupons, and even offer only a certain number of them.

For example ... you could offer just 1 coupon that gives the recipient a \$10 discount on his next order. When an existing customer refers a paying customer to you, you send him the coupon number. He simply enters this number into the order form and his discount is automatically calculated - and now the coupon has been used (and removed). The next time he refers another paying customer you can send him another coupon.

That's just one way to use these coupons. Be creative! Just because no one has tried something before doesn't mean it won't work. :-)

Get Published! Write Articles for Credibility and Profit

Writing articles isn't as intimidating as it might sound... and the benefits are tremendous! You earn credibility and generate interest in your business – and all through a simple little article.

An Effective, Credible, and Free Method to Promote Your Online Business

This section is about one of the best free ways to get traffic to your website - and, of course, make more sales!

It's all about **writing articles**.

"Oh no!" you quaver, "**I** can't possibly write an article!"

You'll be surprised at how much you can do. I know how intimidating it can be when you're first starting out. Heck, I was practically quaking in my boots when I thought about exposing my writing to thousands of others! What would they think? Was I good enough? Would people laugh at me? Worse, would they pity me?

I worked myself up into such a mess that, looking back on it, I cringe with embarrassment.

'Cause you know what? My very first article, entitled, "**Forget the Excuses! JUST DO IT**" was immediately picked up by dozens of newsletters. Over the next few weeks I received numerous emails praising my article and telling me how much they loved it, and how motivational it was.

I was simply astounded.

Even to this day, I still get the occasional email from someone who's read that particular article. Since then I've used articles as a tool to drive more traffic to my website.

Believe me, **it works**. People appreciate a good article, whether it was informative, intriguing, or entertaining. If they enjoyed your article, they'll often click on your link and take a look at your website. Then it's up to your site to sell (but that's another topic altogether!).

So don't be afraid. Writing articles and offering them to other newsletter editors can give you a fabulous source of free publicity. You might be a little fearful at first ... but just wait: once you get started, it isn't scary at all. You'll be amazed that you ever thought it was!

20 Tips on How to Write Articles for Profit

I sometimes think people make things more complicated than they have to be. This is a perfect example. Writing articles doesn't have to be difficult or intimidating. You don't have to be an "expert" in any field, and you don't have to be a professional writer.

Just write about what you know - a "real" voice is very much appreciated in the cold, faceless medium known as the Internet.

For example, let's say you have a gardening website. It's just a hobby; you are not an expert gardener, but you love it and you want to share your experiences with other amateurs. There are scores of amateur gardeners who would be interested in reading about stuff like pest problems you've encountered, lessons you've learned about planning a garden that blooms throughout the season, tips on how to arrange plants so that they're nicely displayed, and so on.

This stuff might be boring and basic to professional gardeners ... but frankly, who cares? Your target audience is **amateur gardeners** and **they're** interested in what you have to say.

Now that we've got that out of the way, here's a checklist of things to do when you write your articles.

1. **Write about something of interest to your target market.** I know, I know, this sounds obvious ... but just bear with me. You might have a "rare books" website, for example. **All** your articles should be about finding and collecting rare books because this is of interest to your target audience. Give

them something they want and they'll visit your site. Do **not** write about the cute things your smoochy-poochy "Pumpkin" does everyday - no matter how much you love dogs. Your target audience will not care that Pumpkin kissed a squirrel yesterday.

2. **Be professional and polished.** You don't have to have perfect grammar, but try not to use slang (or use it minimally). Keep your paragraphs short; they're easier to read.
3. **Less is more.** Let's face it: we're all busy people. Shorter articles are more likely to be read. Try to keep your articles under 750 words.
4. **Check your spelling!** You lose credibility if there are spelling errors scattered throughout your article.
5. **Use lots of white space** for easier readability.
6. **Send your article as plain text, and include it in the body of your email.** Attachments can contain viruses, and many publishers won't open them.
7. **Format your article to 60-65 characters per line.** Most email programs will automatically "word wrap" after 60 or 70 characters on a line - if your lines are too long, your article is going to look ugly and be difficult to read. Make it as easy as you can on the publisher; don't force them to reformat your article for you ... most of them won't bother and your article will go into the "trash".
8. **Preface URLs with "http://" and email addresses with "mailto:".** This will make your links **clickable** to most people.
9. **Check your links.** That goes for both URLs and email addresses.
10. **Include a 5-7 line resource box at the end of your article.** Write up a brief summary about yourself and tell the reader what your website or products can offer.
11. **Submit your article to targeted ezines.** For example, if your article is on family issues, submit it to other family ezines. Don't submit it to an Internet marketing ezine.

12. **If you don't have a mailing program that can personalize each email** and don't have the time to do it manually, then be sure you **use the "BCC" field** ("Blind Carbon Copy"). Any address you put in the BCC field will **not** be displayed to the others who are receiving that same email. This is an essential safety measure: you don't want to be responsible for your colleague's address being added to a spammer's list! For more information, check the Help files for your particular email software.
-
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Another Way to Submit Articles Quickly

Do you have an [autoresponder](#)? If not, you should.

Most professional autoresponders have what's known as a **broadcast** feature. Once you've compiled a list of email addresses that accept article submissions, you can import the list into your autoresponder and use the broadcast feature to announce new articles.

Editors who no longer accept article submissions can simply click on the removal link at the bottom of the message to unsubscribe. All hands-free management for you!

13. **Be professional; do not send advertisements.** Articles have real content; ads - or sales letters disguised as articles - are a nuisance.
14. **DO use recommendations to products within your content.** This can be a little tricky ... what you want to do is add a little "plug" for something you're promoting (whether it's an affiliate program or your own product) within your article - **if and only if it fits with the content.**

For example: I may write an article about how to choose an autoresponder. As I go through the features you want to look for, I'll casually toss in a reference to the autoresponder I use -- along with my affiliate link.

This type of casual mention within the context of an article has gotten me a lot of clicks over the years! But I want to

emphasize: **only use it when appropriate**. Remember that you'll always have your resource box to draw traffic to your site.

15. **Send only one article in your mailing.** Don't send a huge email with 4 or 5 articles - it's too much. However, you can stick a note in your email stating that other articles are available and where to find them.
16. **Publish your article on your website.** This gives you extra exposure: it can be submitted to the search engines; someone may link to your article; and your visitors will have the opportunity to read it while browsing your site.
17. **Make your article available by autoresponder (there's that word again!).** An [autoresponder](#) is an email address that automatically replies to any message sent to it. You would set it up to reply with your article and publishing guidelines. This makes it more convenient for others who prefer to have a copy in their email box.
18. **Include a brief letter to the publisher.** Inform them where you saw that they accept articles, and tell them your publishing guidelines (eg. free reprint rights so long as your resource box is included). I usually ask that they notify me of their intent to publish (this doesn't always happen, but at least a few of them will let you know).
19. **Send articles promptly.** Ezine publishers are looking for fresh content; if your article has been posted on your website for a month, it may have already appeared in other newsletters, many times over. Get your articles to editors in a timely fashion so that **they** have the option of being one of the first to publish it.
20. **Don't send articles more than once per week.** Editors are flooded with article submissions and typically don't have time to look through them as is. Once a week is plenty (I usually only send twice a month myself).

Sample Letters to the Editor and Resource Boxes

Please feel free to use this letter as a template for your own. It's short and to-the-point. As an editor myself, I appreciate this. [Please replace everything in colored text with your own information.](#) A few pointers before we get to the letter:

- **If you know the newsletter editor's name, use it.** People like personalized email. Most autoresponders have personalization "tags" that make this quick and easy.
- **Double-check your article before you send it.** Make sure you've spell-checked it, checked any links or email addresses, and formatted it properly. It's somewhat irritating to get a second email from a writer saying, "Oops! Correction to my last article".
- **Use a simple, descriptive subject line.** I usually just put something like, "Fresh Article for Your Consideration". Do **not** look like a rank amateur by using something like, "Stick this in your ezine!" (I am not making this up; someone actually sent me an "article" - a sales letter, really - with this in the subject line. Very annoying!).

One last note: newsletters go out of publication quite frequently. If someone writes back to you and requests removal from your list, **do it**.

Here's the cover letter I used when I first started submitting articles:



Sample Cover Letter

Dear [Chuck](#),

My name is [Angela Wu](#) and I'm the webmaster/owner of [BuildYourHomeBiz.com](#). I saw from the [Lifestyle's Publishing Directory of Ezines](#) that you accept article submissions.

to publish it freely. I just ask that you publish it in its entirety, including the resource box at the end of the article. An email notification of your intent to publish would be sincerely appreciated.

Thanks and Regards,
[Angela Wu](#)
<mailto:angela@onlinebusinessbasics.com>
<http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/>

<Copy & paste your article here - make sure it's formatted properly!>

It's been a couple of years now, and most of these editors know me. Now I use something much simpler:

Dear [Chuck](#),

Enclosed is my latest article for your kind consideration. You are welcome to publish it freely on your website or in your opt-in ezine. Please send me a quick email if you decide to use it.

Thanks and Regards,
[Angela Wu](#)
<mailto:angela@onlinebusinessbasics.com>
<http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/>

<Copy & paste your article here - make sure it's formatted properly!>

Now for your **resource box**. This is typically a 5-7 line message included at the end of your article. It tells the reader about you, the author, and your website and/or products. It's a great promotional

tool, so make sure you put it to good use. Feel free to use and improve upon the resource box template below. A few tips:

- **Forget the hype.** You don't want your resource box to read like an ad; make it an informative but compelling blurb about your business.
- **Consider adding a contact email address.** By displaying your address you may get more inquiries, comments, suggestions - eg. more leads! By the same token, you may get questions from people who never bothered to visit your site (and expect you to basically regurgitate everything to them). It's up to you.
- **Remember to use "http://" and "mailto:" in your URL and email links.** This will make the links clickable, and much easier for someone to visit your site or send you email.
- **Test different resource boxes.** Like everything else online, you should continually test and refine your resource box to see what works best.



Resource Box Template

About the Author:

Angela is the editor of [Online Business Basics](#), a practical guide to building an Internet business on a shoestring budget. Visit her online at <http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/article.html> or request a series of 10 free reports to get you started: <mailto:businessbasics@workyourleads.com> .

Important: Use a tracking URL for your articles! I know I constantly harp on tracking everything you do online - but there's a reason for that: it's the ONLY way to know what works and what doesn't.

Your tracking URL will show you how much traffic you're getting from your articles, and/or which of your resource boxes are drawing the most response. See the [section on ad tracking](#) for more information.

Where to Submit Your Articles

Submitting your articles doesn't have to cost you much in time. I do three things: I submit to article 'banks'; I maintain and build my own list of editors; and I submit to article announcement lists. You may be asked to submit your publishing guidelines as well (see below).



What Are Your Publishing Guidelines?

Publishing guidelines simply let people know the conditions under which they may reprint your article. You should clearly state publishing guidelines for your article on your website and in your autoresponder message. For example, my autoresponders typically state something like this:

Dear Heather,

Here is the article you requested. It is freely available for reprint on your website, in your opt-in newsletter, or in your eBook, provided that the resource box at the end of the article remains intact. Email notification of your intent to publish would be sincerely appreciated.

Best Regards,
Angela Wu
mailto:angela@onlinebusinessbasics.com
<http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/>

====[Article]====
< your article would be pasted here >

Article banks:

- Keep a plain text copy of your article, formatted to 60 characters per line. **Then bookmark all the sites you want to submit to in a separate 'favorites' folder in your browser.**
-

When the time comes to submit, you simply go down the list and copy and paste the article to each site.

- **Use syndication networks to get your articles out**, where possible. They have a much wider reach. There's no guarantee that they'll select your article for syndication, of course, but it doesn't hurt to try.

Editor's List:

- **Compile an initial list of editors that accept article submissions for your target market** (ie. don't submit a pet article to an Internet marketing newsletter). I did this by purchasing a membership into what I think is the [finest ezine directory online](#). There you can search by topics, and quickly and easily see which editors accept article submissions. When you first write to the editors, let them know where you saw that they accept article submissions.
- **Place a simple form on your site inviting other webmasters and editors to subscribe to your 'articles' list.** This way it keeps growing. You can see an example at [one of my other websites](#).

Sites or lists that accept articles on all topics:

- *[Article Announce](#) (announcement list)
- [EzineArticles.com](#)
- [GoArticles](#)
- [HotLaunch.com](#)
- *[IdeaMarketers.com](#) (syndication network)
- [World Wide Information Outlet](#)

Sites or lists that accept articles on only certain topics:

- [Article Announce Home & Family](#) (announcement list) - home and family.
- [Article Announce Health & Fitness](#) (announcement list) - health and fitness.
- [Business Opportunity Classifieds Online](#) - small/home business

- [Connection Team](#) - personal development, health and wellness, and business.
- [Encyclopedia of Online Marketing](#) - Internet marketing.
- [Family-Content.com](#) – family and home business articles.
- [Free-Content](#) (announcement list) - small business.
- [Hits 'n Clicks](#) - Internet marketing.
- [iBoost](#) - marketing.
- [InternetDay](#) - Internet marketing and online business.
- [MakingProfit.com](#) - business/marketing.
- [MarcommWise](#) - marketing.
- [Marketing-Seek.com](#) - business/marketing.
- [Opportunity Update](#) - business/marketing.
- [Self Improvement Online](#) - personal growth and self improvement.
- [UltimateProfits.com](#) - business/marketing.
- [Womans-Net.com](#) (syndication network) - recipes, health/wellness, business, search engines, and website development.
- [Webmasters' Library](#) - web-related content.
- [The Write Articles](#) (announcement list) - writing.

"Wrapping It Up" - a Note from the Editor

Dear Reader,

I hope you've found this series of tips and tutorials helpful to your business. You now have the basics of building a business online. Please don't just file this information away; *use it* to help your business grow. You'll find additional resources in the next section to help you continue your online education.

Set your personal goals -- whether that's an extra \$500 a month or a full-time living, a change in lifestyle, the exhilaration of independence -- and then work hard to achieve them. It's normal to experience temporary setbacks, and you may even find there are people who will scoff at your efforts. That's ok; an Internet business isn't for everyone. Keep the reasons WHY you're doing it firmly in mind, and continue forging ahead towards your goals.

*"Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.
Talent will not; nothing is more common than
unsuccessful men with talent.
Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.
Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent."*

- Calvin Coolidge

May you achieve great success.

Angela Wu
Editor, Online Business Basics

Recommended Reading

- PrProfits.com - excellent source of information about how to get free publicity. A free newsletter is offered, as well as various "how to" publicity manuals.
- [J.F. Straw's Mail Order Marketing Book](#) -- Jim is one of the mail order "gurus", and a super-nice guy as well. Understanding the basics of mail order marketing can help you tremendously in your offline promotions. One highly-respected marketer once said to me, "The biggest mistake most online marketers make is ignoring the offline market!"
- [How to Write and Publish Your Own eBook in as Little as 7 Days](#) – a popular and practical guide to creating and selling eBooks.
- [Hypnotic Writer's Swipe File](#) - a collection of over 1,550 copywriting gems that took Joe Vitale and Larry Dotson years to compile. This is their personal swipe file that they use to create world famous sales letters responsible for generating millions and millions of dollars of revenue.
- Abraham.com – lots of excellent articles on copywriting, building your business, and increasing your profits. There is so much amazing free information on this site (including audio files) that you could easily spend months just absorbing a small fraction of it!

About the Author

In 1999, Angela started her first website as a part-time “experiment”. She became hooked on the ‘net when she made her very first sale (worth about \$5!) 3-4 months later. From there, her business grew rapidly and in just over a year’s time, Angela was able to quit her corporate job to work online full-time.

Angela’s websites are centered around the two “loves” of her life: working from home (she just can’t imagine ever having to go back to the corporate world!), and pets (she currently has 2 dogs and 2 cats). Aside from the [Online Business Basics](#) website, some of her sites include:

- [HomeBasedWork.com](#) – a collection of articles, tips, and links for people searching for a way to start a work-at-home career.
- [PawsperousPets.com](#) – Angela’s “hobby” site, featuring pet humor, stories, memorials, pet care tips and articles, and photos.
- [PetFriendly.ca](#) – her newest venture, to be launched in 2002. PetFriendly.ca offers a searchable database of pet friendly hotels, cottages, cabins, B&Bs, and other lodging from across Canada.

Subscribe to Angela’s free Internet business newsletter, The Netpreneur’s Notebook, for ongoing tips and online business articles: <http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/newsletter.html>.

Online Business Dictionary

Ad Tracker: A software program that allows you to create "coded" URLs that will show you how many people click on a link. Used to monitor results from marketing campaigns.

Affiliate Program: An opportunity where you are paid a commission for every click, lead, or sale you generate from a special coded link.

Article Bank: A site that accepts or finds reprintable articles and makes them available to others. Some article banks focus on one topic only, while others accept articles on topics of all kinds.

Autoresponder: An email address that will automatically reply to any request with a message that you set up.

Banner: An electronic 'billboard' advertising a product, service, website, etc. Can be found on most websites.

CGI Scripts: Computer programs often used to add interactivity to websites. For example, CGI scripts can send you data that a customer types into a request or order form.

Demographics: Information on your website visitors, useful for analyzing your traffic and the effectiveness of your site. Examples include most popular web pages; time spent on each page; referring URL (ie. how did they find your site?); number of page views and unique visitors; and more.

Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL): A form of high-speed Internet connection. You use a special modem to access DSL. DSL allows you to connect to the Internet without using your telephone line. It does not give you a second line; it merely allows you simultaneously talk on the phone and surf the web.

Domain: Your address on the web. For example, onlinebusinessbasics.com is a domain name.

Download: The transfer of a file from the Internet to your own computer.

Downline: Members you recruit to join an opportunity 'under' you; typically you make a percentage from the sales made by your downline. Often hyped up as the 'easy way' to make extra money.

eZine: An electronic newsletter. Most are emailed directly to the subscriber's mailbox, but they can also be published on the web.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP): An agreed-upon "format" used to send files over the Internet. FTP programs are available to help you transfer files to and from your server.

Firewall: A program that protects your computer from unauthorized connections to or from the 'outside world'. In this context, it protects you from programs that try to connect to the Internet without your knowledge or consent; similarly, it protects your computer from incoming requests for information (eg. a hacker trying to scan your computer).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Exactly what it sounds like: answers to common questions. Most business sites have a FAQ page.

Hit: A request for an 'object' on your website. For example, a web page with 2 graphics on it will generate 3 hits: 1 for the HTML page + 1 for each graphic.

Hype: Making misleading, unreasonable or unsubstantiated claims, such as 'Make \$5000 in three days with just a \$2 investment! Guaranteed income, no selling involved!'

HyperText Markup Language (HTML): The formatting language used to create web pages. Don't be scared off by HTML; although some people refer to it as a 'programming' language, it's not. It's a simple formatting language that's similar to what the old word processors used.

Index: A list of web sites grouped together by category. Probably one of the best known indexes is Yahoo!.

Internet Service Provider (ISP): The company that provides you with access to the Internet, via dial-up service or high-speed services such as cable or DSL.

Joint Venture: A mutually beneficial partnership between two companies. One of the simplest examples of a joint venture is an "ad swap" between newsletter editors.

Link: Those 'clickable' pieces of text you see on web pages. Made clickable through HTML, the web page formatting language.

List Manager: A "robot" that automatically handles subscriptions for a mailing list. For example, I use a list manager to handle subscribers to my newsletters.

Merchant Account: Allows you to process credit card orders on your website. You have complete control; however, merchant accounts tend to be very expensive and it can be difficult for a home based business owner to get approval. A popular choice with online business owners are third party credit card processors.

Multi-Level Marketing (MLM): Any opportunity where people can make commissions from the sale of products and services, and can recruit others into their downlines to do the same. You make a percentage of your downline's commissions.

Newsgroup: An interactive discussion group focused on a particular topic. People post messages and others respond. Also called message boards, discussion lists, discussion forums, and others.

Page View: The number of times a web page is viewed on your website. Each time your page loads, you have one page view.

Park: As in, 'park a domain'. All this means is that a company puts up an electronic billboard stating that your website is 'coming soon' (or something similar), plus an ad for their own company. Don't pay for parking!

PDF: Stands for 'Portable Document Format'. A document that's formatted in PDF is viewable by anyone who downloads the Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is free to everyone. Many online documents are published in PDF format.

Privacy Policy: A statement indicating what types of personal information your company collects and what it does (or doesn't do) with it. Every business should have a privacy policy.

Pyramid Scheme: An illegal 'opportunity' where people are paid to recruit others. In other words, the focus of the opportunity is on recruitment rather than on the selling of products and services.

Search Engine: A website that indexes sites from all over the Internet. Visitors use search engines to look for specific information; if

your website is indexed and fits the search criteria, it is listed in the search results. Great way to generate free, targeted traffic.

Secure Server: A server that can encrypt (or decrypt) messages to protect them from tampering. For example, most ordering forms are secure to protect the customer's credit card information.

Shopping Cart Software: A program that allows users to add items to their online shopping cart. Good for sites that sell a number of related items. For example, an bookstore uses shopping cart software so that people can browse and add several books to their cart before buying.

Sig file: Short for "signature file"; a few lines of text about your business - automatically added to the end of every email message you send. Many people use their sig file to provide contact information and a short blurb about what their business does.

Spam: The slang term for unsolicited commercial email, or UCE. Spam is when someone sends you an offer or an opportunity that you did not explicitly request. Bad business practice; just don't do it!

Third-Party Credit Card Processor: A company that will handle credit card transactions for you, so that you do not need to shoulder the expense of a merchant account. They charge a per-transaction fee and sometimes a one-time setup fee as well.

Traffic: Refers to generating visitors to your website.

Two-Tiered: Usually used in reference to an affiliate program. A two-tiered program lets you make money off the sales of people you recruit. For example, you may get paid 25% on all of your personal sales. If you recruit Joe and he makes a sale, he gets 25% and you get 10% of the gross sale. Commission rates will vary from program to program.

Unsolicited Commercial Email (UCE): Also known as spam, it's when someone emails you an offer or opportunity that you did not ask for. There is actually a difference between UCE and spam, but most ISPs and web hosts do not differentiate between them.

Upload: The transfer of files from your computer to your web space.

URL: The short form for 'Uniform Resource Locator'. Refers to the addresses you see on the web, such as <http://www.yourcompany.com> or <ftp://www.yourcompany.com/>.

Virus: A destructive program that can be transmitted to your computer via email, downloading from the web, or running a program. Investing in good anti-virus software will help keep your computer virus-free.

Visitor: The number of unique visitors to your site. For example, if someone visits your site and views 5 pages, that is still only one visitor.

Web Host: A company that provides you with server space and makes your online business / domain accessible to the world. They give you a place to store your files and scripts.

Webzine: A newsletter published on a web page.