

# **RAKUTEN**

## **Marketing Essentials**

**Maximize Your Efforts As An  
Affiliate On The Rakuten Platform**



# Affiliate Marketing With Rakuten



The Rakuten Affiliate Network began as Linkshare. It was founded in 1996 by Stephen Messer and Heidi Messer, making it one of the oldest affiliate market places operating today.

In 2005 the company became a wholly owned subsidiary of Rakuten, a Japanese ecommerce company. The value of \$US 425 million was paid outright, and the marketplace changed hands.

In 2014 Linkshare was rebranded and the Rakuten Affiliate Network was born. Today, the affiliate network is the self-proclaimed largest pay-per performance affiliate network in operation.

It is rated as the best affiliate network unofficially by its users and official by mThink.com and their panel of experts.

That is all information that you can find anywhere online. Seriously!

What I want to teach you is harder to learn: how you can use this affiliate marketing network to monetise your blog, website, or audience and followers.

# A Quick Affiliate Marketing Primer



Affiliate marketing, at its core, is an agreement.

A merchant agrees to pay a publisher some predetermined amount when they get a member of their audience to complete a conversion.

Publishers have authority in their niche, and they use this to build trust in the merchant's product as a solution to the customer's problem.

The merchant gets some attention, the publisher gets paid, and hopefully, the customer pays for a product that will help them.

Bookings.com pays travel bloggers to feature adds on their sites. However, the travel bloggers aren't paid just for displaying the adds.

Affiliate marketing is performance based, and Booking.com will only pay when someone clicks on one of these adds/links, goes to the site, and books a night in a hotel or flight.

The travel blogger is then given a percentage of the sale via a revenue sharing agreement, and the whole process is tracked using cookies and affiliate links.

This is one example of how the system can work.

## Before You Even Begin...



Most affiliate marketing efforts that go bust, do so because of unrealistic expectations.

*People start too early.*

It takes on average between 9 – 12 months to monetize an audience, and that's assuming that you are starting with an audience.

If your site is not established and you don't have an engaged audience, you will not succeed in your affiliate marketing efforts.

Rakuten doesn't have a traffic minimum, because of this a lot of people choose it when they don't yet have the audience to turn a profit, and they get discouraged and give up.

Some people start websites intending to start advertising affiliate links from day one, and they are widely successful.

There are exceptions to every rule, but these people are often veterans in the industry, and marketing gurus. They have done it before and consequently have realistic expectations.

If you aren't generating tons of traffic, and even if you have traffic, and they aren't immediately re-directed to your affiliate links.

**Don't give up.** Just because three months have gone by to generate \$20, that doesn't mean that you have failed.





## Before You Even Begin...




Remember you are there to provide a service to your readers first, and market second. Stay the course.



### **Don't be afraid to try new things.**

Repost old articles after growing your audience. Seek new audiences as you grow your social media platform.

Pay for some of your own advertising. Whatever it takes. But this business isn't kind to people who want an overnight cash-grab.



## Finding and Placing Affiliate Links



The first step to getting links on your site is to go to register as a publisher. Go to Rakuten.com and give it a look. Scroll down to the very bottom of the page and click “Become and Affiliate” from the menu.

Click “Join Now,” and you will be well on your way. The instructions are pretty straightforward and easy to follow, getting you set up.

Be honest with your answers. Rakuten uses them to show you merchants that are a good fit for your site.

In this business, finding the right ads to market is as important as the rest of the process together, and the better you complete the registration forms, the easier it will be to find products that appeal to your audience.

## Finding and Placing Affiliate Links



Next you want to click on the categories button on the top right of the page, and that will bring up this screen.

These are all the potential affiliate links, supplied by different merchants, arranged into their relevant categories.

### Keep it Relevant

When you look at the statistics that Rakuten gives for the various links, you might be tempted to choose something that isn't relevant to your site because it has a better offer or pays better.

**Don't!** With a relevant affiliate link, you can use your website's authority to ask people to click on the link.

Posting irrelevant adds is just as bad as saying, "this link makes me money. Click on it." By choosing a relevant affiliate, you can create content that encourages your audience to click on the links and convert very well.

The right marketer will make it easy for you to not only place ads that your audience already has an interest in, but to generate content based on the advertised products.

In some cases they might be products that you already use in pursuit of whatever your blog discusses. Find the best product for your audience, not the highest pay-out gig.

# Finding and Placing Affiliate Links



## Research the Company

Make sure the company that you decide to partner with has a product that you believe in. Try and find out if anyone actually buys what they sell. Remember that their earnings are directly proportional to yours. It might be better to go with a company that only offer a 6% commission but sells a better product, than one that offers 12% but sells trash, especially if you have any hope of keeping your credibility.

*Research will also help when it's time to make content.*

If you are going to write articles about this company, you should know and love their products, or at least be excited about how they fit into your niche.

If you have an author blog, and you use a certain software, a special writing instrument, or whatever, then those are the products you can praise without crossing any ethical boundaries.

## Apply for the Agreement

On Rakuten and other affiliate markets, you don't just select the affiliate agreement you want and get a link straight away.

You need to apply, and it can take several days for the merchant to accept you.



## Finding and Placing Affiliate Links



This is another reason to build your audience, before you apply to advertise as an affiliate, some merchants are picky about who they

Advertisers Premium Advertisers My Advertisers Private Offers				
	Year Joined ▲	Commission	Return Days ▲	
<b>Swingline</b> 🇺🇸				
Swingline® is part of the ACCO Brands family of industry-leading planning solutions along with Mead®, Day-Timer®, Five Star®, AT-A-GLANCE®, Swingline®, Quartet®, Five Star®, and Trapper Keeper®.	2015	11.00% commission on all goods	30 Days	No [
➤ View Links				
<b>Quartet</b> 🇺🇸				
Quartet® is part of the ACCO Brands family of industry-leading planning solutions including Mead®, Day-Timer®, Five Star®, AT-A-GLANCE®, Swingline®, Five Star® and Trapper Keeper®.	2015	11.00% commission on all goods	30 Days	No [
➤ View Links				
<b>Nerd Block</b> 🇺🇸				

want representing their product.

This is what the page looks like where you apply for merchant's affiliate agreements:

**There is a filter button on this page.**

I recommend that you take the time to filter your results to find something that is relevant to your niche. I really can't stress enough the importance of selecting a good affiliate to link to on your site.

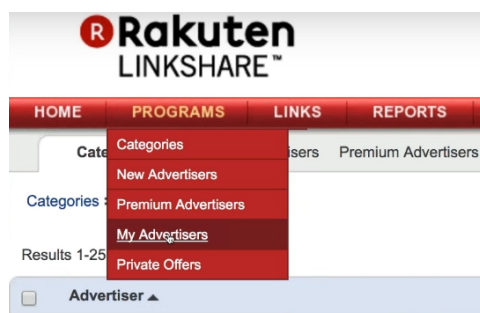
It is important that you also sign up to an affiliate link in the same region as your traffic.

## Finding and Placing Affiliate Links



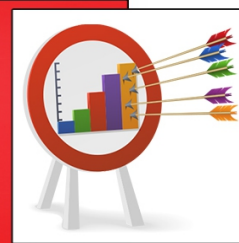
Don't sign up to Australian target if the majority of your audience comes from the United States and vice versa.

People might still buy the product, but once they are redirected to their regional site, the affiliate tracking could break, and you won't get your commission.



Check on the status of your agreements under "My Advertisers." It is here that you see all of the pending and active agreements. You should check it at least once daily.

# Improving Your Performance on The Platform



## **Analytics**

Rakuten records all kinds of analytical data that can be used to determine exactly how you can improve your results.

This is where any troubleshooting needs to start...

*Analysing data is a science.* It's how you evaluate the performance of your ads, and how you can maximize your results.

Change a couple variables, experiment, test the results, and repeat.

## **Click-Through But No Sale**

Rakuten is a purely performance based affiliate marketing site.

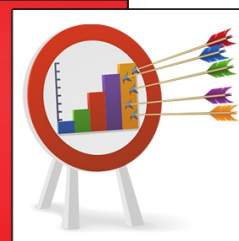
You are only paid in commissions, and it doesn't matter if you got a million impression and ten thousand click-throughs.

If you don't get a sale, you don't get paid.

It is all about conversion rate.

This can be frustrating if you are sending thousands of people to a merchant, and not getting a single sale out of it.

## Improving Your Performance on The Platform



This probably can't be solved on your end, and you might need to enter into a new agreement.

Before you do, however, check the following:

- Are your goals realistic. Affiliate marketing in general has low conversion rates.

Depending on what your merchant is selling, your typical conversion rate can be anywhere from 1 sale from every 100-10,000 clicks. Over time, you can settle on a predictable conversion rate, but at the start it can be infuriating.

Some items won't ever get a sale, and you might want to consider using another affiliate network for CPM.

Sometimes you are simply advertising a product that your audience doesn't want. Some products tend to be slow sells.

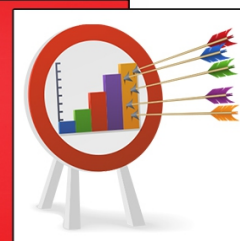
Some depend on you being the last link in their research chain, and making a closing argument for the product to help them decide.

Then again, sometimes your merchant is selling trash, and everyone knows it but you.

- Have you tried the product?
- Do you believe in it?



# Improving Your Performance on The Platform



- Does it have a unfair bad rap online?

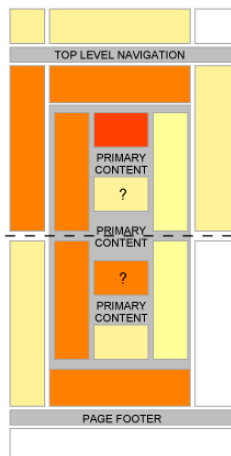
Sometimes, you can use a product's perceived weakness to your advantage. Write about lies or scandal surrounding it, viewers like getting the "truth."

Take pictures of it, and even do some reviews on the product.

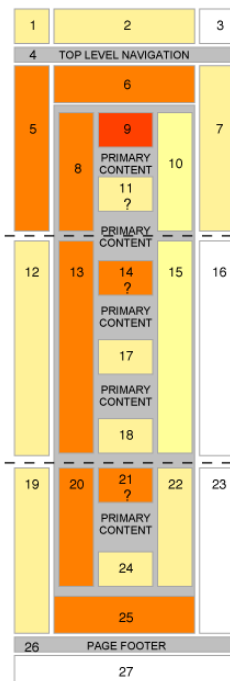
Be straight with your audience. Tell them the pros and cons, and why you think it's the right product to solve a problem.

Ask your audience if they've used the product. If some of them like it, ask them to leave a comment at the bottom of your review. Engage them in a real way.

## Impressions But No Click-Throughs



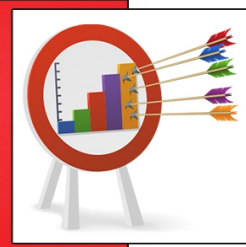
TRUE  
Screen  
Aspect Ratio  
(No Example)



If you have a lot of visitors on your site and no one is clicking on your affiliate ads, then you don't stand a chance of making sales.

There are a few things that you can try. I recommend that you take a look at the AdSense heat map. Are your ads place appropriately?

## Improving Your Performance on The Platform



If you are using banner ads, and no one is clicking on them, try including links in the text instead. It doesn't matter what you try as long as you track the changes with analytics and review the results honestly.

You might want to try some A/B split testing.

I won't go into it, because it is covered in great detail all over the internet, but It is a great way of finding out what your audience is better responding to. Basically set up two pages with different ad places, and see which one gets better statistics.

### **You Are The Expert, Even If You Aren't**

The whole reason that brands use affiliate marketing is because they can get their product endorsed by an authority with an established audience or following.

Don't just place your ads on the side of your page and forget about them then and there.

You need to include them in your content as often as you can.

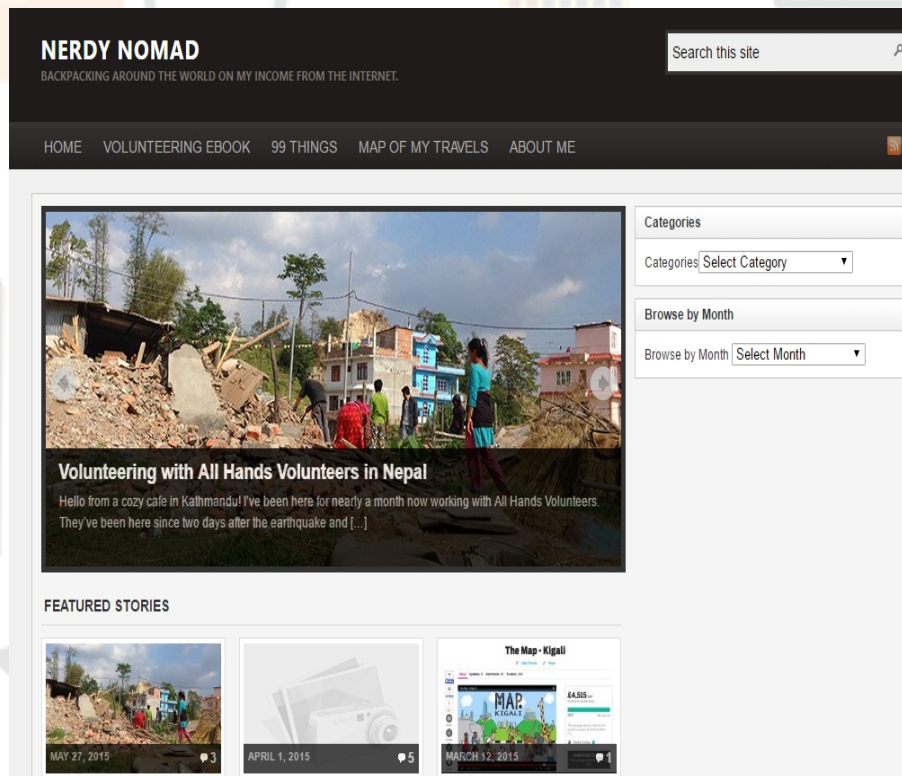
Don't overdo it, but if you have built an audience that trusts you, it puts you in a unique position to present the merchant's product as the solution to their problem.

# Examples of Excellently Executed Affiliate Marketing



They come to your page because they see you as an authority. You are the expert.

Affiliate Marketing has been successful for many sites, and I firmly believe that the best way to learn to use it well, is by studying the real



life examples laid out by the winners.

## Nerdy Nomad

Nerdy Nomad is a great case study. Not only does the site use affiliate links to generate income, but the site's content tilt is explaining in detail how the site generates money for the author, Kristy, to travel the world all around.

# Examples of Excellently Executed Affiliate Marketing



In her monthly earning reports she posts all of her online activities and the dollar value that they yield.

It is a great gauge of how affiliate marketing stacks up compared to other online activities.

There are no affiliate links on Nerdy Nomad, so why am I telling you it is a great example of affiliate advertising?

Kristy has 19 websites, and it is these sites that generate her passive 6 figure income.

Some of the sites are dormant and receive no attention, and others are updated regularly.

Her Stuck in London site is one of her best earners.

It is populated by TripAdvisor ads by Google, and if you can see it, there is an affiliate link for CheapOAir in the top right corner.

This site has granted her the freedom of passive income. There is nothing special about these website, but the content is consistent and helpful to readers.

**STUCK IN LONDON** HOME AREA GUIDE PRICES ARTICLES DATING

**London Prices**  
Last updated: September 2007

If London prices are what you're after then you're in the right place because I have loads. Choose your home country and the prices will be converted based on today's exchange rate. I promise it's not my intention to scare you! If you are coming to London to live, then look for cheap hotels for the first days and get a job as soon as you can because once you start earning the mighty pound life gets a lot better. In the UK **tax is included** so the price you see is the price you pay.

See best prices from 200+ sites on **tripadvisor**

**Singapore Tagaytay Singapore**

Grand Park Orchard Hotel Kimberly Mandarin Orchard Singapore

PS100 \$115% PS140 \$175% PS100 \$95%

View Deals > View Deals > View Deals >

HOME CURRENCY: United States ▼

Accommodation		
Items	Price	Converted
Hostel - Dorm Bed	£17.00	Loading...
Hostel - Single Room	£40.00	Loading...
Hostel - Twin Room	£60.00	Loading...

**Transportation**

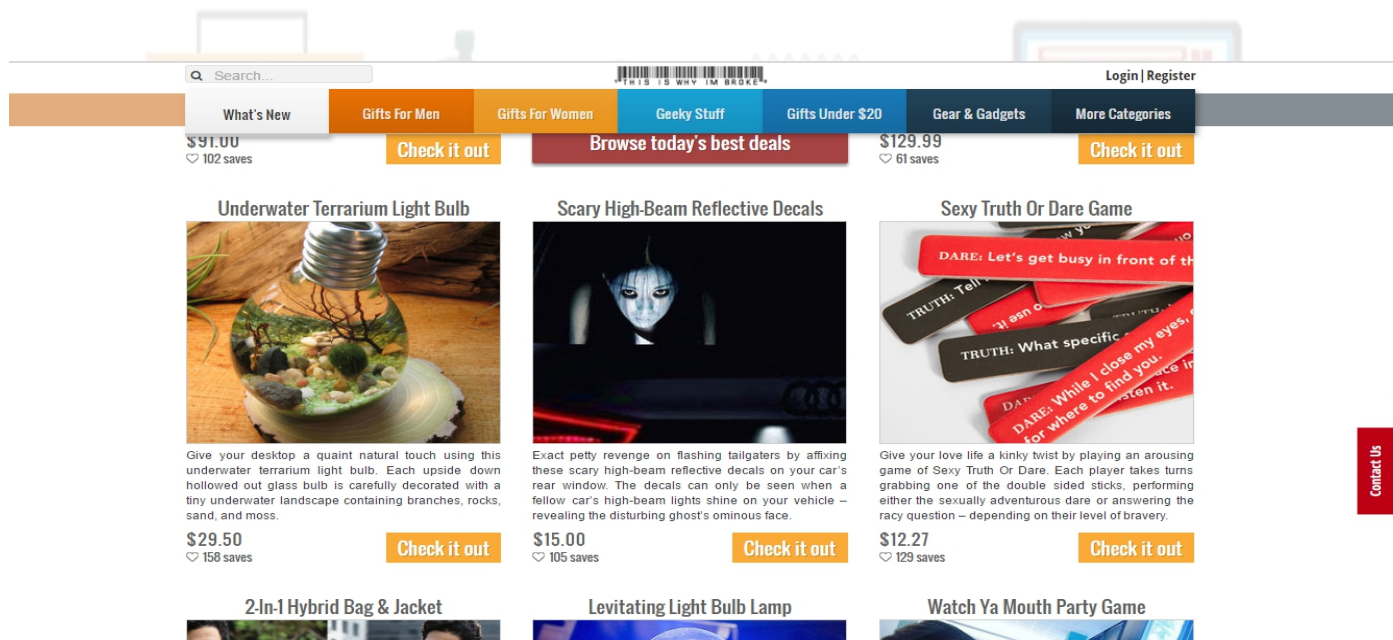
Fly Manila to Brisbane Round Trip US\$553.30

**THINGS TO NOTE:**

- **Accommodation** - Hostel prices will vary widely. Dorm beds can go as low as £8 or as high as £25 so keep this in mind.
- **Transportation** - Single trips are far more expensive without an **Oyster Card**. You need an Oyster to buy a weekly or monthly travelcard.
- **Attractions** - Prices listed are for adults. If you have a student ID or are travelling as a family there are usually deals.
- **Groceries, Health & Beauty** - Prices have been taken from the Sainsbury's website since they're an average priced supermarket. There are cheaper options but you can also do worse than shopping there.
- **Meat & Veggies** - For things that are sold by weight I've tried to give the per kilogram price to make things easier to compare.
- **Snacks** - Prices come from city centre corner stores. Prices can vary but not usually too drastically.
- **Booze** - Prices are also from the



# Examples of Excellently Executed Affiliate Marketing



## This Is Why I Am Broke

This Is Why I Am Broke is an Amazon affiliate site that rose to prominence on the back of an impressive social media marketing effort across various networks.

It relists products from Amazon and other online stores in a grid format, but all of these listings are actually affiliate links.

The site owner collects a percentage of every sale that is made.

## Examples of Excellently Executed Affiliate Marketing

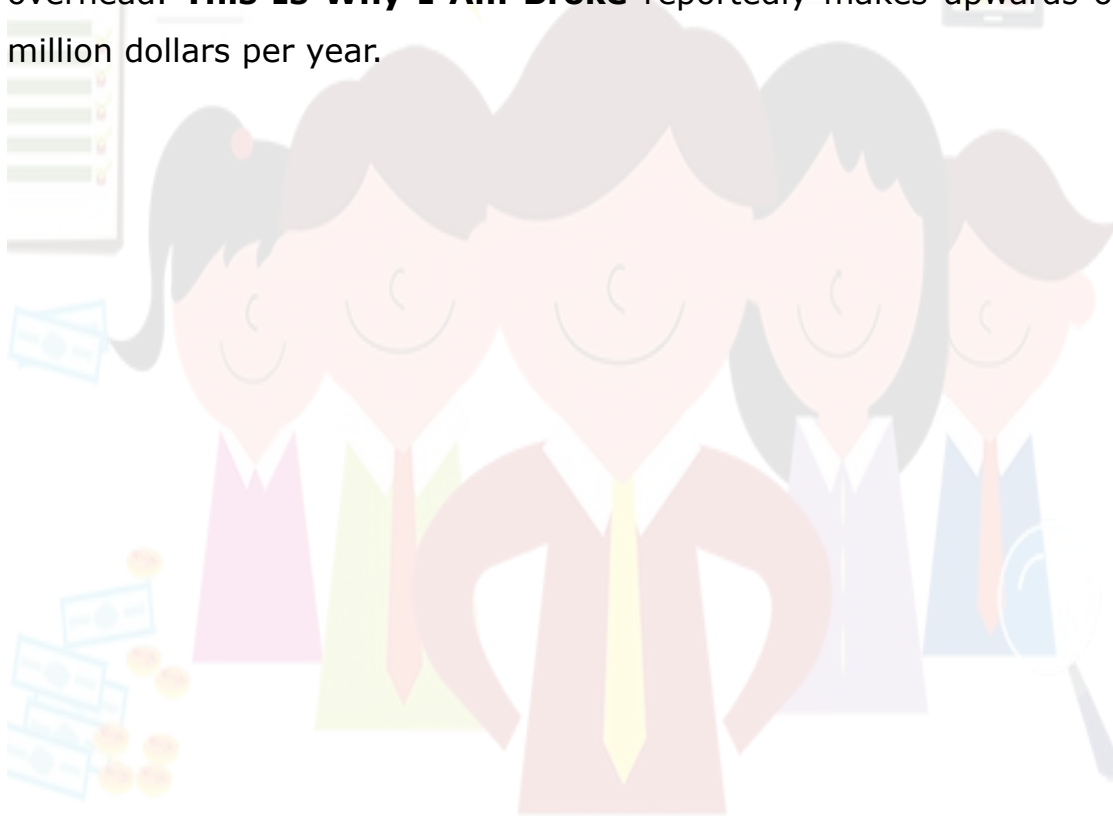


It is a great example of an ecommerce affiliate website that can be recreated with the thousands of affiliate agreements on Rakuten.

These websites are relatively easy to create, but the main drawback is they rank poorly in search engines due to the lack of content.

If you already have the audience or the social media following, building something like this is an easy way to monetize a blog.

You end up owning a kind of digital store that has no inventory or overhead. **This Is Why I Am Broke** reportedly makes upwards of a million dollars per year.



## Conclusion and Final Thoughts



The information in this course should get you started on the right foot with your affiliate marketing endeavors.

Rakuten is one of the better affiliate marketplaces, and they have enough affiliate agreements to monetize your site.

Affiliate marketing is a trial and error process, it's hard, it's work.

You need an audience, and they need to be engaged.

You need a product that they want or need to advertise, and you need to keep at it.

Hopefully the information presented here will keep you from making some newbie mistakes, like thinking that you'll be pulling in \$100 a day by tomorrow, or the illusion that this can be done without any effort or time invested.

If you are willing to learn, try, and stick it out, then affiliate marketing can get you to your goals, and Rakuten can certainly help.