1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips

from STAT News

by Bob McElwain

To all seeking success on the Web:

I hope these notes help you achieve your personal and financial goals, and make it easier for you to do so. -- Bob

Click here to begin!

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Manage Your Mailing Lists The Easy Way - Easy Mail Plus provides all you need to maintain mailing lists.

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Appendix A - For loads of great stuff to help build or improve your site, subscribe to "STAT News." It's **FREE!**

Appendix B - **Reseller Rights:** Sell "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" at your price, then tuck it all into your pocket.

Appendix C - STAT SE Notes. Discover how to submit simply and correctly to search engines. **Save $20.00!**

Appendix D - Want To Double Your Profits In One Year? Here's how to get it done. **Save $70.00!**

Appendix E - Want A Successful Online Business? Discover how to get it right the first time. **Save $100.00!**

Appendix F - **Reprinting Rights:** You may reprint any article in this work. **Click here for details.**

Appendix G - Articles Available From Autoresponders In Text Format For Easy Printing

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Appendix I - **Credits And Contact Information**

Introduction

Hi!

Here is the best of my work published in "STAT News" and elsewhere. Each piece has been reedited and updated to include the latest information available. I hope you enjoy every single article. And that you find great ideas throughout to help you start or improve your website, one that succeeds in producing ever greater profits.

How To Use "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips"

Many will prefer to simply read it from beginning to end. However the Table of Contents is designed to make it easy to select items of interest. And to return to them at your convenience.

The reason for this is in two parts. First, on a given day, you may have no interest in many of the topics. But when you do need the information, you will find it easy to select the appropriate article.

Second, as we read about something we really need, we do so with care. We may take notes, even reread it, just to be sure we have it locked in our minds. But when we turn to paper or a computer screen, we often find what we thought was clear, is not. The Table of Contents makes it a snap to go back for another look.

Don't Miss These Opportunities

Be sure to check out the Appendix items. I have included some excellent offers that may be exactly what you have been looking for. In particular, if you are not a subscriber to "STAT News," I hope you will join my list. Each week you will receive the best information I have been able create and collect. **Click here for details**.

A Technical Point About Links

Links to other parts of "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" appear as links on any web page, typically the title of an article or a click-here item.

Links to the Web are noted only with the domain name. My site reads: **SiteTipsAndTricks.Com**. The actual link, however, includes **"http://www."** and a page name if needed.

When you click a URL to the Web, most systems load the dialer if not already online. If this does not happen in your situation, you will need to be online for a click on a URL to work.

The links at the very bottom of the page to Contents and Appendices are probably obvious. But note that Chapter returns you to the beginning of whatever chapter you are in.

About Printing

Some printers may not work well with this book format. Or may waste paper. Many articles included are available in text format from an autoresponder. These print up nicely. For a list, please see **Appendix G**.

Any Questions?

As you use these notes, you are bound to encounter an idea or two that is not clear, or one that may seem flat wrong, please feel free to ask about it. I welcome all questions and comments. Just send me note at: **TIPS@sitetipsandtricks.com** I will get back to you ASAP.

Here's Too Successful Site Building!

Again, I hope you enjoy what you find here. And that it adds significantly to your bottom line.

Bob McElwain
Bob McElwain

Chapter 1
Staking Out Your Claim

A website is not required before starting an online business. There is a good deal of planing and learning to be done, before beginning to build one. Defining your niche is the fundamental task. If you already have a site running, look through these notes for good ideas you may have overlooked.

How Do You Define Success? - While making a million bucks is unlikely, you can make a good living.

What's It Cost To Start An Online Business?" - There are costs in starting any business, online or offline.

One Path To Online Success - There are lots of paths leading to success; this is one of the best.

Niche Finding Made Easy - Niche marketing is the only way to go.

Define A Niche, Then Conquer! - Success depends upon defining a niche within which you can dominate.

Knock Off The Guru! - If you find a guru dominating the niche you want, see if he or she can be toppled.

The Vortals Are Coming! - If you have found a niche, but lack a great product, consider building a vertical directory.

Who Do You Want To Sell To? - The key question may not be what to sell, but who to sell to.

Plan Your Way To Success - Without a solid business plan, you are doomed to fail.

Learn How To Win - Many willing to do the work required are not prepared for the associated learning task.

The Ultimate Shoestring Startup! - Follow this plan to start a business without spending a dime.

How Do You Define Success?

Many people have selective hearing. That is, they hear only what they are listening for. When such people tune in to the notion of getting rich on the Web, they can't seem to hear anything else. They are deaf to the news of dot-com failures in mass. Deaf to the certain doom that lies at the end of any path claimed to be quick or easy. And deaf to any mention of how tough it is to succeed in business anywhere, online or offline.

If you have fallen into this trap, there are only two options. Continue on your chosen path and fail. Or redefine what success means to you, then begin working to achieve it.

Getting Rich Is Unlikely

It is no easier to become wealthy online than offline. The only advantage to beginning a business online, rather than offline, is in the lower startup costs. The rest of it is work, learning, then implementing what you learn.

What are your chances of opening a new business in your home town and becoming a millionaire? Unless you have very special talents and skills, it's unlikely. The chances of doing so on a website are no better.

Would Making A Living Suit You?

Do you have what it takes to open a business on main street and earn a comfortable living? If you lack essential information, are you willing to take the time to hunt it up? If there are things you do not know, are you willing to learn them? If you lack needed skills, are you prepared to develop them?

One who can answer a resounding, "Yes," to the above questions, can succeed. Online or offline. Until you can shout this right out loud to your family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers on the street, any effort to build a successful website will break your heart. And waste a ton of your time. And more than a few bucks.

One Path

If you want to succeed on the Web, you must first come to grips with what you mean by success. If your definition can be simplified to making a good living with the opportunity to make more, then all is quite doable. And one of the best ways to start is to begin part time and grow your business as you learn.

Getting Real

Whether you have started a business or are still only thinking about doing so, you may find it informative to check out some successful sites. Successful, that is, according to the definition of their owners.

Common Elements

While the following sites may appear quite different from one another, they have much in common.

- Nobody is making a million bucks a year; this was not the goal. Rather they are making a living (their definition) and are in an excellent position to increase their income.
- The site designs are quite simple; very few fancy graphics are to be found.
- Each site is well focused.
- Each site is loaded with content.
- Some face stern competition; others have carved their niche and conquered it.

You will probably note ways in which each site can be improved. But this is true of any site, large or small. And it's true of yours. And mine.

MoHotta.Com

Features hot peppers, sauces, and such. A great example of niche marketing. Not many are into hot in this fashion, but those who are search constantly for more and hotter. Note there are a some such people in your community. Every nursery stocks pepper seedlings in the spring, labeled, "HOT!" This site tapped into this wide, if thinly spread interest. Something impractical in even a major city, but easy to do on the Web.

YouCanSave.Com

A super smooth catalog site. They resell TV direct sales merchandise. Their growth has come through the site and all business is transacted on it. Beyond what you see there is undoubtedly at least one person who spends a good part of each day with routine business chores, solving problems, dealing with customer complaints, and above all searching for even better deals for existing customers.

PrairieFrontier.Com

This company began as a marginally successful local wild flower seed company in Wisconsin. They grew significantly when the owner took the business online, expanded the product line, and reached out to a national (and to some extent, international) audience. In reply to a message, Deb Edlhuber said, "It [the site] has totally amazed me and continues to grow."

Specialist-Herbal.Com

Malcolm Simmonds launched his first site in late 1997, selling herbal products, which he had been making and selling offline since the early 80's. He learned HTML and did the entire site himself. Within a year, it had paid for itself. Since then, he has expanded and enriched the site enormously, increasing his profits in the process. While looking ahead to even further increases, he is doing quite nicely now. All this in addition to his continuing success offline.

ParaPub.Com

Dan Poynter had a successful self-publishing company going before he launched his website. What used to be a travel/phone/direct mail company is now strictly a web-based company. In a reply to a message, Dan said, "This morning I checked the order-email account and found we sold 21 reports overnight.The customers benefited because they received the reports instantly (on a Sunday) and did not have to pay for shipping or sales tax. Para Publishing benefited because we did not have to print, inventory, wrap, ship, or place postage on the reports. This is truly a win-win situation made possible by the Internet."

CarAccessories.Com

This site was built by a mother-daughter team. They first learned the brick and mortar catalog business, then expanded to the Web. The site is now a profitable component of their business. Click to visit my site for their delightful story, "**Net Lessons from the Monster Girls**" by Rob Spiegle.

Wrapping Up

A while back, a visitor asked, "Do you know of a small site that is successful?" I referred him to one of the above. A short while later, he replied, "You gotta be kidding. That's nothing!"

If you visit any of the above sites and find "nothing," then you probably need to know more about business and the web in order to build a winning site. Revaluate your definition of success, learn what is needed, then take another look. These sites are successful. That is, successful in the eyes of their owners. And in the eyes of their customers. What else matters?

What's It Cost To
Start An Online Business?

It's all a function of that extremely precious commodity called time. When the alternator in your car quits, you can fix it yourself or turn to a mechanic. Working the Web is no different in this regard. Doing it yourself saves bucks, but may not be cost-effective. And it can be a serious mistake if you lack required skills.

If you want your site to become a significant source of income, judicious use of time is mandatory. No one person can do it all. And what you need but don't have time to do, will cost.

Going Into Business

If you are starting a new business, you must file a DBA (Doing Business As statement) or the equivalent in the county or state in which you will work. After filing, it may need to be published. Then you need to open a bank account. Costs vary from state to state. In California the minimum is about $50 for the DBA and $10/month for the bank account. Also consider any state or local licenses required.

If you need an accountant, costs go up. Turn to an attorney, and they may skyrocket. But you may need to consider these options because of the products or services you will market, just as in an offline business. You may need to consider liability insurance. Incorporation may provide even more protection.

HTML vs Web Page Editors

You must understand the basics of HTML, the language in which web pages are written. There is a time cost here. But at some point, most will find it more effective to turn to a web page editor to save time. Costs range from about $50 to $200. (**Click here for notes about The HTML Editor**. You may never need more power than is available here.)

Building Your Site

Hiring someone to put a site together can cost thousands of dollars. More important, you may find making changes later brings significant added cost. It is best to build your own pages, for then you have total control.

But the template used throughout the site is so critical to success, consider hiring an artist to get it right. Not the site, just the basic page template. Once the site is established, it can be very cost-effective to hire out the creation of new pages and updating. A good page template with original art work can run anywhere from $200 on up, but $500 should cover even special needs.

Free vs Paid Hosting Services

There is only one option. You must have your own domain name ($13.50/year from **000Domains.Com**) and a good hosting service. I use both Pair.Com and JumpLine.Com. While there are other fine services available, these two offer attractive entry level pricing. $5.95/month will buy ample resources at **Pair.Com** provided you do not need cgi or statistics initially. HitMatic is a free service that provides great stats. **JumpLine.Com** at $14.95/month may be the better choice, for CGI capability and adequate stats are included.

If you need a shopping cart service. Americart is very good, and is available through Pair.Com at $15/month, but anyone can use it at $21/month. JumpLine.Com offers a shopping cart as part of their package at $24.95/month. However, it is limited. If you can live with the format available, JumpLine may be the best choice.

Note forms or shopping carts only take the orders. You will need a merchant account to deal with credit cards. Set up fees run from about $300 on up. Monthly fees run from $25 and up. If you need online processing, add similar amounts. (For inexpensive options, see "**Take Credit Cards On The Cheap**.")

Opening An Office

While getting started, you will likely keep your present job, and it may make sense to work from your home. Even so, you still need an "office," including stationery, invoices, business cards, and possibly brochures to be handed out wherever you happen to be. Costs here are the same as in an offline business, and will be a function of your needs.

Don't overlook software. If you want to do some of the graphics for your site, Paint Shop Pro at $99 is a good value. (**JascSoftware.Com**) For your accounting, Quicken is good. For mail list handling and personalized mailing, including emailing, Easy Mail Plus at $50 is an excellent choice. (For more info, see "**Manage Your Mailing Lists The Easy Way**.")

Then there are other things, such as supplies. Printers chew up enormous gobs of paper. For competitive prices on consumables, try Office Depot. Call 800-463-3768 for a free catalog.

A Phone Is A Must

An email address is not enough. You need a phone and someone to answer it. Preferably an 800 number. Even if you expect to receive few calls, this is a must. People often call just to see if you're for real. If there's no phone, you've lost a sale. Some argue that voice mail is a reasonable alternative, but it will not help if you can not get back quickly. If you have a spouse who can answer, go for it. If not, find someone in your area who can take calls as your secretary. If you provide up-to-date information about your business, your "secretary" can often save you the need for a later reply. Further, there is simply no less expensive way to appear to be working the business full time.

Where We're At

The above is not the whole of it. For example, there has been no mention of search engines, yet good positioning can make a big difference. Again, if you

know how to optimize pages and can do so easily, it is worth your time to do so. If not, hire it out. Writing skills are important. If yours aren't so hot, factor in some cost for editing, or even creating both page content and the advertising message behind all. Good service is available at $25-$50/hour.

You must add up these costs relative to your particular needs. But it is unlikely you can start a serious online business for less than $500 to $1000, even if you do all the work yourself.

Time Cost Analysis

Starting any business means commitments in time you can not expect to recover except over the long run. So good cost analysis is difficult initially. Even so, put a dollar value on your time, perhaps as low as $5/hour, to help you make good decisions about how you will use your time. Even at $5/hour, it will be clear that some things should be hired out.

Building web pages with HTML when you could be generating leads may not be the best use of time. Reading a book or two about how to work the Web can be very helpful, but sometimes it's more cost effective to buy the information needed.

Working harder is often the only option available. But when possible, work smarter, which often means hiring services. In the end you'll have more fun and rake in greater profits sooner.

One Path To Online Success

If you are determined to build a successful online business, here's a plan that works, even if you are brand new to the Web. The key to it is to take a small step in each of several areas all at the same time. As long as each step takes you closer to your goal, then there is no hurry at all. That is, you can work with it as time allows. The trick is to avoid any move in the wrong direction, any step that is counterproductive.

The Fundamental Questions

Begin by asking very specific questions such as ...

- Who will I sell to?
- What will I sell?
- How will I sell it?
- How can a website help get it done?
- What are my financial goals for this venture?

These are not easy to answer. Yet completely defining suitable responses is mandatory. Without them, much of what you do will be a waste of time and effort. On the other hand, answer them definitively, and every move you make will lead you closer to your objective.

The last question may be the easiest to answer. For many, it will be, "To build a business working part time that will grow sufficiently for me to give up my day job and work my online business full time." What follows assumes your answer is similar.

The first question may be the most difficult to answer. But it is the one that matters most because you are going to spend a lot of time directly or indirectly with your customers. It is hard to be effective with people you do not enjoy being around. (For ideas about finding an answer, see "**Who Do You Want To Sell To**.")

Getting Started

Finding appropriate answers to the above questions requires a good deal of study and thought. As you proceed, focus on all of them collectively. That is, as you think about who you want sell to, also consider products to be sold and ways of doing so,

To get started, jot down a few thoughts about each as a beginning point. With these notes, search for ideas and information to help you flesh out a full fledged business plan.

This process will take months, not days. Whatever it takes, it's better to know where you are headed before committing the bucks and time needed to build a website.

The First Step

This may sound like heresy to seasoned professionals, but the failure to understand what great ad copy is all about, and the lack of skills needed

to produce it, is a very common cause of business failure, particularly online. So start here.

Start with copywriting? Have you lost it?

No. Not at all. Copywriting comes after all else is done except building the site. By then you are tired, filled with self-doubt, and doing all possible to minimize committing to even one more small chore. So the final copy on the site often looks and reads as something done hastily and at the last minute. Avoid this calamity by beginning your study right now. Be ready when the time comes to write great pages. Nothing less works.

There is an added bonus in seeking to develop or improve copywriting skills. Almost every gain is also an asset to all other writing you do, including what is needed for your email and newsletter. No writing I have ever done is more demanding than copywriting. Improved skills in this area means better results with all of your writing.

There is no need to master copywriting at this point. But get started with the task. If you have not decided on a product, you can't say who your perfect customer will be. But you can come to grips with the concept of building such an image.

There are many books on copywriting. Grab one or two and dig in. The very best in my mind is "Make Your Words Sell" by Joe Robson. For my review of this awesome piece of work, see "**Dance With Your Customers.**"

About Reading

You are going to do a lot of reading in all this. A lot of ideas you have never encountered will be presented. You will find it impossible to grasp everything. The trick is to skim a lot, read points that grab you, take a few notes, then lay the piece aside and turn to another. When you come back to it later, you will gain additional insights, for you will be further down the path toward your goal.

Finding A Niche

A niche is a narrow slice of a larger market. A slice with an audience large enough to produce the income you need, but otherwise as narrow as possible. And it needs to be something in which you can dominate powerfully. You want to be *the guru* within your niche.

Finding your niche may be the hardest part of all. Not the work involved, but the time, particularly the thinking time. Yet this is absolutely the last thing to rush. For if you don't get this right, nothing is going to work at all well.

For articles about finding just what you need, see "Niche Finding Made Easy" and "Define A Niche, Then Conquer" further along in this chapter. Also visit my site, **SiteTipsAndTricks.Com**. Click on Topics in the navigation bar to the left. Then click on Niche Marketing. You will find a lot of helpful notes here. Some of Dr. Michel Fortin's work is included, and his conclusions are inarguable.

Finding A Product

As mentioned, working with copywriting and seeking to define your niche need to evolve together. That is, as you make progress in one area, move ahead a bit in the other.

Now to this mix, add the search for possible products and services. And throughout, continue to try to picture who you want to sell to. To define your perfect customer.

Without a doubt, the best product to sell is one you create. This gives you total control. You may even invite others to assist in selling it. There is profit to be made in selling products produced by others, but much more in products you produce.

As in most areas, there are lots of resources available that show you how to identify a need and create an appropriate product. One of the best is "Make Your Knowledge Sell" by Monique Harris. (**Click here for my review of this comprehensive work.**)

Enough Already. How Do I Get Started?

It's best not to make a move until you have defined a niche and answered that first question: Who do you want to sell to? Until you have a clear picture of your target, and have defined within this group some possible perfect customers, you are not yet positioned effectively. Here's why.

When just getting started, you must seek to understand everything you encounter, for you do not know what you will need. Yet this is impossible to do. There are simply too many good newsletters out there to keep up with them all. Too many neat books; you can't get and read every one. And too many sites such as STAT, upon which you can spend a week or more without exhausting the resources.

But as you narrow your focus, you in turn narrow the information gathering task. Settle on half a dozen good newsletters to follow, keep as many as a dozen books handy for reference, and refuse to be distracted by anything off target. Until you can accomplish this,

do not extend yourself further by tackling a newsletter or website. Such tasks steal precious time from the fundamental: Defining your target.

When You Have The Focus

Given a focus, you can begin, even if you are still searching for a good product. This can come later. But you must know who your target is.

Given this, start a newsletter, then work at trying to get feedback. When your target begins interacting with you, there are all kinds of great benefits. From their words will spring new ideas that both clarify your goals and bring you closer to achieving them. (For info about starting with only a newsletter, see "**The Ultimate Shoestring Startup**" further along in these notes.)

And consider opening a website. Whether or not you have a product, focus on building great content.

But even with a website, you need to build a newsletter. This is no longer optional; people expect you to have one. A newsletter is the most effective way to stay in touch with your target and demonstrate your growing expertise. (For details, see **Chapter 6** in this work.)

Continue working on your copywriting skills. Make sure every page on the site "sells" even if it's only free information.

Keep the pages simple. Follow the unwritten rules. Let that copy you've struggled to create be the total focus of your site. Hold the art work to a minimum. A logo and a tiled background is all you really need. And whether or not you yet have a product to sell, remember that content is king. Provide all you can and do all possible to keep your visitors coming back for more.

A great resource in building a site that sells effectively is "Make Your Site Sell" by Ken Evoy. It's another heavy read, not to be accomplished in a single sitting. (**Click here for my review**.)

Good hosting is available from **Pair.Com** beginning at $5.95/month. But you will need some statistics; Hitmatic, which is free, may be sufficient at least initially. **JumpLine.Com** is available at $14.95/month, and the statistics included meet most needs.

What Next?

Continue to search for products that fit your defined target. And continue to seek an unfulfilled need within your target that you can satisfy with a product you create.

Given a product, it's time to really zero in on your perfect customer. Everything in your newsletter and on your site must be directed at this target. It's fine if others join in, but it's impossible to talk to two different types of people at the same time. Grab a tight focus and stick to it.

Wrapping Up

This plan may not be as easy to accomplish as you had hoped. It requires time, work, and effort. And there are things to be learned. But it is doable. Anybody who persists can make it happen.

Niche Finding Made Easy

Suppose you love books. Everything about them. You read voraciously. And you'd just love to write some reviews and sell the books you particularly enjoy. But hey, forget that. Right? An individual doesn't stand a chance in the book business. Right? If Barnes & Noble doesn't seem able to catch Amazon, you're not going to get it done. Right?

Well, yes and no. It's true you are not likely to beat Amazon, even if they falter in that heady race with Barnes & Noble. But if you change the rules some, you can win.

If you select a specific area, one sufficiently narrow, you can beat these companies in this niche. Few books are being published in what was previously called Male Adventure. Yet men still read when they can find an author they enjoy. I don't know this would work, but it's a possibility worth checking.

Maybe specialize in technical works, not available through major book stores. Then of course there are rare books; a narrow niche within this category might be just the ticket. Just think books. Write down every idea that comes to mind. Make a note of every interest or skill you can bring to the table.

Testing Demand And Supply

Then try to find combinations of ideas that might work for you. As Ken Evoy has suggested, work up a list of keywords for areas you feel are possibilities. Enter these words at **GoTo.Com** What you will get is a list of related terms people searched for last month. The counts for each item can be taken as a measure of demand. Then go to AltaVista and enter any phrases with a high demand and note the number of listings found. This is a measure of supply. The most promising areas are those for which demand (counts at GoTo) is relatively high and supply (counts at AltaVista) is relatively low.

(The link to GoTo.Com above is:
inventory.go2.com/inventory/searchInventory.mp)

Somewhere in this list there is a combination of books and your skills and interests with which you can define a niche. It may not be obvious at first glance, but if you pursue this approach determinedly, you will find a great niche.

Think About Ebooks

Ebooks are growing in popularity. A while back I looked into them just for the heck of it, thinking I might uncover something of interest. I did not find a specific market that has not been touched, but I bet it's there.

I did find an idea, though. With so many people publishing ebooks, there is definitely room for a great ebook compiler. The Adobe PDF format is popular, but the compiler produces post-script files that are huge. And I don't find the reader easy to use. NeoBooks is an option, but probably unnecessarily complex to use. And it excludes MAC users; there is a reader for PDF files on MACs.

I'm not planning to write a new compiler. I have included this thought only as an example of things that may come up unexpectedly while you are searching for something else. Each such idea is a possible opportunity.

Look For Connections

As I was working on another article, I opened the top drawer of my desk and grabbed the highlighter. Beneath it was an old coin my grandfather gave me years back. A penny. Dated 1849. I know nothing about coins. But this one may even be copper. It's larger than the current crop. It's worn, but the markings are still quite legible. So what's it worth? Nothing? $5000? I have no idea.

I love history. How long would it take me to learn enough about coins to safely buy and sell them? I can't say, for I've never looked into it.

But it would be easy enough to read a book or two, then see if I could find some action on eBay.Com.

There would be little risk in testing. Put the two ideas together, and I've got coins with a history. Maybe it's a joke. Maybe it would work. Easy enough to check it out.

Opening a site on which you plan to sell and trade rare coins, is likely to put you head to head with older more established sites that will bury you. To identify a niche, you must find good answers to the following.

- What can you offer they do not?

- Why will people come to you rather than going to them?

- What will you be able to say about yourself and your site that sets you apart from them?

Regardless of the competition you face, there will be less if you focus on . . .

- Coins of the 19th Century (or the century of your choice)
- Roman Coins (or Greek)
- Gold Coins (Or silver coins, or maybe both)
- Spanish Plunder: Coins With A Bloody History

Obviously there needs to be a market for what you settle on. But assuming there is one, you can see how much easier it is to answer the questions above about the need for a narrower focus.

In a narrow niche, it is much easier to set yourself apart from your competitors. Much easier to let your site speak for itself and demonstrate your expertise. And it answers the question of why people should come to you, for you are now a specialist, soon to become an expert.

You will find your pages will have better positions on the search engines. In fact much better. A different set of keywords emerges from your selected subset of all coin dealers.

The Right Niche Makes It Happen

Targeted marketing is what it's all about; it's a must. You do not want visitors who do not want what you offer. They are not buyers and will only waste your time, resources, and bandwidth.

Start by listing everything you enjoy doing or talking about. Everything. I've no idea how to relate golf and history, but if you like both, put them on your list.

The oddest things can lead to something really neat. This article came from an old penny in the top drawer of my desk. Check out your hidden and/or forgotten treasures. Be alert to every crazy notion that comes to mind. Somewhere in this madness, you will find a niche worth capturing.

Define A Niche, Then Conquer!

Looking for a quality baseball cap? Hey, it's easy. Check out the material and workmanship. Grab a color you like, and maybe a team logo. You don't even have to try it on! Thanks to the little strap in the back, one size fits all. A marketer's dream.

You can still buy baseball caps that are sized. But they cost a good deal more and you have to buy in quantity. That little strap put a lot of cap manufactures flat out of business.

Declining Options

You see this happening across the spectrum of manufactured products.

There is need now and then for me to spend serious time in the kitchen. Which includes washing dishes.

I found a great sponge some years back. Dark green on one side with a roughness to it that really does a number on a pot or frying pan. The other side is yellow, a more typical kind of manufactured sponge. Softer and thicker, it's great for polishing off the heavy scrub. Each lasts about a month, longer if you don't mind some frayed edges.

The last batch I bought looked identical to what I had been getting. But they don't last but about a week. And they do not do nearly as good a job, which means more work. No doubt I paid less, but in the long run, the cheaper version may cost me more. Yet they will likely put the original manufacturer out of business.

Will People Pay For Quality?

My answer is a resounding, "Yes!" If I can find the original sponge mentioned above, I will buy it without even a glance at the price. It's a tool that simplifies a task.

When it comes to tools, I want the best, for they last longer and make the job easier all the while. A lot of people feel the same way.

Quality tools of any kind can become the basis of a profitable niche market. Sized baseball caps sell only on style and comfort. Thus this is not as good a starting point. There are not nearly as many people willing to pay twice the going rate for style as there are who will do so for quality tools.

A Difficult Task

Defining a niche is tough to do. But those who intend to succeed on the Web into the future, must find and conquer one. They must become the dominant name within it. They must provide great content that demonstrates expertise, over-deliver with quality products, and provide extremely high levels of support to all.

But Where Do I Start?

Throughout the offline world, independent merchants have been forced to join hands with large suppliers to the extent many are not free to stock in areas which conflict with the wishes of the suppliers. This may be most obvious in your local hardware store. Most of the stock comes through Ace Hardware or True Value Hardware.

When the owner of the store you favor says, "We can't get those any more," he usually means the supplier no longer handles the item. And because of agreements, he is not free to go elsewhere for it. More than likely, the supplier has replaced what you want with a less expensive product that may or may not measure up to its predecessor in performance.

Quality Is Available

The drill bits available in your local store are not very expensive. But they are not great tools. Those who

use bits regularly as a part of their work, may pay twice as much as you will pay. But the bits they buy will outperform and outlast their less expensive cousins many, many times over.

Hardware Stores And Niche Marketing

Tools are a major item in a hardware store. But the store's target is Mr. and Mrs. Average Consumer. Most do not need great quality and would not pay the greater price even if the better item was available. But some would. Therein lies the key.

While your local hardware store may find it unprofitable to stock professional tools, may even be prevented by contracts from doing so, many customers would like the option to buy better quality.

The Web makes it possible to profitably offer only the best. The few who would buy top of the line in a given shop if it were available are collectively a target of considerable size.

Starting Small

Several years back I discovered bricks of fire starter cubes. Just touch a match to one, and you can ignite a pretty good sized chunk of firewood, provided it is split. Joy! No more kindling. No more nursing things along. No frustrating restarts. Just stack it, add a cube, and touch it with a lighted match.

About eight years back, the hardware store changed brands. (Translate: Supplier changed brands.) They look the same. Cost the same. But it usually takes several matches. (And scorched fingers!) Further, it often takes several cubes.

Make Money Starting Fires?

I can almost hear what you are saying. "Stuff and nonsense," would be one of the kindlier remarks. But a successful Web business can be built upon just such a simple tool.

If you live in a city, a fire in the evening is likely not a necessity, only something that adds ambiance to other activity. For those who live with the first snowfall of winter lying about them until spring, a fire is often much more than a luxury. Most everyone who lives in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas as I do uses a wood stove throughout the winter. Many have no other source of heat.

Okay, so there are a lot of people who start wood fires. But fire starter cubes? Get serious! Where's the buck in this?

Have You Got What I Want?

If you can provide good fire starter cubes, the kind I have not been able to find locally for many years, I will visit your site once each year as a minimum. Think of the accessories you can offer me when I do.

Wood boxes. All sorts of items in which wood can be stored.

Moving wood is a pain. An effective dolly or cart would be a great help. Something that moves easily over icy snow will be in great demand in some places.

Few would buy a stove from you for most need the support of installation. So turn this to your advantage. Let your expertise regarding stoves become the central core of your site. The differences between stoves are enormous. And defining a best choice according to needs is extremely difficult.

Along the path to expertise there are many helpful resources. Company sales presentations and specifications are a good beginning point. Write a good article about a particular stove, then call the company and ask for someone to read it before you publish. Most will jump at the opportunity. And you will discover details of importance overlooked or not available earlier. You may even take this first contact into a drop shipment arrangement for an occasional sale. Do it right, and advertising revenue can be generated.

But getting back to other products you can offer, add the best wax for a tiled hearth. Brick bracer. And all it takes to keep a stove looking great. And something to deal effectively with those bugs that sneak in with the wood.

Then there are teapots to be perched on top of the stove, to add a bit of welcome humidity. Tools to clear the ashes within the stove. Then there's chimney cleaning gear.

Even attractive pillows for the pup. which keeps the carpet clean. And something for the cat as well, though I've no idea what.

Wrapping Up

While the above notion has merit, it is flawed in that it is seasonal. Were I to tackle this, I would probably search for another niche that was summer based, and work this through another site. Maybe barbecues and outdoor cooking.

Tools came to mind because I like good ones and they are not easy to find. Since lots of people feel the same way, this is a good starting point. Cook ware comes to mind.

Yes, I know the Web is loaded with cook ware shopping malls. But have you looked at the products? They are virtually all the same. There is not only an opportunity here to sell quality, but to sell specialty items. What's out there now kind of reminds me of baseball caps in a way. We hope you agree that a eight inch frying pan is as small as is needed.

Since I only fry a couple eggs at a time, I'd rather have a five inch pan. Show me one of quality and I'll pay your price.

Knock Off The Guru!

You've done it. You've found a great niche and a target within it you really enjoy working with. It's an area in which you already have sufficient expertise for a great start and you feel confident that within a very short time, you can master the whole of it. You even have some good products in mind. Further it has potential in the near term, with even more over time. It's just perfect. Exactly what you have been searching for.

But dominating this niche is The Guru. There's a website that seems to be working well. Lots of interactivity, so while you don't have a visitor count, there seems to be good traffic. And a newsletter. So what now? Forget it, right? Look for greener pastures, right?

No. Look closer.

You May Yet Win

Years back a friend of mine who understood the grocery business gave me a winning formula for most any business. "If you want to start a grocery business [supermarket these days]," he said, "Identify the best store in town, open up right across the street, then beat them."

While this may seem unrealistic at first glance, it is the only way to go. For if you can not beat your competition face to face, you won't do better on some side street down the block in a low rent district. It will only take a bit longer to go bust.

This holds for the Web as well. So ...

Get To Know The Guru

Take the time to thoroughly examine this person who apparently stands in your way.

- Check out the site and follow changes with care.

- Subscribe to the newsletter.

- Read the books available.

- Check out the forums from the earliest entry to the latest.

- Find newsgroups in which The Guru hangs out and join in.

The objective is to learn everything possible about this person, right down to his or her favorite color of socks, their stand on Wheaties versus corn flakes, on cats versus dogs.

Is The Guru For Real?

Some obtain The Guru position almost by accident. For example, being the first one to jump in can be enough to make it happen. If you go at this determinedly, you may find The Guru ...

- Is not as knowledgable as is implied. (Or is flat wrong.)
- Is another self-proclaimed expert who is in fact a phony.
- Has a cult following, but does not lead the entire target.
- Is a step or two behind the times, not staying current.
- Offers products or services for which better exist.
- Is not promoting well.
- Is not relating to visitors effectively.

While there are other things to look for, the above is a good start. If The Guru is faltering in even one area such as the above, it may offer a sufficient opening for you to break through and capture the top spot.

Is There An Alternate Position?

In areas such as politics, medicine, and many others, there are different points of view. While differences may not be as clearly defined in your chosen area as in politics, there may be a need for another voice speaking from a different point of beginning. A need for a stand other than the one The Guru has staked out.

The Guru may be wrong in one or more fundamental positions which means the conclusions and recommendations are not as effective as what you can offer.

Or The Guru may only partially cover the subject. You may be able to set up camp right next door and provide what has been overlooked.

While thinking along these line is not entirely clear cut, you may be able to establish an opposing or alternate position. And when you begin to be noticed, The Guru may indirectly be forced to enhance your position by defending against it. If you politely refuse to join in the ensuing fray, you may be able to rise above it and take the high ground.

What If The Guru Is Unbeatable?

If this is really so, there is still one possibility to consider.

If there are several people who appear qualified to contend for the top spot, forget it. The odds are just too long. You don't have a good shot at beating all of them.

But if The Guru is alone at the top, even though there are dozens of wannabes below, there is a chance here, one worth serious consideration.

Go For Second

Years back Hertz dominated the rental car business. Avis was back a ways but doing well. Others came and went, without offering significant competition. But those at Avis were not satisfied. They brought in a new CEO.

He immediately bought an advertising campaign, intent upon remaking the company image and significantly boosting sales. A couple of months later with major bucks expended, the suits met in a large conference room. When the head suit from the ad agency stood, all eyes were upon him. "You're second," he said. "So you try harder."

Silence lingered for a time. Over a million dollars had been paid for each word uttered. The new CEO may have ground his teeth in agony, but he smiled, then nodded agreement. The rest is history.

What a remarkable USP (Universal Selling Proposition). That they were second was undeniable.

That they were therefore forced to try harder was obviously a benefit to busy, weary travelers. For many years, Avis closed on Hertz, doing very well indeed.

The Hidden Pull

Have you ever watched a horse race in which there is a clear leader coming around the last turn into the stretch? With the horse running second back a ways, but with a shot? With the rest of them out of it, making it a two horse race to the finish line?

If you have, you remember it well. The fans go crazy. The jockey on the leader may be forced to use the whip just to keep the attention of his mount fixed on the task. But with or without a whip, that second horse closes. And the fans go even crazier.

But if the second horse can win by even a nose, the stands erupt. People toss smiles in all directions. Some jump up and down in place. Maybe clap their hands over their head. Almost as if each owned the horse.

This is true in racing of any kind. Cars. Motorcycles. Bicycles. Runners, whether a sixty yard dash or a marathon. Thus the new USP for Avis tapped into a vast enthusiasm among the many Americans who tend to support the underdog.

I'd like to report the ad agency was aware of this, for it is magnificent positioning, but I don't recall. Certainly they became aware of it. Through the years, they continued to monkey with this winning position. One blunder I remember was something like, "We're as good as number one!" The campaign lasted about two weeks on television, and sales plummeted. When they tossed it out (and maybe the ad agency as well) and returned to the initial position, sales recovered nicely.

More About Second

While the above is a tale of big business, a small business can be successful with a similar approach. Many applaud the underdog, particularly when they are trying harder.

Quicker response to email. Immediate replies to questions in the forums. A broader range of products or services. Better quality. And in all, total and immediate customer support.

Wrapping Up

If you can beat The Guru, do so. Go for the jugular!

If you can't, seek an alternate position.

If that's no go, consider going for second place. Avis made it work for a lot of years.

The Vortals Are Coming

Actually, they are already upon us. Vertical directories may be the better name, but they are often called vortals (from vertical and portal). They are directories which focus on a specific target or niche. And already, there are directories and search engines to help surfers find the appropriate vortal.

Vortals and tools for finding them will increase in number and quality for the foreseeable future. And they will become increasingly comprehensive. Yahoo, the most significant directory available, makes no effort to "cover" the Web. A search for "home improvement" will bring up a lot of listings. However, Yahoo only wants a few appropriate to a given search term. On the other hand, a vortal focused on this topic seeks to bring up *all* related sites.

The continued popularity of directories stems largely from the frequency with which search engines return irrelevant listings. But the directories lack comprehensiveness. Thus the emerging popularity of Vortals. Surfers seeking complete information on a given topic will increasingly turn to vortals as viable options.

And in this evolving trend, there is opportunity. It may be exactly what you are looking for.

Niche Marketing Is A Must

Most now understand the merits of niche marketing. They understand success is unlikely unless the focus is tight and sharply drawn. (For some good information about this, click Topics in the navigation bar on my site, then on Niche Marketing.) But finding products that can be effectively marketed within a narrow niche is often more difficult. And producing your own may be impractical or unrealistic. Building a vortal is a viable alternative.

The Do-It-Yourself Vortal

Building a vortal is not unlike building reciprocal links to a website. It means finding sites that belong in your directory, and making a link to them. Then inviting them to link back to your site.

Those who choose not to link back may need to be treated differently than they would be on a website. That is, on your site, you might choose to delete a link that was not reciprocated. Given a directory in which you want to point to all possible resources related to your topic, you may need to retain the link for completeness.

Only minimal writing skills are needed. And there's no need for elaborate site design. People will want your information. Period.

The task is building links. The objective is to have every possible link of value. When achieved, you will find you have many times the number of links Yahoo can present for your topic.

What You Need

No special tools are required. You need only to find an appropriate set of keywords, then hit the search engines and find every possible site. Time consuming, yes. Difficult, no. If you would like some suggestions for finding keywords, check out, "**The KeyWord Lottery And How To Win it**."

You can bypass the search engines by using WebFerret. And in the process, save a good deal of time. For suggestions, check out, "**Want A Million New Targeted Visitors?**"

Going First Class

Bob Massa, the guru in search engine positioning service, has opened up another exciting door. He is

using HyperSeek to power the construction of a vast array of vortals. Nearly 2000 people have joined in. If this idea appeals, check it out at **SearchKingPortal4U.Com** Tools available allow you to build a very comprehensive website.

The Bad News

It's tough getting started with Bob's program. And the learning curve is very steep. Having a project of interest, I signed up and got far enough into the program to see clearly just how powerful it is. I also saw that it was not something that can be done properly in one's spare time. As other opportunities presented themselves, I had to let some things go, and Bob's Portal Partners was one of them. I regret it, really, for this approach works.

Getting started with anything new is often quite painful. You will find this true here. But if you begin with the tutorial and work on determinedly, things do begin to make sense. To be honest, many will falter, then quit. Success requires time and above all, persistence. However, it is all quite workable.

The Good News

The forums are very helpful. In fact the thing I miss most is the really neat people involved in Bob's program. They shine through brightly in the forums. They will help with everything from technical support to strategy and marketing. And there is lots of help specifically for beginners.

Options

Bob offers two levels at which you can participate. One includes a free website. The other offers more power, but costs $40/month. In considering the free option, do not get it mixed up with typical free hosting services such as geocities.com.

Suppose you've decided upon "home improvement." If this name is available within Search King, the URL would be homeimprovement.searchking.com in the free version. Bob has assured me that many using this

structure are doing great with the search engines, something nearly impossible to do at geocities.com.

However, I recommend getting your own domain name, as in homeimprovement.com This will cost you $40/month to use Bob's program. But if you can afford the bucks, this is the way to go. Your own domain name adds credibility to your site. It also makes it portable, although it's unlikely you will ever want to abandon Bob's service.

Nothing To Lose And Lots To Gain

Building a vortal on your own or doing it through Bob's program is a great idea. It will have particular appeal for those who have identified a niche, but have not yet figured how to conquer it. Having worked at generating link swaps, I personally would choose Bob's program. The tools available are awesome, thus you can get further much faster.

You do not need any products or special expertise in your area of interest to get started. As your site evolves, ideas for expansion will emerge. You will find products and/or services you can provide, in addition to the directory itself. You may even find a product you can produce. Meanwhile, you will be working in an area of interest and learning more about it every day. Thus this is a grand road to expertise.

A common approach to starting a website is to do so in addition to a full time job. This works well in building a vertical directory. You can not progress as quickly in two hours a day as you can working full time, but you can build. Add ten links a day, and you will have 300 in a month, 3600 in a year. Once you get the hang of it all, this is a perfectly reasonable goal. And there is no limit to where you can go from such a beginning.

Who Do You Want To Sell To?

Those with an eye toward building a successful business in cyberspace often waste a good deal of time searching for the ideal product. One that will sell almost without effort. And generate great profits into the foreseeable future. The problem is, no such product exists.

The Wrong Question

One who asks, "What is the best product to sell?" has missed the whole side of the barn. Even if rephrased to, "best kind of product," it still is not sufficiently definitive. Among reasonable starting points, here is a good one. Ask, "Who do I want to sell to?"

If you go for a product first, then you must define your target relative to the product. And also your website. So if the product flops, chances are very good you get to start over from scratch. A much better approach is to ...

Select The Target First

Since selling means working closely with your customers selecting people you like to be around is a terrific place to start. In one way or another, you will spend a lot of time with your customers. To the extent they are people with whom you are comfortable and effective, being "with" them will be good time, possibly even quality time. Decide first who your target will be; let definition of the product to be sold come later. Look at the positives that spring immediately from this approach.

These are people you know and understand. You relate to them effectively with ease. You already know how to talk to them. You know what you can safely ignore and where they need more information. You know what arguments they accept and what they reject out of hand. You will be comfortable with them. They will even perk you up when you're a little down.

Despite best efforts, we spend a lot of time with people we do not choose to be with. It's so for

anyone striving toward a goal, because our success depends upon others to whom we must relate effectively. This takes doing. But if we enjoy being with our customers, the rest of it's a snap.

Key Questions

So the first task is to ask ...

- Who do you want to talk to?

- Who do you want to spend your time with?

- What kinds of people do you like being around?

- Who stimulates you when things are not going well?

These are key questions. And "anybody" is absolutely not the right answer. In fact you want to

move in the opposite direction. Narrow the focus as far as possible. As an example, rather than addressing all dog lovers, focus on those who love Dobermans. Rather than focusing on those who love to read, go for those who love to learn by reading.

How About Passion?

Many argue that passion is the key. That in doing what you love, you will enjoy the doing, persist, and thus succeed. This may work for you. So while I won't argue the point, it does not seem complete to me.

As a youngster, I studied music and was playing for bucks by age twenty. I no longer play. My passion for music remains, but that in performing has faded, drowned out by the demands for tea-party attendance, smiling at folks I did not like, and in general being at the beck and call of anybody with a dime. In short, I found I was spending too much time with people I did not enjoy being with.

That for which you have a passion, may be the perfect answer for you. For many, however, who you will spend your time with may matter more. However you begin your search, all quickly funnels into ...

Getting Started

The significance of targeted marketing can not be overstated. It's crucial to have a narrow niche in which you can position yourself powerfully. When you know with whom you want to work, you have come a long way toward achieving this objective.

So build a site, even without a product. It can work very well, for there's lots and lots to learn. Consider beginning only with a newsletter. (For some good ideas for doing so, see "**The Ultimate Shoestring Startup**" further along in this chapter.

As you interact with your target, they will begin to respond. All the while you continue to seek to define something these people need they do not have. Preferably a need for a product not available. Better yet, one you can create. Whatever, when you do find a need that remains unfulfilled, you will be in a great position to satisfy it.

The beauty in this approach has many facets, but the best is in the difficult decision regards a product to sell. If what you choose works, add related products and you are on your way. But if it does not, scrap it with confidence. You have not lost your audience. You still have a clear focus on your target. All that's required is to find a better or more appropriate product.

Plan Your Way To Success

Back in the late seventies and early eighties, I got my first close look at small business in action. I was consulting and developing software for mini-computers, which led me into the business world I had previously viewed only from the outside.

I had always admired those who built their own business and continued to run it successfully. To me it takes someone special to carve their own path through life. While I still admire such people, I learned many of my idols were flawed.

The small businesses I worked with were typically one-person shows with from 3 to 10 employees. Most had been operating successfully for many years. Yet for the most part they held what to me seemed a very odd view of planning. For most, it amounted to deciding in the morning what they would do in the afternoon. The observation startled me.

It still does. And since lack of planning is prevalent on the Web, I am frequently startled.

Look Beyond This Afternoon

When I first meet a potential client, I try to get a feeling for where things are just now, and where they are expected to be a year out. Often when I ask about such things, the replies demonstrate there has been little or no thinking about it.

In fact there is often no interest in the topic. The mode seems to be: Take care of today and worry about tomorrow when it arrives.

As competition on the Internet continues to heat up at an increasing rate, those who can not plan effectively will lose to those who do. If there are ten sites selling pet supplies now, there will be a hundred within a year.

But a year later, the number of successful sites may be down to three or four. Why? Because many simply

are not prepared for such fierce competition. And part of the problem is an insufficient plan, or none at all.

The Business Plan

If you have not got a solid business plan, build one now. And do it with a pencil with a large eraser! For a good plan is never fixed in stone. Quite the contrary. It is flexible in all possible ways, allowing for contraction and expansion. It must anticipate whole changes in direction.

- What will you do if your suppliers go out of business or become too slow fulfilling orders?
- If you depend upon imports, what will be the impact of changes in regulations?
- For that matter, how will any change in the law effect your business?

These are not trivial issues. In the latter case, most new laws and regulations no longer come directly from legislation; they come from government agencies empowered to create them. All you can really be certain about is that there will be changes.

There are hundreds of such questions. And hundreds more that apply specifically to your business.

You Need Answers Now.

To wait until a crisis erupts is to have waited too long. It is always more difficult to find good solutions when under pressure. Obviously one can not anticipate all such questions, any more than one can anticipate all future opportunities. But plan for all outcomes imaginable. Do it now before a full blown crisis so overwhelms as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to find a reasonable solution.

While it remains wise to consider in the morning what must be done this afternoon, to survive we need a good idea of what will be required for the rest of the week, the month, the year, and in subsequent years as well.

Learn To Win

Building a new business or growing one that exists takes lots and lots of hours and lots and lots of hard work. Many of the wannabe and newbie webmasters I have met do not seem to understand this. Until they do, there isn't even a chance of success.

If you agree a lot of hard work is involved, and you are willing to do whatever it takes, you have come a very long way. In fact you may be on the verge of leading the wannabe-newbie race. Still, there is one thing that can stop you cold.

Learning

This is where a lot of people cave in. Consider learning to play the piano. Almost everybody thinks about doing so at some point in their lives. Most who give it a try, find the bench becomes very hard in a very short time, particularly when practicing scales. Few stick it out to the point of being able to play popular songs. Even fewer achieve the skills that enable them to perform publicly. Great pianists are rare.

The path to a success in business is not unlike the one leading to success in any field. It is blocked in many places by hurdles tougher to deal with than a piano bench. And while many manage to learn enough to build a business that supports them, few become millionaires. And billionaires are scarcer still.

Learning Is Tough!

Think back briefly to your school days. Did most of your classmates learn easily? Or did they struggle in doing so? Or maybe not bother much at all? Having taught school for 32 years, let me update whatever memories you may have.

Learning is not easy for the vast majority. There are a few talented people who manage with little difficulty.

But even of these, those who do not work at it are easily surpassed by less talented people who do.

Everybody Can Learn

My conviction is that talent and native ability wither away to nothingness in those without a work ethic that includes the patience and determination to follow the path wherever it may lead. To put this another way, workaholics tend to achieve their goals regardless of talent and native ability. Here are two critical factors in learning that are often overlooked.

1) In schools, success in learning is measured with a time limit. That is, each student is expected to learn a defined content in say twenty weeks. And he or she is evaluated according to their achievement within this time frame. Having been habituated to this concept of learning from their school days, many adults considerably underestimate their ability to learn. When learning as an adult, time is no longer a factor. Only results matter. Take as long as it takes.

2) As suggested above, talent, while helpful, is grossly overrated. Note there are lots of things to be learned in building a successful business. Few are equally talented in all required areas. Lack of talent in any area can be overcome with more work and time.

Learning Does Take Time

A reader wrote a while back giving high praise for an article I had written. She claimed she had been stuck on a point I made for several years. She said I was the first person to make it clear to her. So clear, she was able to go forth and accomplish her goal.

This reader needs to take some credit for herself. She had been troubled for quite a while. Overwhelmed even. But she persisted. Stuck with it. She finally saw the light while reading my article.

But to give me full credit for bringing forth this insight, is to give me far too much. She had probably struggled

with the concept a dozen times in the past. Likely she was close to grasping the idea when my words turned the trick for her.

This happens to us all. Months or even years later, we find ourselves saying, "Hey, that's what that guy was trying to tell me."

Be Patient With Yourself

We would all do better if we were a bit more patient with ourselves. Learning is tough. If you're into horses, you can round one up, toss on a saddle, cinch up, and ride off, while telling a joke to a friend. But this skill did not come of itself.

You'll Know When You Get It

Just because you have read something, does not mean a whole lot. Even if you feel you understand what you read, it doesn't mean a whole lot more. The idea needs to become internalized. It needs to become a full fledged member of your bag of tricks. This happens only when you find yourself saying, "Hey, I want to try this," you do so, and find that it works. Then you've got it. Until this happens, you don't.

You Can't Learn It All Now

Part of what makes learning such a tricky business is that you don't need everything offered at the time it is presented. So lots of great information is overlooked or gets laid aside. This is not only natural; it's practical. We all have a limit to what we can absorb in a given time.

But as our needs change, we can learn more. It is really as simple as building a "library" of resources. Then returning to the appropriate resource as needed.

To put this another way, you can not master all the content of a significant book on the first read. Upon a second read at a later date, you will find lots of good information you overlooked the first time.

Why? Because you now know more about the subject. Further your needs have changed. You are now looking for a different set of answers than you were when you first opened the book.

It's Not Rocket Science

The basics of building an online business begin with a plan. Then a website. Which means some HTML. And you need great content, which may mean improving your writing skills. More learning. Possibly the most difficult task you face. But you can do it over time.

You've got to manage the site effectively. You need to be well positioned on the search engines. You must know something about advertising. And your site must sell.

While none of this is hard or difficult to do, these skills must be learned. This does take time. And work. And you must stick to it, else all prior effort is a waste.

It Is Doable!

The good news is that for openers, you only need to *begin* down each of these paths. There is no need to become expert in each before proceeding. If you get off to the right start, and have a clear picture of where you are going, then you are on your way to success when you open your site.

If you are willing to work to improve your skills over time, willing to persist and to be patient with yourself, there is no limit to where you can take your business. Or yourself!

The Ultimate Shoestring Startup!

Without a dime, you can start a business right now that will in time fulfill your grandest dreams. A fortune. A lifestyle. Or whatever you see success to be. It's simple. Start a newsletter. Let a site come later!

Oops! I can almost see the eyes tilt upward. Some are racing down the page in desperate search for something at least practical.

But there is no better way to start a business than with a newsletter. Your age means nothing. Good writing skills help. But if yours are lacking, you can improve them.

What follows is the ultimate in practicality. All you need is some time. You would spend a lot of bucks starting up offline. You can do so free online.

First You Need A Niche

What you need is a focus or niche. And the narrower the focus, the better. The object is to become an expert in this niche. So rather than select dogs, settle on Dobermans or Poodles. Better than classic cars, select vintage Jaguars.

Yeah, But I Don't Have A Clue

Prowl the Web every minute you can spare. Look for sites of interest to you. Examine each one. Make note of anything they seem to have overlooked. While it's hard to do, what you really want to find is a niche others have ignored. Barring that, create your own.

Go to **MoHotta.Com**. Here's a business that could have started with a newsletter. Say the fellow just could not find really hot peppers, sauces and so forth. Since he loved such things, he likely knew at least a few people who felt the same way. So maybe there are others.

He might have begun with a newsletter in which he took orders only by checks delivered by US Mail. It's hard to make a buck this way, but it's a great testing bed for an idea. Once interest is demonstrated and there have been a few orders, it is easy to move to the Web. And to do so with confidence.

So I've Got A Niche; So Now What?

You likely already have your own email address and access to the Web. If you don't have a mailing program, you need one. Get a free copy of Pegasus at **Pegasus.USA.Com** or the free version of Eudora at **Eudora.Com/**.

In either program, open a new address book, and add your address. It's not much, but it's a start.

Now the hard part. Write a newsletter. It does not have to be long. It does not have to be profound. It does have to be something of interest to those you have

targeted, And it has to be well written. Initially, writing as well as you can must suffice. Improve your skills as necessary as you continue.

But I Can't Write! Besides, I Hate It!

Maybe so. **Click here for an article offering suggestions for changing this**.

But What Do I Say?

Most anything. Talk about something you already know. Write just as you would tell a friend about it. Or find something you didn't know, and write about that.

But I'm No Expert

Note the last sentence above. Every time you dig in and learn something you didn't know, you expand your expertise. And when you explain this new information to others, it will become clearer to you than it was when

you started. As you find more, you'll know more. And that's what being expert is all about.

An Audience Of One

One of the toughest challenges in starting a newsletter is the realization that you are writing only for yourself, and maybe a couple of friends. There is a tendency to kind of let things slide, for nobody is really going to see it. The trick is to write as though you have thousands of subscribers hanging on to every word. In short, always produce the best possible copy, and seek to do better next time.

Promoting Your Newsletter

There are a lot of great ideas about promotion in "**Growing Your Subscriber List**." It explains how to announce your newsletter, how to promote it through ezine directories, and it includes references to other good ideas. So check it out. In what follows, the focus is on other things you can do.

Without a website, you can't offer to swap links. But you can offer to run an ad in exchange for a link to your subscription routine. And you can swap ads with other newsletters just getting started.

Build a great sig file that offers your free newsletter. Try something like:

mailto:yourname@home.com?subject=SUBSCRIBE

Most mailing software will send you a message when this is clicked with SUBSCRIBE as the subject.

Get Aggressive

Go down and talk to a real live person at your ISP (Internet Service Provider). Most offer a small amount of disk space free for non-commercial use. You don't have to say you're trying to build a business. Just explain you're starting a newsletter. No advertising. Just content. Chances are they'll let you put up a page with a

subscription form on it. Go to ListBot, grab a form, post it, and you're almost in business. You now have a small platform from which to extol the virtues of your newsletter. And you can refer people to this URL in your newsletter and sig file.

Looking Ahead

Keep all your articles. When you do build a website, put them up as pages. Since they are focused on your niche, some will rank well on the search engines, and begin drawing traffic to your new site almost immediately.

Begin even now trying to find a great domain name. And when you find one, even if you can't afford a site, buy it. Good names are hard to find and they are disappearing rapidly.

Go ahead and open a site as soon as you have a great domain name and a few articles. **Pair.Com** may be the perfect answer. They provide top quality service for

$5.95/month. Pass on all free hosting services until you can afford Pair.Com. Free sites degrade the credibility you are seeking to build.

But Where's The Profit?

Even before you have a site, search the Web for products you can sell. If you're into cabinetry, find sources of wood, plans, and finished product. What you want are products that can be drop shipped. That is, you take an order, keep a part for yourself, forward the balance, and the company delivers. It's not a way to get rich, but it's a great way to start. Forget about a merchant account initially. Click here to look at "**Take Credit Cards On The Cheap**." Or have a friend process your orders. In general, affiliate programs do not bring grand profits, but even small amounts are helpful initially.

In all this you are not really looking for significant profits. You are simply learning about doing business online. And there is a lot to learn. Getting your site right.

Writing compelling copy that sells. Search engine positioning. Advertising. And there's more.

So What's Really Happening Here?

Your major focus remains your newsletter. You continue working to grow it. And you continue improving your writing skills.

Most important, you continue to build your credibility and expertise, and your position within your niche. One of the dumbest things to put up on a site is a silly claim as to how great an expert I am. Nobody will believe it. Yet they absolutely *must* before they will buy from you.

You solved this dilemma beautifully with your newsletter. In it, you have shown your expertise and demonstrated your credibility with practical, useful information. And you have established your position within your niche by providing information and resources not available elsewhere.

Some Can Cut It

Sometimes it seems as though there are just two kinds of people in the world. Those who stick their necks out and take the shot. And those who don't. The latter sometimes tend to clutch their brew come day's end, and mutter something about never having caught a break. Unless you win the lottery, you are unlikely to catch more than a cold, unless you're in there swinging.

Chapter 2
Getting Your Site Right

If you are just beginning to put a site together, here are guidelines that assure you will get it right the first time. If you already have a site, look here for ways to improve it.

Website Baseball - You're Out! - A website is also governed by rules and the umpires are your visitors.

If You Want A Website, First Comes HTML - A free way to learn HTML, the language in which web pages are written.

Conventional Formats Work - A website should follow certain conventions, as do all publishers.

Boring Is Best - Before deciding on the basics for your site, look at what others are doing.

Make Your Own Rules! - There are a lot of rules about site building. Select the best among them.

The First Fold Makes Your Site! - The first fold may matter more than the rest of the site combined.

I Built It, But Nobody Came - If a site fails, it suggests the lack of a sufficient structure and business plan.

Are Free Graphics Really Free? - As with a lot of things on the Web, it takes time to find the right graphic.

Take Credit Card Orders On The Cheap - An inexpensive way to begin taking credit card orders right now.

Choose Your Merchant Account With Care - When it's time to get a merchant account, be sure to ask the right questions.

Expand Your Business To The Web? - The only reason for a website for your business is to increase profits.

Website Baseball - You're Out!

Beethoven was a genius of the first rank. Even if you do not care for the kind of music he created, you probably agree it is great.

Fundamental to music is form. There are strict rules associated with each. To break the rules, is to break the form. The result will sound odd to the untrained ear. It will be broken, unacceptable to listeners who understand the form.

The true genius of great musicians is the creativity they demonstrate within the forms acceptable in their time. Beethoven faced rules as stringent in his day as Scott Joplin faced in his.

And It's So In Baseball

"Strike three. You're out!" cries the umpire. The form and rules which guide a baseball game are simpler to see, perhaps, but no less fundamental to the game than those of the sonata to Beethoven or ragtime to Joplin.

Form Also Rules The Web

The Web is as close as we can get now, to the wild, wild west of yesteryear. It's exciting, exhilarating, and seemingly without bounds. And many believe it to be without form or rules. But they are quite mistaken.

I built my first website in 1992. While I was not aware of the rules back then, they were there. And the site failed almost before I got it finished because I did not follow them.

No, there will be no rehash of the rules just now. I will settle for one example. The human eye can not correctly register the image of red text on a dark blue background. It is a matter of physiology, not opinion. So why put red text on a blue background? While other rules may not be so soundly based, break them at your peril.

Commonalities Exist

Reasons for building a website differ greatly. Some are built just for the fun of it. Others are put together in hopes of making major bucks. Most fall somewhere between these extremes. But whatever the purpose, there are common needs among all sites.

If you want to cheer the NFL, you want visitors to hear your cheers, to support your efforts, and add their own. If you want to be the web authority on goldfish, you need visitors who demand your content and contribute to it, else your authority means nothing. And if you want to make bucks, you need visitors who believe in you, who buy, and who return to buy more.

What is common here is the need for visitors. The target varies with the purpose. If you're cheering the NFL, you don't want goldfish lovers (unless they also love NFL football). But all need targeted traffic.

Since people are pretty much the same the world over, what may offend or annoy one person, will likely do the same to others. That is, red on a blue background will offend NFL fans, goldfish enthusiasts, and potential buyers.

Beating The System

The way to win big time on the Web is to tenaciously follow the rules. And yes, there are lots of them. They range from those that dictate site design to others which guide a business to success.

Speak of joy, if you wish. Or sell, sell, sell! But do so within the constraints of the form. Whatever you present must flow from the form. Your creativity is tested within the form, not in violation of it.

Remember the battle for the home run record between Sammy Sosa and Mark McGuire? It was really something, that's sure. But as great as these men are, they were out on a call strike three. Them's the rules.

Your website may strike out too, even if you know the rules, and follow them. But if you don't follow them, it will never come to bat.

If You Want A Website,
First Comes HTML

HTML (Hyper-Text Markup Language) is the language in which website pages are written, and the language used by browsers to read pages visited. So unless you have scads of bucks, enough to hire someone to create and manage your website, you will need to learn the basics of writing HTML code.

Some may disagree, for there are some good web page editors available that handle the HTML code for you. I use one. And likely you will too. But it is unwise to do so until you have a good understanding of the fundamental code structures. At some point, the best editor will fail in some way. When that happens, your option is to toss the page you are working on, else dig into the code itself, find where it broke, and fix it.

Besides it's not all that hard to do. It takes a little time, is all. And patience. It isn't obvious at first.

But you will come to discover it is really quite simple. Almost primitive, in fact. When you come to this realization, you can turn to a web page editor with confidence.

So how should you start? You need nothing more than a text editor such as Notepad, a browser, and some notes about HTML. You write the code in your text editor and use your browser to load the page to see what it will look like on the Web.

You might like to begin with my Web Page Starter Kit. It takes you step by step though the basics of HTML and helps you build a practical web page template. About a hundred public domain graphics are included. Lots of links to additional resources are provided. The price is right; it's **FREE!** You can download the file by pointing your browser at: **/files/pagekit.exe** (MAC users can use this URL, but grab pagekit.zip.)

PageKit.Exe is a self-installing execute, about390K bytes in size. Just run it, then load the ReadMe file into

your browser from the directory in which you installed. If you take the default, the directory will be WebSiteStart.

Once you get a good start, you will find it very helpful to look at the code behind pages you find on the Web that you like. Once a page has fully loaded, click on the option in your browser to view the source code. Copy any part of it that interests you, load it into your editor, and experiment to find out how it works.

Note you can not actually use what someone else has written, for that is a violation of the copyright laws. Worse, it's dishonest. However, there is nothing wrong with copying a piece of code so you can try it yourself to see how it works. It's no different than writing down some problems from a math book to see if you can figure how to do them. If in doubt about something in particular, drop a note to webmaster@whateversite.com and ask for permission to use the code. 99% will say yes, and a surprising number will offer to help.

At some point you will become quite bored with all of this, and want to see your pages on the Web. For real! Now what?

First you need a host for the pages you create. Check with your ISP (Internet Service Provider) through which you have access to the Web. Most offer free home pages to their customers. If that doesn't work, look around for free hosting service. Geocities.Com, recently bought by Yahoo, will do . (A Caution: A freebie hosting service is great while getting started; it won't do at all for a serious business site.)

Next you need a way to load the pages you create to your new site. If your ISP has provided a free site, check with them first. They may have a program that will do the job. And some free site hosting services also provide adequate software; just now no name comes to mind. But even if you have to buy a program, it's a good investment for you will need it later when you build a site for real.

The two most popular programs for handling FTP (File Transfer Protocol) are WS_FTP ($37.50) at **Wsftp.Com** and Cute FTP ($39) at **Cuteftp.Com**. Either of these programs will provide efficient transfer of your files to and from your site. I happen to use WS_FTP, but Cute FTP is also an excellent program.

Only when you feel comfortable with your HTML coding skills is it appropriate to consider building a business site for real. And this would be the time to consider a web page editor. However, you may find you do not need one at all.

A client of mine operates a very successful business centered at his website which he created and maintains by writing his own code with Notepad, and checking his work with his browser. **HomePlanSoftware.Com** This site works very, very well, and so can yours! Check it out.

I will wrap with an offer tough to beat. When you get a page loaded and you get stuck real good (and I guarantee this *will* happen), send me the URL. I'll take a look and see if I can fix it. Have you had a better offer today?

Here's to happy site building!

UPDATE: The HTML Editor may serve your needs now, and into the foreseeable future. I wrote the guided tour included based upon my very successful Web Page Starter Kit mentioned above. **Click here to learn more**. And if you buy from the Deals page on my site, you will **save $15.00!**

Conventional Formats Work

Books have a lot in common, regardless of the writer, content, or publisher. The covers are of sturdier weight than the inner pages. There's a title page. Some credits on the reverse side, or on the next page. Maybe a dedication by the author. If appropriate, there's a table of contents next. If there's an introduction, it follows. And if there's an index, it's at the back of the book.

So why not be creative? Put the index up front and the table of contents at the end? Why not?

Habits Are Helpful

We are all creatures of habit. In fact we benefit from them. What a chore it would be to get out of bed in the morning and get to work if we had to think our way through each step, and be sure we did not overlook one. We need our habits. And we don't want to change them. A book with a title page at the end of it would be unsettling.

Conformity Is The Rule

The form and format of most magazines is even more consistent, and rigid. Would a magazine be successful with classified ads up front and letters to the editor at the end of it?

Newspapers are even more similar, one to another. The emphasis is on the first fold that shows on the newsstand. Headline creation is a major task. The way stories are written is the same, with the key points up front in case the reader does not continue.

Take a look at your bookcase. Hardbound books are pretty much the same in height. Paperbacks are even more likely to be nearly identical in this regard. You can generally mingle pages from different newspapers and find the edges are pretty well aligned.

And what about the type font? In 9 of 10 cases, it will be Times Roman, or a close cousin. And the printed text is bound to be black on white.

Rigid Uniformity

Publishers of books, magazines, and newspapers follow conventions relentlessly. Why?

They want their readers to focus on the content, not the logistics of getting around in the publication. And content is the only significant difference between competing books, magazines, or newspapers.

Since competition is really a contest between contents,publishers do not want deviation elsewhere that might interfere with the impact of that content.

Web Publishers Must Follow Suit

The conventions for a website are also clearly defined. Fast loading pages that are easy to read. A navigation scheme that is crystal clear in a glance. The same format on every page. The same format? Hey, that's boring!

Maybe. But it is conventional. As with printed publications, let nothing on your site detract from content. It works for the "Wall Street Journal," "The Atlantic Monthly," and Random House. And it works for other successful newspaper, magazine, and book publishers. It also works on a website. Let nothing in your pages detract from content. Then beat the competition with that content, It's the only way to go.

Boring Is Best

In sorting accumulated bookmarks recently, I found I could not recall why I had saved some of them. After clicking on a few, I was struck by the fact that so many sites looked so much alike. Boringly alike.

I sense that more and more webmasters are coming to understand that site content and expertise available is what makes the site. Not bells and whistles.

If you have not embraced these notions, you are losing ground. But as in so many things about the Web, there is no need to take my word for this. Check it out and see for yourself. You will find that in site design, simple is a good idea. And that boring is best.

The Test Sample

I began with a set of 43 bookmarks recently collected. Some I recognized as resources to be added to my newsletters. Others were sites someone had suggested or requested I visit. But for many, I was no longer able to recall why I had saved the address.

While I wanted the sample to be random in the sense of checking the entire set, I did not want to examine this many sites in any detail. After looking at several, I found a criteria that allowed my to eliminate a whole bunch. And that proved to be a great time saver. Here it is.

What's in it for me?

I omitted 14 sites that did not respond adequately to this fundamental question asked by every visitor. (One exception is included below to make a point.) In each case, before making a hasty retreat, I noted additional flaws. Since it is not my intent to play critic here, I simple ignored them. The sites listed below had at least an adequate answer to this question for their visitors in the first fold (screen). Does yours?

First Fold

Since I eliminated sites that did not adequately answer the question above, all the sites listed had at least a good first fold. Note I said good, not great. In many cases there was room for improvement. (For more info, click here and read, "**The First Fold Makes Your Site**.")

Simple Navigation

While some sites were better than others, navigation seemed pretty straightforward throughout.

Load time

All but two sites had good download times on my system. Less than 30 seconds in all cases, most were under 15 seconds. One took 2:47 minutes, which is much, much too slow. Regards the second slow site, see the following.

Splash Screens

Only one site had a splash screen. I left after 3 minutes, before it had completely loaded. This is the exception included, simply to make this point. I never did see the first fold.

I really hate to see this, for it is so easy to demonstrate that this kind of page simply will not work. Just compare the hit count on the entry page to that of the page it links to. It is highly unlikely there will be even half as many hits on the second page. In this particular case, I'm not sure anyone ever has stuck around long enough for the entire page to load.

Horizontal Scroll

Only 4 sites forced me to scroll horizontally with my browser screen width set to 640 pixels. One had the table width set to 660 pixels, which makes little sense to me.

Another had the table width properly set to 600 pixels but still forced scrolling about 50 pixels, probably due to a graphic in the page, but I did not check. Another site was using a table width of 100%, rather than 600 pixels; this leaves things to the browsers to position the page wherever. Of all sites visited, only one had a greater width: 812 pixels, an odd choice that forces almost every visitor to scroll. If you assume visitors are using 800 pixel screens, the better choice is 760 pixels.

Frames

Only one site used frames. And a bit of scrolling was required in each window. Not good. Since 28 of 29 sites did not use frames, you can do without them as well.

Text And Background Colors

All but three sites use black text on a white background. Two used black text on a background Windows calls moneygreen. (A very pale green.) It worked for me. Only one used a bold combination of colors.

I was not taken with it, but it will not likely offend anyone. Clearly the work of an artist who knows web colors. The bottom line, though, is that 26 of 29 used black text on a white background. How much thinking does it take to figure this is the best way to go?

Font Face

Only 5 use Times Roman. There are those who maintain this is the way to go because it is what people are accustomed to reading in printed material. But in taking this position, they may be overlooking a key point.

Text on a computer monitor is much fuzzier than it would be in print. Fuzzier by something like 25%, even when compared to news print. This slows reading by about 20%. The serifs in Times Roman add fuzz, which slows reading even further. Most sites use Arial or Verdana. Either choice is the best available.

Line Length

The amount of readability research available is enormous. Believe it. The basic concern of parents and schools in the early grades is improving reading skills. Better readers do better in school; there's no question about this. Long before the Web was born, it was clearly determined that the ideal length of a line in characters is 60, and that 65 is the maximum acceptable. Only 2 of 29 sites ignored this rule. Can you afford to do so?

Pop Up Windows

Only two sites had a window that popped up. While popular with some webmasters, most visitors are annoyed because the new window blocks part of the page they came to see. Are you into annoying people?

Animation

I found animation on only one site. As a reminder, though, I only visited a couple of pages on each site. Further, I ignored banner ads. It may not be reasonable for a site to reject animated banners if revenues depend upon them.

Sound

No site offered sound.

The Wow!

I was surprised to find such commonality in a set of my bookmarks, collected for a variety of reasons. But the real wow came later, as I was adding up numbers and making counts.

Of the 29 sites included, 14 followed every one of the implied rules above. 7 others faltered on only one point. Thus at least 21 of these 29 sites agree that boring is best in site design. That content is indeed what it is all about.

See For Yourself

Many newbies embrace the freedom of the Web, but then carry this same sense of freedom into their website. That is, they do it their way, without regard to the norms that exist. It's a bad move. Your site design must be acceptable to your visitor. They are the only people who matter. Follow the "rules" most often used. Be creative in your content and products or services.

Don't take my word for this. Or the word of anyone else. Take the time to check for yourself. It's easy.

Go to your favorite search engine and enter "site promotion" as a search term. Remember these are people into making a site sell effectively. Briefly visit the first 15-20 sites listed. See how many you can find that ignore the "rules" above. When I checked at AltaVista, I did not find any break in the first 10 listings.

The Sample Set

I did not include the URLs of the sites visited. However, I have them handy if you want to check things out for yourself. Just send a note to **TIPS@sitetipsandtrick.com**. -- Bob

Make Your Own Rules!

Must you annoy your visitors? Is there no way to avoid this?

No, there is not. But you only need to do so once. When you make your sales presentation. Of course the better it is, the less it will annoy. But in general, people do not rush into a sales pitch for the fun of it. There is at least hesitation. And often a sense of, "Darn. Here we go again."

In order to assure your visitors "agree" to read your presentation, all else on the site be clean, simple, and positive, without anything that may offend or irritate.

Discovering The Rules

Do you like blinking text on a website? Flashing banners? I don't. But what you and I think about them is meaningless. The question is what do our visitors think about them.

There are lots of rules about website design. Lots of dos and don'ts. Unfortunately, on almost any point you are likely to find a considerable difference of opinion. Probably the best approach is to develop your own set of rules. It isn't all that hard to do. It requires honest thought, is all. By honest, I mean you must take yourself out of the picture, and think only of your visitors and target.

Collect Check Sites

Begin by checking your bookmark or favorites file. Move the URLs of those sites you believe your target would enjoy visiting into a separate folder. How many is enough? Hard to say. If you feel you need a couple more, go find them. And when you stumble upon another, be sure to add that URL. Whatever, these become your check sites. State a rule, then see if most of these sites follow it. If so, then live by it. If not, restate the rule.

Building A Rule

Back to blinking and flashy elements, it is clear many do not like them. Visit your check sites. Do they use them? Again, this takes more pondering than work. And again, it's a matter of looking at all from your target's point of view.

In this case you will probably note that blinking and flashy are not used much, if at all. If this is your finding, then your rule may be stated as: Don't use them unless you must.

Checking Colors

Consider colors. If you approach this honestly, you will find white or off-white is the preferred background color. Does this mean your rule should be to use white?

Not really. But it does mean that if you choose a different background color, you will need to be extra careful elsewhere.

Making Your Own Rules

If you work at this a bit, you can come up with some neat notions of your own. For example, I was recently struggling to find a third shade of blue for a page template. I spent more time at it than I would care to admit.

While I do not know it is true, I suspect three shades of the same color on a web page means at least one will clash with one of the others.

Am I right? Can't say. I can say, however, that for me the rule is to not use more than two shades of the same color on the same page. I'll stand by this rule. But also remain open to changing it if I discover something better.

Don't Buck The System

Readability of content is an area often overlooked. It seems odd to me that this is so. Given all the drive

behind getting youngsters to become good readers, be assured there are mountains of research. And that mountain has been growing for scores of years.

To not follow these rules is a great mistake. Don't listen to me on this point. Check it out with your list of sites and see what they are about. Do they use red text on a blue background? If not, you should not do so either? Do they have 100 characters in a line? If not, you should not either. (Incidently, the answer to this "quiz question" is 60!)

In short, use rules demonstrated to be correct.

Let's Get Comfortable

Forgetting rules and building good ones for a moment, let's look at comfort and such. In your list of check sites, you undoubtedly have some you like better than others. Pick a time when you are feeling aggressive or creative or both. Then visit each in turn. Try to answer questions such as the following.

- Why do I like this site?

- Why do I feel comfortable here?

- Why do I want to stay a while?

- What is it about this site that makes it special to me?

- What makes me think these people are successful?

- Why do I feel I can trust the business behind this site?

It's easy enough to add several dozen such questions, but hopefully the above gives the idea I had in mind.

To the degree you can answer such question and determine guidelines to be used on your site, you will

be making great gains. I find this very difficult to do. But I also find it very enlightening. For me, it leads to ideas common to good sites. And these ideas lead to very helpful guidelines or rules I follow.

An Example

Visit some sites offering merchant account services, or some way of taking credit cards. If you have struggled as many do in trying to find such a service, there's no reason to look again. Nothing has changed.

Now visit **WellsFargo.Com**. I don't know what your reaction will be, but I immediately felt several positive things. These people are for real. They are successful. And within seconds, I felt I could trust this operation.

All quite appropriate for a banking site. Also appropriate for mine. I spent quite a long time at WellsFargo.Com, trying to figure all the little bits and pieces that gave me such an immediate positive feeling.

What It Boils Down To

A lot of the rules we hear remind me of political sound bites. They don't give us a sufficient understanding without the context. I'm certain a lot of "rules" we hear, come from trying to answer questions such as those above. But there is not sufficient time or space to give the reasoning. So what we get is a rule without the context.

Rather than blindly following any rule, we can check it out and decide for ourselves. And in doing so we build our own set of rules. A set that collectively forces us to produce pages we are confident our target will enjoy.

When we then introduce them to our sales presentation, any annoyance that may arise, will quickly fade. If we have been bugging them since they arrived, they will never see our pitch, for they will have long since clicked off the site.

The First Fold Makes Your Site! (Or Breaks It.)

Visitors to your site are not looking to make a new friend. They don't want to chat. And they don't give a darn what you think about anything, least of all your product. They only want to know:

1) What's in it for me?

2) Why should I believe you?

3) Why should I buy from you?

They will answer the first two questions to their satisfaction within seconds. Only if they like these answers will they even consider the third. And at least a partial answer to it must come easily, or they'll never see your sales pitch.

Provided your page downloads quickly, visitors will stick around until it does. But as it starts to load to the screen, the first fold (screen) must fill rapidly. It must immediately provide information that compels the answers you want your visitor to decide upon. (If there are any graphics on the page, be sure dimensions are included in the HTML so text will quickly load up top.)

In the first fold, answers to the above questions must flow from ...

1) Benefits, benefits, and more benefits

2) Demonstrated professionalism and expertise

3) Clear statement of the USP (Universal Selling Proposition)

More About Benefits

They must be presented with words. While not easy to define, they are the only tool available to trigger the

answer you want to the question, "What's in it for me?" This part of the message must be crafted as carefully as an ad central to a major advertising campaign.

On a single product site, the home page headline shouts the major benefit of the product. As with a good sales letter, each word draws the visitor more deeply into the site. All is benefits. And all points to the order form and a sale.

Most sites offer a variety of products and/or services, which means the simplicity in a single product site can only be approximated. The home page is the entrance to corridors leading to the sale of different products. (Or to great information, free stuff, etc.)

This requires even more judicious use of the top fold. The benefits presented must be specific to products, rather than to features of a single product. In the first fold, introduce those products most likely to be of interest to an unknown visitor. A possible alternative is to work with the products you most want to sell.

Professionalism And Expertise

Demonstrate these as the first step in answering the question, "Why should I believe you?" The way in which benefits are presented goes a long way toward achieving this goal. Given a sharp, professional presentation, your skeptical visitor is likely to say, "So far, so good." And to withhold final judgement, particularly as to trustworthiness.

In this regard, the appearance of the site is fundamental. Again looking at the first fold, all must support well stated benefits. Even enhance them. A garish or cluttered page destroys any credibility that might flow from the content. Likewise for any graphic that does not enhance the appearance of the site *and* the message.

About Your USP

When a visitor answers the question, "Why should I buy from you?" with, "Okay, you'll do," he or she is ready to buy. And the option to do so must be handy. Throughout,

however, the content must continue to provide solid reasons for buying, for you don't know when the decision may be made. It is not likely to happen in the first fold. The initial response, though, needs to be at least, "Okay, I'll tag along a ways." A good USP is sufficient to bring this response.

The USP may be incorporated in a logo, offered in a colored cell within a table, or maybe as the last line on the screen at the bottom of the first fold. Where it is positioned is not important. But the visitor must see it and easily grasp its meaning in the first or second scan of the first fold.

Examples

The best single product site I have visited is SiteSell.Com. Ken Evoy, author of "Make Your Site Sell" is a master at this. Check out his sales pitch and see if you can keep yourself from buying the book! Even if you have multiple profit centers, a corridor to a sale within a given center can be developed in this way.

UPDATE: Ken now offers several products, and I wonder if his new home page layout works as well as the original.

I don't have an example of a great multi-product site. Most I visit seem too cluttered, too busy, too pretty, or they just have too much stuff. My own site suffers some from the latter malady. I continue working to improve it along the above lines.

But What About The Rest Of The Site?

Pieces of cake. Really. Some may argue the most difficult task in online marketing is generating targeted traffic. I don't agree. While it takes a good deal of time, effort and often dollars, it is largely a 1-2-3 sort of process. Do this, that, and then that. Others have clearly defined the steps that need to be taken, and the order in which to take them.

For me, the greatest challenge in marketing online is building the first fold on the home page. If your visitor

scrolls down or clicks off into the site, you have a potential customer. In fact you have one who is likely to grant you a little slack. Thus perfection is not demanded throughout the site. Top quality is sufficient. But the first fold must be absolutely perfect.

Think of a newspaper. What part of it is assembled with the greatest care? The top fold of the first page. It's what shows in vending machines and on newsstands. How many millions have bought a newspaper because a single headline grabbed hard? Many, that's certain. Is the first fold on your website less important?

I have a strong hunch I can not demonstrate. Of those who click off a site never to return, ninety-some percent do so without leaving the first fold. Get it right and those who arrive with, "What's in it for me?" will say, "This might do." It's a giant step toward a sale.

I Built It, But Nobody Came; What Now?

"Build it and they will come," worked well as the theme in the movie "Field Of Dreams" in which Kevin Kostner turned a cornfield into a ballpark; they did come. But that was a tale. Nicely told, but still a tale. In real life, it just is not so. Why does this notion persist?

In the early days of the Web, it was almost true, for there was a far greater demand for information than supply. Thus if one put up some half-way decent content, some people did come. To whatever extent it was true back then, it is nothing but a myth now.

If you built your site believing in this myth, you have a problem. Nobody is coming. Can you change this? Maybe. In some cases, though, it may be best to start over. Check out the following to see where you stand, then take it from there.

Site Purpose

Why does the site exist? "To make a profit" is not sufficient. Exactly what is the site expected to do? There are many good answers. For example: To increase sales in my offline business. Or maybe: To grow an online business so that it becomes my full time job. And there are many others. But "To make a profit" doesn't cut it.

How Do You Plan To Achieve This Goal?

You need a business plan of the same sort required in opening a store front on Main Street in your home town. This includes answering a host of questions, and preparing a statement sufficient to make your banker smile and reach for a pen when you ask for a loan. While you likely do not need a banker to open a website, you do need the same definitive plan required of any soon-to-be shopkeeper. Some of the questions you need to answer are:

What is my target market? The more narrowly you can focus, the more likely you are to succeed. For example, instead of "Dog Lovers," explore "Doberman Lovers." The narrower the focus, the easier it is to position yourself, and your business, at the top of the heap.

How will I reach them? Search engines and mutual links are very helpful. But your marketing strategy is usually the key. Again, the narrower your focus, the easier it is to target your promotional efforts, including advertising.

What products will I market? (Please substitute services throughout, if that is what you will offer.) Note products you create will bring greater profits than those you market for others.

How will I position my products relative to the same or similar products? If you have narrowed the focus sufficiently, it is much easier to position yourself above your competition. If you sell better products, this becomes easy.

How will I demonstrate a perceived value in my products greater than that of my competitors? Perhaps by the special nature of the support you offer or your guarantees beyond those expected. Whatever, this must happen.

How will I keep my customers coming back for more? This is fundamental, but simple. Satisfied customers will return, provided you have additional products of interest.

While questions as suggested above need to be answered in all cases, there are others. More important, there are many specific to your particular business. The answers must guide every step so that it is in accord with the overall business plan. It is also important that no part of the plan conflict with another; all must lead interactively to the same goal.

An Aside

The word used above was "products." And you were invited to substitute "services" for "products."

Note, however, that both are plural. In this, there is a difference between products and services. An artist who provides a graphic you like can expect you to return.

But in selling products, there is a fundamental difference. Some will disagree with me in this, but I am convinced one needs to sell a variety of products. For example, effective advertising opportunities for a single product are limited. Sales must exceed costs, or it's a losing proposition. Given multiple products, you may be able to afford a loss on a first sale that leads to others.

Most single-product sites do not provide a livable income. At best they bring in extra dollars. Which may be exactly what you want. If so, go for it. But if you want to grow your online efforts into a full-time business that provides substantial income, a single product is not usually sufficient.

You do not need a shopping mall, however. What is required is related groups of products that create multiple profit streams. Just as you would expect one or more such centers to become less profitable over time, you also expect to add further products which become additional profit centers.

If you presently have a single-product site, consider adding additional profit centers related to your product. There is more profit in adding products you create, but you may find an affiliate program or two that work for you. Further, you may be able to create your own personal relationship with other firms. Given sufficient volume, some manufacturers will put your name on what they produce for you.

How To Build Or Modify Your Site

All begins with the domain and product names appropriate to your target. If you are not using names that clearly bring a focus and define a benefit, you may need to change them. In any case this will be the initial point of attack. If you doubt the importance of names, **click here to visit my site.**. There are two fine pieces on this page by Dr. Michael Fortin that will convince you of the importance

of this aspect of opening a new business or fixing one that is broken.

As to the site itself, begin with pencil and paper. Rough out the content for each page including the ad copy which sells a specific product, or opens the door to other pages featuring separate products which taken together are a single profit center. One reason for organizing in this way is that if it becomes necessary, you can drop a profit center from your site without having to rebuild the whole of it.

Since people may enter your site through any page, each needs to sell the business and the product specific to the page. That is, each page must grab reader attention, raise their interest and draw them quickly more deeply into the page and thus into the site. At any point interest lags, you may lose the visitor. So it is important to sustain, even increase intensity, as the page continues.

There is simply no point in creating even a single website page until your plan has been implemented on paper and the content for all pages ...

1) Is properly targeted

2) Effectively positions both you and the product

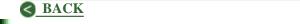3) Grabs and sustains reader interest.

Even if you have a good idea of how you want your pages to look, obtain the help of an artist. A good one can indirectly provide powerful support by enhancing the key points of your plan in the art work itself.

Once your site is up and has been submitted to the search engines, the real task begins. Promotion. A never-ending task. But if your original plan is good, and it is implemented in your site, you have greatly increased the likelihood your promotional efforts will pay off handsomely.

So back to the point. If you are among those who have built a site that is not working, or not working well enough, there are really only two options. Build a plan as suggested above, with your present site in mind. If you can find ways to modify and expand your site to fit the needs of a good plan, go for it. But if you can't, the only viable option is to start over.

I hate to admit it, but both my first and second tries were a total disaster, and have long since vanished. Ask others now successful, and you will find they have been down this road. But all was not in vain. Think of how much more you know about the Web now. How much you know about putting a site together. And maintaining it. Hey, you're way ahead of another starting his first site. Take the time to build a good plan and a site to match, and you'll soon be right where you want to be: On top!

Are Free Graphics Really Free?

Well, maybe. But let's define free. Finding anything on the Web takes time. Often it takes a lot of time. So free must somehow be related to how you value your time.

It can take hours to find a good graphics site, then many more to shuffle through files often poorly organized in search of something useful. And generally what you find is free only for non-commercial use. There can be some pretty hefty requirements if used on a business site. One such site requires a full size banner ad at the top of your index page. This "price" is much too steep for most.

Now suppose you do stumble upon something really neat, something that will add real zip to your site. The chances are others also liked it and are already using it on their site. If you use art your visitors commonly see, it will downgrade your site.

More important, unless you cost your time at zero dollars per hour, this neat graphic you found was not really free after all.

Alternatively, go to ArtToday (**ArtToday.Com**). They have a public section you can explore. But the private section is the strength of this site. It is loaded with quality work. It costs $29/year, but you can use all you need. They require only a link on your site back to them. You need to sign in to use even the free section. They will not flood you with email, but they do send out some interesting offers in hopes you will begin paying. You might find one of these deals very attractive.

It is the search engine on this site that is most important to busy site builders. Use it to save many hours looking at graphics you don't need. Type in "happy kid" and you will likely find something you like.

Since it costs $29 to access the complete library, what you find is not as likely to be as widely distributed as what you might find at a free site. And the search engine will save you time worth much more than the cost.

However, the better approach is to go to an artist. This costs you zero hours, and the few dollars involved are well spent, for you will have original work that adds spice and sparkle to your site because it was specifically designed to do so.

While the focus here was on obtaining good graphics, this argument holds true for all the needs of a webmaster. Hire an expert to do anything you can not easily do yourself. Save your time for important tasks, such as generating leads and closing sales.

Take Credit Cards Orders
On The Cheap

We've all heard it. You simply can not do business on the Web unless you can handle all that plastic folks love so much. You must offer instant gratification, for it's the way of things these days, right?

But a merchant account is not free. While the percentage taken off a transaction may be as little as two percent, your cost per sale can be considerably higher unless you have a good volume of sales. There is usually a set up fee for a merchant account, ranging from $300 and up, and it's mostly up. If you depend upon software, you may need to buy that as well. And buy the upgrade whenever it is demanded of you. This is not cost effective without sufficient volume. So what is a person to do?

I ran across **ClickBank.Com** the other day. They can get you up and running for $39. (Compared to setting up a merchant account, this is dirt cheap!) They want 10%

on each transaction. This may sound like bad news, but it is more likely meaningless. For one thing you don't have to mess around getting order forms up on a secure server. You do none of the work of handling the transaction. And they mail a check every two weeks.

I have not tried this program, but I checked out the site with some care. While it looks like a straight-up operation to me, this is something everybody must decide for themselves. However, $39 is not a lot to risk.

If you are just getting started on the Web and do not have many sales, this may be your salvation. You'll need to check the math relative to your operation, but a merchant account that costs say $200 to $300 per year to sustain is likely to cost a good deal more per sale on small volume.

One reservation: The order screen at ClickBank is quite different than most you see on the Web. You may want to check this with care to be sure it will suit your customers.

There is yet another way to go. If you have a friend or business acquaintance with a merchant account, they may be able to take orders for you. Something like 15% will cover your friend's costs and you put up zero dollars going in. It's a nice way to start, particularly if you don't know if you will ever get an order! (Be sure to set this up in a manner acceptable to your friend's merchant account service, or the account might be canceled.)

Given success, however, you will want to get your own merchant account at some point. On your favorite search engine, try "merchant account" and/or "credit card orders." You will find a bunch. It's worth the time to shop. Finding the plan that suits your needs can save real dollars.

If you or your spouse has an account with Costco, check into the merchant account service they offer. If you are already paying the $100/year premium membership fee, you may find the account they offer to be the best deal available.

An update from a subscriber who likes ClickBank - Bob

I have been using ClickBank for my e-book and advertising as well as a couple of services upon which I have set a fixed price. I have been very pleased with the service. It's easy to set up and to add a new product. **Pam Jones** - **ProfitPowerPromo.Com**

01/12/00: Another Update - MultCards.Com offers a different way of handling credit purchases. They take the order, and forward accumulated funds weekly. You do not need a merchant account. The charge per transaction varies, but is essentially 10% plus one dollar. When the annual fee is added in, you may find a merchant account more cost effective, but this may be an effective alternative for some.

Choose Your Merchant Account With Care

Choosing the right merchant account may be one of the most difficult business decisions you make. There are hundreds to choose from. And they are scrambling for your money as aggressively as do the credit card services for your personal dollars. As in most high pressure advertising, there are lots of downright lies. Not in what is said, of course, but in what is not mentioned. Believe it; in selecting a merchant account it is strictly buyer beware! What follows is an attempt to make some sense of the bewildering morass of options.

The Jargon

Setup Fee: Varies widely, from $200 on up. It may or may not include the software required to access your account from your computer. It often includes a "commission" for the person who sold you the service. And there is often a monthly fee as well. For example, you may pay $15/month to use software.

Monthly Lease Fee: Many services do not charge a setup fee. Instead they charge a monthly fee for using their software or virtual terminal. The commitment is generally for four years.

Annual Renewal Fee: With so many services to choose from, there seems little reason to pick one that requires this fee.

Transaction Fee: A flat rate paid on each transaction. It varies greatly, but $0.20 to $0.30 is common.

Discount Rate: The percentage of the amount of the sale charged on each transaction. This also varies greatly, but 2.5% to 3% is common. There is generally

a monthly minimum, often not mentioned. It ranges from $25/month and up.

Monthly Statement Fee: $10/month is common.

Daily Batch Fee: The charge for closing out your account each day. It is generally about $0.30. For a thirty day month, this amounts to $9.00

Minimum Costs

The minimum monthly transaction fee is important to those getting started, for you pay it whether or not you have any sales. This becomes a non-factor given better sales. For example, at a discount rate of 3% there will be no minimum charge if sales are greater than $834 for the month.

Still, when getting started, minimum costs are likely to be the minimum transaction, monthly statement, and daily batch fees, or about $40/month and up.

Costs Of Greatest Concern

Whether or not to go for a setup fee and lower monthly costs versus the higher rates on a monthly lease may be a tough call. Some people prefer to pay cash for major items and save the often high cost of interest over time. The same thinking is needed here.

However, do not be mislead by the grand brag of "No setup fee." This needs to be treated as a red flag, for it really should read "Lease." If you find it necessary to cancel a given service and turn to another, you will be liable for the unpaid balance.

One way to compare costs is to total those of all plans being considered over a four year period. That is, compare $35/month over 48 months ($1680) to a setup fee of $200 and $15/month for software over the same period ($920).

Hidden Costs

There are a variety of other charges, often not spelled out. Most are small, and of little concern. But two need to be considered.

Chargeback Fee: Charged when a customer reverses a transaction. It commonly ranges from $5 - $35. This can be costly if a flaw appears in your product and you can not satisfy your customers quickly.

Late Batch Fee: If you fail to close out each day, you may get hit with significant charges.

Check Out The Website

Many good merchant services are not supported with a website, for the bank offering them has not expanded to the Web. But where one exists, you can save time by checking it. If charges, including exceptions, are not presented openly, it may best to go elsewhere.

I found several sites that make things sound very sweet. All I needed to do to obtain this unusually precious service was to fill out a form which includes my phone number. I ignored such sites. Leave a number, and you will be inundated with high pressure sales pitches, from which the only rational action is to flee.

Is The Service Provided Only Through The Web?

I may be unnecessarily wary, but I personally question the value of a service not supported by a brick-and-mortar business. I sense, but can not demonstrate, that an outfit that exits only on the Web, is not as stable and reliable as one that operates out of a building. While unlikely, they can disappear at any time. And they certainly can become instantly unavailable if I have a problem with which they do not wish to deal.

Ask Questions And Demand Answers

In deciding upon a service, ask questions and get good answers. One I asked of one company was,

"Under what circumstances can my account be terminated?" The reply was, "There are different reasons for Merchant termination." Not helpful. And it took me three days to get it. I scratched this outfit from my list very quickly.

If you can't get a simple and complete answer to a question such as this, what kind of answer are you going to get to a tough one, such as why your account was terminated?

Questions For Which Answers Are Required

What are grounds for termination? Solid answers are needed here, for if terminated, you may never be able to get another account anywhere. I did *not* get good answers from most of those with whom I talked. Many mentioned such things as contract violation and illegal activity, which are rather vague.

What is the minimum monthly transaction fee? As suggested, it is usually about $25 to $35. Be sure to find out exactly what it is.

Are batch fees applicable? If so, what are they? What do late charges amount to? Not all services demand this fee.

Is there an application fee? If so, there will likely be assurances that it is refunded if the application is turned down. However, it is generally *not* refundable if you change your mind and choose a different service.

What transaction limit can I expect? This is an amount based upon anticipated monthly volume. Exceed this limit, and you may be charged additional fees. One company reported that exceeding this limit for three months was cause for termination.

Is a reserve required? Reserve is the amount of your money the service holds. There should be none if you have been in business for a time. But if you're new to business and/or have less than good personal credit, you may have to accept this restriction. It may mean depositing cash, having an amount equal to half your monthly volume held, or something of this sort.

Is there a toll-free support number answered by real live people? To me, this is the most important question of them all. Several firms I called simply record a message; a representative supposedly calls back. (If you can only contact via email, you likely have the wrong service.) Why is this important?

Very few things go wrong with a merchant account from a reliable firm. And it is unlikely that anything serious will. But if something does go haywire, it will likely need a quick fix. When one considers all the restrictions placed on you as a customer, not to mention the fees you are paying, there needs to be a way to get fast help if needed.

A Note About International Sales

If you plan to sell internationally, be aware that not everyone has a credit card payable in US dollars. Further, many merchant services charge a higher discount rate on such transactions. Ask about this rate, if a number of your customers live outside the US.

Wrapping Up

These notes arose from my own need to make changes in the way I currently handle orders. As I got into the topic, I saw the possibility for an article, so actually went further than I intended.

As I sat down to write, I found that only one of the fifteen companies contacted answered all my questions. And many of the answers were vague, if not evasive. At bottom, I sense one must read the contract in detail before signing up. I suggest passing on services that can not present a readable document. And on those that are written in such a manner as to leave the company pretty much free to do as they please.

I had planned to include the names of half a dozen services that seem satisfactory. Things did not turn out that way. At **MerchantWorkz.Com** click on Rates in the center column about three folds down, you will find a long list of services, with some basic data on each.

I only contacted a couple of larger banks. Of those, Wells Fargo seems the leader. They have been active on the Web longer than most. If you lean toward an established bank, they may fill the bill. Call 800-451-5817.

Update: 11/21/00 - Word of mouth advertising is powerful stuff. And here is a good example. After checking over a dozen services, and wasting a ton of time, I decided to go with one recommended by a friend. Here are the details, and it is doubtful you can do better.

Call Rob or Kim Lyons at 800-313-5198. These are absolutely super folks who will answer all your questions with grace and style. They represent Authorize.Net, likely the largest and most successful credit card processing firm on the Web.

They handle all the get-started details and make it easy to wade through the related documents. Unless you hold things up, they will have you up and running within a matter of days. For doing so, they get the setup fee, $395.

I have been using this service for some time now. And I love it. The minimum monthly fee is $25 which means nothing if your volume is sufficient. There are no ups and extras I'm aware of beyond a modest chargeback fee. There is no daily or monthly batch fee, or any other such fees as are quite common. On any transaction, funds are deposited directly to your bank account and accounting of all transactions is provided via email each day. My recommendation is to ask for a maximum transaction amount much higher than you expect, and to do the same with total volume. Rob is the fellow who set me straight on this. They are not at all concerned about low volume customers. Their only concern is unexpectedly large transactions or a high frequency of smaller ones.

I pay an additional $15/month for their Gateway fee ($10 less than most services charge). I do so in order to be able to use their virtual terminal. That is, I go to their site and fill out a form. This saves me the cost of software and the hassle of updating it as required. Should you have reservations, just write me a note. I will be happy to update the above comments for you. -- Bob

Expand Your Business
To The Web?

If you have a successful offline business, but no website to support it, you have probably considered building one. Others may even be chiding you because you haven't done so. Despite what you may have heard or others tell you, there is only one valid reason for building a website and that is to increase profits. To create a site simply to have one, to be able to add name.com to the bottom of your stationery and business cards has a grand potential for disaster.

I know of two men into negotiations. $500/hour types. Successful by any definition you care to apply. They decided they needed a web presence. Well, they have one now. And they have name.com plastered every place they can find to put it.

One page contains dynamite links, but they are not annotated, so most visitors won't know where they lead. Another page contains an excellent article; others were planned but never finished. The home page is a disaster; it lacks any kind of impact. The site is static; there have been no changes in many months. Email is not answered.

These men are not only kidding themselves about having a web presence, they are literally killing off potential business. Clearly they know nothing of the Web. The catch is some of their potential clients do. If one such person stumbles onto this site, these fellows will be totally written off. The same will happen if someone types in the URL from one of their embossed business cards.

Okay, you say, but I would take a better approach. Even so, you can not improve your offline business with a website unless it adds to profits. No matter how beautiful the art work, how great the content, the site will be useless unless its purpose is to expand your business. Until you can find a way to profit from a site, don't even think of putting one up.

Building and maintaining a good site is a lot of work and takes a lot of time. And anything less than good will hurt you, instead of helping. So if you can afford the time, without hurting your business, or can afford to hire someone to build and maintain it, then a website is a possibility.

But it is only a possibility. If you want a site because others have one or to have a Web presence, then forget it. Right out of the chute your site must be clearly defined and focused on increasing profits.

If you are not clear on this point, use your favorite search engine to find businesses similar to yours. You will likely find some sites that are not making an extra dime. When you find one that look profitable, consider how you might apply what they are doing to a site of your own.

This must be the focus of your thinking. If you decide a website can bring more profit, over and above costs in dollars and/or time, go for it. Otherwise leave it to others to waste their time and money foolishly.

Chapter 3
Website Basics

In addition to concerns common among offline business people, those online must come to grips with others. Here are some of these additional factors that matter.

Reversing Surfer Mania - How to slow those surfers who arrive as over-opinionated maniacs.

Who Do I Believe? - Here are things that lead to failure of a website. But can you believe these arguments?

Building Consumer Confidence - Without a storefront and tangible goods, online businesses are at a disadvantage.

How Do I Sell Products Produced By Others? - The best way may be the indirect or soft sell.

[Can You Risk Supporting An Affiliate Program?](#) - You may find you can not afford the risk of supporting one.

[Does Your Site Tell The Truth?](#) - A alternative to great advertising copy is to tell the truth.

[Is Your Site Ready For This?](#) - Ahead is a truly awesome change. Can you deal with it?

Reversing Surfer Mania

Most people are well intended. Most are happy to share as possible. Most will pitch in and help when it is appropriate. Smile at someone on the street; they'll smile back. Ask for directions and you will generally get a good response. But I don't see this behavior among surfers on the Web. Yet they are the same people. What gives?

People seem to be in more of a hurry these days than in earlier ages. Some seem totally into instant gratification. But still the above holds true for most. What happens to all these good people when they become surfers? What turns ordinary people into maniacs when they hit the on-button and go to cuddling a mouse?

Many become wild, often demonic creatures, lacking any semblance of courtesy, grace or style. I'm not sure why, something related to power, maybe. Since they have the benefit of total anonymity, they are free to do anything they please without ever deferring to any higher authority.

Ordinary thoughtful people become irrational opinionated experts instantly. With a click they not only say, "Forget you!," or worse, they literally do. They're gone.

As webmasters, we ignore *how* surfers behave at our peril. Such questions as right and wrong simply have no meaning. What we feel is best for our site is totally irrelevant if our visitors do not agree. Sure, there is exaggeration in the above. Not all visit in this manner. But your site will be more successful if you assume the above is an accurate picture of every visitor.

The secret is to grab their interest, slow them down a bit, let them catch their psychic breath so they are once again the sort of folks who drop into your shop or office.

A poorly designed page is rejected in milliseconds. A break in the HTML code will drive them away instantly. Many will exit on the first misspelled word or grammatical error encountered.

A benefit loaded headline must appear in seconds, else they're gone. And one is needed on every page on the site, for you never know which page will be seen first. And as in a sales letter, each word following the headline needs to draw them deeper into the page, and ultimately into the site. Since many scan; use headlines that give the gist of the page.

Take a good look at your site. Try to see it with a fresh set of eyes, preferably as a demonic surfer might perceive it. Move quickly down your pages. Are there compelling reasons to read on or to click to another page?

If it's so, you have a better chance of slowing your visitors down to the point where they are willing to click to another page, and at some point listen to your offer. If not, there is work to be done.

Who Do I Believe?

Upon invitation, I recently visited a site that was absolutely loaded with really great art. There was a splash page, beautifully rendered, that took almost two minutes to load. The main table on each page was fixed at 850 pixels, an odd choice that assures nearly everyone must scroll horizontally to see the entire page. The content was very well written, but most of it was on a single long page.

I reported I felt these were serious blunders, and added a bit about the why of it. When the fellow replied, he said he had checked with the artists and been assured these were design considerations. Then he asked, as if with a shrug, "Who do I believe?"

A total novice to the Web, this fellow asked the key question all newbies come to eventually. There is lots of conflicting information on the Web and it often requires careful thinking to sort the wheat from the chaff.

What I explained to this fellow is that site design comes second to function. That is, if a site does not function well, beautiful art will not help. Given any conflict between design and function, scrap the design. He never replied to any of my follow up messages.

But in the above, and what follows, there is really nothing to debate. Go to any successful site on the Web, and you will find function comes first, that art work, no matter how lovely, is secondary. Or ask those who work the Web. I do not know anyone into site promotion who says design is more important than function.

Function rules. Period. If you accept this, then the following must be eliminated from your site ASAP.

Horizontal Scroll

I have never heard anyone say they liked horizontal scrolling. I have never even heard anyone say they didn't mind it. While I have no convincing proof, people are

annoyed when forced to scroll horizontally. If you disagree, try a poll on your site and ask visitors to vote yes or no to horizontal scrolling.

Monitors limited to 640x480 pixels are no longer being manufactured. The minimum resolution being sold today is 600x800. And while many site designers have settled on a width of 760 pixels as ideal, I can not recommend more than 600.

While this is changing rapidly, there are still some 640x480 monitors in use. (I have one on a system here in the office.) And some people using 600x800 monitors have them set up for large font, which amounts to 640x480. While there does not appear to be a way to count such users, I choose not to annoy them by forcing horizontal scrolling.

Another group consists of those such as myself who are less than enchanted with browsers. I do not want the entire screen filled with one. I have both Netscape and Explorer set up to a 640 pixel width so I can easily get to my desktop. Or change quickly from one application to another.

However many surfers the above amounts to, you are annoying them when you force horizontal scrolling; you are urging them to leave quickly.

Frames

I personally do not like them, and many do not. There is a problem with WebTV users about which I am not clear. But I was told it is difficult to scroll in any but the master frame. Annoy 12 million people? Plus folks like myself who don't like frames? Is it worth the risk?

Another concern I have about frames is the screen real estate they chew up. Add another vertical and horizontal scroll bar and you lose about 10% of the screen. Wouldn't it be better to use this for content? Or maybe just white space?

But my biggest gripe with frames is that designers typically blow out table widths, which forces horizontal scroll, often in each window.

Finally, spiders won't like your page, and your search engine position will suffer. Fewer visitors is not the goal.

Splash Screens

To me, these are the greatest site killers of all. Put yourself in the position of a surfer who is checking out a couple of sites. The URL to your site is clicked. And up pops a splash screen. Thud. When the URL was clicked, it was a request to see your site, not a splash screen. Now the surfer must find an Enter button and make a second request to visit.

Forgetting the fact that most splash screens are overloaded with graphics thus take forever to load, consider what happens in the surfer's mind. In the URL, there is an invitation to visit, which was accepted. But at the site there is a barrier, not unlike "Password Required."

If you use a splash screen, you are sending away at least half of your traffic. Most surfers will click off within seconds.

So who do you believe? Me? Others in the know? Fortunately in this case you can answer the question yourself, and with certainty. Just compare the hits on your splash screen to the number on the page it links to. I have yet to hear of a case in which even half those who hit the splash screen clicked on into the site.

And There Are Others

While the above are the most obvious site killers, there are others. But pages slow to load can be fixed. Pages too long can be spilt into two or more parts.

With most such site killers, there are solutions. The above are the most significant because once built into a site, there is no easy fix. In most cases, it's best to simply start over.

"Thou shalt annoy thy visitor" is not to be found in any list of good business practices of which I am aware. Why do so?

Building Consumer Confidence

Consumer confidence is far more difficult to build and sustain online than it is offline. No matter how sharp your website is, it can not enhance visitor confidence in the way even a modest shop can. Even one located on a back street in your home town.

Offline, a potential customer sees a building. It doesn't matter whether it is rented, leased, or owned by the shopkeeper. It's real. And it is likely to be there tomorrow, which matters should a problem arise.

Sure, a fellow can take your money offline for a truckload of furniture, then declare bankruptcy, and shut down. But a website can be closed in minutes. It happens. And surfers know it.

Confidence is also given a boost offline when a potential customer walks into the shop and looks about. The owner may be in hock for the inventory, but it is real. It's tangible. One can touch it. And examine it in detail.

And online business takes another hit compared to one offline. In a shop, you can see who peeks in, then leaves. Not so on your website. And you can approach a customer in your shop and ask if you can help, a great move when they can't seem to find what they want. And you can watch as they exit. Contented? Unhappy? Somewhere in between? No telling on the web. Feedback of any kind from a website is tough to get. And you are always left to wonder if what little you do receive is representative of all visitors.

Starting a business online has one enormous advantage to starting one offline. The start-up capital required is minimal, small change compared to starting up offline.

Online however, you will forever struggle to build and sustain a level of consumer confidence automatically available to the owner of even a modest shop.

How Do You Build Trust On Line?

Begin with a professional site. Anything less is almost a demand for a click on the Back button. Be sure the purpose of your site and what you offer is clear immediately to every visitor. Then lead those who linger directly to what they want. And be sure you provide all information required to make a decision.

A gracious smile and a hearty hand shake available offline can only be vaguely approximated on your site. Make visitors feel welcome. Demonstrate their importance to you. That you care about each and every one. And that you will go out of your way to help in any way you can.

Demonstrate Expertise

A shop that sells and services chain saws needs to say little about the expertise of the owner. He or she is in business, so the skills required to maintain a chain saw must be at least sufficient.

Online, there is no equivalent to the work bench in a shop. Providing repair service does not work online because of the shipping involved. But chain saws can be sold effectively on a site featuring power tools. Expertise can be demonstrated with great content, some of which defines the distinct advantages of one saw over another.

Great Support Helps

Providing excellent support goes a long way toward erasing the lack of a physical present. Consumers are perfectly content with mail order. Sears was enormously successful for many, many years. Today it's tough to beat L. L. Bean. While most know they are paying more, they also know the quality will be good, that difficulties will be quickly resolved, else refunds are forthcoming.

Consumer confidence can be built online. It just isn't easy. While the ideas above are part of it, here are four items often overlooked. And each is a serious trust-builder.

1) Provide a comprehensive privacy statement. Be as protective of your visitors as possible. More and more surfers have come to demand this.

2) Provide complete contact information, including a physical address, at the bottom of each page. An About button simply does not provide the impact of the information itself.

3) Provide a 24-hour 800 number for support. Let it ring through into your bedroom if you are just getting started. But do provide one.

4) A no-questions-asked guarantee. 30 days is minimal; consider stretching it to a year.

Oddly enough, you will find few people contact you. They are satisfied if they know they can. And if you over-deliver great product, the chance of a request for a refund is slim to none.

Making It Happen

While it is difficult to build and sustain customer confidence in your online business, it must happen. The key ingredients are a great site, great products that bring repeat business, and great support. Given this mix, it's hard to go wrong.

An Aside

If you are an online business owner, there is now a further way to demonstrate your professionalism and integrity. Join with us in the International Council of Online Professionals (iCop).

While we are just getting started, we expect to grow quickly. Soon simply displaying the iCop Seal will have a positive impact on consumer confidence in your business.

As a founding member, I am well acquainted with the great people who have put everything together and launched this new program. I invite you join us in helping to enhance consumer trust in websites entitled to display the iCop Seal.

Click here for more info on my site.

How Do I Sell Products Produced By Others?

The short answer is indirectly, and with a very light touch.

We have all hit sites that seem like nothing but a catalog of stuff being sold. Flashy, blinking banners. Bellowing sound, if you allow it. I don't know how they can sell anything. I run quickly without even a thought of looking back.

When you are selling products produced by others, let the producer do the selling. (If they can't get it done, you have the wrong producer and product.) All you should do on your site is to recommend the product. And do so indirectly, with little fanfare. Look at it this way.

When a visitor arrives at your site, the question is always what's in it for me. So you answer this with good useful site content. You provide the information the visitor came to find. Maybe it's air fares to Europe, the cost of renting a house boat for two weeks next summer, all known symptoms of hoof and mouth, or the latest rumors about the price of oil.

Your site has a purpose for being. If all is working well, your visitor arrived in accord with that purpose looking for information you can provide. Do so immediately.

To hit a visitor with a sales pitch is dumb. All surfers know where the Back button lives. And they use it frequently.

One way of looking at your point of view as a webmaster versus that of your visitor is to think in terms of MWR (Most Wanted Response). That is, think of what you most want your visitor to do relative to what your visitor most wants.

It doesn't take a lot of brain power to realize you and your visitor do not ultimately want the same thing. For example, your visitor wants information; you want a sale.

Taking this a step further, it should be obvious that what you want is meaningless to your visitor. Thus you are whipping a dead horse if you do anything other than seek to provide your visitor with exactly what is wanted. That is, your MWR must be for your visitor to find what is needed. To work toward any other objective is to fail.

Suppose your visitor is looking for information about pruning rose bushes. Then her MWR is to find that information. Your MWR at the time of her arrival must be to provide it. If you can, you have accomplished a great deal. You will have drawn her into your site. You have been allowed to demonstrate your resources and expertise. While you may not have made a sufficient impression to assure she will return, she probably will not unless you provided what she wanted.

Now suppose you have a marketing deal with a garden tools wholesaler. That your visitor is interested in how best to prune roses, may mean she is also interested in good pruning shears. Which of the following will bring more sales?

A sentence within the article: "The first step toward good pruning is making sure you have top quality shears. My favorites are made by Diltson. They are simply the best. (Click here for further info.)"

Or ...

Pop up a secondary browser window and in two inch red block letters toss up: SALE! Save 30% if you act right now.

If you think the second approach is even feasible, you're right in only one sense. It is feasible. Some will jump at a sale. Some will even do so when they have no real need for the item on sale!

But you can not build a loyal customer base with the latter approach. The soft sell in the middle of an article in which you are providing needed information will take you much further in the long run. If your visitor clicks on your link, it will be her choice. Thus at the other end of the link, you will know she arrived by choice.

Enthusiastic support is called for. But so is lightness. And grace and style help as well. Something very simple may work best. "Being the gardening fanatic that I am, I think I've tried every gardening tool made. Those I haven't tossed, lie rusting in the garage. These days, I've given up looking. Diltson tools always deliver. They work better and last longer than any other tools out there. Nothing beats them.

And my visitors say the same thing. Many thank me for recommending them. [A great place here for a testimonial.] Check it out for yourself. Just click here."

Now look what has happened. If your visitor clicks on this link, she arrives at Diltson's showplace with an open mind, probably hoping to find a better tool. With less than eighty words, you have converted a total stranger into an excellent prospect.

Even if your visitor did not click on either link, you still have a big win here. For one, you have not offended her with a blatant sales pitch. More important, she found what was needed, good information about pruning roses.

In this, there is at least the beginning of trust and an appreciation for your expertise. From here, she may explore further or come back later.

While we would like to believe this approach always brings a return visit, it just isn't so. A visitor who does not buy on the first visit, and does not come back, is a sale lost forever.

But the more important view is to look at this from the other end. If your visitor does not find what is needed, does not recognize your authority and expertise, there will be no coming back. Period. At bottom, your MWR at the time a visitor arrives is to provide precisely what is needed. It is the only way that offers the chance of a future visit and a further opportunity to make a sale.

Can You Risk Supporting
An Affiliate Program?

There is an over-abundance of affiliate programs available. All eagerly invite you to participate. If you like, visit **AssociatePrograms.Com**. Allan Gardyne has the most comprehensive list of programs I have seen. Almost 3000 of them at the last count I noted. And he reports thoroughly on each, as information becomes available. (Allan does a super top job in this.)

But before jumping on this idea, pause and think for a moment. If getting rich on the Web means only slapping a site together with some banners linked to affiliate products, then why are so many people failing? Why do they cave in and quit after a few months?

Many, if not most, come charging onto the Web with some vague notion of getting rich quick. When it doesn't happen overnight, they're gone.

Short of winning a lottery, I don't know of an easy way to get rich. In fact I've never met anyone doing well who had not achieved their position through hard work. Sure, luck helps. And skills and talents. But it's work that makes it happen.

The Truth About InfoProducts

Long before the Web came into being, there was mail order. It seems there are many millions of people in the US who spend considerable dollars each year on schemes that will make them rich, and do so easily. One of the best items to sell was books. And a book in this sense was maybe 80 pages, cost a buck to produce and sold for $20. Plus shipping and handling, of course. A great markup. And if done properly, great profits.

Now comes the Web and ebooks. Heck, it now costs zero to make an electronic copy. Even greater profits. If you want to get rich, write a book that promises easy riches and sell it to those foolish enough to believe there is an

easy way, that they just haven't found it. Better yet, start your own affiliate program and get others to sell for you.

Remember, though, exactly what you are doing, exactly who your target is. You want people who believe there is an easy way. (There isn't.) You convince them you have found it. (A lie.) And you rip them for maximum profit. (Theft, but legal.)

I have known people successful at this. But they were not people I wanted to get to know well. And while I doubt they dwelt on it, I don't think they liked themselves very much.

An Honest Product

The flip side lies in producing an honest product that sells at a reasonable price. To paraphrase what a bright fellow once said (his name escapes me), the best price is one at which the seller is content with the profit and the buyer receives more than expected.

If you sell products that deliver on this simple formula, your customers will continue to think well of you. And they'll be back for more. So when considering an affiliate program, be sure it delivers the real goods.

Affiliate Kickback

When you sign up with an affiliate program and begin selling their product from your site, you are "recommending" this product to every single visitor. If it is anything less than a good product, one that over-delivers at a fair price, your recommendation will backfire. Your credibility will be diminished. As will that of your site. And it will become correspondingly more difficult to achieve the goals for which the site was built.

Does Your Site Have A Viable Purpose?

If you built your site to achieve a specific set of goals, chances are you are on your way to success already. For example, your goal may be to generate leads followed up

with personal contact by your sales staff. You may be selling information difficult to obtain elsewhere. Or you may be selling good products and/or services.

If you have or are close to having a site that works, think twice before adding a button to Amazon.Com, or to any other program. Unless that product is certain to be of value to your visitors, certain to over-deliver, and increase loyalty to you, don't do it. To put this another way, you can not afford to suggest any product that does not fit in with your site purpose, or that in any way diminishes your credibility.

You Can Live Without It

If your site has a concrete purpose for being, if it is working effectively, you may be unable to find an affiliate product you can risk representing.

Does Your Site Tell The Truth?

Good copywriters are among the best paid people in the work force. Most webmasters are not in this group. Yet we need to sell. Should we emulate good copywriters? That is, should we do what they do to the best of our ability?

While we must follow proven advertising and copywriting principles, most of us would be better served taking a different route.

I've been writing ever since I can remember. All sorts of stuff. And I've had success with most everything I've written. One standout exception: Copywriting. I have never written a sales letter I thought was worth a hoot. Still, I do sell. But not with sales letters. For me, the secret is in telling the truth.

My First Sales Course

I put myself through college selling women's shoes. It's a good way to learn some things about selling. The first thing I learned was that I was no good at all doing what many other salespeople did. Lots of talk, hustle, and the soft con.

When a woman asks, looking at the shoes on her feet in a mirror, "What to you think? They make my feet look fat, don't they?"

Some salespeople are able to respond glibly. "No, not at all. I think blah, blah, blah."

I never was able to make that work. My reply would be, pointing to a pair she had tried on earlier, "I think those give your feet a more slender look."

Two key points here. 1) I learned quickly never to say anything I did not believe, for every time I tried, I lost

credibility. 2) If nothing positive came to mind, I'd say how I felt. Usually, "Guess I'm not sure."

I developed quite a following. On an occasional Friday night, I had the top book, meaning I out sold the full time staff. It worked because previous customers were willing to wait until I was free to work with them.

So What?

So I take the same approach on my website and in pitching my services. It works for me. If you haven't tried it, give it some thought.

A More Contemporary Example

Ken Evoy, author of "Make Your Site Sell" is a good copywriter. Recently I asked permission to create a digest of some of his work. The reply came swiftly. "Sure thing," he said. Then added, "But wrap with your MWR (Most Wanted Response)." And he suggested:

> If this digest strikes a chord, subscribe for
> the full, intensive 5-day Affiliate Masters course.
> I still can't believe they give this away.

I can't bring myself to say this. For one thing, given my time in university classrooms, I know what a full, intensive 5-day course is. While the Affiliate Masters course is loaded with fascinating information and creative thinking, it's not a five day course at all, intensive or otherwise. It's a series of messages from an autoresponder one a day for five days. And I can't bring myself to say differently.

In the last line above, Ken suggests, "I still can't believe they give this away." I can't say that either, for I know why Ken is delighted to "give" away as many copies as possible. And likely you do as well. It gives him a golden opportunity to pitch, "Make Your Site Sell."

I did wrap, though, with my version of a pitch. Here's what I used.

"The course is loaded with great information, including how to carry the ideas above into a successful site. Of particular interest may be the recommendations for successfully selling products produced by others. **Click here now for your free copy.**" (Note this is a mailto link, not a URL.)

There is no hype here. No con. All of the above is absolutely true. And what's more, those who do click on this link are in for a surprise. For they will receive even more than I claimed they would. This means they will be even more interested in accepting another recommendation later.

Wrapping Up

A lot of women feel their feet are too fat. Some salespeople can say right out that those shoes look just great on you, even when it's not so. What's more, they can close a sale in doing so. I can't make that work.

All that I say and write is true to the best of my knowledge. Thus readers need only decide whether or not I'm right. They never need to sort fact from fiction.

If you lack great copywriting skills, give some thought to sticking to the facts and the truth. It's a giant step toward a relationship of trust.

Is Your Site Ready For This?

The Web is rapidly changing the way in which business is transacted. And some of the things coming at us are truly revolutionary. Here's an example.

I encountered the concept of dynamic pricing for the first time just a short while back. And the encounter was brief, so I may not have this quite right. But it goes something like this.

In the not-to-distant future, you will place an offer to buy a product at a certain price. Even now, at MySimon.Com and similar sites, you can search for the best price. But coming at us are better bots than presently exist. They will try to find the product at your price.

Sellers queried by the bot will know if they were passed by for having a price too high. They may or may not adjust their price. They may or may not do so automatically through software installed to monitor bot input.

This Will Bankrupt Everybody!

No. It won't. There is a point below which a business person can not afford to sell. While this price may not be easy to determine, it does exist for every product.

Initially, sellers may make a slight reduction in price. And may continue to do so several times. But at some point, they will refuse to go lower for profit would be insufficient.

Such sellers are not going to make many sales, for those competing on price alone will continue to take less profit. But this is a doomed practice. To sell at less than a profitable price leads only to bankruptcy.

This will not all happen in a uniform manner. But in time, those who care only for profits will be forced to close up shop and go away. Even large corporations will find themselves at risk. Some will be forced to change the way in which the deal with their customers or else they will also fade away.

What Happens Then?

The next person who enters a "bid" in the amount thought to be suitable, will find no sellers at the offered price, for the price-only types are gone. This person must raise their "bid" if they still want to make a purchase.

Equilibrium

The best price will be determined over the course of thousands, and in some cases millions, of transactions. It will prove to be that price at which the profit satisfies the seller and at which the consumer feels they have received not just a fair value, but more than expected. The reason the consumer must get "more than expected" is that only then will they remain loyal to the seller.

While true equilibrium may remain only a goal as prices continue to adjust, the wild swings and great range of prices we see today will vanish.

Who Will Survive This Bloodletting?

If you understand the fundamentals of good business and they are implemented on your site, you are ready for this, and whatever else may come along. That is, if you truly value your customers, demonstrate this with great support and fair prices, you are already establishing a loyal customer base.

Such customers are not going to flee your site to save a dime on a book at Amazon.Com. They will be unwilling to abandon a space in which they feel comfortable to save a few pennies.

While all this change is happening, some customers seeking a specific product may purchase it elsewhere because of a significant difference in price. But when those selling price alone have been busted out, they will return to you.

I'm Not Ready For This

Then it's time to make some changes. Start now providing excellent support and fair prices. Demonstrate that you value your customers. Your profits will increase even now. And you will be ready for whatever awesome change presents itself, even dynamic pricing.

Chapter 4
Promoting Your Site
For Greater Profits

Once your site is running, all is promotion. Here are time tested ways to grow your visitor counts and to maximize profits. Many require only time.

Want A Million New Targeted Visitors? - Link swapping can make it happen.

FFA (Free For All) Sites: Do They Work? - Most classified ads sites no longer work.

The Other Side Of Headlines - Effective use of headlines can drive away non-targeted traffic.

Beg For Questions; It Works! - If you can get questions, your answers can generate customers.

I Need Help Right Now! - Maximize support to maximize sales. Costs will be covered by increased profits.

Do Your Pages Download Fast? - You can easily answer this for yourself. Much is beyond your control.

In Search Of Speed - Given a good host, not overloaded, it is unlikely you can gain much in moving.

Testing Your Way To Success - Use this tried and true advertising tactic on your website.

Want A Million
New Targeted Visitors?

Well, you can have them. It's easy. But it does take time. There's no secret here; the answer lies in getting others to link to your site.

You say you've tried it and it doesn't work? If that's so, then your approach was wrong or you didn't stick with it.

In "How to get 1 Million Visitors to your Website," Corey Rudl, **MarketingTips.Com**, states, "Between all my businesses online this technique alone [links] brings us almost 100,000 visitors a month!... and no, that is not a typo." He also states, "I actually have a full-time employee who does just this [generate links] throughout his ENTIRE DAY!"

While I haven't had this level of success, links generate over twenty-four percent of hits on one of my sites. I have not undertaken this task on SiteTipsAndTricks.Com, but I plan to. Here's what I will do.

Finding Candidates To Link To

You can find potential sites by going to the search engines individually, but this takes a lot of time. Instead, go to **FerretSoft.Com** and download a copy of WebFerret. It will search 9 search engines simultaneously and generate 1000 hits in about 10 minutes, if it finds that many.

It's free, and it has been one of the most useful tools on my desktop for nearly four years. If you want to get rid of the banner ads, register the program; it's only $25. One of the best bargains of which I'm aware.

While you can use the search engines directly as mentioned above, I am going to assume in what follows you have a copy of WebFerret. Here's what you do.

Be sure you have Eliminate Duplicates selected under the Advanced option. Even so, you will get a bunch of URLs that point to the same site, but many will be eliminated. Next set an upper limit for your search. I use 999 for each search engine. Finally enter a search term such as people might use to find your site or one similar to it, and let the program run. Let it run in the background while you do something else.

When the run completes or you click Stop, save the file in .HTML format. Repeat the above with another keyword or phrase, saving the file to a different name. Repeat the process 3-7 times. However, a million listings is impractical. If necessary, use more specific keyword phrases to decrease the number of hits.

Next, collect the source code for all files to a single text file. Start at the top of it and copy the first base URL found into the search function. By base URL, I mean given home.com/index.htm, search on home.com only. This will find additional references to pages on this site such as home.com/about.htm.

Then work clear to the end of the file deleting all further occurrences of this URL. This takes time if the list is lengthy, but it assures no duplicates. I suspect that with so many sites into site support of some kind, it may take me several days to build a list appropriate for my site. But in the end it saves a much larger chunk of time, wasted in visiting sites already seen.

Visiting Sites

Given a list of sites that seem appropriate candidates, I load the page into my browser and one by one click off to visit each. Here's what I look for.

A links page or the equivalent. If they do not have one or it is not easy to find, a link from this site will be of little value.

Is the site a possible candidate? My personal criteria is that it be a site of interest to my visitors. And yes, I do include sites that directly compete with me.

The size or importance of the site is of little interest. Lots of small sites grow. I've found that smaller sites often generate more hits than larger ones on which the links page is hard to find.

If I feel the site will work, I then go looking for a contact name. If I do not find one, I use the contact info and ask a reasonable question in hopes of getting a name. There is simply no better way to begin a pitch for a link than with a name; "webmaster" doesn't make it.

I poke about the site a bit, and always at least get off the home page, looking for something I like, for I want to include a positive comment in my request for a link.

Since I prefer to use icons with annotated links on my site, I also look for an ad sized button. (If I don't find one, I'll ask for a URL when I email my request.)

Actually, all of the above kind of happens as I wander about. Given no links page, or one on which links are not annotated, I leave within a minute or two. And usually by then I have already decided whether or not the site is a candidate. When I have noted the information I need, I move on to the next site.

Wow! That's A Heck Of A Lot Of Work.

You bet, particularly if you have a long list. It is certainly not something you are likely to finish in a day. The trick is to set aside a bit of time each week and go through the process for say 10 or 20 sites. Then get on with things that must be done.

Look at it this way. If you identify 10 sites a week, and stick with it, you will have contacted 500 sites in a year. And if you contact each site correctly, you are likely to have something close to 400 links back to your site.

Create Links First

Before contacting a site, set up a link to it on your site. Some will argue you can generate links simply

by asking. I have not had much luck with this approach. I have far greater success when I create the link to the candidate site before making contact. It allows me to open with a very strong note, for I have already done something that will benefit the site.

Note that if I'm working in chunks of 10 sites at a sitting, I suspend site checking given 10 candidates. I then create 10 links and upload the page, making note of where on the page the link can be found. Then I send a message.

Contacting A Site

I craft the message as carefully as I would a press release. All I need to do before sending it is ...

- Add a name after "Hi" in the first line.

- Work in mention of what I found on the site that I liked, which may mean some editing to make it fit.

- Where to find the link I have added.

People are busy. Period. And they are not really interested in your pet project unless there is something in it for them. My message will be as brief as possible and will mention *only* the benefits *to* the person I am contacting. I point out that I have a link that hopefully is generating more hits right now.

I wrap with an invitation to link to my site, but again stress the benefits in doing so. I make no mention of the benefits to me, for they are obvious. I attach an ad-sized icon that draws well, include a brief description of my site as might be appropriate in an annotated listing and the HTML for the link.

If I've written a good message, I generally get about 80% positive response, often enthusiastic with "thank you" used liberally. While you may consider following up on those who do not respond, I do not. In the past, those I checked with were not interested, so I assume no interest if there is no reply.

Tracking Success

I have read of several ways to track traffic to assure that you do not have more visitors leaving your site than are coming to it. It is easy enough to do. For example, CountLink is a simple free CGI script from **DataTrendSoftware.Com**. It will track the number of times a link is clicked. But having tried a similar script, I don't feel the time is justified. I don't believe it is important that Joe gets 10 hits from my site while I get only 5 from him. My experience suggests it averages out over time.
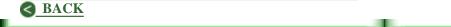
About twice a year, though, I do check my log files. When I find zero hits from a site I have linked to, I quietly delete that link. It's a workable plan that requires minimal time, yet it assures me I am not carrying freeloaders.

Do You Really Expect Me To Do All This Stuff?

Can't say. But consider my experience as noted above. And reread the comment from Corey Rudl. **And maybe click here** for an article on my site about this topic written by Paul Easton.

In the end, it's your site and your business. And there is simply no doubt about it: you *must* use your time effectively. While I see no easy way to generate the list from which I work, I am very comfortable in devoting a couple of hours each week generating links. I have found that once in place, they tend to remain in place. While a given link may generate only a trickle of new visitors, a bunch of "trickles" becomes a good sized stream. Keep at it, and you can build a river of new, targeted visitors.

FFA (Free For All) Sites:
Do They Work?

In the "old" days of the Web (2-3 years back), FFAs were effective in generating traffic to many sites. FFAs are in effect lists of brief classified-type ads with a link to the submitting site. Submit a first class ad (most are not), and at least some hits would be generated. In general, a new submission goes to the top of the list or category, as the oldest listing is deleted.

This plan was effective, for finding things on the Web was not as easy then as it is now. So many surfers had one or two FFAs bookmarked.

While submitting was time consuming, resubmitting once a week pretty much assured your ad would be available.

A Site Where FFAs Worked

Jim Wilson **VirtualPromote.Com** has grown an amazing site in a very short time. Throughout, he has maintained that effective use of FFAs has been fundamental to his success. And he continues to believe this. In fact he offers a free service that will submit to about 1600 sites. (See **JimTools.Com**, then in the center column of this page under SubmitBot, click on Register. Caution: Do not use an email address you need; you'll will be spammed silly with replies.)

Above, it was suggested that FFAs did not work equally well for all sites. One reason for Jim's success was that a large percentage of visitors to FFA pages were web marketers, an audience to which Jim had a great deal to offer.

Things have changed so dramatically in the last couple of years, that it seems unlikely any demographics regards

FFA visitors are available. In fact, if you visit a site, you may find yourself asking, "Why would anyone come here?"

Submission Software Changed The Game

The big change has been due to the availability of software, such as mentioned above on Jim's site, that will automatically submit to FFA sites. While such tools are a great time saver, they are no longer effective because a lot of people use them. Now your submission to a site remains for only minutes.

For example, suppose a site maintains 200 listings. If it receives 20 new listings each minute, and drops the "oldest" 20 listings, your submission will be available for only ten minutes.

To complicate matters, most FFA sites really don't give a darn about your ad. They are automatically posted and deleted by software, and never seen by a human. What these people want is your email address. They will use it themselves to try to sell you things you don't need. And they sell it to others as well.

Using Submit Wolf

Years back I posted ads regularly to several FFA sites. And got some pretty decent results. But the gain in hits never seemed worth the time required to post. So for several years I gave up on the idea.

When Submit Wolf became available, I bought a copy. In June of 1998, on behalf of a client, I used this program to submit an ad for a free recipe cataloging program. Of 1660 sites available, the program reported success in submitting to 1090 sites. The results were astonishing.

My client received over 3700 download requests. And since users are invited to share recipes, he was literally overwhelmed getting submissions collected and uploaded for visitors to use. When I asked if he wanted another run, he said, "Not just now, thanks."

An Aside: Let me underline the caution above. I made the mistake of using my actual email address. I received six megabytes of email from nearly a thousand people over

the next couple of days. Even today, I continue to receive 30-40 spam messages each day from that initial mailing. So if you try automated mailing, use an email address you will never bother to check.

In November of 1998, we did go again. Results? Only a couple hundred hits. I again updated the program database in January 1999, and ran again with virtually the same results.

I don't have any explanation for the massive success on the first run and the virtual failure of the last two. Since we were trying to interest visitors in software being sold, a couple hundred freebie seekers did not convert to many buyers.

Another Try Trough STAT

I wrote an HTML tutorial targeting beginners, even before putting up STAT. And sikekit.html was one of the first pages I loaded. Remembering that first enormous

success with the free recipe program, I was hoping to draw traffic to my brand new site. About two weeks apart, updating the Submit Wolf database before each run, I submitted the following ad.

Master HTML in 4.5 hours!
Get your copy of the Web Page Starter Kit. It shows you step-by-step how to write HTML code. A $39 value - FREE! Click here for details!

Now ads are tricky; that's true. And I'll lay no claim to the above being the greatest. But it is essentially the ad I use on the home page at STAT. It continues to draw well over a hundred downloads each week. And a steady flow of thank-yous from users.

Four submissions to the FFAs with Submit Wolf collectively drew less than 3 downloads per week over a period of nearly two months.

Checking Out JimTools.Com

As described above, I used Jim's service to submit a page to 1600 FFAs. Things have changed. I was asked only for a title. So I used the above headline. I received 2 hits. If this held and I submitted daily, this would mean 14 hits per week, which would translate to about 3-5 downloads.

Other Jim Tools

Jim also offers auto-submission to 75 search engines and 75 directories. I have not tried this, but it may be worth doing. Small search engines and directories are popping up left and right. Many of them vertical directories or vortals. Some of these will grow. And your hit counts will increase correspondingly.

Wrapping Up

To me it's clear that automatic submission to FFAs is pretty close to a total waste of time.

If you are just getting started and even a few hits seem a lot, try Jim Wilson's search engine and directory services. But personally I don't believe you'll recover time costs messing with FFAs.

Your best bet is to follow David Seitz's suggestions on my site in "**Taking Control of The Classifieds**." His approach is to collect a list of classified sites that work, and submit to each weekly.

This sounds good to me. As a bonus, you'll be learning how to write great ads!

The Other Side Of Headlines

Since as many as 80% of visitors will never finish even the headline on a page, it's clear we need to put our best effort into creating them. And the headline on our home page is the one that matters most. Here's why.

We can never be sure of the page upon which a visitor may land. This may not matter as much on your site as it does on some, but it holds true to some degree on all sites. Most of the listing returned by search engines do not point to a home page. So if a surfer clicks such a listing, they land on the page to which the listing points.

Next Stop, The Home Page

The articles on STAT related to site building or promotion are submitted to the search engines as soon as they have been uploaded. A lot of traffic at STAT comes from these submissions. While my statistics are not good enough to prove the following, here's what appears to be happening.

Visitors who get past a headline, which is the title of an article, may click off the site at any time, as in the middle of the article or when finished reading it. But *if* they click to another page, it is most likely to be the home page. This is what I do when I land on an inner page, and want to know more about the site. It appears that on STAT at least, this is common behavior. It is likely so on most sites.

A Good Headline Matters

One of the early headlines on the home page at STAT was, "Newbie-Friendly Site Stuff." (Compliments of Dr. Michel Fortin, **SuccessDoctor.Com** - Mike for sure has a flair with words!)

Since there is a lot of good information and pointers to free resources on the site, this is descriptive of site content. That services are also offered that must be paid for does not come as an overwhelming shock. In short, this headline does not mislead a visitor as to the site content or purpose.

This matters because a surfer expects the headline to provide such an easy-to-read description. If it misleads, the visitor will quickly click off, if not angered, at least frustrated that his or her time has been wasted.

An Aside: The same thing happens if the listing clicked at a search engine site does not lead to the implied or promised content. Since listings are usually generated from the title and description tags on the page, they need to accurately describe the content in addition to compelling a click.

Free Stuff And Freebie Seekers

Visitors who read beyond the headline, scan subheadings. They will remain on the site only if they find one of interest. The right most column on STAT was headed with "Free Stuff." Options available proved popular. And they generated lots of email from people looking for further explanation or suggestions about where to find more of the same.

After a time, it became clear that while most of my email was from serious minded people (excluding spam), most of it related to free resources and services.

There is no question about it. Free stuff does draw visitors. But while I respect the needs of freebie seekers, what I really want to do on my site is sell my services.

Targeting With The Headline

After much pondering, I changed the headline from:

Newbie-Friendly Site Stuff

to:

Affordable Newbie-Friendly Support

I also moved "Free Stuff" in the right most column down below the first fold.

The results were noticeable immediately, and quite positive.

In the new headline, the first word is, "Affordable." No visitor who is freebie hunting is mislead for an instant. The number of visitors clicking off into cyberspace from the home page increased dramatically. Why is this good?

It is not profitable to waste time, energy, resources, or bandwidth with those seeking a free ride. With this small change, the quantity of email dropped drastically. And the quality of questions asked increased markedly. More important, the people writing were, in the main, far closer to being prospects.

Drive Them Off!

The need for a narrowly defined niche and targeted traffic is accepted by most webmasters. There may also be a need to drive non-targeted traffic off your site as soon as possible. And you may be able to do so simply, as with a change in the headline on your home page.

Beg For Questions; It Works!

On the Services page on my site I ask, "Want a second opinion?" I offer to give one for free regarding a proposed change in your site. Several of my friends issued dire warnings about this offer. They were wrong. It works very, very well.

At this writing, the page and this offer have been up for almost a month. I have answered some 30 questions. It takes about 10 to 15 minutes for each. So call it 5-6 hours. A waste of time? No way.

I have 30 new potential clients, unless I discount the two that did not get back with a thank you. I have two brand new clients who will pay me monthly to support their site. I sold services to two others, who may yet convert to my monthly service. And another half a dozen I am still cultivating seem interested.

Contrary to the predictions of my friends, I have not yet received an unreasonable question. All have been "I'm stuck" bits in which the questioner really needed help. All have been uniformly good people, serious minded, and working hard to grow their site. Talk about targeting your market. Hey, these are my kind of people!

My pitch to you? Do all you can to solicit questions you can easily answer. After answering, always go a bit further. For example, if you are visiting a website, begin by saying something neat about it, and very gently suggest a couple of things that might help. In one case, I suggested moving a graphic down the page and putting explosive grabber text up top of the home page that folks can be reading as the graphic loads. The thank-you reply for going the extra distance can be a bit overwhelming.

The reason my friends were wrong in their prediction I would be flooded with requests is that people in general are afraid to ask questions. As we look around at our

peers, we say, "Hey, how can that be so? I don't see anybody afraid of anything in this business." This may be true of your peers, because like yourself they are out-going, assertive types. Most people are not.

Over my years of teaching mathematics and computer science in secondary schools, I found one of the toughest tasks was to get a youngster to ask a question so I could figure where he or she was hung up. I worked at it, and I suspect I was better at it than most. But looking back, I suspect over half the youngsters in my classes *never* asked a question. Here's the why of it.

To ask a question opens you up, exposes you to the person you are speaking to. You have given them something about yourself that you may not really want to share. And you have opened the door to laughter, ridicule and scorn. Even rejection, if there is no reply.

Okay, so I'm talking about high school kids. But they're pretty much like people. I know that in my

contacts with wannabe and newbie webmasters, most are loaded with fears of this sort. Face it. Getting started on the Web is a scary bit!

No, there is no risk in offering to answer questions. I am going to go further to the point of almost begging for them. I want everything on my site to be as warm and welcoming as I can make it, all in hopes of more questions.

Given a question, of course, I always remind myself of the fears overcome in asking it, the courage, if you will, it took to hit the Send button. My response is always positive, supportive, and upbeat. Worst case something like: Hey, it's not all that bad. Sure, there's room for improvement, but you're really, really close. Then I add an idea that helps. Then a couple more.

It works. Try it and prove me wrong!

I Need Help Right Now!

Many business have gone to the elevator-music mode in answering their support lines. You dial, get a recording, and get to guess which is the best button to push. Guess wrong, and you get to hear more music. You may get a recording: "Our average wait time is 20 minutes." This shows you what they think of your time. Is this a good business practice?

Lots of companies must believe so, for many have implemented such a system with a vengeance. They appear to be doing all possible to avoid dealing with customer support. They seem to believe the name of the game is more sales. Period. They continue to erect ever greater barriers to block out unwanted pleas for help.

The Online Parallel

Online, the situation is often worse. As a customer, email may be the only contact you have. If a company representative hits the Delete key to avoid a reply, you're dead. Then there are filters. A company I had been doing business with for three years apparently took offense to a couple of questions I asked, and filtered out my email address. There is no longer a mailing address or phone number on the site.

The impact of such strategies on large companies may be uncertain, but they will quickly kill a small one. Web surfers are getting smarter. And while each day brings a flood of newcomers, they learn fast.

Go For The Gold!

There is an enormous potential in all this for small businesses. Simply by providing truly great support, you can improve your position effectively and generate a much greater flow of repeat business.

Email

Answer it quickly, completely, but succinctly. As with product, over-deliver. That is, seek to anticipate subsequent questions and include the necessary information right now. And do it all cheerfully, while demonstrating strong interest in the needs of your customer.

If you are working a day job or simply haven't time for this, hire someone to do it. Spam will disappear for you. Requests for information or directions will be handled appropriately. And you will receive only key messages that require your personal response.

Before discarding this idea as nonsense, give it a try. When you are able to get an answer to a customer thirty minutes after their message was sent, you are at some point going to get a prompt reply that begins with, "Wow. That was quick." You will become a believer when an order follows minutes later.

An 800 Number Is A Must

An 800 number for orders has been required for years. One for support is not common in small businesses. The mode seems to be to let the customer pay if they want help. It's a bad move. Use your 800 order number for support as well. If you need to keep the order line available, add a second 800 number. Either way, make sure a real live person answers promptly.

Again, if you work a day job, hire someone to take calls. A professional service is not required. Check with your neighbors and friends. Look for someone who would like to make a few extra bucks without leaving home.

Provide 24-Hour Support

People shop the Web at all hours, if for no other reason than differing time zones. Your 800 support number should be available on every page, particularly your order form.

If you are just getting started, you won't have many calls. Consider taking the off-hours calls yourself. Even let the late night calls ring through into your bedroom. This may seem a step too far, but it will demonstrate the need for this level of support. In time you will decide to hire out this service.

Q&As Help

A great way to cut down on support requests is to create and maintain an up to date Q&As section on your website. While many sites have such a page, it is often inadequate and/or old stuff. A support page that is well organized and easy to navigate is a real plus. Many visitors prefer to find answers themselves, rather than make a call or send an email.

Every support question becomes a candidate for a Q&A. Given even one repeat, get it up there.

Shopping Guidance

If you offer a variety of products, visitors may become confused. Set up a page of suggestions, and comparisons if appropriate. And include that 800 number with good answers when the phone is picked up.

Shipping:

Offer at least UPS. Many are turning against the US Post Office. Priority Mail boxes often arrive squished. More and more people now live in housing developments in which they must go to a central site to pick up their mail. A package too large means a trip to the post office. The same is so for rural delivery. If it won't fit in the curb-side mail box, I get that ominous little bit of yellow paper and get to drive eleven miles to pick up the package. UPS comes to my door, and does so even with a foot of snow on the mile-long driveway.

Guarantee:

You've got to give one, and deliver as promised, else the dreaded chargeback. So make it a good one. 90 days at least.

If you ship product, consider including a UPS return voucher. It costs you very little unless the product is returned. And if you are getting many returns, something is wrong elsewhere, as in over-selling, under-delivering, and so forth.

Sure It Costs

Price does not sell. You probably can safely raise prices to cover costs of support. But increased sales of themselves are likely to cover any additional costs. Include the benefits of such support in the first fold on your home page. And remind of it throughout the site, as in posting that 800 number.

When a customer demands help right now, provide it. If you don't, chances are someone else will do so. They'll get the sale, and the customer. You lose.

Do Your Pages Download Fast?

You can answer this question yourself. It is easy to do, and we will get to it. First, let's be clear about what fast means.

A number of people have said my pages download fast. Some have given numbers. But what do they mean? I recently read pages should download in 4 seconds. An expert site designer reported my pages downloaded within 10-15 seconds. A marketing guru gave times from 8 to 10 seconds. Yet on my system, it takes about 20 seconds.

Why are qualified people reporting different speeds as the maximum acceptable? The difference lies in our individual connections to the Web. While the modem, disk, and CPU speed of your system are factors, the route traveled to your ISP (Internet Service Provider) and its performance are also critical. An overloaded ISP can really slow things down. Then there is the speed at which a server can deliver information.

Back to the question, there is only one way to answer it. While the opinions of others are important, the numbers they give are not, because all are trapped by the limitations of their equipment, ISP, and paths through the Web.

The only way to obtain good data is to delete your cache files. Your browser will not take the time to download anything already on your disk. Find your cache directory and delete all files in it. Now download your home page and note the time.

Given graphics repeated from page to page, such as navigation buttons, times to download subsequent pages will be faster, and need not be considered. It is the time to download the first page with no files in cache that matters, for this is what new visitors will experience.

Next, check the web for sites similar to yours. (If you have been to the site, remember to delete all cache files.) Check the download speeds and compare them to yours.

A common reason for differences in times is the number and size of graphics. Ignore results for pages containing more or larger graphics than you use, for they really slow things down. If you find that pages similar to yours in size and graphic content download as yours do, you are fine, regardless of the numbers.

Why? Because all surfers are trapped by their system and ISP. All will have become accustomed to a speed they feel is adequate. You can do nothing to improve this speed, beyond being sure you are using a fast host. Thus if the download speed for your site compares favorably with that of similar sites, your visitors will be content.

If your download speed is greater than those of equivalent sites, take a hard look at your host. A server often makes money by selling more capacity than it has. Then your visitors will always find things moving too slowly. (If you need a fast server, consider **pair.com** or **jumpline.com**; I use both and find their delivery speeds to be excellent.)

So ignore all those numbers given about maximum download times, because the people giving them are also trapped by their gear and ISP. Compare the performance of your pages to similar pages. If yours are as good or better, all is well.

In Search Of Speed

Among webmasters, the search for faster page download speeds continues. The topic comes up frequently. And the usual suggestions are forthcoming. Minimize the use of graphics and optimize the size of those used. Use width and height with the image tags, for it allows text to load quickly, which gives the visitor something to jump into right away. And there are others, such as doing without Java script if possible.

However, the recommendation of finding a fast server continues to rank high on most lists. I have recently concluded this does not matter as much as some believe. If you have a good host that is not overloaded, you probably will not improve your page download speeds significantly by moving to a "faster" server. Here's why.

One of my clients is a software developer who markets his products via the Web. The demands of

Windows 95 and 98 have resulted in an enormous increase in the size of computer programs.

Prior to the introduction of Windows, significant MS-DOS programs were typically about 250K bytes when zipped. Now they are frequently over 3 megabytes. Even with increased modem speeds this tries the patience of potential customers who elect to download the trial version, for it can take a very long time. And given an interrupt, more likely with the longer download times, one gets to do it all over again. Or give up, which to us means the loss of a potential customer.

In an effort to improve download speeds, and thus also decrease interrupts, I explored a number of options, including building our own server. I put a lot of time into this, and largely wasted all of it. Had I had the thinking cap on straight initially, I could have put it all together in very short order. Hopefully what I discovered will assure you there is no need to experiment further, and likely no need to search for a faster host for your website.

I have used Pair.Com for years. Now I also use JumpLine.Com. Virtualis.Com is highly recommended by many, so I opened an account with them as well. I tested many factors, including upload speeds via FTP. But I will limit the numbers here to file download speeds, for this is what relates directly to page download speeds.

After uploading a 3.3 megabyte file to each site, I checked download times from all three. Beginning on a Monday at 7 am New York time, I made the first download. When it completed, I started a download from the next site. When it finished, I went to the third. I continued the cycle throughout the day, wrapping at 6 pm New York time. I used an older slower machine, a 486 with a 33 KB modem. In all, I downloaded six times from each site. The best time was 21 minutes 38 seconds, the worst, 22 minutes 59 seconds. Both were from JumpLine. All other times were between these two.

I had planned to repeat the experiment throughout the week. But when I got virtually the same results the following day, I called it quits. It was clear that all three

were equally fast. It was not what I expected. I pay $5.95/month at Pair.Com, $24.95/month at JumpLine and for that month, paid about $49 at Vitualis. I had expected better performance from one of the three. Looking at pricing, I was guessing it might be Vitualis. Further, they are close geographically to me, some 150 crow-fly miles to the south. That there was no significant difference surprised me, but it shouldn't have.

If you follow any ezine for a time, you will hear folks say your page should download in 5 seconds, or whatever they believe. Or somebody you trust will say your pages really download fast; only 8 seconds. Another says the same, but gives 15 seconds. Why are the numbers so different? How can one fellow get my pages in 8 seconds when it takes another 15, yet both believe it is fast?

The answer lies in our individual connections to the Web. While the modem, disk, and CPU speed of your system are factors, the route traveled to your ISP (Internet Service Provider) and its performance are also critical.

We all face such limitations, as do our visitors. We can do nothing about the speed with which our visitors access our site, for their system and ISP determine this, and perhaps to some extent, the paths available to them through the Web. As an example of the latter, I do fine getting through my ISP, but their only route is through Fresno, California, and for some reason this is a bottleneck.

As webmasters, all we can do is be sure we have a fast host so that we are not part of the problem. But before you run off in search of a better one, check with some care. If you have a good host, one that is not overloaded, it is doubtful you can do significantly better by moving.

Testing Your Way To Success

Efforts to sell begin with a headline. It may be in an ad or in the title of a page on your site listed in a search engine. Wherever it appears, its purpose is to grab the readers attention, and to compel them to read the ad or listing. The purpose of the content read is to cause the reader to take an action such as clicking through to your site.

Once the visitor is on your site, the pages must take up the chore of compelling a further response, such as downloading a program, buying a product, or any of a host of other actions. In what follows, any desirable action can be substituted for the word, "sale."

Apart from improved and/or increased marketing efforts, there are only two ways to increase sales.

1) Improve elements in the paths that lead to your site.

2) Improve the effectiveness of your site in bringing a sale.

The online business person can fine tune these elements far more easily and with greater effectiveness than can be done offline.

Advertising

The testing of ads before launching a sales campaign is well documented elsewhere. But that a listing in a search engine is also an ad, is often overlooked. The title tag is the headline that causes the reader to read the description tag. And the latter must bring a click to your site, else the "ad" fails.

Since many search engines use these tags to create the listing, improving those currently in place can bring good gains once the pages are resubmitted. While testing in the traditional sense with ads is not practical, the proven methods for creating a great ad apply.

In short, create a attention gabbing headline that compels the reader to read the listing (ad). Create a description that compels the reader to click to your site.

One approach is to copy the title and description tags from significant site pages to a text file. Review these "ads" at least once a month.

If you did a good job with the initial tags, this is not likely to bring great results. But if the current tags are lacking, results can be spectacular.

Testing The Home Page.

Keep this simple. Look only at unique hits and page views (total pages downloaded). Also focus initially on the first fold, for if a visitor scrolls down, you already have a positive response.

The task is to make a change, then see what effect it had on page views.

- If page views increase, assume the change is a plus, and hold the change.

- If there is a decrease, it's a negative. Reverse the change.

- If there is little or no change, nothing has been demonstrated. Hold the change or reverse it, as seems best. But make a note and return later to retest.

Throughout, keep accurate records about changes made and the consequences of the change. They are invaluable in providing hints for later changes.

About The Math

Be sure to use ratios when making comparisons. That is, divide the number of page views by the number of unique hits. This erases fluctuations in the hit counts during the testing period.

Deciding upon the length of the testing period is tricky. To some extent, it depends upon time available. If you are getting 1000 hits a day, you may be able to make a change once a day. Once a week works well. For sites generating less than 1000 hits each week, the conclusions may not be as accurate as you would like.

This approach is not as effective with sites getting a hundred or fewer hits a day. Still, if the test period is stretched to two weeks, and solid notes are kept, positive improvement can be obtained. In short, smaller visitor counts make it more difficult to be certain a change is positive or negative, but the process does work.

Test Without Violation

Make no other changes in your site during a testing period. Doing so can distort the results and bring bad decisions. If it's just got to be done, reverse the change made and retest later. Let the site run with required changes until you have a good fix on the current ratio of page views to unique hits.

What To Change?

Anything at all. Colors. Backgrounds. The page template. While content is the most important element on the site, all that supports it should be tested. If you like banners, try one. But also try the page without one. And try different locations as well. In the end, however, it is your page content that makes or breaks your site.

How Much To Change?

In testing ads, changing only one word may be the limit as the ad becomes polished. On a website, while a word in the headline might bring a change, there is not sufficient time to test so definitively.

How much to change is really a judgement call. The first headline on the home page is so important, changing only this one item may be as far as you want to go in one test period. On other pages, it may be appropriate to try different versions of the first fold. In a "sales letter" a paragraph may be best.

There is a lot of guessing to be done. And hunches to be considered. The key is in keeping great notes. An earlier change that made a noticeable positive difference may give you a great idea for the page you are working now.

What To Do While Waiting

Block out a bit of time each day to ponder further changes. The think time is invaluable. Add to the list of possibilities. Recheck your notes in hopes of finding a proposed change related in some way to another that helped. 5 or 10 minutes is enough. It is the continued daily focus on the campaign that pays big dividends. This simple procedure can easily double the effectiveness of your efforts.

More About Testing

There are so many, many things you can test that lead to improving your site, there is no hope of covering them all here. If you have the data, pay close attention to pages upon which visitors click off your site. If you find a common exit page, there is work to be done. Trace paths through your site if possible; they can be very revealing. And if you can, check length of stay. I feel this is more critical than page views. The bottom line, of course, is sales.

Testing Converts Opinion To Fact

In the end, it does not matter what you think about your site. Or about any element on it. It is only opinion. When you test ruthlessly, opinions are replaced with facts: The behavior of your visitors is the only "fact" that matters.

Chapter 5
The Search Engine Game

While it is true search engines and directories can bring lots of hits to your site, generating those hits can take far too much time. The better approach may be to do what can be done easily, then turn to other promotional tasks.

Are You Losing The Search Engine Game? - You are, if you're sweating to get and hold #1 positions.

The Magic Keywords - One approach to finding keywords. then finding even better ones.

The Keyword Lottery And How To Win - Pages that rank well are no help unless somebody enters keywords used.

Spider Friendly Content Pages - Content is king! Great content must be central to your site.

Are You Losing The Search Engine Game?

Many wannabe and newbie webmasters tend to view search engines as their salvation. While certainly important, they can not generate the traffic some hope for. Other marketing methods must be employed as well.

One problem that wasn't as much a factor a year or two ago lies in the move of offline businesses to the Web. Many come aboard with ample resources. They are prepared to spend dollars in significant chunks. Many hire professionals to obtain good search engine rankings.

Can You Beat The Pros?

Face it. You are maintaining a site and growing a business. You need to devote ninety percent of your day to promotion. This doesn't leave much time for mastering the intricacies of search engine positioning. It's likely the pros are going to beat you every time.

With each passing day it is more difficult to obtain top positions with a given keyword. Competition continues to increase for any phrase selected. And more and more professionals continue to climb on board with no end in sight.

That Elusive #1 Position

The dream of being #1 is only that: A dream.

Suppose you do get a page to #1 with a given keyword on a particular search engine. How long will it remain there? Not long, if the keyword is of interest to others.

Why? Because lots of people are looking for the top spot, including the pros. Your page will be analyzed in detail until a way is found to beat it. At some point, other submissions will out rank yours, and you will begin to lose ground.

Forget it. There are far more important things to do than worry about getting or maintaining a #1 position.

So I Should Forget Search Engines?

No. Just forget about being #1, or even in the top ten. There are not enough hours in the day to make search engine positioning a high priority. The better plan is to devote what time is available to building pages designed to rank well. Submit them. Then move on to things that matter more.

To put this another way, be content with any page that ranks in the top 20 on a couple of search engines. And realize that no page will rank as well on all of them. Further, accept the fact that many pages will not rank anywhere near the top.

You can win the search engine game, but only if you accept the above or a similar view as victory.

So How Do I Do That?

First, write your pages for your visitors, not the search engines. Only when content is ready for your visitors, should you even consider search engines.

Then consider each relative to your keyword list. You may find a couple that will rank pretty well with a given keyword just as written. Fine. Edit the title, description and keyword tags to emphasize this keyword. Maybe try to work it into the copy a couple more times. But do nothing that disturbs the flow of the message to your visitor.

What If That's Not Enough?

Build entry pages, often called gateway or doorway pages. While there are many approaches to this task, I prefer the following because it leads to pages that can be freely submitted without risk of them being labeled spam. It goes like this.

Look at your keyword list and select one you can use repeatedly while covering a topic of interest to your visitors. The idea is to build great content, so repeated use of the word must not detract. Be guided (but not driven) by the following.

The content of the Title tag is likely to be the title used in a search engine listing. Thus it is mandatory that it be a headline that draws readers into your description. While holding firmly to this objective, use the keyword as close to the beginning of the title as possible.

The content of the Description tag is likely to be what the search engines will use in the listing. Here the objective is to assure the searcher clicks to your site. This is pure advertising copy: it must compel the searcher to click the link. Again, while holding firmly to the goal, use the keyword as close to the beginning of the statement as possible. Use it a second time only if it makes sense to do so.

Include the keyword and variations in the Keyword tag as a suggestion to the spiders of what to expect on the page.

In the body of the page, use the keyword in an H1 tag at the top of the page, and in subheadings as possible. Again, position the keyword as close as possible to the beginning of each statement. But remember your visitors will read this content. Avoid awkward statements created in hopes of making spiders happy.

Within the content, use the keyword as often as you can without detracting from readability. Again, as close to the beginning of paragraphs as possible. And in the last line on the page. Recommendations vary, but I get good results when the keyword is 1% to 2% of the copy. Some recommend as high as 10%, but I find that at this density, the value to visitors is lost.

So Now What?

Submit the page and get on with business. If it places well, great. If it does not, and you can spare the time, create another page.

At some point, however, let it be. Get on with other promotional efforts. In the end, tools such as advertising will provide far more targeted traffic than the search engines can deliver.

The Magic Keywords

What will your potential visitor enter into a search engine to find your site? If you can find these magic keywords, phrases real people will use, then optimize your pages for them, you will have taken a key step toward generating hits. If you use the wrong words, you will waste a good deal of effort and achieve next to nothing.

A friend of mine has been working with an ex-IRS agent who can be of significant help to those with tax problems. But he has decided to search for clients only in the area in which he lives, the Santa Clarita Valley in Southern California. It is a snap to get a #1 position on most search engines with such phrases as Santa Clarita Tax Expert, Santa Clarita Tax Solutions, and so forth. And he did so. But he is not getting any hits.

The problem is in two parts. Many people who live in the Santa Clarita Valley do not know that they do. Even those who do tend to feel they live in Los Angeles. Secondly, many do not know how to spell Santa Clarita.

So his first place position is meaningless, unless he turns to advertising in locally circulated newspapers, magazines, and newsletters. This can cost bucks, and he could have done this without the effort it took to build his site.

Discovering what potential visitors might enter to find your site is a challenging problem, one often overlooked in advice regards position on search engines. One way to begin is to list a few words you feel will work, go to your favorite search engine, enter them, and see what comes up. Any phrase that generates a lot of unconnected listings is not likely a good candidate.

When you find something that ranks your competitors high in the list, check out the sites. Once the page has fully loaded, take the option in your browser to view the page source code. Find the keyword meta statement near the top of the page, and check those listed. Add as appropriate to your list. Also check the page content to see which keywords are sprinkled throughout it. These may be the most important ones. In particular,

see how the keyword you used to get this page is handled. You may find clues as to how best to use it on your page.

When you think you have a good list, try this useful resource at GoTo.Com.
inventory.go2.com/inventory/searchInventory.mp
Enter the keywords you are thinking about. Some of the suggestions made can be added to your list, particularly those used most often. GoTo.Com provides this service because they hope you will find additional words to bid on (pay for high rankings in lists - another topic). But you do not need to use their service to take advantage of this resource.

At this point you have found and expanded your list to include keywords others use. So is that it?

No! To stop at this point assumes you have found what potential visitors will enter when they want a product or service such as yours. But you do not *know* these are the phrases real people will use. You do not know you have the magic keywords.

I have a suggestion. It is not a guaranteed solution, but I have used it successfully. It goes like this.

I write a good description of the product or service I want to sell, maybe half a page. I describe what it is, what it does, and how one will benefit from it. I write much as I would when producing an ad. However, I do all possible to *avoid* the keywords I feel will be used.

Next I pester everyone I know, asking what they might enter to find this product. And I give it time; not everyone is as interested in my problem as I am.

When I have collected replies, I go back and pester these same people with a list ranked with the most common suggestions up top, including phrases I found that were not mentioned. I ask them to pick four or five they feel are best.

I have found some really neat keywords in this way, phrases I would never have discovered on my own. I hope you can make it work for you.

I sense this is an aspect of search engine positioning often overlooked. It is easy for me to pick a phrase related to your business and get you top position on at least some search engines. It is meaningless, though, unless people actually enter that phrase.

(Also see "**The Keyword Lottery And How To Win**" for another helpful step beyond the above, a way to use AltaVista to discover those keywords for which you have a good chance at a high position.)

The Keyword Lottery
And How To Win

If you simply must have a page on your site ranked #1 on some search engine, build one with turnipberries as the keyword. You'll get a #1 position. And you can proudly show your friends what you have achieved. But if you show it to enough friends, one is bound to ask, "So what?"

And there's the rub. It's easy to get a great ranking on an obscure keyword. But it's of no value unless searchers actually enter it. Further, if they click to your site, they expect information about it. Turnipberries? Not much to say, is there?

What is needed are keywords or phrases searchers can be expected to enter. And they must be central to the site, else a searcher who visits will be gone in seconds.

Finding the best possible set of keywords is a reasonable goal. But it's elusive. Here's an example.

Too Many Options

One of my clients markets a program called Easy Mail. The short definition is that it is a total correspondence center. One function of the program is to print great looking envelopes. Here is a partial list of phases used to find the site.

print envelopes
printing envelopes web tv
print AND envelopes
envelop printing software
envelopes AND print AND address
envelope print free download windows
how do you print envelopes
how do i print on envelopes?
envelopes AND print AND address
ENVELOPE ADDRESS PRINTING addresses
making envelopes

Consider the words used most often: print, envelope, and address. Other important words for this product are: software, download, and mailing.

The above is only part of a longer list. From the whole of it, another twenty important words can be identified. Further, a similar list can be generated for printing labels, correspondence (editing), mail-merge (personalized mailing), emailing, faxing, and mail list management.

Suddenly there are over a hundred words on my list. And several hundred phrases. In a world of unlimited time and/or dollars, one could put together a sufficient number of entry pages that would rank pretty well for many words and phrases in the set.

(**An Aside:** To me an entry page is one featuring a keyword or two in the title, meta statements, and page. However the page content is written strictly for my visitors, or it is not written at all.)

But both time and dollars are limited. It takes time to build an entry page or dollars to pay someone else to do so. Pick a keyword that will seldom be entered, and you have wasted your efforts.

To complicate matters, all we know for certain is that these words and phrases have been used. We can say phrases at the top of the list were most commonly entered, and thus are more likely candidates for future searches. But we can not be certain any will ever be used again. Here's a page at GoTo.Com that can help in this.
inventory.go2.com/inventory/searchInventory.mp

On the above page, enter a keyword or phrase you are thinking about. The number of times it was entered last month is reported. And suggestions of related phrases are offered. This tool was a big help in selecting the best phrases from the large set of possibilities for Easy Mail. For example, it was clear that Print Envelopes and Print Labels were common entries, but with small counts, which meant we could compete effectively.

Jumping To The Big Time

However, in working with my site, solutions were not as obvious. I began by entering "internet marketing." 1322 hits in the prior month.

Wow! And GoTo is really a small engine. Imagine what the count would be at AltaVista!

Okay, so what should I do? Try to beat all these people and obtain better positions than they already have? Nope. It's not the game for me. I would have to assume I can do significantly better than a whole bunch of bright, well qualified people. It would be a total misuse of time.

Go For The Second Favorites

After a bit, I found the following entries and counts.

142 - site marketing
134 - site promotion
205 - search engine positioning

I like the odds better here.

Wrapping Up

The first objective is to find keyword phrases being entered that apply to your site. GoTo.Com will suggest the frequency of entry. If the counts are large, say over a hundred per month, go to AltaVisita. Settle on those with low counts (less competition) you find there. Use these keywords, build some entry pages, and get on with business. You may not score any #1 positions, but you will rank high enough with some pages on some engines to generate significant hits.

But if the page counts are high at AltaVista, forget competing for these phrases. While a position in the top ten with "internet marketing" would be a winner for my site, I'll pass. I'll get fewer hits from the second favorites, but I have a shot at getting decent rankings. I will have to settle for that.

Spider Friendly Content Pages

It is virtually impossible to build a site in which each page brings good search engine position. The home page, for example, will likely change frequently. Thus spiders will not find it the same when they return, which they do, roughly once each month.

Pages devoted to selling product do not often rank well. The same is true of a page where visitors can subscribe to your newsletter. Or the one you pop up to say thanks when they do subscribe. So how does one go about getting good search engine positions?

Great Content Is The Answer

So what is great content? Any information surfers may need. However, it must also be a topic that enhances your site purpose. That is, there is no room on a site devoted to baseball for a piece describing the inner workings of steam engines.

Assuming you have a clear read on who your visitors are, then it's only a matter of selecting a topic likely to be of interest to at least some of them. Given this, write the page for your visitors, not the search engines. Then do what you can to make the spiders happy.

Happy Spiders?

Not likely. It is impossible to please them all. Some see "Market," "MARKET," and "market" as separate words; others see only one repeated three times. Some see "market" as "marketing;" most require a specific match. "Markets" may be seen as "Market," but in other cases both forms may be required.

Okay, we'll include all cases in our keyword tag: Market, MARKET, market, Markets, MARKETS, markets, Marketing, MARKETING, marketing.

That's got it covered fine, but how do we make this work with a spider that considers more than three

repetitions as spam? One that might even consider all of the above as 9 repetitions of one word?

You Can't Get There From Here

Search engines are competing in a multi-billion dollar race. The winner will be the one that can most consistently present the most relevant information available in response to a query.

Be assured that with the stakes this high, the competition is fierce. They are not about to reveal their latest wrinkle to improve their listings. Which leaves us with empirical evidence and educated guesses.

Try to sort this all out for each search engine, and you'll go crazy. Not to mention constant changes which mean one or more of the carefully defined "rules" no longer holds.

Even supposing you had an accurate listing of the rules for each engine. Would you seriously consider

creating a separate page for each? Not me. I have much more profitable ways in which to use my time.

Take the longer view. Spiders are getting smarter every day. And they are becoming smarter at a rapidly increasing rate. Some are now reading a page as if with a thesaurus in hand, thus being able to see house and home as having similar meanings.

Grammar checkers exist; I expect to see these and related tools implemented in spider logic. In the not-to-distant future, those keyword-rich doorway pages are going to be discarded.

Meanwhile we need to create some great content pages and try to make the spiders as happy as possible. Here's my approach.

Finding Keywords

Given a topic and a mental draft of what needs to be written, I identify 1 to 3 keyword phases. (I don't think

individual words work well now.) I work at this, trying to put myself in the shoes of one who will search for this information. If I am building a major page, or one of a set of related topics, I may take the time to visit GoTo.Com to find phrases actually entered, as described in "**The Keyword Lottery And How To Win It**."

Meta Tags

I build a rough draft of the title and description tags before beginning to write. They must serve two purposes. First the title is the headline of an ad which draws the reader into the ad copy (description). And the description must compel a click to my site. Second, though, to please the spiders, keywords need to be included, and the closer to the beginning of the statements the better. (I try not to think about the fact that some spiders will ignore both tags.)

Since Excite limits a title to 70 characters, I try to hold under this. If I go over, I try to work things out so that truncation does little harm. I try to hold the description under 150 characters, the limit at AltaVista. I use these limits because together, AltaVista and Excite dominate among search engines.

These two tags matter a lot; I review them often as I write.

The keyword tag, on the other hand, gets little attention. This tag has been so abused, I simply can't get a handle on what works best. Some meta tag checkers still claim you ought to use all 1000 characters allowed. This seems unwise.

I include only my keyword phrases, all in lower case. But I do add the plural case and "ing" when appropriate.

The Content

When I begin to write, I think only of communicating as effectively as possible with my visitor. I keep the keywords in mind and seek to build in a theme based

upon them. After editing a first draft, I will often lay it aside for a day or two before continuing. My visitors are my target here, not the spiders.

The Spider's Turn

If I can build some header tags with keywords, I will. I don't bother with ALT assignments or comments in the source, although this reportedly gives a boost with some search engines.

I work at including keywords as close to the top of the page as possible, in the first 100-200 words. For this is the part of the page in which one expects to find the subject defined, followed by further explanation and expansion. Even now, spiders also expect this.

I also work at rephrasing things to add more repetitions of keywords and to bring them as close to the beginning of paragraphs as possible.

And I make a point of repeating the keywords in the close of the page, a sort of "theme" wrap up, if you will.

One further thing I do is look for words I incidentally used so frequently they may dilute the weight of the keywords. For example, if I have used "buildings" too often, I may replace some instances with "structures" or a specific name for a type.

But throughout, I absolutely refuse to sacrifice readability. To me, my visitor is far more important than any search engine.

Other Guidelines

Keyword density is the percentage of words that the keywords are to the total number of words. It is considered quite differently by different spiders. Some suggest as much as 15% of a page be keywords. To me this is nonsense, for it makes the page unintelligible

to a visitor. I have never been able to get above 2% without decreasing readability, even when using three keywords.

Page length expected also differs drastically. Many claim short pages are better. 300-600 words is often suggested. But Excite doesn't care how long a page is. I say what needs saying as briefly as possible and call it good.

Never Look Back

When the page is polished, I submit it to the major search engines. Then I do something you really ought to try.

I never look back. The page is up and that's that. I've got more important things to do than worry about what position it has today. Or where it may be tomorrow. If I've done the job properly, my visitors will enjoy the page. And that's the end of it.

Chapter 6
Ezines And Your Bottom Line

Supporting your visitors and customers with a newsletter is no longer optional. It is expected. If you do not deliver, you will continue to lose credibility.

Do You Publish An Ezine? - It's a great way to stay in touch with customers and it lends credibility to you.

Growing Your Subscriber List - As with all else in growing a website, be prepared to spend some time.

Free Emailing Services And Passwords - The four free services require a password and confirmation, which can hurt.

Do You Publish An Ezine?

You should. It's a grand way to stay in touch with potential customers, and to keep your name out there in a positive way. Readers will remember you when they need what you offer. And best of all, they will share your name with a friend with a similar need.

But heck, I sell worms to fisherman. What can I put in a newsletter? Lots. The best fishing spots, the lures that are working best, and "long-fish" stories always work.

Do you still insist you have nothing to say? Really? You were talking to Charlie over there a minute ago. Right? Well, I was standing right beside you and heard what you said. You told him you thought that widget was the best these people had ever made, a great improvement over last years model. Then you went on to point out why it was so. If you had an ezine, you could tell your readers what you told Charlie. He was interested, right? In fact he bought one! Maybe it's just what one of your potential readers needs. Heck, you can't talk to

everyone who visits your site, but you can sure share with all who are interested by offering an ezine.

So How Do I Start?

Just do it. Think back over the last week of conversations with customers, consider what was said, and put the good parts down in writing.

Start with you, yourself, and me on the subscriber list. This is tough, for there's a tendency to say, heck, nobody's going to see this, and kind of just slop something together. Bad habits are hard to break. Write as you would for the "Atlantic Monthly" or "New Yorker." Never settle for less than your very best. If your skills are weak, get someone to edit for you.

The secret to good writing for those of us with less than Pulitzer Prize type skills is to work up a draft, rewrite, edit, rewrite, etc., until convinced it's good. Then print a copy, sit down with a cup of coffee in a comfortable chair and read our creation out loud.

Ignore this last step at your peril. We all tend to fall in love with what we create. Printed copy gives us a fresh look. Saying the words aloud changes the reading pace markedly. Blunders will be noticeable and new ideas will beg to be added in.

The Mechanics

You can use your email program to begin. When your list grows larger, you will want to consider a mailing service, possibly ListBot or Topica.

Decide on a publication schedule and stick to it. The best frequency is a function of who your customers are, and how much great information you can share. Once a month may be just right for a site offering legal services. Twice a month works well for many. Once a week may be overkill; we all get a lot of email. If you decide on weekly, keep it short. A monthly publication can be longer.

Hold articles between 400-800 words if possible; your readers may not hang in to the end of longer ones. It also gives you the opportunity to include a greater variety of content within a fixed space.

How long should it be? Short works fine. And sometimes shorter is better. Ideally, it should be as short as possible while including all that is needed. Most suggest 30K bytes as a maximum.

What's The Best Content?

Whatever your customers will enjoy reading. Period. There is no other answer. Think back to the "conversation" with Charlie above. Charlie was interested, right? It worked, right? So it goes into the newsletter.

There's no need for anything grand. Just talk about things that will interest your customers. Tips related to your business or how best to use your products work great, for they are short, and thus easier to digest.

Coupons are terrific! Offer a special to subscribers only. If it really is special, folks will come forth, and likely tell a friend or two about it, which can really grow your subscriber list.

Report on new products and services available in your area. Review them if possible. They need not be your products. Some webmasters would never consider mentioning a competitor's product, but I sense you'll gain greater credibility by trusting folks. They'll remember your good advice, and get back to you when they need your product. I'll go so far as to say this may be the very best way to build trust and confidence in both you and your products. Sharing good information your readers can use will never backfire.

Think of "Reader's Digest." Quotable quotes work fine. Short tales with a snappy wrap. Humor can be useful, but take care in this. Humor in email does not come across as well as it does face to face with a friend. It can be misunderstood, and sometimes even offend.

Finding Great Articles

Find out what your competition is doing. If they publish an ezine, subscribe. It will trigger lots of good ideas for your own, If articles are included, and you like something you read, write to the author and ask permission to reprint it. They always say yes because readers will see the resource box included, the author's way of advertising. While an ezine of reprints won't fly, including one or two in each issue works very well. A reader who has read it before, just jumps down to the next item.

Regards reprints, here's a useful trick. Collect articles you like to a file by date. When you need something for your current newsletter, go back a couple of months. This avoids the problem of the same article appearing at almost the same time in several ezines.

Article libraries are a great source for good material. Here are a couple.

E-zinez Classified Ad Exchange. - Click on "Gallery" in the top row of navigation buttons. You can search for articles by author name or simply select a category. All articles are available via auto responders, so they are easy to get and they arrive quickly.

IdeaMarketers - Navigation seems a bit tricky, but it is easy to get an article you like.

About.Com (Previously The Mining Company") - Lists ezines by category and provides useful information about each one listed.

Archives Are Good

If your ezine is essentially articles, archiving past issues works very well. Go further, if you like, and give each article a separate page. If you use appropriate keywords in the meta statements and take the time to submit to the larger search engines, you can generate some extra hits.

About Advertising

Don't even think about it until you get your circulation up there. At $25 per pop, it's not worth your time. As you build your ezine, remember the more closely it focuses on a specific target, the higher your rates can be from those wanting to reach this target.

I suggest ignoring the little classified stuff. I sense that readers are skipping blocks of them. Go for sponsor-type ads, and limit the number to maybe four or five per issue. It is also important you demonstrate your personal support for your sponsors. As your readers come to trust you, your endorsement brings clicks on your sponsor's ads. This makes them happy, and more likely to advertise again.

Central to building trust and confidence, is the selection of sponsors. Choose only those who are ethical and offer something useful to your readers. The purpose of ads from your point of view as a publisher is not profits, but content of use to your readers.

Ezines: A Powerful Tool

If you are not publishing an ezine, consider doing so. It can do wonders for your image and future sales. It can increase hits on your site, and your site in turn can help build your subscriber list. It's strictly a win-win combination; you simply can't lose.

Most important, though, providing good solid information demonstrates your expertise in the best possible way. That is, it builds trust and confidence in you by showing you know what you're about, without you needing to make some grand claim to expertise that might backfire.

UPDATE: This article was written some time back. While the approach is solid, there is one point lacking. Publishing an ezine is no longer optional. Your visitors and customers expect it, even if they do not subscribe. That is, times have changed on the Web. Without a regularly published ezine, your credibility is greatly diminished.

Growing Your Subscriber List

I found two great resources that deal with this topic. One is an older article by Greg Schliesmann entitled, "Building Your Ezine." You can find it at
jvmarketer.com/ezine/building.html
If you are serious about growing your list, this is a must read.

The second is an excellent tutorial by Dr. Mani Sivasubramanian available at
newslettercoach.com/tutorial
As above, check this out for loads of good ideas.

What follows is my personal approach to this important task.

What Is A Subscriber Worth To You?

Probably more than you think. Consider the time you put into preparing your newsletter. Factor in the mailing costs. (They will be modest to zero while getting started, but they increase with the size of your list.)

While subscribers to your ezine will not necessarily become a customer, your hope is they will turn to your product or service should they find a need for it. As long as they continue listening to you, they remain great prospects who may step forward at any time and buy.

There is another value to be considered: Advertising. The more subscribers you have, the greater the advertising revenue.

Each individual will need to work things out for themselves, but many successful webmasters are willing to pay as much as $3 - $5 for a subscriber. If you are new to publishing an ezine, this may sound too high. But you need to be thinking of a number that works for you even if you are just starting out. For the sake of argument, call it one dollar per subscriber. Use this factor as follows.

How much time does it take to accomplish a given task designed to bring in new subscribers? Now estimate the number you expect to bring in, times a buck apiece. Factor in an hourly value for your time. Use this approach in each of the following to decide if it's worth doing.

Announcing Your New Ezine

> Press Releases Can Work Wonders
> Get Listed In Lists
> Subscribe To Newsletters
> Hard Work That Pays Off Double

Announcing Your New Ezine

> **Internet Scout New-List**
> **scout.cs.wisc.edu/index.html**

will publish an announcement of your ezine at no charge. (You can find New-List in the nav bar on the left of the page.) I gave this a shot when I began "STAT News." My count showed it generated 15 new subscribers. Since it takes me a lot of time to prepare a good announcement, this did not work out well for me.

Greg reported 350 new subscribers from his release. It may be as simple as the fact that he is a better copywriter than I am. . Check the original article to see how Greg handled it. It may work for you. Remember, 350 subscribers at a buck a piece is $350.

Windsong at **Marketing-Resources.Com** suggests if you are starting a newsletter, send a blank email to OneList.
> **onelist_ announcesubscribe@onelist.com**

They send a confirmation message to which you just "reply." This will subscribe you. Next, send an announcement about your ezine to It will go out to nearly 400,000 people! This a legitimate operation, but if in doubt, check out their site at **OneList.Com**. I had less luck in this, than with Internet Scout. I suspect I did not take sufficient care with my announcement.

Press Releases Can Work Wonders

I have not tried a mass mailing of a press release, for I sense it just won't pay off for me. With so many "big" items to talk about, the announcement of a new ezine about marketing and promotion is not likely to be the talk of the town.

On the other hand, if your ezine is unique in some special way, give thought to mass mailing a press release. Anything new or unusual is news. Given a good press release, returns can be very significant.

Get Listed In Lists

Below is a set of ezine lists. I'm confident it will be worth your time to get listed in each. It took me less than three hours to submit to all of them. And since I used an email address for subscription not used elsewhere, I have an accurate count of new subscribers from these lists. It amounts to about 12 per month over the last two months, which suggests 144 for the year. At a buck per subscriber,

and more expected next year, I feel this is time well spent. Note this list is a combination of those offered by both Greg and the tutorial at eBoz.Com. The links are up to date as of 11/03/99, the day I submitted.

Before beginning to submit, build a great short description and a longer one, much as you would need when submitting to a directory. In the longer description, write so that the last sentence or two can be deleted without great harm. Speak to reader benefits.

You also need to prepare a set of keywords. Not all want them but many do. If you accept articles, be prepared to give guidelines. If you accept advertising, have your rates handy.

While it took about five minutes to fill out the forms at each site, a couple took much more as noted below.

"Directory of Ezines" charge $39/year for access and I sense it's worth it, for it seems to be the most up to date directory around. It also took some time, about fifteen

minutes. Keep track of your account number and password so you can go back and update such things as the number of subscribers and advertising rates.

"InfoJump" has a very complex form. It took me about 25 minutes to complete it. If you're short of time, you might want to pass on this one. Note this is a great source for articles for your ezine.

"Liszt" is a biggie, but I gave up on it. They apparently want subscription information specific to a particular mailing service. Mine was not listed and I couldn't figure a way to get it in.

Directory of Electronic Journals and Newsletters
arl.org/scomm/edir/template.html

Directory of Ezines
lifestylespub.com

Echelon's Newsletter Exchange
bizx.com/cgi-bin/miva?newsletter.mv

EzineSeek
ezineseek.com
As with a directory, pick a category then submit

E-Zines Today
ezine-news.com
Requires email submission, but read the guidelines here

E-zine List
meer.net/~johnl/e-zine-list

eZINESearch
ezinesearch.com/search-it/ezine
A major player; treat with care

Info Jump
infojump.com/publishers
Complex form.

Inkpot's Zine Scene
       inkpot.com/submit

Internet Mailing List Navigator
       catalog.com/vivian/intsubform2.html

John Labovitz's e-zine-list
       meer.net/~johnl/e-zine-list/submit.html

ListCity
       list-city.com

Liszt
       liszt.com/submit.html

Low Bandwidth
       disobey.com
Funky, may not have your category

New Journal Digest
       gort.ucsd.edu/newjour/submit.html

Publicly Accessible Mailing Lists
       neosoft.com/internet/paml/answers.html#add

The Newsletter Library
       newsletter-library.com/ven.htm
Now charging a fee; I passed.

Zinew0rld
       http://www.oblivion.net/zineworld

Subscribe To Newsletters

    The next step, and a very important one, is to go back to the above list and find all ezines with a target similar to yours. Subscribe to each, even if the number seems overwhelming. Hang in with each just as long as possible.

    Prior to beginning "STAT News," I subscribed to over a hundred ezines. Trying to get through them nearly drove me crazy, but I learned a good deal. And one by one, I unsubscribed. Here's what you are looking for.

Ideas you can use in your own newsletter. More important, reading will trigger original ideas of your own. Maybe something new. Or a fresh view of something old.

Articles written by others that you like. Get permission from the author and reprint them in your newsletter. A good plan is to hold current articles for a couple of months to avoid the problem of the same article being printed several places at the same time.

A feel for the kinds of advertisers who may like what you offer. See how each ezine handles different types of ads and note those you feel are most effective. If advertising rates are not published, ask for them. You can learn what to charge your advertisers.

Neat tricks being used to bring in new subscribers. You will want to use every idea you can find and generate your own as well.

A feeling for the kind of material accepted by each ezine. While it is generally not practical to write for a single ezine, you can find common ground between several of

them. As you write for your own ezine, keep in mind you will want to submit your work to others. A good resource box will draw a significant number of new subscribers.

Hard Work That Pays Off Double

Collect the URL for all competing ezines. Also collect the mailto subscription address. What you want to find is all links to either, and where they are listed. You can, of course, do this in various ways with the search engines. And Greg offers links to a couple of good online tools you may find helpful. But like Greg, I favor WebFerret for this and many other tasks. It will search many search engine databases all at the same time. And it's fast. On my system, it will produce a list of 1000 links in about ten minutes. But the best news is that it is free. Go to **FerretSoft.Com** and download a copy for yourself. It has become an absolutely indispensable tool for me. If you get tired of the ads, $25 will buy you a license to turn them off.

However you approach this task it is hard work and it takes time. When you find a competitor listed where you

are not, go there and get listed. When you find a site that is linked to your competitor, go there and attempt to get a link to your site. In this later case, I go a step further. If the site would be of interest to my visitors, I first link to it. Then I send a note pointing out that I have done so, and invite a link back. I get one about 80% of the time. (For details, see, "**Want A Million Targeted New Visitors?**")

Leave No Stone Unturned

Let me wrap with a recommendation to work through the tutorial at eBoz. It's terrific, and includes whole bunches of good thinking not mentioned here. Also read Greg's article in full. Toward the end of it there are several excellent suggestions for building your subscriber list not included here.

Free Emailing Services And Passwords

Shortly after starting my first email newsletter, the list grew beyond a hundred names. I found I was spending far too much time adding and deleting subscribers. And the bounces were tough to handle. (A bounce is an email that is returned as undeliverable.) There are a lot of valid reasons for bounces, such as a mailbox being full, so one can not assume an address that bounced is no longer good. For example, AOL choked one day and sent back some thirty copies of the newsletter!

I never did figure a best-way to deal with bounces. What I settled for was resending the following day with the subject as Second Try. Note this list was subscribed to by a lot of young people and curiosity seekers, so there were lots of changes and lots of bounces from addresses canceled.

When I heard about ListBot, I checked. It is part of the LinkExchange operation, now owned by MSN. I read all the info available with a good deal of care. I liked the way in which they dealt with bounces. (Translate: I would not have to do so.) So I signed up. I passed on free and took the Gold option for $79/year because the size of my newsletter and frequency of mailing made it practical to do so. I put their nice form up on my site pages, and lots of visitors subscribed easily by typing in their email address.

But a problem arose immediately. It stemmed from ListBot's demand that subscribers enter a password to unsubscribe. Sounds like a good idea, doesn't it? It backfired on me in two ways.

First, they send a subscriber his or her forgotten password by auto-responder, which usually arrived in less than a minute. But this didn't work with AOL subscribers. At least at that time, email to AOL was commonly delayed several hours. Impatient subscribers wrote not-nice notes demanding I solve the problem.

I did not like the notes. And it would have been easier to deal with them on my own system, than to trot off to ListBot.

Second, a lot of my subscribers used email addresses connected to the firm at which they worked. When an employee left the company, I got email demanding removal, for of course they could not know what the password was. Unfortunately, it often required waiting for another newsletter in order to find the correct email address.

On one such occasion, I got an angry call from a fellow who claimed to be the owner of a company. He demanded I simply search on his company URL. While still on the phone, I checked my parallel list and got nine hits. I explained I did not know which one to delete.

He flat wigged out and demanded I delete them all! No way were his employees going to waste their time and his resources. His vocabulary was colorful and there was much talk of law suits. A real fun time.

Not much later, I gave up on ListBot. The password bit had proved to be a killer. If I could have figured a way around this problem, I would still be using their service, for it was excellent in all other respects. Instead, I went back to dealing with them myself and grit my teeth regards the time it was taking to maintain my list. Again, this was a list that changed frequently. With a more stable list such as the one for "STAT News," this is not much of a problem for there are few unsubscribes and even fewer bad addresses.

About a month later, I read a terrific article: "Review Of Free Mailing List Programs" by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson, He identified four free emailing services and put all through some very thorough tests. They were ...

eGROUPS - **Egroups.Com**
ONEList - **OneList.Com**
TOPICA - **Topica.Com**
LISTBOT - **ListBot.Com**

Wilson's basic interest seemed to lie in open and moderated discussion lists, but his comments apply as well to a newsletter such as "STAT News" (an announcement list). If you need further information, be sure to read his article. The following is a link to an excellent table comparing these four services.
wilsonweb.com/reviews/list-compare.htm
From this page, you can click back to the article itself.

As Wilson points out, none of them are truly free, for they add an advertisement to the bottom of each copy of your newsletter. At present, Topica has an option to omit it, but this will change. ListBot has not implemented it as yet, but is expected to do so soon. In any case, for $60-$80 a year, you can buy ad-free service.

The few things Wilson found as flaws were of no concern to me. And my list was still growing, taking ever greater chunks of time. So I checked, then rechecked. All appeared to solve the bounce problem well enough. All archive your newsletter. I was ready to try one. Then I found it required a password. Upon a closer look, all required one.

This led to a second problem. I wrote to each asking if the password field could be omitted. The answer was no, which was not surprising, for ListBot had already told me this. What was surprising was that it took several days to get a reply. The answers to follow up questions were also slow in coming.

Bottom Line: I like the support from ListBot. And when you are just getting started, you need lots of help. ListBot was excellent in this regard. If you do not feel passwords will be a problem for you, I recommend ListBot. However, I'm sure the other services do an excellent job. Reading Wilson's article will likely bring you to the same conclusion.

UPDATE: Since the above was written, another requirement has been added. Subscribers must confirm their request to join by replying to an email message. When I tried this with my current mailing service, many did not reply to the request, thus were not added to the mailing list. I canceled this quickly, for I want a new subscriber to see a copy of the newsletter.

Chapter 7
Odds And Ends

Good ideas that did not seem to fit into a category above.

Cherish Fear - Harness your fears, then give them free rein. If you listen closely, you can learn.

Criticism Is Gold! - There is little to be learned from nice things said. Criticism is another matter.

Give Away Gross For Increased Profits - You can increase profits by letting others sell it for you.

Writing Skills Matter - Website content is communicated with words. Use them wisely.

Want Site; Can't Write! - There are simple ways to grow your skills to a surprising degree.

I Hate Writing - If it's so, it's probably because you don't do it well. But you must.

Does Your Email Look Like Junk? - You can't afford to let your email look like the junk mail received.

Email: Do It Right! - What is needed in responding to email is to turn queries into orders.

Cherish Fear

Many argue it's best to overcome fears, to put them in their place, so to speak. For me, that place is right out front where I can meet them head on. Embrace them even.

It's fear that keeps us from coming too close to the edge of a precipice or climbing too high in a tree. In business, it points out the pitfalls ahead and allows us to plan a way to avoid them.

Fear is of two kinds. Rational and irrational. It is rational (sensible) to avoid falling off a cliff. It is irrational (nonsense) to believe all the people in the crowded room are watching you. Expecting you to do something naughty, maybe.

To the degree possible, crush irrational fear. Meet it head on. Why do you feel everyone is watching you? Look about at those around you. Study their faces. Their smiles and frowns. Their ernest or frivolous dialog. Listen to their chuckles and laughter. Are they really watching you? Do they even know you are in the room? Would anyone notice if you did do whatever? The answer is no. But cling to such questions until irrational fears are laid aside. They block our way, slow our pace, and add uncertainties, none of which is helpful.

But rational fear is useful. Harness it, then give it free rein. Listen to what it tells you. Evaluate. Are you too close to the edge of the cliff? Back away. If it is only of goblins in the night it speaks, say the words right out loud, "Stuff and nonsense!"

Building a business online or offline is fraught with fear. Listen to what it says. Lean closer if the voice is too faint. It will help you foresee a great deal of the future, of problems that may beset you, and barriers that may need to be overcome. It is unlikely all of this will come to pass, but think of the added confidence gained in being prepared for those that do.

Taking risks is an essential ingredient in growing a business. From making changes in a website to expanding into another area, all is laden with risk. But if no action is taken, there will be no growth. Instead, the business will wither and die. Let your fears assist you in planning a clear path around possible obstacles, then move forward boldly. With good plans for the unexpected, you can not be seriously harmed.

Specific to your website, recognize that your visitors are real live people, not just hits reported to log files. As such, they are also subject to fears. Know some have not made the distinction between rational and irrational fear; they have both kinds lumped together. Their behavior will be all the more unpredictable.

Some have reported as many as 65% of visitors fail to complete order forms. While I have never seen mention of it, I would bet good bucks that many click away in fear. "Why do they want my address; I didn't ask them to mail anything to me?" "Why do they want my phone number?" "Who are these people butting into my life this way?"

We know how important it is to build trust with the content and presentation of a website. While we may have failed to achieve this goal completely, we have worked at getting close. I suggest another step be taken.

Since indecision and uncertainty often lead to fear, and thus to flight, erase all possible points at which a visitor may stumble. Easy navigation is clearly a must. But look for less obvious things. A link that misleads. An ad that may offend. A line in a sales pitch that is too much to swallow. That is, look at every element within your site. Identify every point at which a visitor might stumble, then make sure it won't happen.

Watch the birds in your backyard. Or the deer in the foothills. Fear keeps them alive. Given any challenge that can not be instantly identified, it is always fight or flight. These options are far too fundamental and primeval to ignore. In your business, harness fears so the next action can be taken. On your website, be sure visitors do not click off from fears of which they may not even be aware.

Criticism Is Gold

Suppose you received the following message from a reader of your newsletter. How would you handle it?

> ... I don't know what your talking about. You don't
> make things clear like your supposed to. And I didn't
> read all those pages of data to find out. I get board
> and couldn't finish it. [More of the same. Some
> meaningless suggestions. Wraps with ...]
>
> I been there did that. Take it from one who is now
> making 20,000 a month income.

Trash It?

Never! Big mistake. Awesome mistake, in fact. There are nuggets of pure gold in this. And it doesn't take much to find them.

But He's Lying!

Of course. Nobody is making $20,000 a month with this kind of spelling and grammar. But that he is lying, does not matter at all. Here is the point.

He *Did* Write!

Not many do. He felt strongly enough about the matter to take the time to write. How many others felt much the same way, but did not comment? There's no way to be certain, really, but to be safe, assume he represents a bunch.

Then you simply can not ignore this fellow's message. At least not until you seriously consider that he may be right. If he is, major changes may be called for.

Read the message again. But this time, ask yourself ...

What is he really saying?

Something like this maybe. "I couldn't follow all that data [too hard], so I got bored [frustrated] and couldn't finish it [trashed it]."

So Where's The Gold?

If this fellow represents a significant part of your target, you missed. Big time, in fact. Examine the article referred to.

- Does the topic have merit to your readers?

- Is the writing level targeted appropriately?

- Could you have presented the material more clearly? More simply? In briefer form?

- Does the copy sustain interest? Does each word, line, and paragraph draw the reader into the next?

- Does all content support the topic?

- Can a word, line, or paragraph be deleted?

The above is intended to be suggestive of things to consider, not a complete listing of any sort. The idea is to see if you can find anything about this piece that would improve it to the point it would be acceptable to the fellow who wrote.

Often you can't. There are people who will not be able to follow even your best, most straightforward work. But if you can find anything at all to take into your next article, it may prove to be invaluable.

In The Real World

Here's a bit that has happened to me more than once while teaching. Upon finishing what I knew was a really great presentation to a class, and starting back to my desk, the class clown would blurt out something like, "What's all that junk mean, Teach?"

Let me tell you, it can take your breath away. My first reaction might easily be a strong desire to pop him one, as I might have wanted to do since meeting him.

But it's not just him. There are others. As I glance about, it hits me. Half the class feels the same way, including many of the better students. It's etched in their faces and eyes. None but the "clown" spoke up. How did I handle something like this?

Take a deep breath, turn back to the class, and say something like, "That didn't work, did it?" A great nodding of heads. "Okay, forget that assignment. I'll take another crack at it tomorrow." Great sighs of relief.

I learned a lot from my students. In some ways, more than they learned from me. To extend this, I have learned a lot from writing. You must do so or you do not grow. The secret is to turn blistering criticism into gold.

In The Email World

With email, you haven't got the help of body language, the blank expression, eyes that shout of puzzlement or confusion. You have only the words you are reading. It makes things a lot tougher. But one way or another you must dig into the thinking behind the words sent to you. And the harsher the message, the more important it is to dig.

Nice Things Don't Help

We all love to hear nice things about ourselves or our work. They encourage us enormously. But they are no help at all in finding a better way to accomplish a given task.

But criticism is another matter. If you examine it with care, you can find pure gold. First uncover the real

message behind the comment or note. Then be honest with yourself and act upon that message if there is merit in it.

Be Sure To Say Thanks

I always reply promptly to such a message. Maybe: Thanks much for your input. I really appreciate it. It helps a lot to know what my readers are thinking. I'm sure my future work will be better for it.

You may not make a friend here, but the fellow is likely to feel better about himself, you, and your work.

Give Away Gross
For Increased Profits

Suppose you produce a super widget that sells for $50.00. If Charlie comes along and says, "Hey, I can sell the heck out of these. How's $20 bucks a sale sound? Wanna deal?"

If you have a successful business, chances are you will say, "Sure thing." Smaller businesses or those lacking marketing experience may answer with, "Why should I give away 40%?"

Such people will run from this offer. But it is an awesome mistake. For readers who have not thought about this approach, here's why you should say yes.

Consider a computer program or an information product, something which once produced, costs virtually nothing to reproduce. (The same idea holds for manufactured products, but greater production costs need to be factored in.)

If you sell 100 copies a month at $50 each, you have a gross of $5000. Your net is close to this, for you have minimal fulfillment costs. Suppose costs are $5/copy. Then your net is $4500.

If Charlie hits the bricks and sells another 100 copies, you pay him $20 per copy or $2000. So your gross is down to $3000 and your net is down to $2500. You have indeed "given away" 40% of gross.

The key is not in what you gave away, but in your increased net. You are $2500 ahead and it cost you nothing to generate. In fact you made more than Charlie did without lifting a finger. So why do some people say no to such an offer?

A common reason stems from believing they could have made the additional 100 sales themselves, at least over time. In the brick-and-mortar world in which territories are assigned to sales representatives, there may be merit in this belief. But the Web is a whole different kind of place. Assumptions such as this are incorrect. There is

simply no way a small business can even hope to make their product available to all the people who would like to buy it at the time they decide to buy.

Regardless of the position of your product in a given market, a person searching for it may find a competing product first. If so, your product may not even be presented for consideration. In which case, your competition gets the sale. Extending the presence of your product on the Web increases the chance of it being found.

Charlie can help in this by adding your product to his website and product list. His marketing efforts bring visitors who are added to the set of those aware of your product. If he sells 100 copies through his site, it is quite possible that every sale is one you would not have made. While one might expect some overlap with brand name products from large firms, it just does not apply to lesser known products produced by small businesses.

The Web is so vast that no one person sees a significant part of it. Thus most netizens will never even encounter your product unless you can get it out and about the Web. You can profit greatly by "giving" gross to Charlie. And for even greater profits, show Joe, Bill, and Pete how to do what Charlie did.

I market a computer program at $39. I will pay you 50% for each copy you sell. I'm ahead by $19.50 and it takes only a minute to send the purchaser a license code. Any takers? I will be delighted to work all day long for $19.50 per minute.

Writing Skills Matter

How many errors can you find in the following?

"At the risk of your not reading the rest of this article with great care, let me assure you that I am about to reveal to you something that is vitally important to you. It is so important that the success of your website and business truly depends upon your thorough understanding of this critical point. With this insight, you will gain a tremendous advantage over all others on the Web, and in particular, over your competition."

Are There Any Grammatical Or Spelling Errors?

No, not a one. But it sure stinks. Yet we see this kind of writing all over the Web. It doesn't work because it's windy, muddy, jumbled, and hyped without a purpose that can be defined.

The opening line is strange, almost an invitation to skip this article. The wrap vaguely implies some advantage over your competition is available, but the reader is not likely to be sufficiently convinced to continue.

Further, there are points at which the reader may stumble, things that don't ring true, and loads of ambiguity, all of which detract from the creditability of the writer.

Unnecessary Words Destroy

Apart from other problems in the above, there are just plain too many words. While the best solution might be to rewrite this from scratch, let's take a shot at salvation. We'll begin with finding words that can be cut. And combinations that can be replaced with fewer words.

An Aside About Adverbs And Adjectives

"That is very beautiful," is a correct sentence.

"That is beautiful," is stronger.

Why? For one, "very" is a weak word. While often used in chatting with a friend, it is not specific. It doesn't say much. For another, the second form is shorter. All things being equal, short is best.

How about, "That is profoundly beautiful?" "Profoundly" is still not specific. In this case, it may confuse. Is it saying something about the reason for the beauty? The nature of that beauty? Or something else entirely? Likely it is saying more about the writer than the object.

If there is something about the object that is profound or it is beautiful in a profound way, there's little point in saying so. The viewer will see this. Or will not. If not, your saying it's so will fall on deaf ears.

One way to improve any writing is to consider each adverb and adjective as a candidate for deletion.

Using A Large Ax

Seek to delete non-helpful phrases and replace multiple words with fewer. For example, the following says nothing: "At the risk of your not reading the rest of this article with great care, let me assure you that ...." Scrap it. With this phrase and most adverbs and adjectives gone, we have:

"I am about to reveal to you something that is important to you. It is so important that the success of your website and business depends up upon your understanding of this point. With this insight, you will gain a tremendous advantage over all others on the Web, and over your competition."

Better, maybe. But still windy, muddy.

Another Try

"I am about to reveal to you something important. The success of your business depends upon your understanding this point. It will give you a tremendous advantage over your competition."

Better?

Well, at least it's shorter. A drop from 79 words to 30 helps some. But what does the paragraph say? What is the author talking about? What stands out in my mind is the hype. Many flee upon first encounter with such stuff.

A Sales Pitch?

Some open a sales pitch in this fashion, although this is not nearly strong enough. I will leave handling such copy in a sales presentation to another time.

If we take this as the beginning of an informative article, the best move is to scrap it. Open with the "secret," then explain, persuading at every step.

Two Options

Suppose the "secret" I had in mind was that writing skills matter. Here are two possible rewrites of the above.

"The success of your business depends upon your writing skills. Here's why."

"Improved writing skills can boost your advantage over your competition. The following time-tested ideas work."

Neither of the above is exciting. But each clearly defines the content to follow. The first suggests that in business, writing skills matter. The second, that improved writing skills can help you beat the competition.

More important, the focus is on the reader. Put "I believe" in front of the first sentence in each paragraph, and it will weaken the copy. It shoves yourself into the face of the reader.

There are many who can write in the first person effectively, but for most it's best to omit or at least severely limit the use of personal pronouns. That is, try to do without "I," "me," "mine," "my," and so forth. Readers, just as website visitors, want to know what's in it for them. They don't give a hoot about you, the writer. Hopefully they will before finishing the article, but they do not initially.

As with the headline on a web page or in an advertisement, begin with one that grabs attention, but also accurately sets the stage for what follows.

Two Winning Ways To Start

All writers have their own formulas, their own tricks of the trade. But here are two approaches that are used effectively by many to ...

- Get a good start.
- Cling to it.
- Wrap effectively.

Outline

Don't panic. There's no need for that outline you may have been required to produce before beginning that monster term paper. All you need is a brief sequence of incomplete statements to keep you on track. Here's what I might have typed hastily before beginning this article.

- Give some typical web junk.
- Improve the junk
- Adverbs and adjectives
- Replace two words with one
- And whatever.
- Suggest outlining
- Writing fast
- Wrap: Writing skills matter.

There is nothing complicated in the above. It is only an ordering of thoughts clashing in my mind as I sat down to write this piece. Time required? Two minutes.

Just Write It

Sit down and start typing just as fast as you can. Say anything and everything that comes to mind. Ignore spelling, rules of grammar, or any of the basics. Just get it said. As quickly as possible.

Start somewhere, explain something as to a friend who doesn't know the topic, then wrap it.

Comparing The Two Approaches

Both have merit. The outline helps you stay on track so that when you finish, there is less editing to do. But the just-write-it approach gives an added bonus. Spontaneity.

You're not following a plan. You are just trying to make a point. When you finish a first draft, you will have more editing to do. Stuff will need to be moved around. Some of it rewritten. And much of it scrapped.

Both schemes work. If you have not tried one or the other, give it a shot. It may be exactly what you need to produce better copy.

Writing Skills Matter

Nearly everything you communicate to your website visitors is accomplished with words. You may be a really super neat person, the life of every party you attend, or a dynamic public speaker. But you have only words with which to convey your message to your website visitors. The way in which you string those words together matters.

At all cost avoid windy and muddy. Edit and rewrite until the piece flows from top to bottom without a hitch. Continue to seek better results today than you settled for yesterday. Keep at it, and you'll find your writing skills improving regardless how good they are now.

Want Site; Can't Write!

While good writing skills help build and sustain a website, there are ways to work around any lack you may have. Right up top, let's wipe out one myth that simply does not apply.

If you are serious about putting together a website, you have visited many. If you have less than great writing skills, you may have found yourself saying, "Heck, I can't write like that!" So forget it? Not really.

There is a vast array of tasks to be accomplished in putting together a website. While writing skills are very helpful, other skills you have may far outweigh any weakness in your writing.

There are two main areas in which writing is needed: Creation of web pages and responding to email. Let's start with the pages on your site.

The content of a web page is far more important than the writing skills required to put it together. Think of sites you have seen that you liked. Excepting those providing information, there may not be much text on any page. You can often get by with as few as 400 words. The point here is you do not need to write a book. You only need to provide what is needed to sell your product or service.

The key is to write as you would speak to a visitor to your shop or office. Avoid cute and clever and avoid formal. Write as you speak. Make your pitch as clearly and briefly as possible. Then show your work to a friend and ask for suggestions. Rewrite as necessary, and seek further criticism. You can buy this sort of service, but costs can add up. If you need lots of help, you may be able to barter for someone's writing and editing skills.

Email will prove to be the greatest challenge, for it needs to be answered promptly and completely. Most of your new business relationships will begin with email.

And they will end there, unless you handle it well. Yet the friend who helped in building your web pages is not likely to be standing at your shoulder as you reply. So what to do.

Boilerplate will solve most of your problems. By boilerplate, I mean content you write prior to receiving any messages at all. You know a lot about your product. Sit down and figure what questions people are likely to ask. Then write good answers for each one, take them to your friend, and rework them as necessary.

If you load them into a text file, you can use something as simple as Notepad to load the file, then copy what you need and paste it into your reply. While some editing will be necessary to make your pre-written answer fit the way the question was asked, you can manage this. And it gets easier as you go along.

But what about a question you did not anticipate? If you do not feel up to answering it from scratch, write what you feel is a good answer, share it with your friend, add it to your list of boilerplate, and then reply.

As suggested, Notepad works fine, as does any text editor. I prefer ClipMate: **ThornSoft.Com** It's twenty bucks, but I find it invaluable. You can copy as many items of text into it as you please, assign whatever descriptive title seems best, then select any item by its title, and paste the content into your message. A great time saver, for you do not have to search through a text file.

There is a lot of work in this approach. You will find yourself spending much more time with your writing than most webmasters do. But regardless of your present skills level, you will be surprised at how quickly they improve.

Not right at first, for getting started is tough. But once you get the hang of it, you will find it easier every day. In time, your file of boilerplate will end up being simplified to addresses, obscure references, and such, that you occasionally want to share with your customers, for you will be writing as you would speak to them face to face.

I Hate Writing!

If that's so, it's because you feel you do not do it well. We seldom hate doings things we are good at.

But let's assume it's true. You hate writing. Does this mean you can't have a successful site and business on the Web? Does it mean you can't produce a top quality newsletter? Maybe can't even deal with email effectively?

You can if you commit the time and effort required to learn how to write well. It's no tougher than mastering any other skill. Be clear about your goal. You are not seeking the Pulitzer Prize. You simply want to write well enough to share your thoughts and ideas with others. All that's required to achieve this skills level is the determination to do so and the persistence to hang in until you achieve the goal.

Here are some things to consider. Not all work for everybody but all do for some.

Talk To A Customer Or Friend

Picture a person standing in front of you. Then write down the words you would speak to explain your thought or idea. Don't be fussy. Don't worry about grammar. Just get it written down.

Now Edit

Read it with care. Look for thoughts that did not come through clearly. Ponder until you find a better way to say it.

Always look for and delete unnecessary words and sentences. Sometime a whole idea must go because it just does not fit in.

Lay it aside for a time. Come back to it later. See if something new strikes you. If so, make the change.

Read It Out Loud

This is an absolute must. When you read aloud, it changes the pace. It brings words into your mind through your ears instead of only from your eyes. Listen for phrases that just don't sound right. Go to work immediately at any point you stumble.

Record It

Read it into a tape recorder. Play it back without looking at what you wrote, so that you only hear the words.

The Litmus Test

Ask a friend to read it to you. Where he or she stumbles or becomes confused, there's a problem. Fix it.

Where Do I Find All This Time?

There is a subtle point in the above that may have gone unnoticed. With this kind of approach, you will be more focused on what you are doing even as you begin. And with greater focus, your work will be better from the start.

But you're right. There are not enough hours in the day to do all of the above with everything you write. But even with email, you have time to reread what you wrote before sending it. It will help.

With major work such as an article or web page you want to publish, follow the above as possible. Again, there may not be sufficient time to go all the way through the list, but always go as far as you can. In time, you'll find it easier to do.

What Else Can I Do?

For one, pretty much forget most of what you were taught in school. Look for better guidelines, practical things that work. For example, use simple words and short sentences. Sometimes break long sentences into parts as I just did. Avoid cute and clever. And avoid formal. Write as simply and directly as you can.

Try to write everything in the briefest possible form. A web page is not better because it is longer. Neither is an article or newsletter. And brevity is king when it comes to email. Eliminate as many words as possible. Period.

Where Can I Get Some Help

Since writing web pages is essentially writing advertising copy, a look at copywriting accomplishes two purposes. To this end, check out the terrific copywriting tutorial at Joe Robson's site, **AdCopyWriting.Com** And check out Joe's book, "Make Your Words Sell." It is simply unbeatable. **Click here for my review of this remarkable work**. And the neat part is that most of what applies to copywriting, applies equally well to all your writing needs.

Take A Course

I took a quick look, **KnowledgeHound.Com**, but did not find a lot of use to beginners. Even though the slant is toward serious writing, you may find just what you need here.

Jennifer Stewart has an excellent online tutorial at **Write101.Com**.

The Little Book

One of my most precious books is, "The Elements Of Style." by William Strunk, Jr. It's been published many times, first in 1935. My copy was published by Macmillan in 1959. Two things are quite remarkable about this book. 1) It's only 71 pages long; you can read it in an hour. 2) There is *no* hype; it is all down to earth and practical.

Although it's been reprinted since, it's likely out of print just now. But if you can find a copy, you will have found gold. Thumb the book open to any page as you begin to write, and try to follow the author's advice. Your writing will improve quickly. I'm sure there are many other books that will work for you, but none will beat this one.

Update: The last time I checked, "The Elements Of Style" was available in paperback from Amazon.Com

It's All A Matter Of Priorities

When I was in my teens, I had a keen interest in young women. Many of these delightful creatures loved to dance. I hated it. I was all fumbley-footed. I had a tendency to stumble, and even to fall. But I learned enough to get onto the dance floor with my arm around a young woman. I still hate dancing. Detest it, in fact. But I enjoyed the company then, and still do.

Given appropriate motivation, one can learn to dance. Or to write.

Does Your Email
Look Like Junk?

A large portion of the email I receive is junk. But I have to be sure before deleting. I can usually figure this from the preview screen (Eudora), but sometimes I have to open it to be certain.

What surprises me is how much legitimate mail *looks* like junk. Over the last while, I tried to figure why. The obvious things are misuse of the ...

From field: Often crony names, rather than a straightforward email address, preceded by the full name of the sender.

Subject field: Often cute and clever, rather than a clear statement as to content. Sometimes blank.

Greeting: Often opens with an odd heading, sometimes in all caps, as is true of a lot of junk mail.

Legitimate email opens with a name, as in, "Bob," Hi Bob," or even just, "Hi."

First Line: Lousy grammar and spelling errors right from the start; spammers write some of the worst stuff you will ever see.

First Line Revisited: No sense of the purpose of the message for several lines. Get to the point. Fast!

Sure, some of this is from people new to the Web. But a lot of it is from people supposedly in business. How long they can continue with such poor standards is another matter.

HTML: Hot Stuff?

Some must think so, for I'm getting a lot of it. The other day I got a real dandy: black text on a black background. Totally unreadable. And not all mail readers can deal with HTML, which means your message may never be read.

While things may change, a good deal of the spam I receive is in HTML. While probably not fair, my first reaction to any message in HTML is that it's junk. If it proves not to be, then it's someone who is not being professional.

While sending streaming media along with HTML may be the wave of the future, it is not appropriate today in business. Send only standard text in a non-proportional font such as Courier.

In addition to the above, here are some common blunders I observed, that contribute to an overall sense of something I don't want to read. If you want to annoy people, then go for it. Most know where the Delete key lives, and use it frequently.

Send 80 Character Lines

Many people, including myself, have their email reading window set at 65 characters as the maximum line length. So when you do not hit Enter at or prior to the 65th character, your message on my screen looks like:

> I wanted to let you know about a neat site I ran into
> the other day. Wow
> it's terrific. Knowing how much you are into panda
> bears, you've just got
> to see this site.

This is difficult to read. "But hey, if folks don't like 80 characters per line, tough stuff!" Fine. Everybody has a right to their opinion. Good luck with this one. Many people are almost as impatient when checking email as when surfing. If you don't make it easy for those who receive your message to read it, it may be trashed.

"But why would anybody narrow a screen to 65 characters?" Because a 65 character line is about twice as easy to read as one 80 characters long. Most newsletters use this line length, some even less.

Quote Back Everything!

Never quote an entire paragraph; your response can be difficult to find, particularly if the original message wrapped. Also be hesitant to quote the entire message below your reply. If I can't remember easily, I have to go hunting for what I said, which takes time. This is particularly true when the reply is to a message sent out three or four days back.

The best approach is to quote just enough to be sure your reader will remember what was said earlier as a transition to your reply. Quote no more than a couple of lines, unless more is absolutely necessary. Also be sure to add blank lines to highlight the difference between quoted text and your reply. Here's how I might quote the example of wrapped text above. And I'll remove the wrapping for better readability.

> Knowing how much you are into panda bears, you've
> just got to see this site.

Thanks for the heads up, Joe.

Yes, it does take a bit more time, but to the extent you care about your image, it's a must. To the extent you care about communicating effectively, it's a must. Sending clean, easy to read email is mandatory. Your customers will downgrade you if you send anything less.

Everybody Loves Email

Uh huh. It is much wiser to assume the person you are writing to is very, very busy. A second good assumption is that they receive several hundred emails a day.

"But hey, that's not so." Maybe it's not. But make the assumptions anyway. They lead to better email habits.

Email: Do It Right!

Judging from what I receive, lots of people have not thought much about email. Yet dealing with it effectively is vitally important to the success of your business. This may be the most overlooked and under-valued aspect of doing business on the Web. Here is what is needed.

- Answer it!

- Answer it promptly!

- Answer it completely!

- Answer it with grace and style!

These all seem obvious, I'm sure. They reflect plain good old common sense. Yet I find one or more of them ignored in much of the email I receive.

Answer It!

Apparently many are selective as to what they will reply to. Big mistake. If I visit your site, ask a question and do not receive a reply, I promise you won't hear from me again.

You say you're just too busy to deal with dumb fool questions or stuff of no interest to you? If that is really true, then you can afford to hire someone to do it for you. If a person felt it was worth the time and trouble to write to you, they deserve a reply.

Not so? Try this. Pick three sites you feel are successful and ask them a question. Let it be something way off the mark. Maybe: I was given this URL as a source of information about Dobermans, but the address must be wrong. Do you by chance know of such a source? You will get a reply. Brief, most likely, but courteous.

Spam is probably part of the problem. Much too much of what I receive is pure junk. Even so, I take the trouble to read at least the first line or two before hitting the delete key, for serious email occasionally comes in looking like junk.

A Tale: A newsletter I follow asked for articles in a way that sounded as if material was needed. So I wrote what I thought was a neat piece, and worked it over carefully. I put about four hours into it, then submitted it. No reply. Well, things get lost, so I resubmitted. No reply. Out of curiosity, I sent a brief positive comment about the newsletter, and asked a question easy to answer. No reply. Rejection slips? I deal with them. No reply? Nuts.

Think about what a person risks in asking a question. Ridicule, rejection, and such, and the possible misuse of the email address that brings more spam. A reply is mandatory. Besides, it's good business.

Answer Your Email Promptly!

This can be difficult if you are working a full time job. Still, it must be done. I often get replies so much later, I've forgotten why I sent the message! If mail is answered every evening, in most cases you provide a same-day response, which is sufficient. You might also consider a morning session before going to work. Since not many messages come in during the night, a short session may work well. You can leave a tough question or issue until evening.

I personally check my email four to six times each work day. It really pays off. I see it in a reply that begins with: Wow, that was quick! I see it even more clearly when a sale comes through an hour later.

Again judging from my email, some apparently wait until the weekend to answer. This may mark you as a part-timer in your Web business, a negative to be avoided if

possible. For the same reason, I do not reply to business email on Sundays or holidays.

Answer Your Email Completely!

Next to waiting too long for a reply, my pet peeve is a reply that fails to answer the question I asked, or an important part of it. Often this is just carelessness, but consider what it does to a company image. Do you want to deal with careless people?

One of the problems with email is the lack of eye contact and body language available in face-to-face conversation. Even the phone gives something of this, as in a hesitant response, the opportunity to quickly repeat something that may have been misunderstood, correct a blunder, etc.

This slack is just not available in email. All you have are the words in front of you. To complicate matters, not everyone is a good writer. This sets things up so that it is easy to overlook the real question buried in the one apparently asked. If I have the slightest doubt about what the question means, I say so. Maybe: I'm not sure I understand the question. If you meant ... blah, then ... blah. Then I wrap with: If that is not what you were looking for or I missed something, please get right back to me.

Not stated, but implied in the above, is the need to be correct. Never try to fake it; people will quickly peg you as a phoney, con artist, or worse. Sometimes the best answer is: Sorry, I don't know. Maybe continue with: It seems to me ... Also provide a source if possible. Worst case, suggest a search engine. But in whatever you say, be correct.

Complete does not mean it is necessary to write a manual. In fact brevity is king in all business correspondence. If the question is too broad, the best choice is to try a one sentence reply that offers something of the answer, followed by a reference as suggested above. A few do try to take advantage, and in such cases, this is the only reasonable approach.

Answer Your Email With Grace And Style!

Few webmasters are professional writers, so how is the above possible? Substitute courteous for grace, and the first part may make more sense. The idea is to treat the writer as you would a valued client or customer.

Your first contact with a future prospect is quite likely to be email. Since you are not meeting face to face, you can not offer a hearty handshake, a warm smile of welcome, or show your intense interest with your eyes or posture. While it is not easy, I try very hard to get something of this in every message I send, particularly to someone new to me.

Style is not as tough as it sounds, for we all have one, whether or not we recognize it. I tend to be informal. Some tend to be formal. Most are somewhere in between. What your style is matters little. The important thing is to be true to whatever it is. To do otherwise quickly destroys credibility. That is, cute and clever doesn't make it, unless

you truly are. And grand formality doesn't fly unless it is who you are. Write as you would speak to a visitor to your office or shop.

All of the above has to do with trust. Any relationship between yourself and a client or customer begins with trust. A question gives you the opportunity to build on the trust inherent in the act of sending the message. Do otherwise, and you will blow it.

The structure of your website, search engine position, and so forth are essential elements to the success of your online business. But of all vital elements, email seems to be the one most often overlooked. This seems odd, for it is the easiest part to get right.

Chapter 8
Product Reviews

Here are comments about those products supported on my website. All are practical, down-to-earth, and reasonably priced. What's more, they work as advertised.

Dance With Your Customers - The best book on copywriting I have found: "Make Your Words Sell" by Joe Robson.

"Make Your Site Sell" by Ken Evoy, MD. - I have never read a better book about selling on the Web.

Windows For Newbies - A pictorial description of how Windows works and just what it can do for you.

"Make Your Knowledge Sell" - To produce a profitable information product, here is everything you need.

The Perfect Price! - If you have a product or are planning one, you can now find the Perfect Price.

Dance With Your Customers

Dance you say? No, I didn't say that. Joe Robson said it in his book, MYWS (Make Your Words Sell) released by Ken Evoy. And yes, Joe means it. He encourages us all to dance with our customers. Take the time to get the steps just right. To really get in sync. Learn to anticipate the next move, need, or question. It's a fascinating idea, one of many pictures Joe paints vividly throughout this remarkable work. Here's another.

Joe suggests collecting the headlines on your page into a separate file. Then study them. Do they collectively define the page? Do they do so in compelling fashion? Will each draw the reader into the content which follows it?

This is grand insight. Most visitors will stick around long enough to read your headline, but that's about it. Something like 80% click off without reading a word of content. But what action do the 20% who continue actually take?

They scan your headlines. Follow Joe's suggestions, and at some point your visitor will slow down enough to read a bit. And if there's a convenient link back to the top of the page, they'll take it. Then read with serious intent.

The above may suggest this work is a collection of secrets about writing great ad copy. If so, let me be clear. There are no secrets here. No grand theories upon which to choke. All is simple, practical, and straightforward. MYWS is strictly a how-to-do-it-right piece. Joe has the answers here, backed with 30 years of experience.

Further, Joe is an excellent writer. His work is super easy to follow. He tells it like it is. He says no more than is necessary. He leads the reader step by step through the basics so painlessly it seems only a delightful read.

As with any real pro, Joe makes it seem his thoughts just naturally flowed from his mind to paper. But it is not so. And Joe would be the first to admit it. Writing

isn't easy for anyone. And editing and rewriting are the hardest tasks of all. Yet that's what it takes. Joe makes this point very clear under the heading of "Slash & Trash." There are lots of terrific ideas here. Great stuff that can improve the quality of anything you write.

Joe blew me away in the last third of the book. He asked me as a reader to join in. And together we . . .

1) Defined a hypothetical product.

2) Defined our "ideal" customer.

3) Developed 92 significant benefits.

4) Then produced an entire site.

Talk about wrapping with some snap. This hits like lightening. It's both a wonder and a wow. You are going to love it.

If you have been working at it a while, you already know that learning what is needed to build a successful online business is not an easy task. And learning how to write solid ad copy may be the most difficult task of all. But if you follow Joe's lead, you will accomplish your goal in the quickest and easiest way possible.

I read every single word in MYWS. I made 9 pages of notes. Over 20 pages were printed, things that clearly need more study. So armed, I know what steps need to be taken, and that they will lead to ever greater success. Just follow Joe's lead, and he will do the same for you.

For me, the great elegance of MYWS is in Joe's carefully crafted presentation. There's no preaching here. No teaching or prodding. Nothing of, "Hey, I'm right, so listen up." Quite the contrary.

Joe is persuasive, just as is good ad copy. He speaks to you as if he was standing beside you, as both of you examine an idea. At each step, he persuades

you the suggested approach is best. He does so by showing you it's so.

He does not say, "Sell benefits, not features." Instead he shows you how to find the benefits. Once uncovered you are persuaded. That is, those who have not yet discovered the power in this approach, will see it in a glance. Joe will have persuaded you so completely, you will never again make the mistake of wasting your time trying to sell features.

There is a tendency in reviewing a great work like this to be overly enthusiastic about it. Be assured this work is everything suggested above and much more. Frankly, it is not possible to overstate the quality of this book. Or to overstate the positive impact it will have upon both you and your business.

As to flaws, there are none. It always lends credibility to a review to note a topic not covered well, or one overlooked. But I can't do so here, for I found nothing of the sort. I'll bet a buck against your dime, you won't be able to do so either!

Ken Evoy is pricing the book dynamically. Which means I can not say what you will have to pay for it. But I can say it is invaluable and thus worth far more than whatever price you pay.

My suggestion is to take the option to bid. Then place one a dollar above the lowest recent prices shown in the graph. You'll likely close a deal within a couple of days. At this writing, the price is ranging from about $13 to $25. But it has sold much higher than $25. Whatever you must pay, this book is a bargain.

Click here for Ken Evoy's presentation of this outstanding work.
SiteTipsAndTricks.SiteSell.Com/myws
Or just buy it!

Make Your Site Sell!

I have never read a better book about selling on the Web than "Make Your Site Sell" by Ken Evoy, MD. Nor do I expect to find one. Ever. Anybody who implements the approach suggested here will have a successful, profitable website in very short order.

The author focuses on selling information products, which is only one type of product being sold successfully on the Web. Still, his approach to marketing is universally applicable.

In all other respects, the work is a complete and comprehensive guide to all aspects of building a successful business on the Web. The author does a particularly good job of explaining how to use search engines effectively. But he does as well with lesser topics, such as how best to handle email. The list is far to long to include here. When you get the chance, check out the table of contents and you'll see exactly what I mean.

I joined the affiliate program, so if you decide to purchase the book, I'll make a couple of bucks. But while I enjoy tucking bills into my wallet as well as the next fellow, I did not join for this purpose.

Site Tips And Tricks is all about helping wannabe and newbie webmasters be successful right out of the chute. That is, I want to do everything possible to make sure your first site is a winner. I want to save you a year or two of wasted effort going down dead end trails. This book alone assures this. If you follow the path precisely defined in this book, your first site will be a winner, and I will share in your success in having recommended the book.

When I was teaching school, I often met a new class of really exceptional young people. Talented. Eager to learn. Determined to do it right. I always kind of wished I could give each student a magic pill which when swallowed would provide everything I knew. What a delight it would have been to spend our time moving on and learning together.

"Make Your Site Sell" comes pretty close to that non-existent pill. You do have to read it. And you do have to implement what you learn. But every move you make will lead you directly toward a successful and profitable business. You will bypass all the pitfalls into which beginners so frequently stumble.

When you click below to visit SiteSell.Com, you are in for another treat. The sales pitch is a work of art. It is well worth your time to study it, for this one is done right. While compelling at every step, there is a lightness to it all that is remarkable. There is no hype. No promises that will not be fulfilled beyond expectation. Click here to check it out! **sitetipsandtricks.sitesell.com/myss/**

Update: Ken has change the layout of his site since this was writtin. I'm not sure the new format works as well as the original.

Windows For Newbies

Written by Tom Glander, "Windows For Newbies" is the first product released by Tom and his partner, Joe Robson, through the Newbie Club. And it's a dandy. If you are just getting started with computing or still find Windows something of a mystery, this is a sure cure. All questions will be answered and you will quickly come to master Windows, and in the process, your computer as well.

The accent is on showing what happens when you click this or do that. Lots and lots of screen shots (pictures of a computer screen). Few words. I like this part best. The pictures tell most of the tale. Words are only used to fill in the gaps. In all there are over 200 pages and 400 screen shots collected into 52 tutorials. Since each tutorial is specific to a particular point, you are never asked to consider too much at one time.

Every effort has been made to minimize computer jargon. In getting started, you may find some words troublesome. That is, if you have not yet looked at the section about files and folders, you may be puzzled by these terms in what you happen to be reading.

A good approach is to scan quickly through the entire set of tutorials, just to get an overview. Then return to items of interest and consider these with greater care. And, of course, the information remains as a resource. When a question comes up for which you don't remember the best answer, recheck the appropriate notes.

I found the navigation scheme a bit confusing. While the tutorials are grouped by topic, such as those related to files and folders, the menu remains a list of 52 titles. Most will need to become familiar with the content in order to be able to quickly find the tutorial needed. Again, though, a sequential scan will help in figuring where to find what.

The Newbie Club believes in "Windows For Newbies." They offer a 12 month unconditional money-back guarantee. And, of course, they can only make this offer from a position of confidence. They believe you will

love this work, find it extremely helpful, and benefit greatly from it. If you're new to computing, grabbing a copy may prove to be the smartest move you can make. For further information, **click here visit NewbieClub.Com**. Then see Joe Robsen's presentation of this exciting product.

And while you're there, be sure to join the Newbie Club. Sign up for the newsletter and be treated to some great content pointed right at new computer users.

Make Your Knowledge Sell

Here are the guidelines and resources you need to produce a great information product and successfully market it: "Make Your Knowledge Sell," (MYKS). It is the second release by Ken Evoy via the 5 Pillar Affiliate program. Originally produced and marketed by Monique Harris, lots of goodies have been added.

As readers and visitors may know, I support Ken, his affiliate program, and his book, "Make Your Site Sell." It is loaded with great ideas extremely valuable to all who have a website or are planning to build one. (**Click here for my review**.)

In some ways, this second product, MYKS, is better than his first. Ken's book meets the needs of a wider audience than does MYKS, for there are many more people interested in building a great site than in producing an information product. But MYKS shines in its focus. That is, if you are considered producing a profitable information product, MYKS is pure gold!

I am a published author. My list even includes a novel. And I have self-published a variety of material. This is to say that were I to decide to produce an information product, I have the skills, tools, knowledge, and experience to create one.

But MYKS startled me! I found literally hundreds of ideas I have never considered, and would not have discovered on my own. Follow what is offered here, and you can produce a great product, then market it successfully.

Probably the greatest mistake one can make is to get an idea, become taken with it, and run for the gold. MYKS shows why this almost inevitably fails. It offers the best approach to finding and testing ideas I have seen. That finding part can be tough; MYKS makes it a snap. Follow these guidelines, and you will be on track from beginning to end.

Ebooks are very popular these days, and can be inexpensively produced. Audio tapes can work well.

Since not much attention has been given to video, there may be opportunity here. Every form of presentation is covered. Even how to deal with printers, if you prefer hard copy. And whether you decide upon hard or electronic copy, distribution and marketing suggestions abound. Coverage is thorough.

The only flaw I found in MYKS is an implied assumption that anybody can produce most anything. It isn't so. While you do not need to be a prize winning novelist, you do need to be able to write effectively at the level needed. That is, you need considerable skill to compete with Ken's book. But in producing, "How To Build A Boat," great ideas about building one are more important than how they are described.

Ken Evoy argues that everyone has a great infoproduct within them. So even if you don't have a clue as to what it might be, grab a copy of "Make Your Knowledge Sell." You may find one. If you do, MYKS

will guide you step by step through the task of producing and marketing it successfully. Click here to check it out further.

sitetipsandtricks.sitesell.com/myks/

The Perfect Price

MYPS (Make Your Price Sell), the latest product released by Ken Evoy, is awesome! Essentially you invite your visitors to read your sales pitch, then instead of an offer to sell, you invite them to answer six multiple choice questions. Two relate to buying habits, two to attitudes, and two to pricing. So you get a cross check on each.

The resulting graphs are stunning. There will simply be no question in your mind regards potential interest in or uniqueness of your product. You see it in a glance at the graphs. Nor will there be any question as to the buying habits of those who participated in the survey.

The Perfect Price

Finding the Perfect Price takes a bit more doing, but the information needed is provided in detail. The key pricing question produces what Ken calls the Teeter Point, a term he has trademarked. It is the price at which your buyer may or may not buy. That is, the price at which people will hesitate.

The beauty in this question is that there are two versions of it. One asks respondents for the price that is *almost* too high The other asks what price *is* a bit high. Half of respondents get one question, the other half get the other. By approaching both from above and below, the focus is excellent.

Further Information

For less then $50, you can have results previously available only in the $10,000 range. If you do not like the results, your money will be refunded. But the manual is yours to keep in any case. And it's a real clinic on pricing. The first four chapters do an excellent job of explaining pricing strategies with lots of examples of when to do what. Subsequent chapters explore various uses of the model. For Ken's presentation of this outstanding product, please click here.

sitetipsandtricks.sitesell.com/myps/

And while you are there, take the demo tour. The graphs and explanations will startle you.

There's Much, Much More

There are tons of neat things I can say about this fantastic model, but frankly I can't say it better than Ken does, so I'm not going to try. Instead, click above for Ken's presentation. Or click below for his latest 5 day mini-course on MYPS. It's free. Send any email to:
sitetipsandtrickstpms@sitesell.net

I'm going to change direction here just a bit, and mention some things about this model that may not be obvious at first glance.

Best Use Of MYPS

The best way to use this model is to build a website to sell the product, but take visitors to the survey rather than an order page. (You can reach respondents later, for you will have their email addresses.)

Taking this a step further, build two sites and two surveys (at no extra charge). You can now also indirectly test the effectiveness of your sales presentation.

A Possible Better Use

However, my personal view is that this model, while extremely effective when used with the above format, will be even more effective in testing the feasibility of a product that is little more than an idea.

Just put sufficient thinking into the idea to build an effective website or page. Then ask you visitors to read your page and take the survey.

If they have no interest in the product or do not find it to be unique, you will see this immediately with a minimal number of respondents.

To be able to know in advance your idea is not likely to work? Think of the man hours saved if this is the case.

Given interest and uniqueness, you have a real possibility. It is then time to look at the pricing aspect of the model with considerable care. But here again, if the pricing options show little profit given estimated costs amortized over the life of the product, you again save major bucks or time as suggested above by laying the project aside.

But if you have a solid idea and there is sufficient profit in it, you will find the Perfect Price. And again, you will find it before ever spending a dime on marketing, design, or production. There is unbelievable power here, a tool previously available only to Fortune 500 type companies willing to pay very hefty fees.

A Trial Run

I used this model to check the feasibility of The HTML Editor before it was produced. The results were quite surprising. If you like, you can view them on my site. Click here to do so.
SiteTipsAndTricks.Com/test/

Click here for info about The HTML Editor.

Other Early Returns

While MYPS has only been available for a very short while at this writing, Ken has reported two early results that are fascinating. One customer had thought to price his product, an ebook, at $14.95. The model said $19.95, and there was simply no question but what the model was right on in this case.

The second case reported is quite different. A fellow had been selling a CD-ROM of games at $39.95. The model said he'd do better at $29.95. Ouch! That's a hard bullet to bite. But he did so. And tripled sales!

Before we hear the end of it, there will undoubtedly be even more dramatic examples available. But the above only add to my previously established conviction that MYPS works.

The Flaw

As is true of any statistical model, MYPS can not overcome GIGO: Garbage In, Garbage Out. Thus the major difficulty in using this model lies in finding people who will take the time to respond to the survey, and who will do so honestly. If this doesn't happen, results may be meaningless.

It is reasonable to offer some incentive to encourage people to participate. But if the offer is too strong, some will take you up on it, then do what they can to screw up your results. Making the right offer is a crucial step in putting this all together and generating solid results.

This is not a flaw within MYPS; it is something with which every statistical model must cope. Find the right target, and results will be stunningly accurate. MYPS is destined to become one of the biggest games in town, a dynamite tool for offline businesses, as well as for those online.

Chapter 9
Great Deals

Each of the following is available at a discounted price if ordered through the Deals page on my site.

The HTML Editor - This one has it all. It is intuitive, and a snap to use. Beginners will love the tour.

All About Kate At KateKreates - Here I share my enchantment with this remarkable graphics artist.

"BookJones" by Rosemary West - Here's an effective ebook compiler that is truly easy to use.

Web Express - If you understand the basics of HTML, and now want a web page editor, this is a dandy.

Manage Your Mailing Lists The Easy Way - Easy Mail Plus provides all you need to maintain mailing lists.

The HTML Editor

Hey! If you are looking for a dandy HTML editor that is powerful but easy to use, look no further. THE (The HTML Editor) is just what you need. For the record, though, I'm biased, for I co-authored the program. Still, let me brag some about it.

A Great Tour For Beginners

Beginners or people looking for a quick review of the basics of HTML coding will love the guided tour. Honest. It's great. (You probably better try it yourself, though, rather than take my word for it. There is also bias here, for I wrote it.)

Seriously, though, my free Web Page Starter Kit available through my site has been a big hit. I receive a steady flow of downloads, good suggestions, and a lot of thank-you notes.

I took this as the beginning point for the tour in THE because it has proved to be such a successful approach. Then I tailored it to the program in such a way that you indirectly learn how to use the editor as you learn how to write good HTML code.

The Power Of THE

The main program screen is divided into two parts. The upper half is the editor in which HTML code is written. As entered, the viewer in the bottom half of the screen is updated to show the exact effects of that entry. This makes it a snap to make changes and corrections, for you see the page build as you enter the code and content. When you see something you want to change, you are at this spot in the editor.

Why THE Is The Best Choice

The program is intuitive. Yes, I know. You have heard other programmers make this claim. (MicroSoft uses it often.) But the claim is an honest one in this case.

There is a help file, of course, but few need to use it. The screen invites you to click here or there. And you immediately see the results of that click.

For example, enter a block of text, select it, click the paragraph tag, and the block will be bounded by them. Or click without any text selected. Paragraph tags will be inserted with the cursor positioned for entry of text between them.

You Are In Control

For those who do not use the closing paragraph tag, auto insertion of them can be turned off. It is precisely this kind of control that allows every user to configure the system to suit his or her needs.

The tag tool bar which contains the most commonly used codes can be positioned at any edge of the editor screen. Codes delivered can be changed to suit. Library functions allow you to save and reuse blocks of code commonly used. For example, define a complex table, save the settings, and the table can be entered into the editor at any time with a single click.

And There Is More

- The built in FTP Manager is all you need to transport pages to and from your site.

- Load as many files as you like, limited only by memory available.

- Switch from one to the other by clicking its tab.

- Click a web-safe color and the corresponding code is inserted.

- Click in the viewer and the cursor will be positioned correspondingly in the editor. Click the editor to position the viewer.

There's even more, of course. For example, one feature I use frequently is the Find In Files routine. It's trick.

Search for whatever in a directory with an option to include subdirectories. Files found are listed. Just click to load one with the cursor positioned at the first occurrence found. I often load the program just to use this feature.

The Price?

At $49, it is an excellent value. But if you purchase it through the Deals page on my site, it's yours for only $34. A savings of fifteen bucks!

Since the program is shareware, there is a FREE 30 day evaluation period in which to give it a test drive. No features are turned off. All is there for your use. And we support people during this trial period as determinedly as we support our customers.

So you have nothing to lose and a lot to gain. And when you check it out, you'll find I was not bragging after all.

Click here to download a copy now.
thehtmleditor.com/files/edsetup.exe

Click to visit the site.
TheHTMLEditor.Com

Click here to visit my Deals page.
sitetipsandtricks.com/deals.html

Got A Question?

I'll be happy to answer any question that comes to mind, and I'll do so promptly.

All About Kate
At katekreates.com

Getting graphics from Kate is like Christmas when I was a kid. You open the image and say, "Wow!" Then another: "Great!" And another: "Out of sight!"

Kate is simply amazing. She is one of the greats. Period. Her work is lovely, original, and always tailored to meet your particular needs. Probably one secret to her success is that she knows the Web and she knows business. Further, she has a keen understanding of people. Give her just a few of your half-baked thoughts about what you want and she'll come through with something that pleases, perhaps even startles, but always a work that is first rate.

Kate has produced every graphic I have needed for over four years. In all that time, even with minimal clues, she has always produced great stuff I immediately fell in love with.

Okay. There was one exception. It was a good piece, but I just didn't like it. Solution? She just did something different that came out super.

Have you any use for a great animated banner? Kate's price is $60, if you provide the wording you want. Order from my Deals page, and the price is only $50; you will save $10.00! It's a great way to introduce yourself to the work of a true professional. I suggest you go for it! On this deal, I don't take a cut.

If you are just getting started with a site or have one you want to rebuild, create the index page and a couple of others in draft form. If you are new to this stuff, download my free **Web Page Starter Kit**; you'll have a great page template in very short order.

Whatever, the idea is to build a couple of pages that contain the essence of the site you want to build. Include enough text so you have the flavor of how you will proceed with other pages. Forget images. Just put them in with bold text. Site Logo Here. Plea for bookmark here, and

so forth. Also describe any ideas you have regards the art work needed. Colors are always important. Be sure you are clear on the colors you want to use.

Then ask Kate to look at it and make suggestions regards what will work best. When you've settled on what you want, she'll give you a quote. Take it, kick back and wait a bit. (Kate is *always* busy, so you need to give her a week or more.)

But the wait will be worth it. When you open graphics from Kate, it's just like Christmas used to be when you were young. Except there is not likely be even one that falls short of expectation.

But if you come to one and find yourself saying, "I don't know about this." Not to worry. Kate will make it work. Count on it. She is a wonder, if not a wizard!
KateKreates.Com

BookJones by Rosemary West

Ebooks make great info copy, to be sold or given away as a promotional freebie. If you have an ebook in mind, you need a compiler to put it all together. Of the bunch I've looked at, BookJones seems best for three reasons.

- Simple to use
- Powerful options
- Inexpensive

Simple To Use

When I first opened the program, I fumbled a bit, as I tend to do with new software. But the simple, direct, to-the-point help file quickly got me on track. In fifteen minutes flat I created an ebook consisting of articles I have written for "STAT News." And that's fast. And it just doesn't get any easier.

The program expects your content as .RTF files. But .TXT files work fine. Just open each file needed in the editor included, and save in .RTF format. You may want to strip carriage returns at the end of lines, particularly if you choose to use a proportional font.

Collect files as chapters. Illustrate each chapter with a graphic if you like; a lot of neat art work is included that you are free to use. Then "publish" the book. A table of contents is automatically included.

Finally, view your book as it will appear to others. If changes are needed, they are easy to make. Content can be edited, even rewritten, within the editor. Publishing is a snap, so you will never hesitate to make a change for it costs you only a minute. This tends to lead to a flawless product, which is always the goal.

Powerful Options

A variety of options are available for the final form. Most will want to create an installation file for distribution. During installation, users will have the usual options such as where to install the system. If you like, the installation can wrap with an invitation to run the program and open the book. The install can be password protected to assure only authorized people can access the book.

The editor is simple and straightforward. If you have ever used a Windows type editor, you will find it a snap to use this one. The common tools are included. For example, you can use any font on your system and set attributes to suit. You can set margins, tabs, bulleted text, and so forth. A spell checker is included. You can include an ad banner, if you like, pointing to your website. If you choose to display an online button, the reader can click to visit your website. You can choose whether or not you want to allow printing and copying.

Inexpensive

At $45, the price is right! But on my Deals page, there is an even better offer. It's only $30. You save $15.00! You simply can not beat this deal. Check it out now!
sitetipsandtricks.com/deals.html

Since BookJones is shareware, there is no charge to check it out. Download your copy and give it a try. This may be exactly what you have been looking for.

An Aside: The author, Rosemary West, is a great friend of mine. So I am not taking a cut here. This means an even greater saving for you!

Web Express -
The Ultimate Web Page Editor

When I first started putting up Web pages, I tried every editor I could find. I even bought two of them, but tossed both within minutes of trying Web Express. Others I have seen since have not showed me significantly more than I already have. FrontPage is popular, but pricey, as Microsoft products tend to be. DreamMerchant is excellent, but expensive and very complex, thus a bit tedious to use. Certainly WebExpress is best in its class, and may in fact be the best of them all. Here's why.

The purpose of a web page editor is to allow one to create web pages by writing text, loading images, creating links, tables, forms and so forth with simple editing tools we are accustomed to using. Your work is displayed on screen as it will appear in a browser. Transparent to what is being viewed, the editor adds the appropriate HTML code. Correctly and efficiently. Web Express does this very well and far better than do most.

But the bottom line when comparing Web Express to other web page editors is that it is easy to use. It is much easier to use than any other I have tried.

If Web Express has a weakness, it is in its dependence upon Windows Notepad as the editor in which the HTML code is viewed. Notepad is not very sophisticated and it is limited to 32K bytes of code. While this is ample for most pages, some will be longer. You can work around this limitation by loading the HTML file into your favorite editor, as opposed to loading them from within Web Express. I personally bought **UltraEdit** ($30) and installed it to replace Notepad, thus eliminating this size limitation. I also like the way it color codes HTML tags making it easy to spot errors.

But apart from defaulting to Notepad for viewing the HTML code produced, I can not fault Web Express in any way. I am an enthusiastic, dedicated fan.

Another area in which Web Express excels is in support. Send them an email message, and you get a reply. And they stick with you until you are able to solve the problem. It's like a breath of fresh air in an age in which so many companies go out of their way to duck questions from customers.

Their website does an excellent job of presenting the strengths of the program. Click here to check it out. **mvd.com/webexpress/index.htm**

Explore all the options. In particular, see "Us vs Them" for a nice comparison of Web Express to other popular web page editors.

While you are there, download a copy and give it a test drive. You can use the program free for 30 days.

Suggestion: If you try Web Express, click off all the wizard stuff every time something pops up. Just open a new file and start typing some stuff in. Load some

graphics. Try a inserting a table, and like that. The wizard features may be great, but I have never used them, and I think they will confuse a first time user.

The price is $69.95, modest when compared to other editors. John C. Dvorak of PC Magazine said, "At $70, I consider WebExpress the bargain of the decade." But it is even less on the Deals page at **SiteTipsAndTricks.Com/deals.html**, only $54.95, a savings of $15.00! Check it out now!

Manage Your Mailing Lists The Easy Way

When you first begin a mailing list, it's not hard to keep it up. But given success, it can become a difficult task without good software. As your list grows into the hundreds, additions and deletions become a chore without the help of a program. And the ever troublesome need to eliminate duplicates can become a major problem.

A database program is the best solution, one that lets you grow your list virtually without limit. You can use Microsoft Access or Excel to maintain your database, but they are not free.

Sooner or later, you will want to begin personalizing your email. That is, have each message start out with "Dear Bob," "Dear Jane," and so forth, taking the first name from your database file. Further, you may want to repeat this name within the body of the message,

or include other information, such as the name of the city in which the person lives. If you are using a program such as Access or Excel, you will need additional software. Some of it is quite expensive and the learning curve can be steep, which means you must commit valuable time.

There is an inexpensive solution. Easy Mail Plus. It offers:

- Personalized mailing and emailing (Mail-Merge)
- Full database capabilities
- Compatibility with dBase and Paradox database tables
- Easy elimination of duplicates
- No limit to the number or size of lists

It's shareware, so you can use it free for 30 days. If you like it and want to keep it, the registration fee is $49.95. (Only $39.95 if you buy it through the Deals page at SiteTipsAndTricks.Com.)

Since readers of "STAT News" and site visitors are largely into online marketing, their focus for personalized mailings will likely be email. Thus this capability of Easy Mail Plus was pointed out first. However, this program is really a total mail center, an ideal tool for home and small businesses.

It includes a powerful editor with graphics capability. Lists can be output to customized envelopes or labels in a variety of sizes. Or you can set up a specific size for your needs. Layouts for envelopes, labels, and letterheads are easy to put together, for it's all done with the mouse. Graphics can be inserted and sized to suit, all with the mouse.

There is a growing tendency to use US Mail for follow up of online customers. While you may have no intention of doing so, you may change your mind one day. If you do, the US mailing features of Easy Mail Plus will serve you well.

But even if you need only the database capability and personalized email, this program beats anything on the market I have seen. It's less expensive. It's a snap to use. And the support is terrific. Any fix or enhancement is immediately available. Click a button and you will find out if there has been a change. To implement the change, click another button and updated files will be downloaded and automatically installed. This is an outstanding level of support.

The program can be downloaded from
easymailplus.com

Further details about the program are available on this site. But the best option is to simply download it and try it. It costs nothing but the download time.

Order it from Deals page on
SiteTipsAndTricks.Com/deals.html

and you'll save $10. However, since Chuck Herndon, the author of this program, is one of my clients, I will pass on collecting a referral fee on this product.

Appendices

Appendix A - For loads of great stuff to help build or improve your site, subscribe to "STAT News." It's **FREE!**

Appendix B - **Reseller Rights:** Sell "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" at your price, then tuck it all into your pocket.

Appendix C - STAT SE Notes. Discover how to submit simply and correctly to search engines. **Save $20.00!**

Appendix D - Want To Double Your Profits In One Year? Here's how to get it done. **Save $70.00!**

Appendix E - Want A Successful Online Business? Discover how to get it right the first time. **Save $100.00!**

Appendix F - **Reprinting Rights:** You may reprint any article in this work. **Click here for details.**

Appendix A
Subscribe To "STAT News" Now!

"STAT News" brings you . . .

- Tips and tricks to give you a running start in building your own successfull online business.

- Winning marketing strategies to punch up up your profits to ever higher levels.

- Powerful, time-tested promotional methods that will work for you.

- A steady flow of great ideas for improving the performance of your site.

From finding a niche to growing a profitable online business, "STAT News" has it covered. And the goal is always to provide you with the latest thinking available. If you have enjoyed the no-hype just-the-facts approach in "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips," you are in for a treat. "STAT News" delivers more of the same every Tuesday. To join my list, send any email to **join-stat@lists.dundee.net**

If your mailing program does not respond to the above link, click here to visit my site and subscribe through the form. **sitetipsandtricks.com/subnews.html**

You will also be invited to grab a copy of, "Get Your Site Right," a special report from my private files. When you subscribe, you will receive a welcome message which includes the email address to an autoresponder that will deliver a copy of this report to you. Please let me know if you do not get the welcome message. Or this special report. While it is unlikely, things do sometimes go wrong.

Appendix B
Reselling "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips"

Keep 100% Of Your Selling Price

When you purchased "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips," you also received a license to resell the work at whatever price you choose. And you keep 100% of the price at which you sell. There are no complicated contracts. No requirements at all. You are free to tuck the total amount of the sale into your pocket. You can even give the book away as a traffic builder. No strings. (Well, maybe one; I retain the copyright.) Further, you can pass on your reseller rights to your customers.

Use My Page Copy

While you probably will want to make changes, feel free to use any of my sales copy. I recommend using the image of the book cover, for it really helps make a sale.

Click here to visit my site for a look.
sitetipsandtricks.com/stat2000.html

About Your Guarantee

Clearly I can not guarantee a sale you make. But I do recommend you offer one of your own. Surprisingly few people ask for a refund. In the case of "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips," I will be surprised if there is even one.

Why? Because this work over-delivers in grand fashion. It includes a lot more solid, informative, and useful content then anybody will expect for only $29. Customers will be delighted at having found a great value, if not in fact a bargain.

About Pricing

I suggest you price "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" no higher than $29. If you go higher, you risk some nasty kickback. If a customer buys from you, then finds they

could have bought it from me for only $29, they may become unhappy with you. Having said this, you may sell it at any price you please.

About Passwords

The password you received will work for your customers. There is no need to modify the ebook in any way.

Best Of Luck!

However you set it up, I hope it works for you big time. Here's to your continuing success!

STAT Search Engine Notes. Save $20.00!

"Are You Worried About How To Submit To The Search Engines For Best Results?"

If you know ...

- which sites are important

- which can safely be ignored

- and how to submit to each

it's easy! You simply can't go wrong.

Act now! Click here to visit my site.
sitetipsandtricks.com/senotes.html

You will discover a simple solution, one that also provides precise information about submitting to directories.

Remember to return here to this page in "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" to take advantage of the offer. Click here to order and **save $20.00!**
sitetipsandtricks.com/orderoptstips.html

Appendix D
"Want To Double
Your Profits In A Year?"

Sure you do. The catch is in finding the best move for maximum growth in the shortest possible time with least effort.

- Will more targeted hits get the job done for you?

- Does the secret to your success lie in more sales?

- How about expanding your product line?

- Maybe narrow your niche?

Any or all of the above may be appropriate objectives for your business. But there are so many options, it is difficult to identify where your focus should be.

The answer lies in establishing priorities. That is, find the one area in which maximum gains can be produced with minimal time and resources. With my support, this is a snap!

Act now! Click here to launch your business to ever-increasing profits!
sitetipsandtricks.com/serupdate.html

Remember to return here to this page in "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" to take advantage of the offer. Click here to order and **save $70.00!**
sitetipsandtricks.com/orderoptstips.html

Want A Successful Online Business?
Want To Get It Right The First Time?

Want to save the pain, agony, and wasted bucks others have encountered in starting their online business. Let me show you how to . . .

- Save tons of time and avoid wasted effort.

- Implement time-tested methods that bring dramatic results.

- Explore new ideas effectively so as to maximize success.

- Find the best solution to any problem encountered.

Act Now! Click here to discover how easy it is for you to build a winning site right now!
sitetipsandtricks.com/sermonth.html

Remember to return here to this page in "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" to take advantage of the offer. Click here to order and **save $100.00!**
sitetipsandtricks.com/orderoptstips.html

Appendix F
Reprinting Rights

Any article appearing in "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" can be reprinted on your site or in your newsletter in whatever format you like. You do not need to ask permission; it is hereby given.

I do ask, however, that you add my name under the title of the article, Bob McElwain. And add the resource box to the right at the end of the article.

If you want to be assured of receiving a copy of each new article I write, please send any email to **ArticleList@sitetipsandtricks.com** I will be happy to add your email address to my article mailing list.

To the right is the resource box that needs to be appended to any article reprinted.

_____

Bob McElwain
Want to build a winning site? Improve one you already have? Fix one that's busted? Get ANSWERS. Subscribe to "STAT News" now!
<**mailto:join-stat@lists.dundee.net**>

Web marketing and consulting since 1993
Site: <**http://sitetipsandtricks.com**>

Email: <**mailto:bob@sitetipsandtricks.com**>

Phone: 209-742-6783

Appendix G
Articles Available In Text Format

Many articles in "1001 Newbie-Friendly Tips" are available in text format from an autoresponder. However, these copies have not been edited or updated recently. Still, if there are a few articles you would like in a format easy to print, send any email to the autoresponder address shown below.

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Credits

The art work, including the page template and virtual book cover, was created by Kate at **KateKreates.Com** As you can see, Kate's work is outstanding in every way. I highly recommend her to all interested in top quality art work. Her rates are modest.

The HTML pages were created with The HTML Editor, a product produced by myself and Chuck Herndon of **HomePlanSoftware.Com**. **Please click here for further notes** about this excellent program, and about how you can save a couple bucks by buying it from my site.

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If you have a question or comment, I would enjoy hearing from you. -- Bob