

NEED TO KNOW

WHAT YOU MUST KNOW TO ACHIEVE REAL SUCCESS ONLINE

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WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?

The problems most people face with making money online have nothing to do with information overload or complicated technology. They're not the result of "unscrupulous gurus" manipulating them into buying things they don't need. And they're not from lack of motivation, or reluctance to take action.

All of those things, and many more, are symptoms. They are not the disease.

Those symptoms don't only affect new folks. I know people who've been at this a long time, and who do very well, but who suffer from the same limitations. They have found one or more things that work and they replicate those, scale them up, but are missing the concepts that could take them to the next level and beyond.

But why?

There are thousands of books out there that will teach you various tactics and techniques you can use to make money online. Literally thousands. Many of those books and reports are extremely useful.

Almost none of them cover real strategic principles. Even fewer talk about the things that can hold you back, or that can propel you to the top more quickly than you might believe.

Many of these products do nothing more than set you up with a job where you replace your old boss with a new one - you.

Being your own boss is fine, but a job is still a job. And, if you don't know the business, your new boss is likely to be no more fun than the old one.

My goal with this book is to help you reach the goals you've set for yourself. To develop the strategic mindset that will, hopefully, enable you to get there more quickly and certainly, with fewer missteps than you might otherwise encounter.

It's all about clarity.

Knowing what you need to know, and how to find it out.

I am not promising anything but my thoughts on the subject, based on having made my living online since 1996, and having watched the industry go from its faltering first steps to its current adolescence.

Some of you will read part of the book, put the rest off, and never return to it. Some will read it all, feel smart, and do nothing with what you've learned. Some will use it based on wrong assumptions and lose money, time or both.

Some of you will think carefully about what you learn here, use it wisely, and go on to make fortunes.

You control which group you fall into.

This information is provided at no charge. Don't let the price fool you. The 2-page section on leverage alone is something that can have a profound impact on your success.

Much of what you're about to read will seem obvious to established folks. Some of it will be new even to many people with full-blown Internet empires.

All of it can make you money.

Enjoy.

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GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

If you already have an existing business online, you'll find things here that you may not have considered previously. I recommend that you read the book with a notebook in hand, and allow time for yourself to visit your own sites and look over your existing products, with an eye to improving them.

Re-read the section on leverage frequently, until it becomes a habit and a constant way of looking at things.

If you're new to online business, whether starting something from scratch or adding an Internet presence to an offline business, you're going to want to read this book a couple of times to start with.

On the first reading, just go through it all the way, without taking notes or forming any strong opinions about what you read.

The second time through, have a notebook handy, and write down ideas. Be honest with yourself about what you are good at and what you know you're not. And keep your own work habits in mind.

If you're a "stop and start" kind of person, don't get heavily invested in the idea of doing something that takes daily effort or a strict schedule. Likewise, if you're a "grind it out" sort, don't limit yourself to one-shot projects.

Kidding yourself about your own strengths and weaknesses is a sure route to trouble and disappointment.

Likewise, don't worry about your technical abilities. Most of what you need to do is simple enough, and you can either learn it or get help with it cheaply.

Once you've got a clear idea of what you want to do, you can start doing research on the specific techniques that are necessary to getting it done. What you learn here will help you to stay focused on your own goals, rather than getting caught in the "flavor of the week" trap, and the tons of irrelevant distractions you'll face as you work at your new business.

If there's one bit of advice I can give you that will make the biggest difference, it's this: Be very clear on exactly what you want

On with the show.

THE 5 THINGS IT TAKES TO SUCCEED ONLINE

Before I get started, I should point out that parts of this may seem basic to some people. The key to getting the most from this manual is to remember that none of these things exist independently of the others.

Without putting at least most of them together, you won't have a business at all. And that brings us to an important distinction. That's the difference between a business and a succession of money-making projects.

Just so it doesn't sound like I'm being academic, here's a brief explanation:

If you're doing projects and you stop, the money stops. Immediately. If you stop because you're sick or you have a family emergency, stopping the money can be very inconvenient indeed.

To put it bluntly... It sucks.

A business, on the other hand, can keep going with someone else at the helm, and the money can keep coming in. It's entirely possible, with some models, for the business to keep generating cash automatically for months or even years, without any need for regular oversight.

Which do you want? A succession of projects, or a business?

That's a question you need to answer for yourself. Either way is fine, but you need to understand that there is a difference, and it's important.

'Nuff said on that.

Please also keep in mind that this manual is intended to show you **what** you need to do and to learn. It's waaaay past the scope of the thing to teach you **how** to do every part of what's covered. That's for later.

As you probably guessed from the title of this chapter, there are five things you must have for a truly successful online business. They are:

1. A product that delivers value
2. A site that communicates that value effectively
3. Visitors that already want what you're selling
4. Leverage
5. Focus

Anyone who's ever read Ken Evoy's excellent (and free) manual, "Make Your Site Sell," (<http://makethat.sitesell.com/myss>), will find the first three points quite familiar. As usual, I tinkered with them a bit, to help make them a little clearer.

The last two are things that you won't find mentioned in a lot of courses. They're ignored by the majority of people who try to start a business online.

They're also what makes for real success.

Before we get side-tracked, let's go over each of them, in order.

A PRODUCT THAT DELIVERS VALUE

This one is easy, as long as you remember that value is defined by your prospective customers. Not you.

I don't care how "cool" you think widget-whackers are. It makes no sense to try and sell widget-whackers to people who have no idea what a widget is, or why it should be whacked.

If your product solves a problem that 100% of the people in the world have, and 0% of the people in the world care about, it's not providing value. And if it doesn't provide obvious value, it won't sell.

Unpleasant Fact of Business #673: You are not your market.

Get over it.

....

Value is defined as "what they want."

- Not what they need.
- Not what you think they need.
- Not what you think they should want.
- Not what you're sure will make them happy.

What they want.

The more powerful the want, the more you can charge for fulfilling it. And the happier they'll be to pay you for it.

Whether you create the product yourself, or have it done to your specifications, you must make sure it provides value your market wants.

Find out what they want, and give it to them.

It's that simple.

A SITE THAT COMMUNICATES THAT VALUE EFFECTIVELY

Simple sales copy: What's in it for them?

Communicate benefits. For those of you who are new to the whole thing, you may be confused about the difference between a benefit and a feature. That's likely true even for most people who don't know they're confused.

Don't worry, it's a lot simpler than most people make it sound. In fact, it was the content of the shortest issue of this newsletter ever. Reprinted here, in toto:

"Myers' Marketing Maxim"

**Benefits exist in the head and the heart.
Everything else is a feature.**

Yeah. I thought it was an important enough point to make that the whole issue.

....

Keeping that definition in mind, remember: People buy for benefits. They rationalize the decision with features.

You may think that doesn't apply to you, or your market. If you think that, you'd be wrong. Like most things that have to do with human nature, this hasn't changed in a Very Long Time.

When you create a product or write a sales letter, you should do so with one thing in mind: Giving people things they perceive as benefits. Things that make them feel better (the heart) or that make them feel better about themselves (the head).

Everything else is fluff and mummery.

Your site must be built and written around the goal of communicating to your visitors that you have the answer to a question they're already asking.

"How do I get this condition or this state that I want?"

A SIDE NOTE, ON ROSES AND ASPIRIN

There are two kinds of sales: Roses and aspirin.

A "rose" sale is something that appeals to their opinion of themselves, or that promises to make them feel good by making someone else feel good about them.

In short, it's a "feel good" thing.

An "aspirin" sale promises to solve a problem that causes them pain. It's a "feel better" thing.

A "rose sale" is fun, but it's too easy. There are tons of people who can make you feel good about yourself, who can appeal to your ego. The money in a "rose sale" is sometimes as good, but it's up against more competition, and it doesn't inspire loyalty.

On the other hand, an "aspirin sale" means you've fixed a problem. You've removed pain. That creates a much more loyal customer. Someone who trusts you implicitly and wants to deal with you again in the future.

It's also a bigger ticket sale, most of the time.

If you can communicate both - appeal to their ego AND eliminate pain - you're golden. Try to do that in every sales letter you write, or have written for you.

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I strongly recommend that you learn the basics of writing effective sales copy, even if you intend to have someone else write your letters and ads for you. That way, you'll have an idea of what's needed before the writing starts, and how to tell if it's good when it's done.

If you understand how to communicate benefits, you'll be able to explain them to your copywriter, and to "see" them in the finished copy.

In a later section, I'll get more into the key distinction between features and benefits. That is a critical thing to understand, and it's a lot easier than most sales trainers and copywriting courses make it seem.

For now, we'll get on to the next topic, so that you get the 5 major requirements in your head all at once. The next is...

VISITORS THAT ALREADY WANT WHAT YOU'RE SELLING

Traffic. It's the marketing equivalent of "abracadabra." The magic wand that opens the mythical door to riches.

Or so you'd think, if you listen to the people selling it or the people who need it.

Here's a little secret about people involved in the "Internet marketing" field: One out of four would eat their own young for an extra 15 visitors a day.

Fortunately, the rest are really cool, so you've got decent odds of getting out of it alive. ;)

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If you think I'm kidding, watch the things some people will do to get you to visit their site, or sign up for their list.

Some are deceptive. Some give away the farm to get a glass of milk. Some beg, some borrow and some steal.

Some make a planned effort to only talk to the people who already want what they're offering.

Who do you think is going to make more money and have more fun?

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Some people will tell you that any traffic is good traffic. That's nonsense.

I've seen businesses fail because they had too much of the wrong kind of traffic. More common are the businesses that fail because they didn't have enough of the right kind.

I have never seen a business fail because they had too much qualified traffic.

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No matter what you're offering, you need to have a plan to attract the people who already want it, and to get them to your site at a price that creates a profit.

That's much easier if you create the product in response to an existing demand for which you've already identified traffic sources.

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Traffic is the place where your math skills will be most important.

You need to watch your "visitor value." That's the amount of income generated, on average, for every person who lands on your site. You need to know what it is for every traffic source

you pay for, so you can judge the best places to put your money. You need to know what it is for free traffic, so you can gauge where your time is best spent. And you need to track it over time, to make sure it's staying in the profitable range.

If you're planning on working on only "free" traffic generation, make sure you remember that your time has value. Decide what value is acceptable as a return for that time.

If you're concentrating on promoting affiliate products, you need to consider "EPC." That stands for "earnings per click." How much money do you make, on the average, every time someone clicks on your affiliate link?

Basically, that's your "visitor value" for a visitor you send to someone else.

The math is simple, but you have to do it.

This is why you'll hear so much about testing and tracking. You need to know how you're doing now so you can compare it to how you do in the future.

How else can you expect to improve?

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When you consider the value of traffic generation, you need to keep in mind that some traffic generation techniques pay over a longer time than others.

The worst kind of traffic technique is one that happens only once, and can't be duplicated. This can be profitable, even very profitable, but it's what I call "stunt traffic."

This is stuff like press releases, articles that get printed in newsletters but not on web sites, etc. If you do that sort of traffic generation, make sure you have a way to get at least some of those people into your affiliate program or on your customer or subscriber list.

This is not to say you should avoid this kind of traffic. Not at all. It can help provide the boost you need to make some money and get the staying power to work on other methods, generate other products, or pay for more consistent traffic.

If it's effective at generating subscribers or affiliates, it's worth making time to keep doing it. But it should not be your main focus.

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There are ways of generating traffic that keep working, long after you've stopped working at them yourself. Free (or paid) ebooks or reports that contain links to your site. Articles posted on other sites that contain links to your own. Viral systems that get people to spread the word about your site on their own.

Or an affiliate program. You pay people for every visitor to your site that does something

specific and measurable. Signs up for your list, buys your product, or asks for information on your services.

The more attractive you make it for other people to send you traffic, the more traffic they'll send you. And they'll keep doing it as long as it's profitable for them to do so.

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Paid traffic is another option. This includes various systems like pay-per-click, banner ads, CPA networks, and even more odd sounding items. The benefit of paid traffic is that most of it can be expanded. If it's profitable, you can buy more of it.

That can be a very fast way to build a business, if you know how to properly measure and track changes in the value of that traffic.

It's not for those with small budgets or faint hearts.

The best traffic is that generated by your own subscribers and customers. They know you, trust you (if you've treated them right), and have a demonstrated interest in your subject.

The best way to build a solid base is to build a list of people who're interested in your offers, and treat those people well.

If there's one thing you get from this lesson, it should be this: Know who your perfect prospect is, know where to find them, and know what they want to get before they'll give you what you want in return.

After that, it's all about creating systems to repeat the process.

LEVERAGE

Leverage is a simple concept. You arrange your strategy to get more results from a given effort than would normally be expected.

Leverage is one of the most talked about things in business, and pretty much everyone gets it wrong online. Well, it might be more accurate to say that almost everyone gets less of it right than they could.

Let's take a simple example: You write an article and submit it to various newsletters for publication. If it gets picked up, you could get a decent amount of traffic from it.

Not horrible. But how could you get more from it?

- * Write it as a 5-10 page report, and offer a condensation of the report as an article. Then suggest that readers go to your website for a report giving more details on how to do what you've just told them they need to do. Give it as a bonus for subscribing to your list.
- * Include a link to your product, and give the article to your affiliates to use on their sites or in their own mailings. Let them put their affiliate links in where yours is in the original.
- * Same as above, but get people to subscribe, and track the affiliate who sent them. Give that affiliate credit for ALL sales of your products made to the folks they sent your way.
- * Have a plan that allows you to use the same report as a chapter in a product.
- * Sell reprint rights to a branded version of the report, with a link to your site or product. Also, include a link (not too obvious or disruptive) that tells the readers they can also distribute the report.

This makes the report an even better tool for your affiliates to use to generate sales, since their version will be distributed by the folks they give/sell it to.

- * Make sure there's something in every version that points people to your list, and gives them a reason to subscribe.

There are other techniques. Lots of them. This is just to give you the basic idea. For a list of the most important areas where you should look to apply leverage, keep an eye out for the next section: The 7 things you must include in everything you do online.

Leverage isn't only a matter of which techniques you use. It also means making the most of how you use them.

You want to work at improving every step of the process.

Let's say you have an article that you've promoted to 100 publishers, and 10% of them use it. Each of them has 3000 subscribers, and 10% of those click through to your site. Of those, 3% end up buying.

That would be 90 sales.

If you can improve each of those things by 10%, you end up with 110 publishers, same 3000 subscribers each (you can't control that), with 11% clicking through and 3.3% ordering.

That's 119 sales. A 32% increase.

Not bad. That sort of incremental improvement can make a big difference in your income.

But it's not leverage.

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Think about how this can build on itself if you make those improvements part of a multi-channel process that re-purposes that same content over and over again in different ways.

Hook it in with the examples given in the previous section, and think about what leverage can really mean.

That's just a glimpse of it.

Really.

Before you create any content or promotional piece, whether a simple banner or classified ad, an article, viral report or free online service, think about how you can use it in different ways to get more from your effort. Then think about how you can make each of those ways more effective.

I promise you, you will be surprised at what you come up with. Both in terms of ideas and increased results.

FOCUS

You know what this is. You've been there. But you may not have the words you need to repeat the process on demand.

Hopefully, this will provide you those words:

Focus is wanting something so bad that you measure every action against the answer to one question:

"Does this move me closer to what I want,
faster than whatever else I could be doing?"

Focus is the thing that separates the successes from the almosds.

It's sometimes the hardest thing to get and keep. And it's as easy as knowing what you really want and gauging your actions based on the answers to that one simple question.

This section is short. Please re-read it. Think about it. Tape that question over your monitor.

Then do something with it. Right now.

....

Take some time and think about this. It's the first part of the foundation for your online business.

The second part consists of knowing...

THE 7 THINGS YOU MUST INCLUDE IN EVERYTHING YOU DO ONLINE

When I refer throughout the manual and follow-up emails to the section on leverage, this is the part I mean.

This section is short. Don't let it slide by, or treat it as less than critical.

Learn this. Memorize it. Make it part of your planning for all your projects, from the smallest to the largest.

It's a major key to speeding up your success.

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To create leverage, there are 7 things you can include in your actions. You want to incorporate at least two in everything you do, and more if possible.

Those things are:

- 1. Sell product**
- 2. Generate subscribers**
- 3. Recruit active affiliates**
- 4. Generate targeted traffic**
- 5. Generate links**
- 6. Create product**
- 7. Build your network**

As an example, suppose you are arranging an affiliate-based endorsed mailing by a site owner or newsletter publisher. Rather than just giving them copy to mail (or letting them create their own), you might offer to do an interview with them that relates to the topic of your product.

They could offer the audio recording of that interview to their subscribers as a bonus for ordering your product, increasing profits for both of you. You each get to use the interview for other purposes, with the agreement that neither of you will give it away free.

If you plan these right, you can arrange a number of these interviews that cover all the major aspects of your topic using interviews with experts. This is a much easier deal to arrange than just asking someone to do an interview and spill their guts for nothing.

This shows real respect for their knowledge in addition to making them money, so it helps build the relationship with these individuals. That means a lot more in the long run than just saying, "Hey. I'll give you 50% to promote my stuff."

And, since the deal promotes them as much as you, it's much easier to get them to continue the offer indefinitely instead of stopping with a single commission-based promotion.

So, with a process like this, you're looking to: drive targeted traffic, sell product, create product, build your personal network, recruit active affiliates and generate links. Plug a few places into the process where people who don't buy can sign up for your list, say through an affiliate-branded mini-course that promotes your product, and you've got the Grand Slam.

This is really just an example of building a better offer.

Promoting your site with articles? Do a very in-depth version that will serve as a lead generating report or a chapter of a book. Then use a shorter version that still offers useful information as the submitted piece.

Want to get to know some of the players in a specific niche market? Create a product that includes them or points to their sites. Introduce yourself, give them a review copy to let them know what's being said, and take it from there.

Look at everything you do and see how you can connect at least two or more of the goals listed above into the process. Spend a half hour on that right now, and I'm sure you'll find lots of ways you can put this idea to work to increase your immediate profits and long-term growth.

If you're not sure where to start, start anywhere.

Got a product? Pick one of the 7 things and ask yourself, "How can I do more [whatever] with this process?"

Repeat it for each thing on the list.

Then go do it.

When you're done, pick another part of your business and do it again.

COVER YOUR ASSETS

To start, a paraphrase from the book "Rich Dad, Poor Dad":

The difference between rich folks and poor folks is that rich folks acquire assets, while poor folks acquire liabilities.

That's one of those lines that's so clear and simple that we let it go right by, seemingly obvious. I call that an "Of course" moment.

It's a line you should think about. A lot.

To make sure you do, you're going to take inventory of your online assets as you read this article.

The reason is a surprise. Not mine, but yours. The surprise you'll get when you see just how many resources, skills and assets you have at your disposal. Most of which you haven't thought about before.

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Before you can list them, you need to know what they are. Consider: There is a difference between assets, resources and skills.

As an example: An affiliate program is a resource. Recruiting affiliates is a skill. Your affiliate force is an asset.

An asset is anything that has real commercial value or that generates cash directly.

Keep that in mind as you make your lists.

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What are the main assets you might want to develop for an online business? The most obvious are:

Completed Products
Domains
Sales letters that convert
Effective landing pages
In-demand content
Your list

Let's start with the obvious.

Get a notebook or open a document in your text editor or word processor. Create headings for each of those categories, and get typing. List each asset you already control, in each area.

"Control" means that you can use it for your own benefit. You don't need to "own" it. If you're a member of a group and can advertise to that group legitimately, that's an asset. (Access is considered an asset, rather than a resource.)

Create a separate document for assets you need to get or build. Create another for resources that are necessary to getting or building those assets. And another for skills you need to have access to in order to make it all happen.

You don't need to master the skill yourself in order to have access to it. If you have a staff member who can do web design, you have access to that skill. If your brother-in-law will let you use his audio equipment to record and edit audio for your products, you have access to those resources.

Access without ownership can often save you a lot of time and money that you can use for other things. Learn to think like this. You'll find that both your business and your sanity benefit greatly.

You'll also find that you have a lot more opportunities than you thought.

Gentlefolk, start your listings!

....

I wasn't kidding. This manual isn't going anywhere, and those lists are important to you.

Go on. I'll wait.

Okay. If you're that eager to read more of my deathless prose, it can wait. But at least **start** them now. List the main ones for each group from memory. That should only take a few minutes.

If you don't start now, you might as well close this book. There's almost zero chance that you'll finish them later if you don't do the basics while you're reading this.

Here's a little secret that might motivate you: Better than 90% of the people who read this (or any information product) won't do any of the exercises. That gives a huge advantage to the 10% who are smart enough to follow through.

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Now for the not-so-basics.

Keep in mind, this is far from a comprehensive list of possible assets. Literally anything that makes you money or increases your available resources qualifies.

List them all. List everything that occurs to you. If you think of it, it has value, real or potential.

Don't throw away assets because you don't understand how to use them yet.

....

Inbound Links: This is an area that creates a lot of dispute with more advanced folks. Some think that any link is good, while others think you need to be selective, to guard your reputation with the search engines. To make it more confusing, the impact varies with the search engine you're talking about.

My advice is simple. Don't go out looking for links from places that seem to exist only for that purpose. If the link makes sense relative to the content of your site, and it's not just a gimmick to get more links, it's probably a good thing.

The exception to the warning above is, of course, a legitimate topical directory. If you have a site about Yamaha audio equipment, Joe's Reciprocal Link Page isn't a quality link for most purposes. Joe's Favorite Audio Sites page might be. A comprehensive directory of online audio reviews definitely would.

How do you find out who's linking to you?

At Google or MSN.com, you'd type the following into the search box, replacing example.com with your domain name:

link:example.com

At Yahoo!, the format is slightly different. You have to give the full URL of the site, as either

link:http://www.example.com

or

link:http://example.com

Try both. The lists for each are different.

You don't need to list every site that links to you, but you might want to list the top 10 or 20. The big thing is to know how many links point to your site, and to have an idea of where they're coming from.

I'm not going to get too much into strategies for getting links here, but I'll give you one suggestion. Look for places that link to sites like yours.

I'm sure you can find plenty of sites that cover the same topic, or related topics, that you do. List the domains and go back and do the same search outlined above. Think about ways you can get your site listed on those same pages.

This is also a very effective way to find people who are promoting affiliate programs with products similar to yours or in related fields.

Try this. It's an eye-opener. And quite the little goldmine.

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Effective Text And Graphic Ads: This one is simple. What's working for you right now?

If it works to sell your product directly, you can use it in more places, or give it to your affiliates to use to sell more of your products.

More importantly, you can use it to find out what your prospects really respond to. That's the best way to build even better ads in the future.

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Search Engine Listings: To find these, you use a format similar to the one you'd use to find who's linking to you. The format is the same for Google, Yahoo and MSN.

inurl:example.com

That will show every page that's listed which includes the domain name you specified. You'll need to watch these, as it will also show results where the main word (example) and the extension (com) appear. That would include a link like:

http://www.gargle.com/example/

This doesn't show you where you rank for people searching on your keywords. It just lets you know which pages have been indexed.

Finding where you rank for your targeted keywords is easy enough. Type them into a search engine and see where you show up. Be aware that you'll rank differently in each search engine.

That's getting into search engine optimization, so it's probably best to stop there. That's a whole other story. A long one.

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Your Suppliers: Yes, your suppliers. Anyone you regularly buy products or services from that benefit your business. That includes offline sources like specialty book stores.

As a rule, people who sell what you need also know a lot about your business. And, often, your competition.

Talk to them.

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Your Network: Oh, yeah. This is the biggie.

It is possible to run a business with nothing but a good address book. I don't recommend it for most people, but it's possible. And it's a lot easier to run a more "regular" business profitably if you have access to people who will help.

Your network consists of anyone that can help that would tend to respond positively to communication from you. Some examples:

- * Your subscribers
- * Your affiliates
- * Your professional associates
- * Your contractors
- * Your clients/customers
- * Your advisors and mentors
- * Your mastermind group

List everyone by name who fits any of those categories, except your subscribers and your customers.

Those folks should already be on a list.

You'll notice that "personal friends" wasn't one of the categories.

There is very likely to be some overlap between your network and your friends. Maybe even a lot of overlap. That's good and normal. Just keep in mind that being friends with someone does not mean you want to do business with them. Or that they want to do business with you. If they do, great. Be careful that the business doesn't interfere with the friendship.

This is an area that's tricky to give advice on, because every relationship is different. I'll just give you some observations I've made over the years. Do what you want with them.

- * It's less likely to be a problem if you were business associates first and became friends later.
- * If you're not sure, ask. Make saying "No" easy.
- * Never presume on the relationship.
- * Cut your friends some slack if they screw this up. We all do. You're going to screw it up some time, and you'd want them to cut you some slack if you meant well... wouldn't you?
- * There is a difference between friends and friendly associates. Don't confuse the two.
- * Don't call a business associate a friend unless you'd call them that if they weren't a business associate. Especially if you're just doing it to try and get something from them.

If you use people that way, you suck.

This is all about networking, and that's another of those topics that could be an entire book by itself. It boils down to two rules:

- 1: If you want friends, be a friend.
- 2: If you want someone to do business with you, treat them fairly.

You don't have to mix the two, but being friendly never hurts.

Build your network. There is nothing more important to your long term success or enjoyment of the business.

OKAY. YOUR LISTS ARE STARTED. NOW WHAT?

Yes, started. You are planning on adding assets over time, aren't you? Keep updating those lists as you go. Set goals based on them. It will make sure you stay honest with yourself about your position.

That honesty is critical to your success. If you don't really know where you are, how will you be able to get where you want to be?

To see a small example of the value in this, pick one product from the list. Make a separate list of the various things you use to sell that product. Do a little brainstorming.

You want to look at each part of the process and ask yourself:

"How can I do just 10% better on this part?"

You don't need to get 10 TIMES the results in any one area. Just 10% better. Do that for 7 parts of a process and you just about double your sales and profits for that project.

Yes, that's just plain math. Sounds easy, but what happens when you try and do it in real life?

You usually end up doing even better than you'd hoped. You're much smarter than you give yourself credit for.

Go back to the earlier section and re-read the ideas about leverage. Look at the 7 things you need to do with every action. See if that 10% increase doesn't look a whole lot easier after that.

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It's difficult to overstate the importance of this exercise. It isn't about listing. It's about knowing where you stand.

As you think about where you are right now, you'll start seeing possibilities you hadn't previously considered. You'll realize that you're in a better position than you thought. And you'll know where you're weak and need to improve.

You'll see where you can add income streams you hadn't noticed were available. Sometimes, it's as easy as just adding a link in a web page or autoresponder sequence.

The key is to keep adding assets. Things that add to your income.

When you're getting started, that may not be a huge amount per day per change. After a year of practice, you'll find that each day's work is worth thousands of dollars in long-term income.

Here's an interesting way to look at it. If you do something that increases your daily income by 50 cents, and you do it every day for a year, you've just added over \$66,000 to your average annual income.

50 cents per day. That's not too tough, is it?

....

\$8 per day is tougher. If you can figure out a way to add \$8 a day to your average daily income, and do that every day for a year, you'd be up to - are you ready for this? - \$2920 per day.

That's over \$1,000,000 per year.

You can't do that if you don't constantly study, refine your systems, and know everything you've got to work with.

And you can't do that if you don't understand and apply the concept of leverage.

This is similar to what Jonathan Mizel meant when he said that you're not in the business of marketing. You're in the business of math.

Go forth and multiply.

....

It's not likely that you'll add the same amount every day. That kind of precision isn't possible and, if it were, would mean that you'd gotten stuck in a rut. None of us needs that, eh?

The goal of this isn't to tell you that you're going to make a \$1,000,000 income for yourself. Some may, most won't. You may not even want that.

I'm not going to promise you any specific results. No-one can.

The goal for this piece is just to let you show yourself what you have to work with. If you did the lists, you probably found that you're in much better shape than you thought.

And, if I'm lucky, a handful of you will pick up a new way to think about this stuff.

Now, if you haven't done the lists yet, get going.

If you have, you know what you need to do.

BECOME A "MODEL" CITIZEN

Before we get into this topic in specifics, let me be clear on one thing: This is my way of looking at the subject. There are other ways of viewing it that are every bit as valid, and that sometimes disagree with my structure and definitions.

The perspective you're about to learn was chosen specifically to fit with the rest of this book. It's intended to make the whole thing fit together cleanly. If you find that one of those other ways is more intuitive to you, use that one.

Perspectives are like hats. You can put them on and take them off at will, and one size does not fit all.

Choose one that fits.

....

There are 3 components to what most people refer to as a business model. One is the model itself, which I am going to define here based on the accessibility of the product. The other two are the mechanism used to deliver the product and the system used to make it profitable.

Model. Mechanism. Money.

Keep those in mind.

....

Model 1 - Open Access: This is exclusively the realm of digital content. In this model, anyone can get the "product" without giving anything for it in advance. This can be in the form of text, video, audio, software, or any other digitally deliverable goods or services.

This is the original web-based model for delivering "product."

Model 2 - Restricted Access: In this model, the person wishing to acquire the product must exchange something for it in advance, or after having received a sample, offered using the open access model. (You'll note that these three models are often most effectively used as steps up a consumption ladder.)

The most common price for restricted access content is personal contact information, such as a physical or email address, allowing the provider to deliver the content directly.

This is occasionally used for physical goods, in the case of samples or hard copy information on a product. It is more commonly used for delivery of free subscription content or digital delivery of product information.

Model 3 - Paid Access: Obvious. They have to give you money and contact information before you deliver the product.

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This part is simple, right?

Of course.

A big problem many people have is that they get too wrapped up in the delivery mechanism to see the model clearly. If you're not absolutely clear on this, it's very easy to lose sight of the money end of things.

It's amazing how easily you can lose track of the money while you're creating content.

The reverse is true, too. It's easy to get so focused on trying to make money that you forget the value that has to be exchanged for it.

Being clear on your model is the first step in avoiding both of those business-killing mistakes.

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The mechanisms can be anything that operates on the Internet, or that can be delivered using it.

The most common forms are:

Static web content: Basic web pages, with text and graphics.

Dynamic content: This is most commonly found in discussion forums, blogs and news sites. Much of this is user-generated, and can be text, graphics, audio and video data.

Downloadable documents: PDF files, spreadsheets, word processor files, databases, lists and other information meant to be downloaded to and used on the visitor's computer by their own software.

Solicited Email: I strongly recommend a strict policy of getting clear permission before sending any form of content to an email address.

Audio and Video: Whether streaming to the visitor's browser, or downloaded for use on their computer or other digital devices.

A lot of options. But there's more to it.

All of these can fit into any of the three models. And they can overlap in a lot of different, and very interesting, ways.

For example, an RSS feed can deliver static or dynamic web-based content to a reader on the user's computer, giving a functionality that resembles a cross between email and the web.

Blogging software, like Wordpress (for self-hosted blogs) and Blogger (for folks without web hosting or domains), makes it easy for inexperienced people to run dynamic web sites, and to keep the need for coding and other technical skills to a minimum.

Many web hosts offer discussion forums that can be installed with nothing more than a few clicks of the mouse. More advanced forum software can be had for relatively low costs, and can provide very significant functionality.

Blogs can double as discussion forums. The latest version of vBulletin, a forum script, allows the option of user-run blogs, chats and private messaging systems, and a lot more.

Membership scripts abound, with feature sets that allow for amazing variety, and for free or paid access, recurring billing, and more widgets built in than you can shake a mouse at.

Social networking sites, like MySpace, Facebook and Twitter, allow for extensive interaction between users, providing nothing more than the tools for users to create all of the content and the sense of community.

You can buy scripts to set up your own social networking sites, or create one, for a price, using externally-hosted services like Ning.com.

Social bookmarking services, like Digg, StumbleUpon and Technorati, let users share the content they find most useful, as well as voting on it among themselves.

YouTube lets anyone upload their own videos, and many of the systems we've discussed allow the same, as well as enabling their users to "embed" YouTube videos in their content.

Tools like Skype allow people to communicate one-to-one or in groups, using text or voice chat, with others around the world. Most of these tools can be had at low or no cost.

Web conferencing is becoming so popular that it's not uncommon to see families having get-togethers using systems that were, not that long ago, the sole province of businesses with an IT department.

There are even free and very low cost teleconference lines, such as FreeConferenceCall.com, that let large groups of people listen in on, and participate in, telephone calls involving dozens, or even hundreds, of people at once.

Any of these can be used as a commercial vehicle.

Combining them will usually give you even more powerful results.

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For example, I have a friend who does free audio instruction on general topics within his niche, uploading a new lesson every week. Anyone who wishes can drop in and listen to these recordings, for the price of registering, and without paying a dime.

He emails these people to let them know when new lessons are uploaded, and to tell them about the topic of the week's PAID conference call. Paying participants get to ask questions, receive transcriptions of the call, and often get additional bonus materials that add value to the already more advanced information included.

He uses a Wordpress installation, with a free theme, as his website. He bought software that allows him to stream the audio recordings. Other than that, his monthly expenses to run this rather profitable business are under \$50.

In this case, like so many others, the profit is in the promotion.

That's true whether your product is good or not.

....

Let's take a moment to debunk a myth that costs a lot of people a lot of time, money and heartache. You'll hear this one more often than you should. It's used as a reason to complain about "hype" or salesy messages. It's used by folks who are uncomfortable about selling to justify their reluctance to do what's needed to succeed.

It's a nifty little ditty that goes like this right here:

"If the product is good, it will sell itself."

If someone says that to you, politely ignore any and all advice they give you on running a business. They mean well, and they might make a killer cheeseburger, but the clue-meter is on zero.

If you believe that cliché yourself, you'd better get over it. Now.

It's commercial poison, of the nastiest and most painful kind.

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Look... Don't misunderstand me. I believe in providing significant value for the money someone spends with you. I strongly encourage you to do the same.

Still, you have to understand the problems with this myth if you're going to have a chance of doing more than just getting by (if that.)

That little cliché sounds nice, and it "feels" right, but it's so logically flawed that it's amazing a thinking person can utter it with any seriousness. Yet, many of them do.

Question: If the person doesn't buy, how do they know it's a good product?

The only way for that to happen is through a referral of some sort. In that case, a third party did the selling for you. But selling was done, make no mistake about that.

If your sales message isn't compelling, what would make the person doing the referring try the product in the first place?

Sure, you might get someone who buys based on a dry and boring list of features, and they might tell a friend or two. Stranger things have happened.

But to base a business on that?

Foolishness. Pure, unadulterated wishful thinking.

Business suicide.

....

Fear of selling is one of the top reasons for failure online.

With good marketing, even the crappiest product can be a big money maker. With lousy marketing, and especially with a fearful sales approach, even the best product will be a complete failure.

If you are promoting a product or service of your own, you **MUST** learn to sell effectively. Even if you're giving it away for free.

If you think I'm exaggerating that, consider how you got this book.

....

I'm not saying you should be over the top, or over-state the benefits your product offers. The former is a turn-off, and the latter is unethical, illegal and stupid.

Will people complain if you sell without apologizing? Hell yes.

Allen Says runs what is probably the most useful and valuable discussion forum for online marketers in the world - the Warrior Forum. (<http://www.warriorforum.com>) The value in the place, if you're careful about whose advice you take, is enormous. And membership is free.

Allen occasionally posts an offer which you have to look at before going on to the main forum. This is usually only once every week or two. We're talking about a few seconds, literally, to see

if it's something you're interested in. If not, you're on about your business.

A small number of people howled about it. Some of them were rude to the point of being abusive. This despite the fact that the forum has almost no other advertising in the discussion areas, and that Allen is very picky about what he recommends.

The difference in response rate by using the approach he chose, rather than something more timid?

Over 1000%. More than 10 times as many sales.

Zig Ziglar had it exactly right: Timid salespeople have skinny kids.

Being polite, he never mentioned the nagging wives.

....

With that in mind, you may ask, is it possible to make a good living online without learning how to sell?

Absolutely. Just not with your own products or services, which is where most people are going to make the most money.

Read on, MacDuff.

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One way to do this is to get someone else to write your salesletter and promotional emails.

You can pay them directly, or you can partner with someone who's good at selling and driving traffic, while you create killer products.

Or, you can get a manual on salescopy and a split-testing script. (An inexpensive one can be found at <http://www.evospittester.com>). Do a basic letter, using the formula in the copywriting manual, and feed it a bunch of things to test.

It will figure out what works best of those options as you throw traffic at it. That way you can just play with it, and not feel you're being pushy, even if you try some things that might seem a bit over the top to you. It tells you what people respond to, and you don't have to feel like you're "selling." You're just playing.

After a while, you'll get the feel for what works, and you'll get better at it. You'll also probably get over the whole, "I don't like to sell" thing, too.

Which is a plus.

You can do reviews and recommendations of affiliate products. Tell people exactly what you like and don't like about the products, give them an affiliate link, and let the merchant do the selling for you.

These can be placed within or along side your other content. Or, depending on the site, they can be the only content. Just be sure to make them as objective as possible. Saying only good things is a sure way to convince people you're shilling.

Telling the truth is not only easier, it sells more product when the recommendation is good.

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If you're selling software, give away a time- or feature-limited demo. Have them register for it, and set up an affiliate program. When the customer comes back to buy, pay the affiliates. Let them sell the demo for you. (It's an easy sell if the product is useful. Or fun.)

....

If you're offering your own professional services, you might find it useful to put a page about them, along with your rates, on the site. See if that brings you customers based on your content.

Then work on learning to sell. There's no substitute for it.

....

The last major revenue source I'll talk about here is an ad-sponsored model

You can do this with contextual ad programs, like Google's AdSense program. Basically, you put some code on your content pages and Google looks at the page and decides what ads are relevant to it. When visitors click on those ads, you make money.

To do well with this, you need to pick topics that have higher-paying ads, generate a lot of traffic using keywords related to those ads, or just have a TON of content online.

While some people do extremely well with it, most people don't make enough money with this to cover their coffee bills. Don't screw with it unless you plan to study the process and learn how to make it pay.

If you want to get started learning it, go to Amazon and get a copy of Joel Comm's book, "The AdSense Code."

CPA programs can, if you handle them right, be much more lucrative. CPA stands for "Cost per action," which means you get paid whenever the user does the specific thing the advertiser is asking for.

The trick to CPA programs is to learn to get people to a page that has the offer on it in a way

that gives you the highest likelihood of them being interested in the offer, and positioning it so that they do what's asked.

Page design and context are key here. If you spend the time learning this, you can make a lot of money with it.

And, of course, you can sell advertising directly. This is easier with local sites than with run-of-the-net sites.

There are other systems and other factors, but these will give you the basics you need to understand. You can research the specifics later.

The key here is that you must understand your income model and plan for it before you even get started. That will make it much easier to focus and get the information you need while you go.

The biggest problem most people have with making money online, and the reason so many flounder around for years, frustrated and disillusioned, is that they don't have a clear plan. They don't know how to figure out what they need to know for their own business, and they don't know how to adjust when they learn new things or see new offers.

The second biggest is having a plan, but not knowing how to tell if it's realistic. They just don't know what they don't know.

Think of your "model" as consisting of a number of parts that have to fit together. If you know where they need to connect, and what each has to accomplish, you'll know the important questions.

You'll be able to focus on learning what you need to know to make it work, instead of jumping from one thing to another. You'll be able to see when it's time to gear it up, change it around, or toss it out.

You won't be as tempted to waste time, money and effort on things that just don't fit. Which means your resources and your actions will be more focused, more productive and more fun.

Direction, clarity, and the understanding of your own plan.

That's the cure.

That's what you "Need to Know."

By the time we're done here, I hope to help you discover it for yourself.

REVENGE OF THE PSYCHO-BILLY CADILLAC

Old-time country music fans in the crowd will recognise the sub-title from the Johnny Cash song, "One Piece at a Time."

The hero of the song built himself a Cadillac from parts "smuggled out" of the factory. The result was ... unusual. The parts didn't all fit, there was only one tail fin and they had just three headlights. But "when we pulled out the switch, all three of 'em came on."

Hence the name.

Sometimes building an online business seems like that. "Where does this go, again?"

You've been there, right?

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Later in this book you'll find an article on building your own online playground. The idea is to create a site that's purely fun. You use it as a testbed for new ideas, but the main thing is to just have fun.

This one's slightly different, but it runs in a similar vein. It's about creating projects.

A project, as I'm talking about it here, is any online system you create to accomplish a narrowly defined purpose. (Yes, you can do this with offline systems as well.)

For example, you might create a mini-site that promotes audio electronics and devote the money you get from it to paying for your own music collection or personal recording studio.

You could set up and promote a combination free ebook and autoresponder sequence on a niche subject. The goal might be to develop it to the point that it automatically makes enough money to pay your rent or mortgage each month.

A project can also be intended for a one-time purpose. You might create a product and a solid marketing plan designed to raise enough money to buy your dream house or car. Or you might plan to spin a project off from a process, as a way to keep motivated about the process itself.

For example, let's say you're researching online to find all the newsletter and web site owners in your niche who accept articles for publication. That could get monotonous fast. But if you also arrange it so they can choose to be added to a list that you'll turn into a commercial product... Well, let's just say your motivation to get it done faster might increase a bit.

Almost anything you want to get done can be set up as a project or the result of one.

But why would you bother?

Because projects are finite things, with measurable steps along the way. That's why.

Let's take a look at setting something up to pay your monthly mortgage or rent, automatically. That might explain it better than abstract definitions or theory.

The first thing to do is to quantify the goal: How much is the check each month? You already know the answer to that. Now, how much is that divided by 30? That's your daily income target from that project.

Let's assume that you want to do it by offering a free ebook and autoresponder course. You set it up, write the book, and start promoting it. You find that you're getting an average of \$1.50 per person who downloads the book or signs up for the course.

If your monthly mortgage is \$1500, that comes to \$50 a day. That means you'd need to get 34 people per day to get into the system. That's not that too tough, is it?

Going at it this way keeps you from getting overwhelmed, because you're working with very measurable and attainable goals and numbers. And you're the one that sets the timeline and controls the process.

....

There are a number of other useful aspects to creating projects to do certain things.

- * You can add streams of income that are independent of each other. If one stops working, you have the others to fall back on.
- * You can easily test niche markets.
- * You can quickly learn different marketing methods.
- * You can use one to promote, or jumpstart, another.
- * You can finish them quickly.

Once you get going on them, you may find that you get a lot more done, a lot more quickly. The lack of "Big Goal Pressure" can be quite... liberating.

....

Before we get into the rest of this, I want to tell you about a conversation I had not long ago. The gentleman I was talking with has been trying to get his son to do something online. The son is willing, but they couldn't figure out what he wanted to do.

I asked him what his son is interested in. Computer games.

Who'dathunkit, huh?

As it happens, this guy is something of a wizard at making big money with AdSense. (For those who know the program, he gets his checks by UPS every month.)

Well, why not teach the kid how to run a forum discussing games? Let him run the thing, and just plug in the AdSense code the right way, and he's got some motivation to get people into the discussion.

Later, add a blog, and maybe some other content. Reviews and the like. Let some people who are interested in different types of games have their own blogs, too. Get people involved in the community based on their interests and pay for the whole thing through AdSense.

This is very easy to do with some forum scripts, such as vBulletin.

Think about it. This is all very targeted, keyword-rich content. If you can get other people to create it for you, and provide them something valuable in return... How cool is that?

He wondered if this would work, so I told him about how Ken Evoy's daughter. She is making a killing with her own site about a place they vacation.

Kids will get interested in stuff like this easily at first, if only for the novelty. If you help them set it up so it'll make them some money right off, even a little, they're likely to stick with it.

The next suggestion was the important one: Tell him you'll help him, and he gets half the money right away each month. The rest goes into "savings." (Translation: Investments.)

His son is, I believe, 12 years old. If he works on any project to the point where he's putting even a few hundred a month into solid investments, he might well have enough gathering interest by the time he's 20 years old that his retirement will be secure before he even starts thinking about it.

And he'll learn early that he really can be a success. He won't have to be convinced. He'll have already done it.

That's a lot to gain from a simple project.

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I told another friend about that conversation, and he decided to set up some small content sites himself. He's getting permission from authors to use their material, and formatting it to get better search engine placement than the authors themselves.

The authors don't care, as they get what they want from it, which is exposure to people interested in their subjects. He gets more practice in doing search engine optimization.

He's putting the money into a college fund for his 3-year old twins. Smart as this guy is,

there's liable to be enough in that fund by the time they need it for those kids to BUY their school of choice.

Spark any ideas?

....

Like anything else, your chance of success with a project is greatly improved by doing a little planning before you get started. And I do mean a LITTLE planning. Nothing complicated.

There are 10 questions you should answer when considering whether to create a project for something. Before we get into them, pick a goal. Make it something simple, but make sure it represents something specific for you.

Thinking of "making \$1500 more every month" has a different effect on you psychologically than "setting up an automatic system that will pay your mortgage for you." That's true even if the dollar amount required is the same.

The first seems like "more work," that needs done over and over. The second seems like "less work," almost magical, and has an end point.

I recommend a financial objective for the first effort at this. Something you know you can do. The key is to learn the process. Getting into something that stresses you out isn't the best way to do that.

Once you have the objective in mind, decide on how you want to achieve it. Specifically what do you want to do that will generate the necessary income?

How much do you need to make with it? And how often?

Think about it a bit. Write down a short description of what you want to do and how you're going to go about it.

TEN QUESTIONS YOU MUST ANSWER BEFORE BEGINNING A "PROJECT"

We've talked about why projects are such a good idea, and you've picked a project to get started with.

You have picked a project, haven't you?

Before we get into the ten questions you should answer before starting any project, here's a little more motivation to pick one.

There's a benefit to the kind of projects we're talking about that might not be obvious at first: These are often where you'll discover the Big Breakthroughs.

Why? Because, since you're usually thinking about smaller amounts, you'll try things you might normally leave untested. And the ones that work on smaller projects will often pay just as big dividends on larger ones.

Or for your main business.

Here are the questions:

1. Is there a definable and measurable requirement it can fill? How much, and how often?
2. What are the requirements? Will they be less than what you spend now to achieve the same goal once the project is running? Can you spare the resources to get it started?
3. How much of it can be automated?
4. Can it be expanded?
5. Is it based on "evergreen" products or services, or is it limited in time by technology that will become obsolete?
6. Can you delegate it?
7. Will it be a one-shot thing, or an ongoing process?
8. Can you define the objective of the project and stick to that objective?
9. Do you have, or can you get, the skills and information needed to make it happen?
10. Is it realistic?

"Is there a definable and measurable requirement it can fill? How much, and how often?"

Why is being specific so important?

If you can't define the goal and break it down into measurable steps to check your progress, you're imagineering. That's a fine and useful thing for some purposes, but not for anything that has to do with making money or improving yourself.

Yes, self-improvement processes can be turned into projects. In many cases, they're more likely to be achieved this way.

For example, saying, "I want to get back in shape" is not a measurable goal. Saying, "I want to lose X pounds, reduce my waistline by Y inches, or walk Z miles per week" IS measurable. And it's easy to track your progress and make the necessary adjustments.

For every internal process, there is a corresponding external effect. You just need to work on the internal part, and measure it by watching the change in the external effect.

Sounds easy, don't it?

For now, stick with money.

How much, how often?

"What are the resource requirements?"

If it will take so much time to set the project up that it takes away from what you're doing now to accomplish the same objective, you might want to wait to work on it.

The more serious issue to consider is the time and other resources required to keep the project going once it's established. It does you little good in most cases to trade 10 hours of work at one thing for 10 hours of work at something else to get the same result.

If you're not familiar with the amount of time and effort that goes into maintaining what you plan to create, find someone who is and ask them.

Consider the cost of other resources, too. If you're looking for something simple, like \$40 a month to pay your phone bill, it's probably not the best choice to spend \$25 a month on an autoresponder account for that project.

How about technical resources? Do you have the skill needed to adjust or fix parts of the process as needed? If one problem would require ten months worth of results to fix, you may need to make some adjustments to the plan.

"How much of it can be automated?"

The goal of a good project is to increase your available time and/or resources.

Automation is a wonderful way to do that. And if you get into developing projects in a serious way, you're going to find quickly that, unless they're automated, you hit the wall fast on how many you can keep going.

Obviously not all processes can be automated, but for business projects, you want to automate as many as you reliably can.

A few of you have checked out the site at <http://www.buy-paul-a-beer.com>

There's a place on there where I list folks who've bought me beers through the site. Well, John Delavera decided he liked the idea, but he didn't want to have to maintain it manually. So, he created a script to automate it.

<http://www.software4profit.com/bmad/>

Yes. Really.

Automation. Smart.

"Can it be expanded?"

Tech types will refer to this as scalability. What it means is, "Can the system handle the growth needed for it to be successful? If it exceeds your initial goals, can you add capacity to allow for unexpected success without losing the benefits of that success?"

If you're using an autoresponder system for your project, you're going to have a long time before you run out of resources. If you're giving away a large download with a low conversion rate, you might just hit the bandwidth wall - hard -if it gets too successful.

Plan for it.

"Is it based on "evergreen" products or services, or is it limited in time by technology that will become obsolete?"

Long-term projects should not be technology-based. That's better for short-term or one-shot stuff.

Take my word for it... Constantly updating a project to keep up with technology can be a pain. And if it gets to be a problem, you may wind up abandoning what would have been a useful project because of the hassle.

"Can you delegate it?"

If you can pay someone to handle the day-to-day details, and still keep expanding the profits from them, there's no end to the projects you can implement. That part is obvious. There may be other ways you can adapt this rule to your ideas that aren't quite so "in your face."

Example: Let's say you've got a site that derives its income from AdSense. Consider a niche-focused discussion board. The visitors will create the keyword-rich, relevant content for you. And they'll be glad to do it. Everyone gets what they want.

I call that "delegation through volunteering."

"Will it be a one-shot thing, or an ongoing process?"

This will determine how you'll go about setting the thing up, and how much time you'll put into it.

Obviously, you're going to consider it more effective to spend a lot of time creating a project that will pay off your mortgage automatically than you will on something that has to pay that bill this month.

Some things may not be so obvious. For example, if you create a project to pay a specific large bill, you might think of it at first as an ongoing thing. But is there a way to promote that product that will knock the whole thing out in one swell foop?

Look at the balances.

"Can you define the objective of the project and stick to that objective?"

The first part is easy: Defining the goal. How much, how often.

But when it starts to succeed, will you keep using the project for what it was created to do? Or will you slip into using the new resources (money, time, whatever) for something else entirely?

Stick to it. Create another project for the other things.

"Do you have, or can you get, the skills and information needed to make it happen?"

This one is easy to answer, once you've done an inventory of what you'll actually need to know and do to accomplish the goal. Just make sure you don't set an objective that requires that you learn to do something you'll hate (and thus, not follow through on.)

You also want to watch out that you don't create problems in getting the necessary resources. For example, I know a number of people who've gone deep into debt to get tools or training they thought would solve their money problems, only to find that they didn't have the basic resources or experience needed to use what they'd bought.

Ya gotta watch that.

"Is it realistic?"

This is a double-edged sword.

You need to be sure that you're not convincing yourself that something is going to pay off in a

big way when it's guaranteed to be a let-down. Some things are just too improbable to be worth betting much on.

Then there's the case where the idea is perfectly sound, but you overestimate your own commitment, or underestimate what will be required to make it happen. You need to be honest with yourself about these.

And then there's the other problem: You overestimate what will be required or underestimate the potential payoff. It's very easy to dump a project that people tell you is never going to work, just because you believe them.

If you're not sure, ask yourself: Can I test the waters without spending a lot of time or money on it? Can I start the process in a way that lets me drop it if it looks like a loser, and expand it if I see potential there?

All too often people assume that any negative opinion of potential qualifies as "being realistic."

That's every bit as bad a mistake as believing that whatever sounds good is a sure thing.

There is no set number of these that you have to answer favorably to make a project worthwhile. That's a call you have to make for yourself.

Even the last question - "Is it realistic?" - is negotiable.

Consider: Suppose someone says, "Don't waste your time. That will never work." And further suppose you think they're probably right.

If the project is something that can be done quickly, doesn't require significant resources, and can teach you something, it might be a good idea anyway.

Hell, if the cost is low enough, it might be worth doing just to get it out of your head!

Just pick something and do it.

You'll be glad you did.

The way this fits with the rest of the book is simple: It provides a short-cut to learning. If you're planning a big aspect of your business, but don't know if your strategy is sound, you can try it out on a project first.

You can use projects to develop resources you need for your business, or simply as hobbies. Ways to keep the skills sharp, without the stress that sometimes goes with having to pay the bills.

If you plan to outsource things, you can develop those things as projects for someone else to complete. Doing it this way can lead to some interesting ways to look at your resources. You might partner with someone on a project, helping both your businesses. Or you might get two people to partner with each other on developing a tool or product you want.

There's a wealth of perspective in being able to see each process as a separate and discrete item.

It also provides a different perspective on your overall business. If each part is seen as a project, nothing is beyond trying, and nothing is indispensable. You can add and remove things at will, without agonizing over what should be clear decisions.

Try this out. Create some small project and get started on it.

It's an education like very little else.

GIMMICK, TOY OR TOOL?

For some people it's a function of being unfocused. For others, it's not wanting to miss out on anything. And, for still others, it's a full-blown case of digital hoarding.

Question: Of the last 10 electronic books or reports you've downloaded, free or paid, how many have you actually read completely?

Of the last 10 pieces of software you acquired, whether free or paid, how many are sitting there unused?

The only right or wrong reply is the one to the question, "Are you happy with your answer?"

....

This sort of hoarding is a symptom of a common problem: Lack of direction.

If you have a plan, and you know what you need to accomplish that plan, you are far less likely to get distracted by whatever shiny new widget or enticing new title happens to flash across your monitor.

The rest of the book is about making and executing your plan. This section is about avoiding some of those resource-wasting distractions that can keep you from achieving it.

....

All too often, people who are trying to get something going online get into the habit of chasing a single product or process that will be their personal answer. The problem with this is that they're just chasing. Even if the product really does provide everything it promises, which is the case much more often than not, these folks usually don't have the experience to make it work.

It's not that the books are incomplete, although some are, but rather that the chaser doesn't have the experience of actually doing anything online in a focused way.

Gaining that experience is why I included the sections on creating and running projects and building your own playground. Those are easy ways to get the feeling of actual results. If you're new, that's even more important than what you'll learn from doing them.

Even if you've run a successful offline business, you may find that the somewhat different environment of the Internet causes you to have those same hesitations.

Hey. We respond to different things differently.

At least we do if we're normal.

There is one other class of people who might do the sort of collecting I described earlier: The dabbler. The person who's just playing around with this Internet thing, out of curiosity or to see if there's anything to it.

If that's you, cool. Nothing wrong with that. You probably have an income you can count on and a lifestyle you enjoy. If this is just a hobby for you, rock on.

If I might be so bold, though... Consider developing a sandbox. Dabbling can be a lot of fun when it's a process, rather than an aimless and random stroll through the digital countryside.

Just a thought.

....

For the rest of this chapter, I'm going to assume that you have some sort of plan, however basic or advanced it might be. You see something that catches your eye. Ask yourself, "For me, right now, is this a gimmick, a toy, or a tool?"

Ask it that way because the answer may change later, and may be different for someone else than for you. It's not about judging whether a thing is legitimate or not. Merely whether it's going to help you achieve your goals.

For purposes of clarity, I use the following definitions for those terms:

Gimmick: A fad, a technique that will be rendered useless in the short term, or something that looks sophisticated but doesn't really accomplish anything productive.

You'll get better at spotting these as you gain experience. In the mean time, just watch what people have to say about anything you might suspect of fitting into this category.

Toy: You don't really need it, but it's fun, or it makes you feel cool. The classic example for many guys is the obligatory purchase of a table saw, or other large power tool, that either never gets assembled or that's used solely as a place to set laundry before folding.

Note that those are tools for many people. They're toys if you're just buying them because they're cool.

Tool: Something you will actually use to build your business, either immediately or in the very short term.

For software and hardware, the line is pretty clear, as long as you're honest with yourself.

With information products, it can be fuzzier. For example, information that helps you to better understand, plan or develop your business skills can be a tool, even if you don't see the specific need for it right this minute.

You will need to constantly upgrade your knowledge and understanding of techniques, tactics and strategies, along with various regulations and conventions, in order to keep your edge and

to be better able to plan your growth.

Things like testing, copywriting, and content development fall into this category.

A separate category of information is training in specialized techniques. For example, AdWords or blogging tutorials are very worthwhile if those systems fall within your immediate plans. They're useless otherwise.

Know the difference.

....

Depending on your answer to the question, "Gimmick, toy or tool?," you'll know what to do.

Avoid gimmicks like the plague. They waste money and time and, more importantly, dilute your focus.

Toys are okay if you know that's what they are, and can afford them without taking resources away from productive areas.

Tools get trickier. If you have a specific place in your plan for the tool, can actually afford it, and will use it either immediately or very soon, it's a good buy.

If you're not sure, do some research. Find out what results other people have had with that sort of thing, and whether there are unstated "gotchas" associated with it. For example, lots of people buy autoresponder scripts and don't find out until later that they don't work as well on shared servers, or that their hosting company has a history of getting blacklisted because they're not careful of who their customers are.

If you know those things, and don't need the power of a dedicated server for anything else, you might decide to go with a paid service rather than hosting your own lists.

Look as much at whether you **can** use a tool as whether or not you intend to use it.

....

Skills development information gets a bit trickier, and depends on more than immediate usefulness.

For example, suppose you're considering starting to use AdWords to generate traffic. You can start by doing some research in related forums, but that might not be enough for you to know if it's something you'll pursue. Forums can be dicey for this, as the people answering usually have strong opinions one way or the other. They probably don't share your personal traits, and those can have a big impact on how, and how well, you use a specific technique.

In a case like that, you might buy a beginner's guide. If you find out that it's something you feel you could use effectively, you can move up from there. If you decide it isn't, even if only for right now, you know more about the subject for future planning.

If you weren't thinking about using AdWords at all, but everyone else starts buzzing about the latest and greatest AdWords course, you're probably better off passing on it.

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More fundamental skills are a different thing.

For example, I firmly believe that everyone should know at least the basics of writing sales copy. If you are on a short budget, learning to write solid copy can be the thing that moves you into a better position.

If you plan on paying copywriters to do that work for you, you should still make at least a basic study of the subject. Understanding the process makes it easier to spot a good one, and eases the process of communicating with them effectively.

Either way, it's in your best interests to know a bit about the art and science of creating effective sales copy.

....

The advantages of learning the fundamentals are many. One of the main among them is that, unlike software, hardware or search engine techniques, they don't change over time. Once you learn them, you've got skills that you can use for years to build your business.

They help you to keep focused, and to ask better questions about your own plans. They make it easier to know what you need to learn to execute each part of your plan more quickly and efficiently. And, when you get big enough to outsource things, they make you a more effective manager and negotiator.

The controlling factors with products in the skills area are your budget and your time. Once you've got a clear plan, you should fairly quickly get to the point where the budget is less of a consideration.

Your time never stops being something you should take into account in these decisions.

Know what you want from any resource decision, even to the point of downloading a free ebook. If you're not going to use it, it's a time thief.

Distractions eat time and kill focus, while a lack of fundamental skills limits your opportunities.

Balance. Keep it in mind at all times. And know where any decision fits within your plan.

The bad news is that you're going to be telling yourself “No” to a lot of things that sound good at the moment, but which won't help you to get where you want to be. Don't worry. You'll quickly get over that, and find that it's more than a little liberating to have that independent habit that frees you from impulse buying of things you later realize were a waste.

The good news is that, by knowing where things fit, you'll actually have more time to develop your skills **and still** get things done more quickly.

And, when you do decide to buy or invest time in something, you'll know that it's a good decision, whether it happens to work out well or not. That knowledge will help you to avoid beating yourself up over the occasional, and inevitable, decision that flops.

The thing that stops most people isn't lack of resources. It's lack of a clear plan that they want to accomplish, which leads to constant, unfocused flitting from one thing to another.

If you use what you're learning in this book, you won't have to worry about that problem any longer.

And there's nothing quite like clarity to kick your motivation into high gear.

OF WOMBATS AND MEN

(WITH APOLOGIES TO MR STEINBECK)

I've referred to Mrs. Wombat in my newsletter over the years, but, until recently, I'd never told her story. To anyone, actually.

Mrs. Wombat was real, and she gave me my first lesson in marketing - in the 4th grade.

The woman who was supposed to teach that year was sick, and they brought in a substitute to cover for her. Her name was Mrs. Hasbrouck. Years later, I saw a picture of a wombat and thought, "That looks *just* like Mrs. Hasbrouck."

She's been Mrs. Wombat ever since.

She was a nice enough woman, until you asked a question or disagreed with her. She could become quite cranky when challenged, in the way that only women in their 80's can get away with. She spent the entire day, every day, telling stories of her extensive travels and teaching English.

Stories and English. Just that. And, as it turned out, the woman she was substituting for was sicker than anyone thought.

We had Mrs. Wombat for the entire year.

Oh, joy!

....

It was fun for the first two weeks. Then the stories started to repeat, and the English got more advanced. After the first month, we began to notice that you could almost hear the punctuation when she spoke.

It seems that Mrs. Wombat's previous employment was as a post-doctorate level instructor of advanced theoretical grammar at Anal-Retentive U.

Rumor has it that she was nominated for a Nobel prize in physics when the committee mistook her diagram of a multi-page sentence from an old German philosophy book for a working formula for cold fusion.

She wouldn't have hesitated to cut off your participles, if you were careless enough to dangle them in public.

She'd have charged e. e. cummings with capital murder.

Mrs. Wombat was a stone-cold Grammar Cop.

Her stories were fascinating, in a CIA-World-Factbook kind of way. A cold listing of details and happenings, with all the romance and excitement of an almanac.

She often told us of the book she was writing about her travels. She was always "Almost done. Just a little bit to fix yet." She knew there was something missing, but she couldn't quite figure out what it was.

Mrs. Wombat's darkest secret was that she failed, miserably, every communications course she ever took.

....

If you're going to write for the popular market, you need to understand your audience. That's marketing, and Mrs. Wombat had the worst characteristics it is possible for a marketer to have.

Her first mistake was that she was a perfectionist. A mindless, if expert, follower. Like most followers, she had no tolerance for those who thought or acted differently. She strictly observed the rules of grammar, true, but she never really understood its purpose.

Here's a little preventative aspirin for your next session of Grammar Police brutality:

The purpose of grammar is to help ensure clarity of communication. If grammar gets in the way of getting your point across, toss the rulebook out the window.

And don't let anyone make you feel bad about it.

Yes, grammar can get in the way. For some audiences, slang can be clearer than more "accepted" forms of speech.

More commonly, a strict adherence to grammatical correctness and the expansive use of extended vocabulary can lead to awkward, if not incomprehensible, sentence structures, which can distract from the successful conveyance of your message.

Kind of like that last sentence.

This doesn't mean you should be sloppy. Just be aware of what you're doing. Message first, always.

Second: Git 'er done.

Almost 40 years later, I'm sure she'd still be working on that book. (I'm assuming she's not still kicking around. She'd be roughly 128 years old.)

Perfection is the second greatest enemy of success. (Doing nothing is the first, but it was a near thing. Inaction picked rock to Perfection's scissors in the last round of the finals.)

How many promising projects do you have sitting there that need "just a little more work," that haven't been touched in ages? Or that you keep polishing, hoping to make them "good enough?" (Mea maxima culpa...)

You can't fix what never gets done. You can't improve or build on a project that's 99% ready.

If you write a book and it's not perfect, so what? Get an editor and get it closer. But get it done.

If you have to do it in parts, that's fine. That's what I have to do sometimes to get a project out and complete. (I have more ideas than time, and often change between projects more often than a teenaged girl changes shoes.)

Finish first. Polish second.

....

How do you know when it's done?

Look at your sales letter. If the product delivers what the letter promises, it's done enough to start selling. If not, either add enough to the product to make that happen, or subtract something from the sales letter.

Haven't written the sales letter yet? Excellent.

Write a letter selling the product as it is right now. If you've got enough benefits to make it worth buying, snip the loose ends and get it out to market.

You see, your prospects don't have a set idea in mind of what you're supposed to be offering. They don't care if you can think of things that might make it better.

They have a problem NOW, dammit, and they don't want to wait until you're 128 years old for a solution!

Mrs. Wombat's second problem is that she didn't understand personal communication. At all. She assumed it was nothing more than data exchange.

Bzzzzt! Nope. That's what encyclopedias are for.

If you're going to communicate with people on any deeper level than they could get from Funk and Wagnall's, you need to connect with them. That means talking about things they care about - right now - in terms they understand.

You already knew this, of course.

The real question is, do other people know you know it?

Do your messages talk to them in their language, about their concerns? Do they feel a connection with you? Or a real desire for your product?

Do you reach them where they live?

You can tell by what they do after reading or listening to your message. If you draw an emotional response (and it isn't pure hatred), you're connecting.

If not, you'd better start working on it.

....

Mrs. Wombat wasn't alone. There were thousands of her. There was probably one in your school. They spawned an army of Grammar Zombies - people who exist for the sake of rules they don't understand.

Beware of these people. Avoid them at all costs.

They will suck the life out of you, your products, and your pet turtle - if you let them.

They'll quibble over the tiniest things, and insist that you not only take them seriously, but that you come back from the Dark Side and follow the One True Path of Grammatical Goodness.

They'll see a misspelling in your ad for a book on restoring antique vehicles. They will assume, beyond all reason, that this is proof that you don't know anything about car repair. (Really. Remember, these people are nuts.)

They'll hammer you with silly comments like, "If you have typos in your work, no responsible person would buy from you." (Yes, I've heard that. Often.)

They'll scream if you use a whole colon, when a semi-colon would do. (Okay. I made that one up. But it could happen.)

They will micro-focus to the point that they miss everything that matters, to satisfy their need

for universal conformity.

Grammar isn't the only weapon they'll use. It could be their opinions on web design standards, or file formats, or operating systems. Whatever fuels their mania. And they don't have to know what they're talking about to behave this way.

The real experts at least have the benefit of Clue. They can, occasionally, be helpful despite themselves.

Dog save us from the didactic newbie, who knows nothing and is determined to make sure that we know it too.

Literally. Dog save us.

Cujo, come home!

....

I'm not suggesting that you assume that anyone offering criticism is a Grammar Zombie. Far from it. If people don't point out ways you can improve, you usually won't. And it's a safe bet that you won't see every possible problem that exists.

If the criticism is valid, swallow your ego and fix the thing. Then say "Thank you, sir or ma'am, may I have another?"

Grammar Cops and Zombies don't really offer criticism to help, although they often claim that's their goal. They're nitpicking to show they know more than you. This usually happens when you're doing something they can't - making a profit and making a difference.

Do not spend time on these people.

Do not argue with them.

Ignore them.

I repeat: *Ignore them.*

== Do Not Debate With Them! ==

If they can suck you into a debate, that proves to them that their ideas are worthy of consideration. From there, it's a small leap to believing that you're only disagreeing with them out of ego. At that point, they will never let go.

They have the potential to make you doubt yourself when you shouldn't, to make you work when it's not useful, and to steal your life if you let them.

I mean that literally.

More than one person has lost the will to live life their way by listening to these people and buying into their nonsense. They become convinced that they're just not good enough to succeed, so they quit trying.

At that point, you're a Zombie. Your only purpose will be to create more Zombies. And, just like the George A. Romero flicks, you'll only be able to survive by sucking the brains out of real, living people.

(For the really attentive folks, no. There was no "in" missing in that last sentence. ;)

There's only one thing you have to remember to avoid this problem:

"Zombies suck."

....

Mrs. Wombat's Tale doesn't end there. Not precisely. Every hero needs an anti-hero, and, over 30 years later, I met him: the Anti-Wombat.

At the time, I lived in town. The east side of the city of Erie, Pennsylvania, to be exact. A very mixed neighborhood, in every way you can imagine. I love it.

There's a store down the block that had posted pictures of people shoplifting. Pretty clear shots of "customers" putting stuff inside their jackets and moving for the door.

The thieves were suing the owner.

One day I headed down the block to pick some stuff up from the store. I see this tall blonde guy in front of the place, with a cameraman, a \$400 trench coat and a \$75 hair cut. He's trying to talk to the kids walking home from school.

Have you ever stuck your finger in a stream when a school of minnows was swimming by? You know how those minnows make a wide and nearly perfect circle to avoid your finger?

Those kids reacted to this guy just like that.

So, I get to the corner and head for the store and the guy stops me. "Do you know about the pictures inside, and do you have any opinions on them?"

Opinions? I have a pocketful. Why no, I don't mind sharing.

He gets the okay to interview me and the camera-man starts recording.

(It's actually relevant that, at the time, I was wearing black jeans and shirt, black cowboy boots, a black leather duster and a black Stetson.)

He starts off the interview with:

"So, Mr. Myers, do you live in the 'hood?"

....

Long pause.

....

I looked him up and down slowly and asked the obvious question:

"What is a middle-aged white yuppie doing asking a middle-aged white redneck if he lives 'in the 'hood?'"

After he finished stammering and the camera-man was done laughing, we re-did the interview.

I pointed out that there were a lot of people in the neighborhood who couldn't afford cars, and how important that store was to them. The next closest was four blocks away.

I talked about the fact that the employees all lived in the neighborhood. I remarked on how they all treated the customers with more respect than you ever got from a chain grocer. I commented on the tradition, as this is the oldest grocery in the city.

I mentioned that the owner was a good neighbor, keeping his place clean and his prices low and watching out for the folks who lived nearby.

I asked him what the alternatives were: Raise prices or go out of business?

In short, I spent two minutes on the things that made that store important to the people who lived near it.

Yes, I laughed at him for the "in the 'hood" remark. But the interview got picked up as far away as California, and it brought a crew from Good Morning America out to Seraphin's Grocery the next week.

The reporter did okay.

He didn't deserve it.

I mean, this guy is supposed to be a professional communicator, and he asks something that stupid?

The Anti-Wombat. All style, no substance, and totally inappropriate use of slang to boot.

Completely clueless.

The story got picked up because it was news. There are millions of people in this country who live in neighborhoods just like that, and millions of store owners facing the same challenges.

That's stuff that people care about.

That brings up a perspective you might find useful:

If your product solves a problem, your *salesletter* is news.

....

The lessons?

- * Your market is a community, with their own concerns and language. Talk to them in their language, not yours.
- * If you're going to speak your market's language, be authentic. Talk to their concerns, don't try to make yourself one of them by mimicking them. That's just insulting. Even the little kids new, that guy didn't belong "in the 'hood."
- * Make life better for your customers, and they'll tell the world about you.

There are lots of lessons that can be drawn from these two stories, but I've rambled on long enough.

If you only take two things from this, it should be these two:

Do not waste time debating with Grammar Cops (or Zombies). No matter what their grammar of choice might be.

If your product solves a problem for someone, your salesletter is news. People want to hear that kind of news.

THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL

There really is one skill that's critical to almost any form of success online. Or in life in general, for that matter.

I talk a lot about copywriting and selling and writing clearly. Those are very important, to be sure, but they're all dependent on something more basic.

Listening.

Listening provides the foundation on which your activities must be based, if they're to be as successful as you'd like them to be. And there's a lot more to it than you might consider at first.

For example, surveys and split-testing are forms of listening. You're listening to preferences - one expressed through multiple options and the other through a binary choice of accept/refuse an offer.

You need to listen to both individuals and markets. While you do, remember: Individuals sometimes lie. Markets never do.

Also keep in mind that you can tell a lie, but you can't DO a lie.

Actions are always true. On the flip side, your interpretations of those actions could be completely wrong.

For example, if you send 1000 people from a given group to one salesletter and get 80 orders, and 1000 people from the same group to a different salesletter and get 30 orders, you can be reasonably sure that the first is a better choice for that group overall.

You can guess about why, and be wrong. But... does it matter?

Not much. Which is why listening to markets and actions is the best way to avoid confusion and make correct decisions.

Give 'em a choice and count what they do.

....

You'll often see threads on discussion forums about various marketing strategies. For example: People complain about pop-ups, screaming to everyone who'll listen that they'll kill your business, because "everyone hates them."

Big clue: People who dislike a thing are far more likely to complain about it than people who like it or who don't care either way. And a lot of the people who say they hate them will respond to them if they're presented in the right way.

The same thing is true with many sales techniques. One time offers, continuity programs, big red headlines, quantity limits, bonus packages, and just about everything else that someone could gripe about.

The only thing you should rule out completely is the unethical. And always keep in mind that, even if every single human being in the world hates the technique, it could still be ethical.

Ethics, as they relate to business, are primarily about truth and choice. If it's clear, true and doesn't literally force people to do what you ask, it's very likely just fine ethically.

Yes, there are exceptions. Hiding unexpected terms in unlikely places can be fraud, even if they're clear. Claiming that people should read every word on every linked page isn't going to fly with government regulators. Be up front about your terms and your product.

If you feel like you're being sneaky, you probably are. And that's not a sign of being on clear ethical ground.

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Learn to do surveys - properly.

Very little can give you as big a head start on success as knowing what people really want. Throughout this book, I mention offering product to people who already want them. Surveys are one way of knowing that.

Doing them right is beyond the scope of this book. Just understand that you can bias your results if you aren't careful. Do some reading. It's not hard to get the knack for this.

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Learn to do online research. Dig into keywords. Study your competitors. Dissect businesses, and learn what works for them and what doesn't. Sign up for the lists of other marketers in your field. Read the influential blogs and other publications.

Look for trends. Not in opinion, but in actions.

....

Constantly open doors for feedback. Ask questions in forums, or just read what people have to say in response to the questions of others.

Create systems for your subscribers, prospects and customers to tell you what they like, what they dislike, and what they want.

Here's a key point to making the most of your feedback, however you get it... Don't just listen for the most common responses. Listen for the responses that sound the most desperate!

The most common are your bread and butter benefits. They'll sell copies of your products for you in enough quantities to make them profitable.

The most desperate ones, the ones that talk about real pain, are the ones that will turn a profitable promotion into a monster. Those are the ones that can kick your conversion rates up by multiples instead of fractions.

Those are your million-dollar selling points.

They're also the things you should focus on for your higher-priced back-end products and services.

....

Test, test, test.

Spend the time to learn how to do split-testing. It's a pretty simple process, that amounts to showing differently presented versions of your offer, and counting to see which version they respond to most strongly.

There are a lot of commercial programs you can get that will make this an easy process. They range from \$10 to over \$500, and cover a vast expanse of capabilities.

Start with something simple.

The main things to test are your headline, your offer (what they actually get), your guarantee, and your price.

Never assume you know what the results will be.

I've watched two of the smartest marketers in the world guess a headline so wrong that they were stunned when the final answer came in. (Out of 8 tested headlines, it pulled 2/3 of the total "votes." Neither of them had picked it as being a contender.)

The great thing about this process? The world's dumbest marketer could have done the same thing and ended up with the same result. Testing eliminates a big chunk of the need for experience.

I've personally done surveys to see which of 12 product ideas would be the most "in demand," and had the one I thought would be first come in dead last, while one I thought would be ignored finish in the top two - and way ahead of third place, at that.

One of the most expensive mistakes you can make it to fail to test a broad range of prices. It's very common for people to assume that a lower price will sell more copies of a product. That isn't always (or even most often) the case. Sometimes a product will sell better at a much higher price than you might have even considered for it.

Don't sell yourself short.

When in doubt: Test. When you're certain: Test anyway.

....

Listening well, especially in an online environment, is a skill that takes some practice to develop. Just making a continuous effort will get you a long way toward the goal. Still, there are some things you should consider while you learn.

First, keep in mind that everyone who says something (as opposed to taking a definite action) is trying to convince another person of the rightness of their opinion. They have a specific end result in mind. Their goal may not be the same as, or even compatible with, yours.

You also need to remember that, while everyone has a right to their opinion, not all opinions are of equal value. Be aware of the experience of the speaker when assigning value to their words.

Treat every opinion as a piece of data to be figured into your decisions. No single opinion, no matter how well-informed the presenter, should be allowed to make a decision for you.

And to repeat a very important point: People who dislike a thing are many times more likely to say something about it than people who like it, or who really don't care either way.

Unsolicited negative opinions about a person, product or process should be given very little weight in your thinking.

When it comes to choosing who to do business with, keep this in mind:

**When a person expresses an opinion on a thing,
he is telling you more about himself than about that thing.**

....

The last thing to mention is that the right answer isn't always contained in any one thing you learn. If there's a conflict between what someone says and what they do, believe what they do. Then consider why they said otherwise. That might give you clues to something more effective.

If you hear a lot of conflicting opinions or data, look for options that fit them all. You may not find them but, if you do, they'll be worth the effort to test.

And consider that sometimes the important things are hidden in what people don't say.

Go. Practice.

Hear something new today.

"WHERE'S THE PARTY?"

The primary function of marketing is simple: To create a situation in which people willingly give you what you want in exchange for what you offer.

You need to do one of two things to make any deal work:

Find the people who have what you want and who already want what you've got, and propose a trade...

...or, find out what those people already want, get it, and give it to them. (This is actually a simpler process, as it doesn't matter what you start out with in this approach, and your risk is much smaller.)

One of the most curious things about marketers is their almost universal failure to grasp this aspect of the business.

They don't understand what people really want.

Sometimes it's because they're wrapped up in the way they present the deal. These are the folks that win Clio Awards for their cleverness and "creativity," and find themselves clientless shortly thereafter. (*Because their clients either went elsewhere or went broke.*)

Sometimes it's because they try to fit the market to the product, which is something like resizing your feet to fit your boots.

Sometimes it's because they separate branding from response, which should be punishable by being barbecued over old issues of the Wall Street Journal.

Most often it's because they fail to recognise - and emphasize - the difference between features, products, and benefits.

This is a Very Bad Thing®.

....

A long time ago, in a lifetime far, far away, I was employed by a "Corporation." (*To you creative types, this is something like the Empire in Star Wars, only less benevolent.*)

They wanted me to teach their people to sell a line of nutritional products. Vitamins and the like. Great products, but not real "sexy" stuff.

You can imagine the training process, eh?

They all wanted to do the same thing: List ingredients. The more, the merrier.

"We gotcher vitamin A, yer vitamin b, and yer vitamins X, Y and Z. Absorption rate's over

90%. Cold processed, just like yer faveright beer!"

"Ummm... No," says I, in my most professorial voice. "That ain't how you sell vitamins."

"Huh?"

"Huh?" seemed like a wall in their minds. Even the fitness fanatics couldn't get past the Ingredient Approach to selling vitamins.

We explained that the ingredients were of no interest to the customer, except as far as they produced a benefit the customer was looking for. (Benefit being defined for now as "Whatever brings the customer closer to the state in which they'd like to live.")

The customer, we pointed out, was similarly uninterested in the product. Little tasteless pills that they had to remember to take every day? What a nuisance! That's too much like medicine.

They didn't want the features (the ingredients), and they didn't really even want the product itself. So why do people buy vitamins?

Vitamin C sells big because people know it helps them feel better when they've got a cold. That's easy. Removing pain that people understand is a simple sale.

Anti-oxidants help people minimise wear and tear on their bodies, by cleaning up poisons. Sort of nebulous, until you tell them the unpleasant things those poisons can cause.

B vitamins help reduce the effects of stress. People who are interested in their health "got it" right away.

The salespeople didn't.

We'd explain to them that what people get from vitamins is the key. More energy to enjoy the things they do. Less stress. Reduced risk of certain illnesses. Better sleep. Stuff that makes a difference.

With vitamins, as with any product, the key is simple:

**They don't care what's in it
until they know what's in it for them.**

Some of them learned. The rest needed a more "concrete" example.

But how do you make the point? If your salespeople (or you) are focusing on the features of your product, how do you get them to switch their attention to benefits?

Try something like this.

One day, put a bag of groceries on a desk somewhere in the office. Include a 5 pound sack of

flour, a gallon of milk, a dozen eggs, a pound of sugar, a stick of butter, and miscellaneous flavorings. Generic stuff.

Tell them you grabbed someone else's groceries by mistake, and ask each of them individually if they want to buy them from you. At a markup, of course.

Hey, the store makes a profit, why shouldn't you?

They'll look at you like you have two heads. At the end of the day you'll still have those groceries.

A couple of days later, have a birthday party for one of your staff. If it isn't anyone's birthday, get someone to play along. (This works best if you time it for a real birthday.)

Play music. Have someone bring out a cake, complete with candles and balloons, and sing "Happy Birthday" to the victi... err... lucky celebrant. Do it up right.

The next day, get everyone together and ask if they enjoyed the party. (*Except the Grinches. Never ask a Grinch about a party.*)

When they say yes, ask them, "Then why didn't anyone buy those groceries from me?"

The confusion will be a tangible thing. Let it simmer for a moment.

"Those groceries are the ingredients that go into a cake. The 'features' if you will."

"You know, if I had gone in to buy that cake and been offered the flour, butter, eggs and all that went into it, I wouldn't have bought them either. I paid for a cake, not a sack of groceries."

"I paid for a cake, but that's not what I bought."

"What I bought was a party."

"THAT is the difference between features and benefits."

....

That's one of the cool things about understanding selling. Once you "get it," it's easy to adapt to technologies. You just keep in mind that people all buy things the same way.

They want to know where the party is.

Before you run off looking to learn some new copywriting formula or sharpen your technique, you need to understand what kind of party they want, and structure your sales process around throwing just that sort of shindig.

That's where the real magic happens.

Give them what they want, the way they want it, and you won't have to play mind games, or try to "bend them to your will" using your "mystic Kung-Fu copywriting powers."

Your products will fly off the shelves without all that self-important foolishness.

Those last two paragraphs are, of course, directed at my fellow copywriters, not you sane folk who just want to sell more stuff.

....

So, how do you really get in touch with the true benefits your product offers and your prospect wants? That's so easy that I am embarrassed every time I see a professional screw it up.

You folks who don't do this for a living are about to learn the most important part of writing effective sales copy. You folks who do this for a living and sell features can consider this a professional consultation.

There's a "beer link" at the end of the book.

....

First step: Define your "Perfect Prospect."

That's the person who should already want what you're offering, have the money to buy it, and the resources to use it effectively to get more of what they want out of life.

If you're selling sneakers, that means \$X and feet.

If you're selling high fashion footwear, that means \$X+, feet, and a sense of their own social status as represented by their attire.

If you're selling business automation software, that means they either have or can afford the technical skills and computer gear needed to run it, a business that the software fits, are time-conscious, and can afford it.

Basic outlines, to be sure. You need to get specific.

So specific that you can see them.

....

Next, list every good thing that person gets from your product, in concrete terms. How much time do they save, how much more money do they make, what opportunities does it create, what pain does it remove, etc.

Now, list every good thing that comes from those concrete benefits, whether it's concrete (better car with the money) or intangible (more freedom, security for their families, etc).

Now, ask yourself why they want those things.

The answers to that last question will be your list of benefits.

....

When you look at the answers, and I do suggest writing them down, you'll have an aerial view of where the party is for them, and their map for getting there.

If you do nothing else before you start writing or rewriting your copy, this will focus you so much more on the real desires of your prospects that you will almost be guaranteed to write much more effectively.

Yep. It's that easy.

....

The (only slightly) more advanced thing to remember is the formula for proper presentation of benefits:

Feature yields result which delivers benefit.

"Our advanced drive train design (*feature*) will last years longer than traditional systems (*result*), which means less maintenance expense (*result*), a greater sense of control on the road (*benefit*), and a safer ride for your family (*benefit*)."

Or, for a much shorter example, consider the old Michelin ads.

They started with a description of the features of the tires, giving the logical justification for the decision to buy. They ended with one of the hardest hitting hammers I've ever seen for a consumer brand. A picture of a baby sitting on the product, with the announcer saying:

"Michelin. Because there's a lot riding on your tires."

Powerful.

That is benefit-based selling at its finest.

That's what you can do when you know your prospect and where their party really is.

It works for tires, it works for downloadable products, it works for homes and political campaigns and every other type of sale you can make.

It works online and offline and in business and personal situations.

I've often heard people quote Zig Ziglar's line, "You can have everything in life that you want, if you will just help enough other people get what they want."

It's often followed by suggestions that you just blindly give and give and hope that comes back to you. That's fine for your charitable work, but it's not a stable way to run a business.

What Zig was talking about is exactly what I've described in this article.

....

While I was writing this, I got a phone call from a friend. He wanted to know if the people he sees who screw things up badly and still make money were just lucky or if they were really that skilled. I told him that, in my opinion, the answer was neither.

This is it.

Give people what they want, the way they want it, and you can get almost everything else wrong and still be a success.

WINNING THE CONTENT CONTEST

This section is all about content. You know... the stuff you put up on the web that your visitors come looking for.

For those of you who've been at this a while, most of this will be a refresher. If you haven't looked at your content strategy with a critical eye in a while, it'll be worth the effort.

....

Most people hear the word content and think of text. That's a very limiting view. Anything you can deliver digitally is, by definition, content. This includes text, graphics, audio or video, software, services or data. It can be static or interactive, informative or salesy.

The first key to getting the most from your content is to understand that all content either makes an offer or fulfills one - or both.

The more clearly you communicate an offer that directly appeals to your visitor's current desires, the more likely you are to be successful with it.

It's that simple. Give them what they already want, and they'll help you get what you want.

....

The second key is realizing that you're not just competing with others in your field for the attention of your visitors. You're competing with every other content provider on the net, plus TV, radio and the newspapers, every human being they deal with offline, and every fear, hope or wish they have for themselves.

Plus the football game that's coming on in 10 minutes.

If you can get them to miss the first 5 minutes of that game to read your content, you're ahead of the vast majority of businesses online. If you can get them to skip the game entirely, you've got compelling content.

For most businesses, that's about as far as you'll ever be able to push it. For the few that offer what I call an aspirin sale (something that fixes a painful and persistent problem), you can go further.

This is one of the main reasons you need to know exactly who your prospects are. It makes it easier to build your offer in a way that will keep their attention.

The third key is to recognize that planning content is a project, while delivering it is a process. As much as you can, you want to make that process self-maintaining.

You want your content to achieve a goal in itself, as well as increasing the likelihood that your visitors will want more in the future.

An example is the use of articles to drive people to a subscription page. The initial content gives them something useful, which makes them want to hear more from you. They subscribe, and the additional information makes some of them willing to buy your products. Some of those people may later want to pay you to consult with them about your field. Every step is driven by what you've offered before.

This sounds obvious, yes?

That's the problem. When it works, it looks so easy that you miss the little details that make the difference.

If you don't see them, you can't use them in your own efforts. That means reinventing the wheel. Problem is, that takes time.

And most of us end up putting corners on the thing.

....

"Putting corners on the wheel." I use that expression a lot. Sometimes it gets glossed over and folks don't quite get what it means.

It means "adding resistance." This is a Bad Thing, just like, well... corners on a wheel.

The formula for high levels of success in any offer/acceptance process is simple. It's another of those things that are so obvious they seem ridiculous even to mention. And, like most such things, it's almost never directly applied.

Here's the formula:

Increase the desire and lower the resistance.

There are limits to both, but the more you can do of each, the greater your chances for success.

That's probably an article for a later time. For the moment, just keep those two things in mind as you read the rest of this.

TARGET YOUR MESSAGE

The success of your content will depend on the 5 Ps of targeting. We'll cover those briefly in this section.

What are they? Excellent question.

1. Purpose
2. Prospect
3. Promotion
4. Presentation
5. Payoff

(Yes, I know there are 7 Ps there. Only the first one in each word counts. So stop nitpicking and start note-taking, okay?)

Sheesh. Some people's kids...)

Purpose: What do you want to get from this article, ad, piece of software, report or email sequence? What - exactly?

If you can't put a number to what you want, start over.

Yeah. Really.

You don't want to "be rich." You want to have enough money to live a certain lifestyle. Exactly how much do you need for that? By when? How often?

You don't want to be famous. You want enough credibility in your market to get people to do something. What is it, and how many need to do it?

My friend Jim Lanford told me a long time ago the main secret to getting a programmer to create what you actually want:

Define your output.

Once you've done that, it's just a matter of working backward from that. The more clearly you define it, the easier it is to create and measure.

Whenever you set out to create content, know - exactly - what it is you want from it when it's done.

If you don't, you'll probably end up getting something else entirely.

Prospect: Who is able to give you what you want? What would they want from you?

Wanting money is fine, but you have to offer significant value in return. The two main approaches to determine the form that value exchange will take are:

- 1. Decide what you're offering and find the people who already want it, or**
- 2. Find a group that desperately wants something, and give it to them.**

Either way will work, in most cases. The second is easier and faster, but it may not fit your tastes. Some folks want to work with a topic that excites them. Others want the end result, and any honest path that leads there is okay.

Whichever approach you choose, the folks who think the other way is right will argue with you.

Ignore them.

As long as you're making an honest offer in an honest fashion, it's no-one else's business.

It's your life and they're your goals.

Just make sure you do the research and know there really is a market for what you're offering.

There is nothing more frustrating than building the world's best widget whacker and finding out after much expense and effort that people just don't want their widgets whacked.

....

If you use the second approach, your prospects define your product. That makes it easier.

If you start with the product or general topic and then look for the demand, you have to answer two main questions:

Who wants what you're offering, and where can you find them?

A bass-ackward way to answer those questions is to define the main problem your product solves, and describe the person most likely to have that problem and a strong desire to fix it.

I like this approach because it often reveals additional markets that I hadn't considered when I created the product. There are lots of products and content that can easily be adapted to additional markets.

Now that you have a general description, build on it. Who among those people can afford to buy your product?

Who is already desperate to solve the problem?

That's your perfect prospect.

Face it, it's always easier to sell something to someone who already wants it.

It's more fun for them, too.

....

Promotion: By this point, you have at least a general idea of what you'll be doing. You need to turn that into a powerful offer, something that will grab your prospect's attention.

You do that by focusing on benefits.

What benefits do they want that you can give them? What's the most powerful desire they have that you can fulfill?

Build your offer around the most powerful desire. Then make sure that everything you say about it speaks to that desire and promotes those benefits.

If you want them to read an article, your title (read: headline) should talk about the main benefit they'll get from doing that.

"Will This 15-Second Treatment End Your Migraine Misery?"

Believe it - anyone who suffers from migraines will read that article. They'll stop whatever they were doing and make the time, because you're offering a possible cure for a genuinely serious pain.

If the article delivers on the promise, or points to something that does, they'll take the next step.

Pain relief is a powerful benefit.

....

Even experienced salespeople often confuse benefits with features. Here's a simple rule to make it easier:

**If you can touch it, it's a feature.
If you feel it, it's a benefit.**

Benefits are all about feelings. Removing bad ones or adding good ones.

Features are the things that make benefits happen. People only care about the features if they don't already know the product will work.

People don't need to be told how aspirin works, because they know it does. Conversely, they do need logical reasons to justify spending thousands of dollars for the feeling they'll get from owning that new 60" high definition TV.

Which brings up another point: Features don't always even have to relate to the benefits the prospect is looking for. As an example, how about that new 60" high-def system?

I've never seen an ad that talked about any of the logical features that lead to actual benefits. They talk about the "big, bright, crystal-clear picture."

Dude! That is not a benefit!

It's barely a feature, unless you have vision problems. You just don't need a 60" TV.

A big-screen TV is a toy. A large, expensive, very cool toy.

There's nothing wrong with toys. You just need to realize, if that's what you're selling, that the appeal to logic doesn't have to be real strong. People can justify their toys just fine without it.

Pain is a different thing. Other than greed, that's what con men focus on most often. Because of that, and the fear that's associated with most pain, you need to explain clearly why your solution will work.

That's important, but it's still secondary to the benefits.

It's all about benefits. All the time.

That's what you're promoting. That's what they're buying.

....

Presentation: Before you can present your offer, you need to know where your perfect prospects can be reached online. That's primarily a matter of a little research.

Make a list of all the places they hang out online. Then, consider what are appropriate ways to get their attention in those places.

If they read online publications, you could get their attention by publishing useful articles. Or by getting reviewed in those publications. Or by paying for advertising.

Every medium has appropriate ways you can use to get attention.

Be very careful to avoid inappropriate means of presentation. You may get some sales using spam or posting ads to a discussion forum, but you'll lose a lot more. Niches tend to be tied to

communities, and communities tend to reject those who are seen as "intruders."

When in doubt, ask. Research. Watch what other people do who advertise and are welcomed by the community.

Become part of the community. Or take the old-fashioned way and pay for your space.

Sponsors are cool. They pay for the food and the booze.

People like sponsors.

....

Aside from focusing on benefits, there are a few other things you'll want to watch out for.

The biggest is making sure you present your offer in the prospect's language. You should listen to how they describe their problems and use the same language to tell them how you'll fix them.

Every group has a language of their own. It's how they tell other members of the group from "outsiders." The very last thing you want is to be seen as an outsider. That's putting a big, wedge-shaped corner on that wheel.

....

The next thing to be aware of is keeping the style of your offer consistent with your promise and positioning. If you're promoting a migraine cure, you do not want to sound like a valley girl.

Like, I am so sure.

If you're positioning yourself as a rebel fighting the established medical community (not usually a good plan), sound like a rebel. A smart and educated one, but a rebel.

If you're promoting a dating guide and sound like a statistician, you're probably going to miss the bulk of your potential sales.

If you're offering free, open source software designed to help systems administrators eliminate user complaints, you don't want to sound like a late-night infomercial. Or a valley girl.

If your subject matter involves aliens and black helicopters, you **MUST** sound at least a little paranoid. (*Hey, even if you're right, they're still out to get you, my pretty. And your little dog Tinfoil, too!*)

The last thing (well, the last I'll cover in this part) is to keep in mind that they stepped into the process expecting an experience. You want to deliver one that's in keeping with the expectations you created, and maintain the consistency of that experience throughout.

Don't change focus or style in mid-stream. They'll bolt on you, and rightly so.

For an example of how a very simple adjustment to consistency can make an enormous difference, see the report that came with this book, on improving conversions.

It shows how a guy used a 3-minute change to increase his subscription rate by over 15 TIMES what it was.

Yeah. A consistent experience can be that important.

....

Payoff: For your prospect, the payoff is simple: You deliver on the promise you made in your presentation. If you do that, they'll want to deal with you again.

For you, the first payoff is the first "Yes" action, whatever that may be. For each yes action, you want the prospect to feel that they've received enough value from you to warrant further yes actions in the future.

If you've done things right to this point, all you really need to do is ask.

....

This may have seemed a bit vague to some folks. That's okay. If you do the things listed here, you will definitely see improvements in your results.

In the next section, which continues the "Winning the Content Contest" theme, you'll get some more specific strategies and tactics.

The "Just do it" types will really enjoy this one.

ARE YOU THAT BORING?

There's a discussion that comes up all the time on the forums and in various lists. The question that starts it is a sensible one and usually asked by sensible people. The answers, however, especially from so-called "experts," can be really annoying.

That magic question is:

"How long should my content be?"

The answers that make me wonder if there's any actual effort of thought behind them are the ones that say, for instance, "You can't go over 350 (or 500 or 750) words for an article. People won't read them."

I'm often tempted to respond to those with, "Well, maybe if you'd learn to say something interesting you wouldn't have that problem!"

That would be rude. So, I just think it.

But it's true.

....

Before I go any further, I want to point out that I don't think content has to be long to be effective. If you can say what you need to say in 350 words or less, do it. Don't waste people's time just to show off your writing skills. That's rude, too.

But if you need more space to communicate your ideas clearly, use it.

Don't worry... the electrons are all recycled.

And if an article directory or publisher says that submissions must be X-hundred to Y-hundred-and-fifty words to be used in their site or sent to their subscribers, well, it just has to be that length. Their service, their rules.

That's life in the Very Big City.

The justification for the arbitrary 350-750 word guideline is usually one of these little beauties:

"People get buried in so much email they won't read anything longer than that."

Sure people get a lot of email. What they don't get is a lot of relevant, useful, interesting email. They'll put that stuff right at the top of the list.

"People just don't have the time for longer articles."

Nonsense. What they don't have time for is yet another copy-and-paste promotion for the flavor of the week. If they know it will be interesting, they'll make the time.

"The average person online doesn't have the attention span for more than that."

When I hear this one, I just want to slap the person saying it. (*If you've ever said that, slap yourself for me, wouldja?*)

What? We get computers and suddenly we're all stupid? Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. It's all so clear to me now.

Condescending, sanctimonious sons of...

To anyone who's ever used that as a justification for short-changing people on information that can help them live better, I would like to offer these thoughts:

People watch 2-hour movies and actually follow the most intricate plots. They read magazines and newspapers and even, if you can believe it, *whole books*.

If they aren't staying focused for the 4 or 5 minutes it takes to read a "longer" article, maybe the problem isn't with the reader. Maybe the content isn't relevant to them.

Or maybe you're just ... BORRRRINNNNG!

Hmmm. Could it be that simple?

....

Years ago, when I was still publishing articles by other people, an author emailed asking what my guidelines were for length of submissions. My response was, "As long as you need to make your points, and not one paragraph longer."

That is the theoretically correct answer. In a perfect world, we'd all know how to do that. We'd say what we came to say and we'd shut up, as it were.

The problem is, we're generally talking to groups with very diverse ranges of experience and understanding. We have to try to balance the flow, where we might be able to pinpoint things better in a real-world environment.

For example, I was once approached at a conference by an experienced copywriter who had a long and confused question about something she'd just heard regarding SEO and how it could be applied to sales letters.

My answer was: "Bullets." She processed that, thanked me effusively, and left much less confused than she arrived. The guy sitting next to me looked surprised (and amused) and said, "Did YOU just give someone a one-word answer?" My reply was...

"Yup."

The copywriters and SEO folks in the crowd "get" what that answer was all about. It might take more explaining for the folks with less experience in those areas. And that's the point.

As far as possible, Know Thy Audience.

....

That's the First Commandment for creating good content. The second is just as simple:

**Have something to say,
and say it in an interesting way.**

I'm amazed at how often I get emails from alleged publishers that meander all over the place, saying nothing you can quite put your finger on, until they slide a pitch in.

People, there's nothing wrong with recommending a product. Tell your readers specifically who will benefit from it, and how, and tell them where to go to get it. It's that easy.

Stories are good, too, if you're good at them. Unless you're much smarter than the average bear, don't start with a story about potty-training your child and try to segue into a pitch for a new piece of affiliate software. It won't work.

Besides, you probably don't want to attach that image to a product you're promoting.

Yes. I have seen people do just this sort of thing.

It's an eerie feeling.

Useful. Relevant. Interesting.

Hammer those words into your head and recite them like a mantra every time you sit down to write anything that's meant to instruct or entertain.

If you know your audience, you'll know what they'll find useful and relevant. You'll never get it right for everyone, of course, but you don't have to. If you're close enough often enough, you'll earn a reputation with your subscribers or visitors that will carry you through the misfires.

Some definitions might be in order, especially for the folks who wonder how this applies to entertainment.

Useful: It accomplishes a purpose for the reader.

Relevant: It matters to them. (Yes, it's that simple.)

Interesting: It engages them, involves them and makes them want to know more.

Simple, yes? Yet the word "relevant" has become a buzzword.

That says something very bad about the state of the Net.

....

I'm going to assume that what you have to say helps your reader accomplish something. If not, why are you bothering them?

Relevance is very much a matter of your situation. There are three primary ways to ensure a high likelihood that your content is relevant. In descending order of preference:

- 1: Pre-qualify.**
- 2: Ask.**
- 3: Test.**

Pre-qualifying is just a matter of making the subject matter clear to people before they start reading. For subscription-based content, that means having an actual, identifiable theme, and letting people know what it is before they subscribe. For open web-based content, that means making sure your links and ads target your market, so you get traffic that cares about the subject.

If you offer information on a clearly defined topic and then give it to the people who say they want it, you're going to hit the mark more often than not. This, by the way, is generally called "targeting."

Some people don't like that word, because they think it has a hostile tone. Can't say I blame them, really. Yes, I use the word myself, but only because it's such a useful bit of shorthand

when speaking with other people in the business. I regularly remind myself not to take it too literally.

Words like that tend to foster attitudes that aren't really healthy. I mean, think about it...

Do you like the idea of being a "target?"

....

Asking is always a good idea. If you ask people what they want and give it to them, you usually won't miss by much. You just have to know how to ask so that you get accurate answers.

Be careful with that. If you ask the wrong way, people will lie. They won't do it to deceive you. They'll do it because they think that what they're saying is "the expected thing," or that it's "what you want to hear."

....

I wrote a report a while back on doing surveys properly. I called it "Instant Marketing ESP."

Someone finally asked me, after months of it being available, why I called it "ESP." Asking people what they want isn't exactly the same as mind reading, right?

That's an excellent point, but it misses the reality of life online. You see, in very few cases will you get a majority of your current visitors or subscribers to actually answer your questions. The ones who don't answer will, generally speaking, want the same things as the ones who do.

For them, and for future visitors and subscribers, you'll be so accurate, so often, that you'll seem like you're psychic.

Giving people what they want most, on a consistent basis, is a powerful way to build a business.

Plus, it's fun to get emails saying things like, "I can't believe it! This is exactly what I was looking for. It's like you're reading my mind!"

....

"Testing" is a necessary item in building a business online, but it's probably the least efficient way to develop a strategy for content.

Used this way, it amounts to, "Send them lots of stuff and see what works."

Nah. Tell them up front what the subject matter is, then ask them what parts of it are most important to them. Use the answers to laser focus your efforts.

Much easier. And it makes you look smart.

If you're trying to establish credibility, looking smart isn't a horrible thing.

Anyone can do those things. The "experts" usually do. The hard part is being interesting.

Consider your friends and the people you like to spend time with. The ones you enjoy the most are usually people who are funny and interesting and who you have something in common with, right?

Those are the relationships that you value.

Now, what is the biggest thing people are told to do when communicating with a group? "Develop a relationship with them."

The question always arises: "How? What do I do?"

Ummm... Be funny and interesting and share the things you have in common?

Hey. You never know. It could work.

....

Let's assume, just for the sake of argument, that your visitors already know what you have in common. That's why they came to your site. That takes care of the "introduction," if you will.

You don't **have** to be funny. It may not even be appropriate for your topic. You do have to be interesting. Or useful and very, very short.

Pretty much everyone knows how to be interesting. Doing it in print is a matter of following some simple steps. And that leads us into part 2 of "Winning The Content Contest," cleverly titled...

HOW TO BE INTERESTING IN PRINT

Follow these simple steps, and you'll find that your readership goes through the roof. Your customers will read and use your products. Your audio sessions will motivate them to buy.

And people will want more of what you have to say.

CREATE AN OUTLINE

Not many people can just ramble around their points and keep the attention of an audience composed of more than Mom. If you want to try and learn it, start a blog. Keep at it until you figure it out. It's not hard, but it's more art than science.

It's scary to see how many people lose their audience because the audience becomes confused. Assuming you've defined your outcome, that's the result of two things: Disorganized thought and unclear explanation.

The good news is that both of those can be avoided easily. Just create a clear outline of your article (or report, or book or whatever) before you start writing the actual product.

Look it over for gaps, places where the message might be garbled because you've left out something important. Make sure the points you're making are in the right order and follow each other logically.

When you've got a clear outline, then you can start writing. You'll spot things you missed as you write. Don't be surprised by that.

The only really complete outline is the finished product.

TO REACH A GROUP, WRITE TO ONE PERSON

The best way to talk to a group of strangers is to pick out a familiar face in the crowd and talk to that one person.

That may sound odd but, if you gathered the group around a common theme or interest, many of them will respond to the same things. They'll have similar goals, a common "language," and be involved in the same process.

That makes your job really easy.

Pick one person you know who needs to learn what you're teaching and write the whole thing to them. Or, pick a photo out of a magazine that looks like it could be of someone in your market, write down their situation and what they need to learn, and write to that "imaginary"

person.

Adapt your tone for that one person. Make your message clear to them, and don't worry about everyone else. Surprisingly, everyone else will "get it" too.

DON'T WORRY. BE HUMAN

Ignore the "Wombats" of the world. Pay no attention to the grammar cops or the arbiters of "professionalism." Talk to people like you know them personally. Say what you have to say in the clearest way you can.

No matter what the nay-sayers tell you, you are most definitely allowed to be angry, sad, happy, frustrated, confused, excited, nervous, jubilant and even proud.

One thing you are not allowed to be, by your readers, is unreasonable. Unless, of course, you're a partisan blogger, in which case that's expected. Even, dare I say it, reasonable.

Know Thy Audience!

And let thy audience know thee.

BE ENTHUSIASTIC

There is very little that's as contagious as enthusiasm for a shared interest.

I'm not talking about over-the-top BS and exaggerated hype. I'm talking about a sincere enthusiasm for your subject. Get people seeing the results they'll get from using your product or the information in your article. Just get into what you're writing and use action phrases, rather than sitting back and sounding stuffy.

It's really hard to be boring when you're having fun.

YUCK IT UP

If you're good at word play or jokes, use that whenever appropriate.

People have a lot of demands on their attention, so you have to keep them focused. Not only is laughing fun, it serves a sinister, secret purpose for the clever content developer.

Write this down in your Little Black Hat Book of Internet Marketing Secrets:

**When you make someone laugh,
you reset their attention span.**

Okay. So it's not *really* sinister or "black hat." And they don't all have to be knee-slapping funny. A quiet chuckle will do just as well.

You don't even need to be a laugh-a-minute kind of guy. Or gal. A laugh-about-every-three-minutes will do.

Roughly once per page of text.

Seriously, if you aren't funny in print, learn. It will be time and money well spent. You can get books on comedy for cheap at Amazon or your local bookstore. (*Cheap books are okay. I recommend avoiding cheap shots. They're not usually funny, unless they're directed at the premeditatedly stupid or the casually rude.*)

One clever bon mot, an appropriate aphorism, or even a grin-worthy gag can be the difference between someone reading on to your promotional links or deleting the email with a yawn.

Thus, we give new meaning to the phrase, "Laughing all the way to the bank."

THROW DOWN THE GAUNTLET

Challenge your readers. Make them think.

Contrary to the "common wisdom," people enjoy a challenge, as long as it's honest and in their own best interest. They like to think, and they enjoy being creative. It's human nature.

Never talk down to your audience, and never be condescending. Don't try to impress people with your language, but don't "dumb it down" either. They'll sense both, and they'll toss you aside like a bad first date.

Ask questions. Present new concepts. Challenge conventional wisdom. Push the boundaries. Explain yourself clearly and expect them to understand, and even to go beyond it.

If you treat someone this way, they'll sense the respect behind it. And they will rarely disappoint you.

Most people are much smarter than most other people give them credit for. Don't be the one who forgets it. The average person is much smarter than average. And just about everyone is a genius or a potential genius in some way.

Expect more than anyone else, and you'll usually get it.

DON'T RIGHT-SIZE. BITE-SIZE

Forget writing in pre-measured doses. Skip the artificial limitations on length, and focus on clarity. But don't make your content so heavy that it wears your readers down.

If you have to take more words to make your point, do it. But break it down into bite-sized chunks. One concept or topic at a time.

People who've been subscribed to my newsletter for more than a few issues have probably noticed that I use a lot of indents, put a blank space at the beginning of every line, and use those four dots (...) to break the newsletter into smaller sections.

And I rarely use long paragraphs.

White space makes reading easier. Short sections don't just make it feel faster, they emphasize the end of each point, so folks can stop and digest a section before moving on to the next. That focuses the mind, and clarifies the flow of ideas.

It provides a visible structure for your outline.

That all helps to make your content more interesting.

You might also be surprised to find out how much easier it makes writing.

Everyone wins. We like that.

EDIT WITH CARE

Once you've finished a piece, set it aside for a while. Come back and re-read it. Edit it lightly.

I've noticed over the years that the articles I worked on the hardest and polished the most got the least feedback. The ones I wrote and just spell-checked and sent out got the biggest responses. One of the most well-received articles I ever sent out was, in my opinion, terrible in terms of the writing. The ideas were great, but the writing... Not so much.

For a long time I thought that was because people were responding to the casual feel of the articles. I recently came to a very different conclusion, based on a number of those things happening fairly close after each other.

The difference was that the ones I just wrote and sent out were pieces I had to write. They weren't part of any planned pattern or any market response. They just wouldn't leave me alone until I got them out of my head and into someone else's hands.

They demanded to be written.

That may sound odd, but anyone who writes much knows what I mean. It's just something that happens. And it's a lot more work to fight them than to write them.

When those things start gnawing at you, write them down. There's a reason the ideas keep coming back to you and asking to be let loose. They'll usually resonate with other people for the same reason they wouldn't let you alone.

That's your most powerful content.

That's the sort of thing that goes viral. That's the kind of content that creates raving fans.

Here's a secret that even most writers don't know: If you focus on pushing a lot of value through the pages, making it interesting and useful and relevant... You can create that same feeling and that same response.

You'll enjoy writing more, your readers will enjoy your content more, and you can thumb your nose at the arrogant twits who think we're all too stupid to pay attention for more than 30 seconds.

That's a win all the way around.

Except for the twits. ;)

....

If you're not primarily a writer, it may be tempting to dismiss this section as not applying to your activities.

Do not make that mistake. Please don't.

Useful. Relevant. Interesting.

Those words apply every bit as much to advertising, sales copy, software design, and anything else that can be classified as content (read: everything online) as to what is traditionally considered to fit the label.

When designing software, for example, the features must be useful. The goal must be relevant. The documentation and sales materials must be interesting.

If your ads are not relevant, they won't attract attention. If they're not interesting, they won't hold attention. And if they don't credibly promise something useful, they won't succeed in getting your desired action.

Those three words form the prism through which you should view and judge every piece of content you develop.

Every piece. No exceptions.

THE "THUD!" FACTOR

A while back, I read a post on the Warrior board in which someone asked "How long should an ebook be?" One person suggested that 240 pages was the minimum, and anything less would leave him feeling ripped off.

My first response was:

"When did we start valuing information by the pound?!"

Duh. What was I thinking? We already do.

It's called the "Thud Factor."

....

In the info-product world, the phrase refers to the noise the box makes when you drop it. If people spend a lot of money on a hard copy information product, they want mass to justify the cost in their mind.

This works differently for various types of products, but it all boils down to one critical part of the buying process: Perceived value.

When you buy an information product, you generally buy on the basis of the results promised. Unfortunately, many people have a comparison-mode that kicks in when they get the package that requires that they judge information as though it was all of the same value - by volume.

For instance, a person might judge a 100 page book that will solve a serious health or business problem for them by the same criteria they'd use when looking at a book on Cajun cooking. That's not a valid comparison of the value of each product, but it's what happens. It's what they're are used to.

People get into perceptual ruts.

....

This can cause some serious problems, ranging from high returns and customer service issues to (more importantly) failure to use the information. This means the customer misses out on the real value of the work.

There are a number of solutions to this. The easiest and most common is to add to the package, mixing the media so that you don't get snared by the problem of misperceived familiarity.

In other words: Break the pattern.

Warning: Don't mistake volume for value.

The most common example of this online is the site that offers "\$1600 worth of ebooks as a free bonus for signing up for our newsletter!"

Puh-LEEZ, people!

If you're not making the package more valuable for your customer **in a way that's relevant to your main offer**, you're wasting your time.

And theirs.

....

In order to add to the "Thud Factor" in a way that your customers will respond to and appreciate, you must actually make the product more valuable as well as increasing the perceived value. A few possibilities to consider:

Add media: People learn better if more of their senses are engaged in the process. If your product is primarily audio in format, add transcriptions, with worksheets to make the information easier to grasp and apply.

A 3-minute narrated video demonstration of some things can take the place of 20 pages of text instructions. The text can, and should, focus on the principles behind the process: why it works the way it does, how to make it most effective, etc.

Or consider adding audio tutorials. Many people grasp information more readily when they listen to it. Many others find it convenient to listen to MP3s while they drive, jog or do routine tasks.

If you're sending hard copies, deliver the audio in standard CD format, rather than packaging it as MP3s to save money and space. Standard audio CDs are more convenient, thus more likely to be used, and they add to the perceived value at the same time.

Add supplements: Additional "advanced" or "extra" information that goes beyond the specific product description make very useful bonuses. As a word of caution, I'd avoid including them in the same binding as other material. They have to LOOK extra as well as just BEING extra.

Deliver it as a course (or deliver a course in addition to the main work): This is simple enough. Sequential material with worksheets makes it more likely that the customer will actually use the information. It also reframes the content as educational, and intended for progressive usage.

Add personal service: Consulting, critiques, etc. Anything that involves you directly interacting with the customer is clearly a substantial value.

Look at your product or service, and see what you can come up with. There's a very strong

chance that you can add significantly to both the perceived and the actual value of your offering without adding substantially to your costs.

That means you make more money **and** the customer gets more real value. Everyone wins.

We like that.

....

Note that relevance is a key factor in all of this. One of the fastest ways to kill the psychological "Thud" your product carries is to add a lot of material that doesn't relate to what the customer is ordering.

One common mistake is to constantly interject political, religious, philosophical or social beliefs throughout the content - IF they're not directly relevant to the customer's success with the product.

I like to know about the creators of the various products I buy. Most of us do. But that sort of thing is best kept to the introduction or "About the Author" sections of a product. Or put on a separate page on your site. Or put in your newsletter in a section that's separate from the main content. (Unless, of course, your opinions are the main content, which is often the case.)

Anywhere but in the middle of "how-to" instructions.

In short, if you're a liberal Calvinist, don't beat people over the head with tuna sandwiches when they paid to learn how teach their cows to play billiards!

(Name those cartoonists...)

....

Side note: Don't include obscure references like the one above, except for example or humor purposes. ;)

....

It's often a good idea to give the customer choices. You don't want to make them confusing, so you need to balance this carefully.

This is quite common online. You'll often see a package offered in Bronze, Silver and Gold options, with additional value at each level, but the same fundamental content at the root of each.

The various options let each person choose the parts that are most important to them. This generally increases sales and opens further options for future products. Let people acquaint themselves with your material's quality at their own pace.

Letting people become comfortable is a major addition to perceived (and actual) value.

Let's look at some specific examples of increasing the "Thud Factor" for different types of products.

One powerful way to do this with pure digital products is to offer multiple files. A lot of people misunderstand the concept and just give away bucketloads of ebooks, without concern for their relevance to the offer, or even their value to the reader.

An offer with a solid "Virtual Thud" will contain useful and original information combined with one or more of the following:

- 1. Relevant and (at least somewhat) exclusive software.**
- 2. Proprietary data.**
- 3. Bundled services that relate to the product.**
- 4. Expanded info on related techniques.**
- 5. Audio files to add depth to the process of learning.**
- 6. Video, for clarity in learning.**
- 7. Worksheets and checklists**
- 8. Phone or email consultation.**
- 9. Exclusive followup info or free subscriptions.**
- 10. Case studies. (Separate, for illustration purposes.)**
- 11. Sample text, scripts, ads, and anything else that will help the customer to better use the product.**
- 12. Free or dicounted updates.**
- 13. Spreadsheets.**
- 14. Easily imported "Bookmarks" or "Favorites" collections.**
- 15. Access to membership areas.**
- 16. Contact lists for vendors, potential partners, or other relevant companies or individuals.**
- 17. Separate package of reviews of related products.**
- 18. "Quick start" guide.**
- 19. Interactive tutorials or self-assessments.**
- 20. Hard copy material mailed separately.**

Note that every one of these are intended to add VALUE, not just bulk.

REMEMBER: The real goal is to get the customer from purchase to results as quickly as possible.

Re-read that. It's important.

Really. I'll wait.

....

When looking to increase the value of a hard copy product (both real and perceived), all of the above are useful. Some additional things to keep in mind are:

Separately mentioned print material should be under separate covers. Make sure your customers have no problem finding each piece individually.

As of this writing, cassettes are more popular than CDs for audio presentations. Bonus cassettes should be in separate packaging.

Stick to the main theme of the product.

For business-to-business or other "How-To" material, make the packaging appropriate to working documents, rather than being too slick. You want people to write in the margins.

Save the slick, "professional" look for lower cost consumer goods.

Yes, it **is** counter-intuitive. It also works.

....

For affiliates, one brilliant strategy (first used by Phil Wiley) is to offer your own bonuses to people who buy using your affiliate link and send you the receipt.

In this way, you add sales **and** add to your own customer list.

Leave it to Phil, eh?

....

So - Does this actually work?

How about an example or two?

#1: I was in Tampa for a brainstorming session that included some extremely sharp folks. One of them asked "How would you take this \$39 product and turn it into a package that's actually worth \$1500 in real value?"

In a half hour, using just these strategies, we did it.

He suggested that he'd probably sell the resulting product for around \$400.

The increased cost of delivery is about \$10. He'll get 10 times the price, and the customer will get 40 times the value.

Not a bad deal for anyone.

....

#2: I attended Jay Abraham's (<http://www.abraham.com>) "Advanced PEQ" conference. When I got the home study package (which sells for \$5000), I was surprised at the sheer size

of the box.

Included was the entire contents of the seminar in cassette, CD and video formats (along with the promised bonus materials.)

This may seem like just a way to "pump up the volume," but it's actually what most of Jay's clients wanted.

The program is designed to be used for anything from small companies to large organisations. Many of the attendees wanted ways to incorporate the material in their in-house training programs, and the different formats accommodated that need perfectly.

Rather than explain the information themselves, with the inevitable omissions and lack of clarity from second-hand instruction, they can use the multiple formats to make sure it's all clear and accurate.

That's adding value - perceived **and** real.

....

#3: Jimmy Brown (<http://www.listandtraffic.com>) has a much more straight-forward way of adding to the "THUD!" factor. He offers many of his products with reprint rights. This allows you to sell them and keep the resulting income.

It doesn't get a whole lot simpler than that folks.

Look over the checklist above. How many of those ways can you use in your business to add value to your product or service?

By the way, don't make the mistake of thinking this is just for digital information producers. ANY business can use these ideas to add profits, increase value for your customers, and increase your customer loyalty.

Take a few minutes right now and see how many of these ideas you can incorporate in your business within the next week.

I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

....

A final note on this: Making an ebook fit a mandatory size expectation is a Very Bad Idea. If you take 240 pages to teach me something that requires 240 pages to teach well, I'm going to be happy. If you take 240 pages to teach something that could have been done in 50 pages, I will probably never buy from you again.

Time savings can be one of the most powerful additions to perceived value.

Sometimes less really is more.

THE WORLD IS YOUR PLAYGROUND

Stress. Overload. Technophobia. Computer anxiety. Burn-out.

Any of those words ring a bell? Maybe a little too loudly?

While I used to go to seminars a lot, I had the good fortune to meet a lot of very cool people. One question that comes up every time I'm around a group like that seems to always come in two parts:

1. How do I learn this stuff, it's so technical, and...
2. I barely have time to keep up with what I already have on my plate.

For help with the "Dreadful Dailies," (those routine chores that so easily distract us and consume our days) see any decent book on time management. As for the rest, I have an answer. I'm sure there are others that would work just as well, but I'll bet they're not as much fun as mine.

My answer is always:

Build a playground!

Yes. I'm serious.

....

Create a virtual sandbox. Set up a site that's fun, for whatever definition of "fun" you personally subscribe to.

How will that help, you ask? Patience, young Skywalker. We're getting there.

An attendee at one of the seminars, a very pleasant woman named Patti, mentioned that she was having problems with some of this stuff. I asked some questions, and suggested that she build herself a new sandbox.

She was a little surprised at the suggestion, but when I explained what I meant she warmed up to the idea fast.

The rules for your personal sandbox are simple:

Rule #1: Have fun.

Rule #2: No cats.

Rule #3: There is no rule #3.

The process is only a little more complex. You figure out what you want your site to be about, and get a domain name that relates somehow, if only distantly. (If there's a bad pun involved, so much the better.)

Get an account at one of the "Five and Dimes," (\$5-\$10 a month web hosting services), and put your domain up.

Decide on a theme. This is your approach to the whole thing. Are you the curmudgeonly type? The class clown? The serious older sibling?

Flip it. Turn it around. Exaggerate it. Whatever role you think would be the most fun to play. Then write up the stuff you're going to put on the front page of the site. Note: I didn't say "your copy." That's already too serious. Keep it light.

Set up a form so people can sign up to get your comments on the subject. They might be recipes, satirical rants, suggestions for turning stress-busting into a hobby... whatever it is that you want to say.

And don't sweat it too much. If you change your mind later, you can go play on the swings.

If you want to keep it simple, start a free list for this through Yahoo or Google Groups. Tell 'em the address for subscribing, and get on to the fun part.

Come up with one - just one - outrageously fun thing to do that relates to your sandbox. Then do it. Live it up. Make it larger than life.

Now, write up a little story about it on your new site. Tell the story with all the funny details. Include pointers, and maybe mention what you're going to do next time to make it even more fun and more outrageous.

Or, if your sandbox doesn't fit with changing activities, talk about the subject with a humorous eye. Take darts, for example. (*But not in the eye. That's not humorous. Usually. "It's all fun and games until..."*)

I'll bet you can have a lot of fun telling stories about the local archery shop that also sells darts. (*"Yeah, but can you take it into a bar?"*)

Don't ask.

....

Play with the wording. Ask for stories from your visitors. Put them in your however-often-you-feel-like-it "newsletter." Watch people spread the word.

As you do this, and work on your "real" web business at the same time, you'll start to see how you can use some of those things you're learning about business in your sandbox, to make it more fun. And maybe to make back the \$5 or \$10 you spend on the thing each month.

If you do, that's great. You're making a profit. If you don't, so what. The great thing about a sandbox is that the worst case scenario is that you...

...spend \$10 a month and have fun.

How stressful is *that*, huh?

....

That's the key, after all. Above all things, keep it fun. If it stops being fun, you're doing something wrong. Whatever it is you're doing, don't do that!

Remember: *No cats in the sandbox.*

Do you think that, after having all this fun with your sandbox, your computer will stay a thing of dread? Do you think you just might learn something?

If you're having fun, do you think other people might catch on and want to tag along for the ride?

Do you think that might be a Good Thing?

It's a really rejuvenating experience. I highly recommend it. Especially if you're sitting there scowling at the idea. If that's you, you need this more than anyone!

Try it. You'll like it.

You'll find that you get a new perspective on Life, the Internet, and Everything.

....

If you're considering starting an online business as an extra stream of income, but don't have the time to go into it full-bore, or are afraid of the learning curve, this is an even better approach for you.

Give it a try. I think you'll find it's quite a lot of fun.

So long, and thanks for all the fish.

RAMP IT UP!

Scalability.

That's the magic word for a lot of business models. It's the measure of how easily and predictably you can increase the amount of a profitable activity you do, in order to grow your business beyond its current size.

It's a large part of what controls the upper limits of your income.

That's worth thinking about, yes?

....

There are businesses you can run online that cost very little aside from time, but they present one major limitation: You only have so much time.

For example, the Bum Marketing Method, which is based on article writing. There's a limit on how many articles you can write that are acceptable in quality and are properly keyword focused.

If you go with that model, you would need to figure out how to get a lot more from each viewing, in the early stages, to go beyond a very basic income.

You could improve your writing, learn to create and use more effective titles, get more clickthroughs from your resource box, find more ways to re-purpose your content, and drive your visitors to a subscription page in order to get whatever you're offering them.

Those things will all help to bring you more money for your efforts, but there is still a limit. It may be that you reach your goal before you hit that limit. If not, you have to find a way to scale it.

The only real option at that point is to pay someone to do articles for you, which raises the question of return on your investment. Do you make enough on each article to pay the writer and still turn a profit that's worth the effort?

It can be quite a juggling act to keep that ratio positive. Some contract writers will produce sloppy work, some might go missing on you, and there's always the issue of keeping the other numbers in line, as your competition studies their options and gets better at attracting your market.

Welcome to the world of online business.

It's really just like offline business... only faster.

Here's another example: You have a product of your own, and you've been driving traffic with articles, classified ads, and occasional joint venture deals with ezine publishers. You average \$1.50 per visitor, which could be good money if you can get enough of them.

What happens when you start finding it harder to arrange those deals, since there's only a limited number of publishers in your niche?

Try your hand at Google AdWords. Paid advertising, by the click.

Again, we're back to the math. You need to know your numbers.

In order to make a profit, you've got to make sure your visitor value (the amount you make for every visitor to the site) is higher than the amount you're paying Google for each visitor.

That means studying AdWords. Getting to know what kind of ad attracts buyers, as opposed to casual surfers. How to keep your cost per click as low as possible, while still keeping quality high. It's not rocket science, but it involves a lot of details.

Get it right, and it can be a goldmine. Get it wrong and you can burn through a lot of cash, fast.

Once you master it, you can just keep re-investing part of your profits back into expanding your campaigns.

That's "scaling it up."

....

Another way to scale your business is to arrange for other people to sell your products and pay them a fixed amount for every sale, and only for sales. That keeps the numbers pretty predictable, but how do you do it?

An affiliate program.

The requirements for a good affiliate product are simple: An in-demand product, a salesletter that converts well, and a high enough commission that your affiliates make a healthy profit.

It helps a lot to have proven banner ads, text ads and emails to give affiliates. This makes their job easier, and makes it more likely that they'll promote your products early and often.

Affiliates have to work with the same numbers that you do. They can do well on a percentage of the sale because they usually have more cost-efficient methods of getting targeted traffic than most merchants.

They also have lower management overhead, since you're handling all the product development and support.

If it can be made to fit your model, I strongly encourage you to consider an affiliate program

as one of the best ways to scale your business up in a dependable fashion.

I would also recommend that you study affiliate marketing techniques. It has been said that you are your own best affiliate, and you might be surprised at how effective and innovative some of their approaches are.

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The idea of this section is not to focus on any specific method for scaling, but to make sure that you're aware of the need for it if you plan to build a business that's more than just a job, with you as the boss you get to hate.

The first consideration in scaling, as it relates to profits, is the ability to generate continuously larger quantities of cost-effective traffic.

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The next consideration is your follow-up offering. This is referred to in marketing circles as the back end.

Having additional products to offer to your new customers is an almost guaranteed line to increasing your business in a big way - fast. You don't want to wait until you have a suite of products before you start promoting the first one, but you do want to develop at least one or two back end offers as quickly as possible.

You can offer them in a number of ways.

The first is an upsell. This is nothing more than asking, while they're ordering, if they'd like to add some related product to their order. You must, of course make sure it really is related, and that there's some reason for them to order now. A new customer discount is the most common reason for this.

You can also present it as a one time offer (OTO), which they see immediately after ordering. Again, if they're getting a special price, you need to make sure they are aware of that, along with the reason for the discount.

Of course, you can contact them later with related offers. Whether by email, phone or postal mail, you want to have this systematized. Automate it whenever possible.

Some of you may be uncomfortable with the idea of what you consider "pestering" your customers. That concern for their feelings is commendable.

The fact is, if your offers help them with whatever it is they want to get from your original product, and they're presented in a clear and honest way, you're doing them a favor.

At least, you should be. If the folks who take advantage of those offers don't feel like you helped them out by showing them more ways to get what they wanted, you need to adjust your product or your approach.

If you are careful to make sure that your products really do add significant value, your customers will remain happy, and will grow to trust you even more as they do more business with you.

There's the added benefit that, when you know you really are helping them out, your enthusiasm and conviction will show through in your presentation. You'll make more sales, more people will get more of what they want, and everyone will be better off than before.

We like that.

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The third step in this process is getting people to buy more expensive products.

This is a pretty straight forward thing. In most cases, your introductory product will be just that - introductory. This is especially true with information products, but it applies to a great many businesses.

For example, you might start with a low cost product that teaches the basics of a topic. Or, you might be selling a low-end dart set, that's in a price range that's appropriate for beginners.

Your more expensive product could be, in the first case, a more advanced product that includes software they can use to accomplish their goals more easily. In the second example, you might present a better, and more expensive, dart set, which would be useful to folks who've decided they enjoy the game and want to get better at it. Or it could be a case, with a dart tool, extra flights and tips, and other custom accessories.

If people are serious about a thing, whether professionally, personally or as entertainment, they are going to have an ongoing need for materials and products that relate to it.

This is especially true of things that involve the development of skills. People want, sometimes need, to get better at certain things. Each new level of skill is worth more to them. In the case of a business skill, achieving one level is what makes it possible for them to afford the next level.

They're going to get that information somewhere. They've already ordered from you and, assuming they're happy with what they got, they're more than likely going to prefer to keep ordering from you rather than someone they don't yet know or trust.

Give them what they want.

That last section will seem especially obvious to some folks. I include it simply because there are a great many people who want to get into business, but who are afraid to sell.

If you're one of those people, I suggest you do whatever you need to do to get over that.

Don't worry. You are not going to make someone buy something they don't want. And they're not going to hate you for giving them what they want.

I've mentioned testing at various points throughout this book. I will mention it again, and I'll keep mentioning it.

There is no faster or cheaper way to increase the size of your business than to get more of your visitors to buy.

Period.

You've already spent the money or effort on getting those folks to get them to the site. They've already invested their time, looking for whatever it is that they believe you can supply for them.

Ask yourself: When you're out shopping for something, don't you feel good when you finally find the thing you were looking for, and can get on to enjoying it? If that's true, don't you think your visitors will feel good about having found the answer (your product), buying it, and getting ready to use it?

Sure. So, increasing your conversion rate (the percentage of people who see your ad who actually end up buying) increases the number of happy customers.

On your end, consider: If your offer converts at 3% right now, and, through testing, is increased to 4.5%, you've just added MORE than 50% to your profits. (That's assuming you didn't test your price and end up increasing that, too.)

And testing is easy!

If you focus only on increasing traffic, you would have had to spend 50% more on advertising to get those extra sales. By concentrating on conversions as well, you get them at no additional expense. They're gravy.

Now, consider that there are usually multiple steps in each sales process. If you test each step, and increase it just a little bit, the improvements you make can add up fast.

This is the fastest and cheapest way to scale up your business, bar none.

Don't neglect it.

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If you already have a business going online, look at the various steps in your sales process. For each one, consider how easily it can be scaled, and what you can do to increase the flow at each point. If you find that it can't easily be scaled up, look for ways to change it so that it can.

If you don't yet have an online business yet, keep these things in mind while planning one.

And, in case it isn't obvious, you can apply these same ideas to your offline business.

Go. Grow.

THE LAST WORD

I don't know your goals or experience level, but I hope that this book has been useful to you. That it will help you in getting where you want to be more quickly, and with less of the hassles and obstacles that so often get in the way.

I chose to put the "Playground" chapter at the end to reinforce something that I believe is too commonly forgotten in today's world. The idea that business can be fun, and that we build our businesses to support our lives, and not the other way around.

Seeing real success, and having fun in the process, will help to protect you from one of the harder challenges you'll face in any attempt to improve your life: Negative people.

Throughout your online career, you're going to deal with a lot of people. Probably, hopefully, many more than you would believe at the beginning. Many of those people will work harder at keeping you from believing you can succeed than they do at accomplishing anything positive for themselves.

You get to choose who you listen to and who you associate with.

Choose wisely, and remember the words of Laurie Anderson, who was once asked, "How do you deal with all the negativity in the world?"

Her response: "You're hanging with the wrong people."

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I would love to hear your thoughts on the book. What helped, what didn't, and what you think would make it more useful to you and others.

I've set up a special email address just for those comments. You can send your praise or flames, criticisms and suggestions, and just general comments to me at:

ntk-feedback@talkbiz.com

If you found it especially useful and feel motivated to say thanks, you can do that, too. Buy me a beer, at <http://www.buy-paul-a-beer.com>

Good luck, enjoy the ride, and remember...

To live your life your own way is the best last word.

Paul Myers

<http://www.talkbiznews.com>