Search Engine Optimization Made Simple
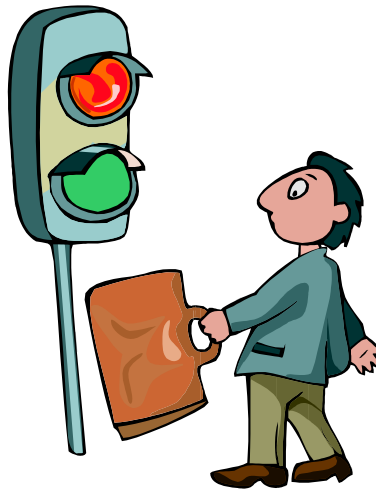
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We are not tax experts, or legal experts. We advise you to seek further assistance from a professional if you do not feel able to make decisions about difficult issues. We do not assume any risk for your success or failure.

We provide general guidelines to get a business off to an intelligent start, and to avoid some types of problems later on. You are solely responsible for verifying legal requirements for your business, and for timely application for necessary licenses and for payment of taxes.

No business is without risk. Even if you do it right, unforeseen circumstances may intervene with unpredictable results. Starting on firm footing though can help you to make those risks as few and as small as possible. We make every reasonable attempt to help you understand the necessary elements for building that foundation.

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Introduction

Search engine optimization is a confusing thing. The experts contradict themselves, and every one of them seems bent on making it so complex that you'll give up in frustration. Not only that, but the experts are all talking about optimizing large corporate sites, and what works for them is not cost effective for a small site!

There are strategies which are simple to implement, and make a huge difference. There are small things which don't make much of a difference, but which make sense to do because they are so simple to do. There are other things which take moderate time, and still return a reasonable result, but which may or may not be necessary for your site. And lastly, there are costly or time consuming strategies which make very little difference. And you need to know which is which, so you can use your time and resources on the things that matter for YOU. **You need to know which things you can do quickly that will really help, so you can do what makes the most difference first, and then slowly work on the rest later.**

The things that make sense for huge corporate sites won't make sense for a small startup, or even a well established small site. Your cost/benefit scale is different than theirs. You only have two choices – be the jack of all trades and learn enough to do the important things yourself, or hire someone to do it for you on the little you can afford. And hiring involves risks if you don't know what they are doing, or where the billing will stop!

So this guide is aimed at helping owners of small sites know just what actually needs to be done, and what WILL help. **It also is written to help you understand why things matter that do, and what the trade offs are for the various strategies.** I'll cover the six things you SHOULD absolutely do, and then some optional things. Then I'll cover the stuff that I don't think is worth the bother, and explain why.

The purpose of the book is not to confuse you so much that you give up and think you'll never get it. It is not to give you just enough information to make you feel like you have to hire someone. I am not doing this to sell you my services, but rather to give you all the information you need to do the things I suggest. If I fail to do that, you have an open invitation to email me (techie@adventuretech.us) and inform me of that, and I'll reply with a personal explanation – and I'll improve the book!

What is SEO?

SEO is an abbreviation for Search Engine Optimization. And it is big business.

What it refers to is a series of strategies, some proven, some not, which aim to make your website more visible to the search engines, help the search engine index it more accurately, and therefore give you a higher placement in the search listings (closer to page 1). The higher your rank, the more people are likely to click on your site.

The whole thing revolves around two factors:

Competition – The web is fiercely competitive. When you search any give term, you may come up with millions of hits, displayed on hundreds of thousands of pages. What good does it do if your page ends up on page 862, if people are not going to look past the first three pages of hits, or 10 if they are really digging deep?

Search Engine Technology – Search engines have their own rules. Some of those rules keep changing, but a few are pretty logically set and won't change. In order to optimize, you have to understand how the search engine sees and rates your page, and then help it to see your content more accurately.

Search engines see text. They do not see pretty pictures, and they mostly ignore colors (except in a few instances). No matter how gorgeous your site looks, it won't mean a thing to your ranking unless you have elements that the search engines can see and interpret correctly.

You'll hear the term "Keyword" tossed around a lot. A keyword is nothing more than a word that a person is likely to use to search for a particular topic. If you sell wide shoes, they may search "wide shoes", "e width shoes", "hard to find shoe sizes", etc. Those are all keywords, which may in fact be phrases, not just words. Some people get really anal about keywords, as though the whole search engine world revolves around getting just the right ones. I have a more casual attitude, so if you are thinking it has to be hard, relax.

The other term you need to know is "pagerank", because that is used in search engine optimization circles too. It merely means a number that the search engine gives you to determine how important your site is when weighed against others that seem to have information that is just as relevant as yours. When there are thousands of sites that seem to have relevant matching material for a search, the ones with higher pagerank get listed first.

Pagerank is determined by the search engine's evaluation of your site's popularity. It measures that popularity by how many sites out there have links to your site. The more sites you have linking back to you, the more popular they think your site is, so the higher they rank your page. Of course, in actual operations it is not that simple, but that is the theory anyway.

Search Engine Optimization involves two types of strategies:

Internal strategies which focus on improving the code and content of your pages so that the search engine can "see" them better and more accurately tell what the site is about.

External strategies which involve getting links back to your site to improve page ranking.

Each of these has some rules, and some strategies that you can use. Each of them has some strategies which you absolutely should NEVER use as well. And if you get nothing else from this book, PLEASE pay attention to the things you should not do, because they will not just waste your time, they can actually hurt your site's ability to get traffic.

Now we get down to details...

Registering a Site

A lot of emphasis is placed on registering a website with the search engines. Companies that offer automatic registration make it sound as though this is the be all and end all of getting traffic to your site.

So I suppose you'd be surprised to hear me say that registering a site with the search engines is NOT the most important thing you can do to get website traffic! But its true.

If you register a site, but do not link it into any other quality sites, your traffic will stop at about 200 hits a month, and just get stuck there.

If you link your site into other sites, EVEN IF YOU DON'T REGISTER IT, you'll get traffic that will gradually grow over time, way past what it would with search engine registration. Of course it won't happen as fast as it would if you also register it, but it does happen. The reason for this is found in the way in which search engines index sites, which I'll explain a little further down.

The best strategy, of course, is to do both, which gets you the most permanent traffic in the fastest way. I only point out this rule so that you understand that while registering with the search engines is a step you don't really want to leave out, it is NOT the most important one, and **it is not a solution in itself.**

Registering a site with the search engines consists of two sets of tasks:

1. **You can autosubmit to certain search engines and directories.** You can choose any system or program to do that, there is not a lot of difference between them, because there are big search engines which they all submit to, then tons of tiny ones which don't make a huge difference whether you submit to them or not. All of them submit to the big ones, the differences lie in how many, and which, of the ones that don't matter.
2. **You MUST submit your site to specific search engines manually.** They simply do not allow auto-submissions. So systems that promise superior performance through auto-submitting simply cannot deliver on their promise. To do the job right, you HAVE to manually submit to certain search engines and directories.

I use SelfPromotion.com as my first line tool for submitting. The next one I'd recommend would be Submit-It, but if you are going to use that, just go to MSN B-Central and get the one year listing for your website instead, which includes a Submit-It subscription also. Submit-It is nice for startups because it does offer some optimization tools.

If you do not get anything else done, you'll want to register with "the Big Three". That is, Google, Yahoo, and MSN. Google allows auto-submissions, but you currently have to manually submit to Yahoo and MSN. And all three of those will send you significant traffic over time if you get them done, so don't miss out on one.

It pays to take the time to work your way through the submission process at SelfPromotion.com, because some of the small sites will index you faster. Others will pick you up later from other search engines.

There is controversy over whether to submit regularly or not, and whether to submit multiple pages. Here is my own personal rule about how often to submit, how much to submit, and why.

I submit my sites to the search engines no more than once a year. Some of them not even that often after the initial submission. This is because if you change your content regularly, then the major search engines will re-index you anyway.

The only sites that need to be resubmitted are those that almost never change, and even then they do not need to be submitted more than once every six months or so. You see, the only reason to resubmit is to get the search engines to update changes. And if you have no changes, then resubmitting does not help.

If you have a neglected site that you make major changes to, then resubmitting can help, especially if you intend to go on making regular changes.

As far as submitting individual pages, I feel this is also generally a waste of time. However, if you have a site that needs to get rapid traffic to specific interior pages, then submitting just those pages can help. Usually though, over time, the search engines will spider deeper and deeper into your site and index those pages anyway. This happens most often within 3-6 months. And since your home page is indexed anyway, if you don't have special features that need traffic in their own right, then submitting individual pages usually is not necessary. I just feel that there are more effective uses of my time that will get more results than this.

If this is your first website, you might want to submit more than one page to the search engines. If you are building multiple sites and are interested in getting things done fast, then you can just register each new domain with the search engines, and then go on to building another while you let the search engines do their job. Takes more time to gain momentum, but pays off very well when it does.

If you have stats tracking on your web host, you can watch the progress of the indexing process. You'll see the big search engines spider one to five pages, then ten to twenty, then the whole site, over a few months.

Be aware that it takes anywhere from 24 hours to 8 months for your site to be included fully in the search engine listings that you submit to. Some will spider your site and include it right away. Others will spider the site and then review it by a real person. Some will require that you submit it and then they will choose the category when they get around to it. Google seems to index you, then bury your site at the bottom for six to eight months. So it still may take considerable time to get results after registering it.

Registering your site is not the be all and end all of internet marketing. It is really just the first step. It is the one that you make when your site is ready to be viewed, with content on each page, and for many sites, it is sort of the equivalent of a "grand opening", though there is no party, and no immediate response.

The Three SEO "Hats"

The SEO catch phrase for how safe various tactics are is defined by classing them as Black Hat or White Hat. Since some tactics are desputed or on the edge, they are classed as Gray Hat. I'll give you some idea of what those terms mean.

White Hat

These tactics are considered totally safe. Many of them are directly recommended by the search engine companies themselves. They are based on sound website building strategies, and not on the changeable features of any given search engine. Such tactics will include:

- Solid, regularly updated content.
- Accurate metatags.
- "Friendly" page design.
- Honest linking strategies.

These all take time, and are worth doing, one at a time.

Black Hat

These are the tactics that are forbidden or deeply frowned on by search engine companies. They are all bad enough that they can get your site banned if you are found to be doing any of them. The philosophy behind them is that you can manipulate the search engine computers to give you traffic you do not really deserve (in their definition of deserving it), or that you can trick the search engine into rating your site to get traffic that is not related to your actual content.

Black Hat tactics are used all the time by people who sell illegal or immoral content, which is one reason that search engines have come down so hard on them. This is an excellent reason to steer clear of them, because your reputation WILL be harmed if you group yourself with such unethical people.

They include such tactics as:

- Buying links in huge numbers for fast inbound links.
- Invisible text on your pages.
- Metatags or page titles that have nothing to do with your content.
- Building a ton of "doorway" pages that all lead back to your site.
- Invisible links that cross link a bunch of sites together to make them all seem like they have more links than they do.

And more. Don't touch any of these! It is not worth having it all go up into nothing when your site gets banned. We will give you clear warning as we go through, so you will know how to avoid them.

Gray Hat

Gray Hat strategies are somewhere in the middle. They may be highly controversial, and they may be only classed this way by one expert, not by another. There are no clear guidelines about gray hat strategies, because there is no clear information about whether they do or do not hurt you or help you. You must study the sources, and decide which side you think is telling the truth. They might include:

- Owning a large number of sites and cross linking them on every page.
- Purchasing links on every page of a smaller site (under 100 pages).
- Getting links on a site that is a high quality site, but not relevant to your business topic.
- Some people consider any purchased links to be in this category.

There are a lot of these, and you'll find that usually they are hotly debated. Or they are a watered down version

of a Black Hat strategy which is diluted enough so that it falls below the trigger point of the search engine police. BUT, the problem is that search engine algorithms (the code that helps the search engine interpret what is legit and what is not), are not completely known or predictable, and they are being updated all the time, so something may come back to bite you if you make the wrong assumption.

The only real answer is, research more than one source, and then make a choice based on how much risk you are willing to assume.

It is important that you understand the difference in function between Black Hat and White Hat strategies especially, and that you know which things are classed unmistakably as No-Nos by the search engines. In between, there is some gray area, but on each end, the distinction is very clear.

Banning – What it is and How you Get It

Search Engine Banning is something that any honest business owner will not flirt with, AT ALL. Because once your site is banned, you don't get any traffic from the search engine that banned you.

Your site can get banned for using what the search engines consider to be unethical optimization OR marketing practices. Most of them have to do with linking, and keywords. Those things will always be clearly defined in this book so you'll be warned about them in context. For now, we are just focusing on the what and why.

If you take chances, and use unethical tactics, then eventually during the spidering of your site, and the updating, your site will be flagged as having suspicious factors. More than a certain level of alert features, and it gets dumped from the index, and listed as one that cannot be indexed again. It may only happen with one search engine, or your site may have factors which get it banned from more than one.

Once that happens, your ability to get traffic through free avenues is virtually gone. There are very few places left which will send you free traffic. You won't be able to advertise through many paid venues either, because of the ripple effect that having your site banned causes.

When you advertise on someone else's site, most will check to see if your site has been banned. Most will at least check with Google. If it has, then they will not allow you to advertise on their site, because you will then present a threat to their ranking if they do.

It is like having the front door to the web world slammed in your face. Your site, and your domain, are now virtually worthless. You cannot earn from them without serious effort, and you cannot sell them, because no one will buy a site that has been banned.

If your site is banned, and you feel it was a correctable mistake, your only option is to rewrite the site contents so they are clean of violations, rewrite the text so it is different enough to not show up as the same site, change the filenames and link names, and then upload it into a new domain and try again. In order for it to work, all of the problems must be corrected, and you must change enough electronically visible features to make it appear to be a new site.

Many sites that end up banned don't get banned immediately. They will in fact rocket for a few months (usually not more than about 3 or 4), and then suddenly bomb because it caught up with them. It simply is not worth the risk, because there is very little chance that you can actually make enough in that short a time to compensate for the work and money that it takes to get a site going. In order to see a real return on your investment, you'll have to be smart about playing it safe, so your site is ranked and out there for years.

You don't have to worry too much about walking on eggshells for fear that your site will be banned for something you did not know about, as long as you follow this one rule:

Don't do anything that promises a quick result.

That's it! Tactics that promise quick results are aimed at tricking the search engines. Well, sometimes you also run into legitimate strategies that someone is selling a book about, and they will promise you they have the secret to an instant flood of traffic, but since you don't want to buy something from someone who is being dishonest in their marketing stuff, the rule is still a good guideline!

Wear the white hat, don't let it get very smudged, and your site will have a fighting chance. And that is the best anyone can promise you!

The Six Most Important Optimization Strategies

With all the Search Engine Optimization hype out there, and all the conflicting information, some simplification is needed! **It boils down to a simple rule:**

If you can afford to pay for it, you don't need to be reading this. If you need to be reading this, you can do all of the most important things yourself.

The six things here are the ones that make the most difference for the least amount of effort.

1. Create a site with good text content. This is the NUMBER ONE search engine strategy. **Without good text, no matter what else you do, your site will fail. If you have to pay for something, pay for help with this.** Search engines see text. They do not see images. If you create a site with a huge graphic on the home page, no meta tags, and no text, and just an image that says "click here", the search engine will have no way of knowing what your page is about! **An image with text on it is NOT text.** The search engine can only read text that was typed in directly on the page (or pasted in, etc). So make sure you have text on the page that tells what the page is there for.

What NOT to do: Do not use "hidden text". Make the text part of the page, or the search engine will be able to tell that it is hidden, and you can be penalized for that.

2. Use keywords in your text. Keywords are words that people think of to look for your site. If your site has a topic that people may refer to with several different sets of terms, then you need to use each one on the page in some way. A well written page will naturally use common terms anyway, so don't obsess about it. Just explain well, and it will be good enough!

What NOT to do: Do not pack the page with keywords! Do not misuse them in an unnatural way. Do not use words that have nothing to do with your site either. Either tactic can hurt you with the search engines, and drive off customers. Just write well, and you won't have to worry about it much!

3. Use Alt Tags for images. Look this up in a book on HTML, or look up in your HTML editor program, since there is usually a simple way to put in an alt tag. **An Alt tag is a specially coded bit of text that tells the browser to show that text if the image is not displayed.** Alt tags can also help people with visual impairment to navigate a site better. A good alt tag will provide a concise description of the image, or the text on the image. Alt tags are also not a miracle fix, they are simply an easy thing to do to fine tune your site.

What NOT to do: Do not use Alt tags that are too long. Do not use Alt tags that are misleading either, and do not pack them with keyword lists.

4. Put in Meta Tags. Meta Tags are bits of code that are seen by the search engine and browser, but not by the site viewer. They can do a lot of things, but the two that we are concerned about are the Description and Keywords tags. A good site description will be informative, but not too long. It will describe key features using keywords. The keyword tag will contain words that tell the search engine what your site is about. Use good variety in your keywords.

A search engine looks for text in your site. It also looks at metatags. If there are no metatags, it uses part of the text in your site for the description - this can have unpredictable results! But even if you DO have metatags, some search engines quote parts of the text. And search engines will not pay much attention to keywords if they do not correlate with the site content. Don't worry about hiring a pro to analyze them, it won't be worth it if you have good content.

Most HTML programs have a simple way to insert Description and Keywords - sometimes under Document or Page Properties, sometimes under its own heading of Meta Tags. Put a comma between each keyword.

What NOT to do: Do not use keywords that are not appropriate for your site. Keep your description to the point and do not be misleading with it. Do not use a metatag generator that creates 10 different kinds of metatags - some of those will introduce errors into your site. Just worry about the Description and Keywords.

5. Use a title. This is also code behind the scenes that does not show in the page - it is the page title that shows in the top of the window of the browser. A shortcut for a site is to use a general title for the whole site., but a page title that reflects the actual page contents can be helpful. At the very least, you want one that names your site or business. Keep them short and to the point though. Use some keywords in the title, but keep them

relevant and concise. Use a title that describes your business and that uses one good keyword or keyphrase. If you have to choose between your business name and a meaningful description, choose the description.

What NOT to do: Do not leave the title as "untitled". That helps no one. And do not name the page inaccurately, or use a title that is more than a few words or a short phrase. A title that is too long or too crammed with keywords can get your site penalized, and there isn't room to show it all anyway.

6. Get inbound links. Inbound links are links on other people's sites that lead back to your site. Many search engines now keep track of how many other people think your site is worth linking to, and they consider that in how they rank your site. So exchange links, post to directories, and ask everyone you know to put a link on their site for you. Read more about linking in the later chapters in this book.

What NOT to do: Do not create seven other sites and link your site in to them in the hopes of fooling the search engines into thinking your site is big. It won't work, because the age of the site also matters. Linking it into an existing sites helps, but that won't propel it to instant fame either. Do not buy "instant links", where someone promises to put your links on X number of sites overnight, those types of services do not work and will get you banned from the search engines. Be careful what kind of traffic exchanges you participate in, some do not help rank or sales either one - who cares if you get tons of traffic if it does not help you sell anything? And watch out for popups... if your site has to have popups to get traffic, or your site appears on popups, you'll annoy your guests. When I talk about inbound links, that kind of traffic "generator" is not what I mean. I mean permanent links on other people's reputable sites. Stay away from Free Classifieds, or Free For All link sites, they get you lots of spam and no marketing advantage, but they CAN hurt your site. Each inbound link is a drop in a bucket. You need to aggressively pursue legitimate links, and not get sidetracked by hype.

The tactics above are solid, and proven. They aren't going to change any time soon, and they are not based on tricks which will only hurt your site or cause you to have to re-write your site coding if the rules change.

A Few More Strategies

This chapter is not for beginners. The things here are a little more technical, and some involve coding strategies, so unless you understand how to find your way around in HTML code, you are not going to be able to do these as well.

These things are also less important, and will make less of a difference to your site success, so they should not really be done unless you have already done the the first 6 tasks. If you have, and want to nudge your site more, then these strategies can help a bit. If you cannot do them, or do not have the time, don't fret about it. They are a nudge, not a leap, in effect.

If you have the opportunity to do so, then you can use Optimized Links to help your pagerank (see the chapter on that topic for more details).

Search engines do not like Javascript or Flash, so avoid those unless you have a major reason for using them. Yes, many large sites do use them, but they have an advertising budget to compensate for it. **If you are relying heavily on free search engine traffic, then you cannot afford to obstruct their view of what your site is about, and those things can do that.** Short JavaScript like Google code is not a problem. But JavaScript menus limit your ability to use keywords in links, and too much of it and the search engine won't even fully index your page.

If you have a php website, make sure the pages can actually get indexed by the search engines. Certain types of php sites don't index well. To find out if yours is one, just do a search on some keywords that you have used on a page that are fairly unique. I used part of an article title which had unique word usage to search for a page on my Content Cupboard site, and it popped up #1, so I know the site was indexing properly.

A domain name with one keyword or keyphrase in it can help a tiny bit, but don't get in a knot if yours doesn't have one, because Wal-Mart ranks for toasters even though their domain is www.walmart.com. If your domain is not directly connected to your product or information offerings, then don't worry about it. Next time you build a site, you can think about it. There is a "to dash or not to dash" argument out there. Some people say that search engines pay more attention to names with dashes, some people say they pay more attention to sites without. **I, personally, do NOT use dashes, for two reasons:**

1. They are so often used by people who are trying to manipulate pagerank that they give your site a less professional, more scammy look.
2. People remember URL names better if there is no dash. It is sort of an internet tradition to use domain names without dashes, and that is what people default to. Make it easy on them by choosing a simple domain name.

Keep your domain name short. Many places won't allow you to use one more than 30 characters long. Too long looks scammy. And finally, people don't remember them. Two words is best, three at most unless it is a well known, SHORT, phrase.

If you **use keywords in your page links,** this supposedly helps, because it is a repetition on your page of those most important words. It also helps tie your site together as a site, and gives your pages more relevance to each other. Short link descriptions are best.

You can also **use keywords in your filenames**, that reputedly helps - most people do that anyway because you choose a filename that is logical, and a keyword usually pops to mind. This is similar to the domain name thing, just a word or two, nothing too long. Some auto-site builders generate page names from an entire article title, so you get "opposing-google-adwords-why-pay-per-click-may-not-be-a-wise-choice-for-shoestring-startups.htm". Not only is this absurd, but it smacks of search engine manipulation and may eventually have a backlash. Plus, some programs (zip programs, file management programs) may have a problem with excessively long filenames. 20-30 characters is generally a safe limit. **Search engines WON'T pay THAT much attention to the filename, since so many dynamically generate websites assign random names to the files anyway.**

If you use H1 tags around your text titles, and bold important phrases that have keywords in them on

your pages, that reputedly helps because you just indicated to the search engine that those words were more important. This is just another way of saying, "Hey, this is what is most important on my site."

Don't get obsessive about it, and don't go overboard into the gray hat area. Just keep things simple and honest.

Mostly, do what is logical. **Don't ever try to trick the search engines into getting visitors that are not actually looking for what you have.** And last, do what you can do easily, and don't worry too much about the rest. Search Engine Optimization is usually more about nudging your traffic, and not really about skyrocketing your numbers.

<h1 style="text-align:center">*The "Keyword Lists" Hype*</h1>

So right away, just because I called it "hype", you know I am not going to be telling you that keywords are the most important thing. But you are only partly right.

Keywords aren't the beginning and end of SEO. But they ARE what search engines pick up on. You have to include them in certain places, and you have to insure that you include logical ones that are targeted to what you have to offer.

Now, what I have a problem with is that some internet marketing "gurus" are telling you to not even build a site before you check the keywords and see if they have high competition or not. **They operate on a couple of assumptions, some of which are misleading, some of which are downright wrong.** This gets pretty complex, and I may talk myself into circles, so please bear with me here as I try to explain what IS and what is NOT important about keywords.

For the small business owner who is just starting out, it is critical that you begin with what you KNOW. Your options for creating products or information MUST be limited by that, until you learn more. Do not EVER try to produce a quality site based on something you are not proficient in. It will be unsuccessful.

So, right off, your options are limited. They are further limited if you happen to be good at a business focus that is in an overcrowded niche anyway. **One reason some niches are overcrowded is because there is NO simple way to describe them** other than the same words everyone else is using, even if they are all offering different facets.

Work at Home is a good one. Sure, there are Work at Home Moms, Work at Home Dads, Home Businesses, Small Office/Home Office Resources, Home Business Opportunities, Home Business Reviews, etc. But they all boil down to the same thing. If I ask them to describe it in two words, they are all going to say, "home business". That is the large category that all of them occupy, and there is NO getting around using it.

Sure, you can create pages that target different facets, but your home page is still going to be about the broader category. **And if that is what it is, then that is what it IS.** You cannot suddenly decide that it is going to be for people who own a home business and don't have kids but do have dogs. You can create a page about that, but not a whole site.

What IM experts tell you is that you have to get a keyword tool and generate a list (and they imply that the bigger the list, the better – some of them though are trying to sell you a keyword generation tool, so don't buy that premise!). You plug in your broad keywords, and the generator will spew out a list of variations that people are looking for, usually in order of popularity. The keyword tool is supposed to let you know which keywords are high demand but low competition, and which are high demand but high competition, etc, so you can target your site to hit one that nobody else does (or that very few others do).

Most IM experts also tell you that you need to research how much people are paying for PPC advertising for specific keywords. This is their method of indicating competition on the business end of things. This may or may not be an accurate representation of the competition, because of some of the factors listed above, which apply to keyword bids as well as to search terms. **(And it is not at ALL an indication of what you can earn if you build an AdSense site targeted at the high paying ones!)**

Now, I am not saying that a keyword generator cannot be useful in knowing what pages to add to your site, but there are some problems with the assumption that a keyword tool is your answer to conquering the net overnight!

1. **As you are searching, there are others in the world who are also searching.** And guaranteed, someone else is finding EXACTLY the same information you are. If you are a startup, you can be certain that someone else has more resources than you do to slap a site up on that topic. Many people are paying big dollars for that kind of information and service, and you simply cannot compete with that!
2. **Popularity changes rapidly.** People are fickle, and auctions are volatile (keyword popularity determined by keyword bid prices will always be highly erratic). You may be able to spot temporary

trends, but you won't be able to specifically identify what is best or worst. And for a newbie, by the time you get a site built, the entire dynamics may have changed.

3. **It is not the only thing that affects success.** There are many other elements which must be considered, and which may, in fact, have a more powerful influence on future traffic to your site than the keywords you choose to optimize your site around.

So, use a keyword tool if you feel it can help you, but do not make all your choices based on keyword research. It is merely a factor, and not the determining one for a startup especially!

Here is how I choose a good topic for a new site:

1. **My interests.** I have many, so I have a wide range of things to choose from.
2. **Recent events in my life.** Many times, something in my life will require me to research a topic and become knowledgeable in it. I'll bookmark sites, and learn what I can. If I have to go digging REALLY deep, and then still end up having to learn the hard way, then I just KNOW there is a niche there which I can supply valid content for! Because I make the assumption that I am not the only person who may need that. Often these are VERY tight niches.
3. **Sometimes, a whim!** If the idea sounds practical, I run with it. In fact, some of my best sites have been built on a whim, and I did not really expect them to do well. The reality has been pleasantly surprising!
4. **When I see a lot of misinformation, and not a lot of correction of it,** I put up a site to debunk the myths. This is risky, some people would rather perpetuate the myth for profit, so it makes enemies.

I feel you can usually get a very good idea of what is needed just by observing. There are a couple of factors that you must be aware of, and some rules that will really help you if you understand them:

1. **Never build a site on something you know nothing about.** Do not hire someone to write articles for you and build a site around that! You won't even know if they gave you quality articles if you are clueless about the topic! This is a sure recipe for disaster.
2. **Don't build a "work at home directory" site, PLEASE!!!,** unless you can make it SUBSTANTIALLY different than the other 300,000 work at home directories out there. Some people assume that they can build a site, and offer advertising on it for other people who are building more substantial businesses than they are, and make their fortune off the advertising needs of others. It doesn't work. Short term or long term. For one, there are other, BIGGER directories out there doing a better job than you can, and for another, advertising on them is largely ineffective anyway, so people do not resubscribe at a very high rate. The point of this is NOT to indict WAH Directories. Just to point out that if you are going to enter a saturated market, do it DIFFERENT!
3. **The best thing is to find a new twist on an old theme.** I did not just put up a Diabetes site, I put up a site for Natural Diabetes Control. There were other sites that SAID that, but most were selling supplements. Mine is pure information, and it has information all gathered together which is not found in one place already online. And it is taking off faster than any site I have ever built up to this one.
4. **Let keyword analysis be a nudge, not a dictator.** It cannot accurately predict your success or failure.
5. If you MUST enter a saturated market, be prepared to put in more time marketing. It is not impossible to break in and do really well, but it is going to be a bit harder to get noticed. My SuperMom site took two years to get the traffic that most sites get within 6 months, but once it got to that point, it has steadily grown, because it is truly different than the competition.
6. **All the keyword research and targeting in the world won't make up for a bad site, or an unoriginal one.** Take this as gospel. The back button is always accessible to a site visitor, and they know how to use it.
7. **If you notice that in order to get information on a specific topic, you have to dig really deep, and that it is next to impossible to find it – you have to search a LOT of places to gather bits and pieces and inferences instead of being able to go read up on it in one or two sites, then you can pretty well be SURE you have a potential niche.** This has proven true with many of my websites. They may not get a huge flood of traffic, but what they do get is a steady traffic flow that keeps coming because the information is truly needed, if only by hundreds of people per month instead of thousands. I know that these people are desperate for the information, and that they will be there to grab every bit I can provide. Such sites have grown steadily and so has their income.

In general, accurate observation and creativity will get you just as far as Keyword Research. And without the observation, and creativity, your keyword research will be useless anyway.

So don't buy the hype. **If you start out your sites without searching on keyword popularity, don't feel like you missed the boat.** If the other criteria for the site outweigh the keyword results, go forward with confidence. If you feel like you just want it to be simpler at first, so you can focus on learning how to build the beastly thing and get it up there, then do it. **If you think that you have learned one level of things, and that learning more about keyword popularity is the next step, then go for it.**

Keywords are another tool, not a requirement. And that is my own personal opinion, backed up by some success and experience. **And you aren't likely to hear it like this anywhere else, so make up your own mind about whether it is trustworthy!**

Is There a Sandbox, and What is it?

The Sandbox is something that is usually only mentioned in reference to Google. And the reason that Google is such a powerful dictator of search engine optimization rules is because for many sites, more than 50% of their traffic comes from Google alone, very often much more.

The Sandbox is also a point of controversy with SEO experts. Some use an example of a nonsense phrase that was built into a series of new websites, and indexed almost immediately by Google to prove that there is no Sandbox effect. But this example is really meaningless, because if you built a site using an otherwise unused term, and then search on that term, of COURSE your site will come out on top, because there is no competition! The Sandbox is not a place where a new site gets put until it proves itself, it is merely that Google ranks your site at the bottom until there is a compelling reason to move it up in the ranks – this includes inbound links, relevancy, age of the site, etc.

Google guards their indexing protocols pretty tightly, but one thing they seem very concerned with, is indexing sites based on popularity as well as actual content. This means they had to come up with a means of measuring that.

So when you register a new site, they are very reluctant to give you traffic until your site has proven itself, and has some incoming links. **They want to insure that you are not building new sites to manipulate them, so they reputedly bury your site until it has proven itself by their rules. All this means is that your site goes to the bottom of the heap. It does not mean your site is not indexed at all.**

I say, "reputedly" because some people say there is no delay, that you can get indexed right away with Google if you know how. But every brand new site that I have built for a new client has in fact experienced a delay of 6-8 months before Google really started giving them significant traffic. Interestingly, Google actually helps perpetuate the myth in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, by calling their Keyword Research Tool the "Sandbox Tool".

This delay is what is referred to as the Sandbox. As though you get lost in it and have to sort of sift to the top again. **It may also be called "aging delay".**

So it is not unusual for a brand new site to register with Google, get a few immediate hits, and then dive into obscurity for half a year before it resurfaces. This is fairly typical behavior for Google traffic. **It often happens something like this on your tracking stats:**

Month 1 – 1 or 2, or no hits.
Month 2 – Google spiders your index page.
Month 3 – Google spiders about 5 pages of your site.
Month 4 – Google spiders about 20 or so pages of your site.
Month 5 – Google spiders your entire site, and gives you maybe 5 hits.
Month 6 – Google spiders the whole site, and gives you perhaps 50 hits.
Month 7 – Google won't spider unless there have been regular changes, but gives you 1-200 hits.
If you are cross linking, it will grow from there, if not, then it will plateau.

So what do you do about it? As a newbie, there are very limited strategies you can use if you do not want to pay for hits, but here is the other side of it:

MSN and Yahoo give hits right away. They also pay attention to the age of the site, but they are more willing to let a new guy break in.

If you link all of the pages of your site to your home page, or to a sitemap type page that is linked into your homepage, it can reputedly shorten the time it takes for the site to fully index. An XML sitemap created specifically for Google can speed up some aspects of indexing, but WON'T do a lot to overcome the aging delay while they wait to see if your site is a keeper or not.

If you are patient, and understand what is normal, you can use that time productively doing things other than

worrying. It may be a good time to start on another site, and you'll see why in a minute.

Now, if you are not a newbie, there are some advantages which can help you get around the "sandbox".

If you have one site indexed, then you can get another "grandfathered" in. I have done this, and there are three tactics.

First, start linking your new site into your old site(s). This will get them picked up as being legit when you register them. It won't speed things up much, but it WILL speed things up a little.

Second, this is something I cannot prove, but I have build a large number of new sites which were put into my webspace as "addon domains". A few companies let you put more than one domain into a single hosting account. The second domains are set up as "subdomains", which still retain the features of an independent domain also. Since the subdomain is set up in a folder in your server space, the search engines index those when they spider your site. They just dig into the new folder too, and get redirected to the new domain – Google especially does this because they will search nearly any unprotected folder on your server. The new pages get indexed right away. I am getting solid traffic on 6 new sites using this strategy.

The third thing you can do, if you don't have hosting that accepts multiple domains, is to set up your new site as a sub-folder on your old site. Wait about 4 months, for it to get fully indexed, and then move it into its own hosting space, under its own domain, with a redirect from the old server to the new. The new domain will get grandfathered in that way too.

Another thing that I cannot prove is that having Google AdSense on your site may help you get indexed better. My sites were getting minimal traffic at one point (I was not actively marketing anything at the time), but within 3 months of installing Google, the traffic had increased by a factor of 10.

All of my new sites are built with Googles in the template. I cannot tell whether that is affecting anything with them or not, because there are multiple factors which could be responsible for them getting indexed so fast. **Beware though, if you build a site with Googles in the template, you MUST make sure the pages are complete before you upload it, and that you do not have the ads on any pages that Google forbids them being on.**

What I can prove though, is that sites that happen to target an unmet need online will get traffic sooner. You cannot fully find this out through keyword research, because keyword research only shows you what you think to look for. I land on these by building sites around topics I cannot find enough information on myself. I research the topic, then produce a site unlike anything else online, and they do very well, right away.

I feel that the sandbox is a factor with new businesses which are trying to break in with an initial web presence, and for them, it will be harder. Persistence will pay off though, and when it does, you'll have a chance to build new sites and springboard them off the old one.

PageRank Explained

Every search engine has some way of ranking your site in the listings, whether it is by relevancy, by popularity, or something else. There are rules, computers don't know how to do things without rules, and search engines are nothing more than computer programming. A couple of the biggies though, put a lot of thought into how to exactly prioritize your site in the listings. Two of them get a lot of attention for published rankings, but the other biggies also have a pagerank system, even though it is not talked about.

The two that get the attention are Alexa, who gives you a number based on which listing number your site falls at (the larger the number, the worse off you are), and Google, who ranks your site based on their own private algorithm. **For most search engine experts, the one that matters, is Google.** And when someone cites their pagerank to you, it is Google they are going to be citing.

MSN and Yahoo do use some of the same criteria for determining search listing position that Google does, but they have not made such an issue of it.

The Google PageRank works something like this:

Based on site relevancy (determined by content), and site popularity (determined by incoming links), they will assign you a specific rank, from 1-10. One is the lowest, 10 is the highest. Of course, they assign you a decimal number, but when you are able to get your pagerank from a pagerank checker, it is just the whole number.

A site starts off with 0. It only has 0 when it is brand new, and has not been ranked yet. It may be indexed for quite some time before it is ranked. I have sites that are 4-5 months old, which still have a pagerank of 0. **Once it has been indexed, it will generally have a pagerank of 1, because anything over 0 is rounded to 1. To get any more than that, you have to do some work.**

With Google, the part of the PageRank that you can affect the most, is inbound links – links on other sites that point to your site. They take a count of the inbound links, and they give you credit for popularity based on those. Now, there are, reputedly, a WHOLE bunch of things that can affect inbound link values (I'll cover those in the next chapter), some of which you need to be concerned about, some not. But basically, the rule is, the more inbound links you have, the higher your pagerank.

The ranking reputedly increases exponentially, so that you have to increase by a large multiple to go from 1 to 2, then from 2 to 3, etc. This means that the higher you get, the harder it is to get the next rank. It is not hard to get from 1 to 2. It takes some work to get a 3, and some serious work to get a 4. Higher than that for a small business site takes some time, and consistent effort.

Now, because Google and the other big search engines pay so much attention to inbound links, of course there are those who have tried to manipulate the search engines using fraudulent or purchased inbound links. We are not talking about finding a site with similar content and negotiating a purchase price for placing a link on the site. We are talking about "pay me and I'll put your link on 2000 pages!" and that sort of thing – instant huge numbers.

Or people who build 100 of the same site, put them all in different domains, and cross link them to each other. No, that won't work either, because Google doesn't seem to pay much attention to links on new sites, but they do on established sites.

If you purchase a website with a domain, then you'll want to know the pagerank before you buy, and to check to see if it has not been banned if the pagerank is 0. Because banned sites have NO pagerank. And a site with low pagerank is worth less than one with high pagerank. You also need to know how to check it before advertising on someone else's site so you'll have some idea of the worth of the ad.

There is a lot of complexity in the PageRank issue, and a lot of controversy as well. **The important thing from this chapter is to understand that the factor that you need to know about is inbound links.**

PageRank and Linking

Once you know that inbound links can affect your pagerank, your first instinct will be to want to get inbound links. Good idea. But before you do, you'll have to understand that some links have more power than others.

Links on sites with a high pagerank are more valuable than links on a low pagerank site. They will count for more. This does not mean you have to stick your nose in the air about linking to low rank sites, not at all. While it is better to get links on a site with high pagerank, this is VERY difficult for a small site to do!

Some people have the mistaken idea that links on any site with lower pagerank than yours will harm you. It won't. In fact, these are good links to get, because they often just walk into your site with no effort on your part other than placing a reciprocal link on your site, and long term, they will help you more and more as their rank rises.

There is also some controversy about reciprocal links. Some people say they are a waste of time, others say get all you can. I take a middle road.

Getting reciprocal links, where you put a link on your site in return for a link on theirs, can be very useful. But I don't spend a lot of time at it after the first push on a new endeavor, because it is VERY time consuming to negotiate a good trade. So when I meet people online, if an opportunity to trade links comes up, we do. But I dont' seek them anymore by going hunting for sites to put them on. Instead, I put a link on every site I build titled "Exchange Links", and link that to a page with an invitation to link with us if their site meets our "family safe" criteria.

Relevant reciprocal links are certainly worth more than non-relevant links. This means, your site has something to do with the site it came from, in one way or another. But since search engines ONLY judge that by keywords, relevancy is not, and cannot be the final criteria, because if I have a site on special needs, and link it to a site on working from home, the connection may not be relevant to a search engine, but it certainly is to those with disability who need to work from home!

What will hurt you is linking to sites that have a bad reputation, so make sure you don't link to a banned site or one that is trashy.

It is fairly well established that the more valuable links are "one way" links, or "non-reciprocal" links. In other words, the other site has a link to you, but you do not link back to them. You can get these through listing with directories (but not all directories help pagerank), and through three way link trades, where you trade links, but the links are not reciprocal on any of the sites.

Cross linking your sites in with other sites that you own is a helpful strategy in my personal experience, but not everyone agrees on that either. Still, it IS free, and since it sends visitors to your other sites also, it is worth it.

A link from someone else's site only helps you if the link is readable by the search engines. Some sites (often ad sites or directory sites), will have dynamically generated links, or JavaScript links which the search engines do not read as links, so they do not count them. The true power of links comes from the search engine benefits, so if you are paying for a link that is not readable by a search engine, then you'll need to be certain that it will get you enough traffic in its own right to benefit you.

You can also improve your actual links to help your pagerank, but you don't always have control over that, unless you email the HTML code to the site owner for the link. There are tips about how to do that in the More Optimization Strategies chapter.

Your goal with links should be, to get good quality links, on good quality sites. Get them honestly, or pay for ones that won't get you banned.

Optimized Linking

Optimizing your inbound links may be possible in some situations, not in others, but it is a strategy that can help when you have the ability to do it.

With many link exchanges or ad placements, you follow the site owner's rules. Since ANY link is better than none, go ahead and get those links if they will help you, but when you have the chance, there are a few ways you can make the most of your inbound links.

Create a couple of different kinds of links – text, image, whatever. Optimize them, and then copy the code for them and put the code, visibly, onto a "Link to Us" or "Exchange Links" page on your site. This encourages people to use your code for the links. If you put the full http reference for an image into the code, then people who paste your code into their page will have the image pulled from YOUR server each time. This can be a negative thing if it overloads your server, but it can provide a nice benefit too, because it can allow you to track where your ads are doing the most good.

Some optimization strategies include:

Use keywords in the links. Don't load them, just put in the most important ones. For a short ad, use the same rules you use for writing a page title. For a longer one, use the same rules you do for a Description MetaTag.

Put the link into some descriptive words, as that can help your pagerank, which is what gets you more traffic from the search engines. The words that you embed the hyperlink into are called "anchor text", and the search engines reputedly pay more attention to the words that are linked than the words that are not. To a search engine, the link is about the words that the hyperlink is embedded in, so if you write your compelling text, and then put "click here" for the link, then the search engine thinks that the link is about "click here", not about all the wonderful things you just said!

If you have banner ads for others to use, then you should ask them to put in a short Alt Tag with a keyword or two in that to give your banner ads more power, or add a good Alt Tag to your copiable code.

Text ads are generally more powerful than banner ads in all ways. First, more people actually click on them! Second, they have more power with search engines because you can generally use keywords more effectively. You may not have as much control over this as you'd like when advertising on other people's sites, but anything helps.

The use of several different descriptions for inbound links can help some also. Search engines view identical links as your marketing message. When links vary, they reputedly give them more credibility, because they are less obviously an attempt to sway search engines for particular key phrases. If you provide HTML linking code, then offer two or three choices.

You should also have several lengths of text ad code available, for use in different places. I usually recommend that you have two each, of the following:

A 1-3 word description – This is used in sidebars where you get just a single line, or for when people want to mention your site in context. This eBook would be described as "Simple Optimization Tactics", or something like that.

A single sentence description – This one is used when space is still tight, but you have an option for a little more elaboration. "Search Engine Optimization for the Little Guy – Who knew it was this easy?".

A one paragraph description – This one gives you the opportunity to describe it more fully, and to elaborate a bit. Usually you are limited to about 300 characters, so keep it pertinent.

You can also make up standard banner sizes (125X125, 480X60, and 768X80 are standards) for image ads.

Don't sweat it if you cannot optimize your links on every site. Use this strategy when you link to your own

sites, and encourage it when you can tactfully do so.

Let the people who advertise on your site know that you do this for them. If they understand the power of it, it will get you more advertisers as well as help offer them the most powerful benefit.

Optimized linking is something that will help you long term, but which is not going to make or break your business. Just something to be aware of and do right, simply because it takes very little more time and effort to do it right than to not bother.

Linking Strategies

You have four basic options for linking:

- **Reciprocal Links** – Link Trades that you negotiate.
- **Directory Links** – Links that you request in quality niche directories.
- **Article Site Submissions** – Links in articles that you submit for distribution through article sites.
- **Paid Links** – Links on other sites that you pay to get.

Each has its advantage and disadvantage, and each has its place in a long term linking strategy.

The first thing to understand about linking is that the traffic you get from the link itself is not the most important traffic. On some sites it can be, but on most, it is not. You may not get more than two or three hits a month off of some links that you get on other sites (they may be higher quality visitors, but there won't usually be that many). But the search engines may send you an extra 50 or 100 visitors a month because of those links. And that makes it well worth placing them.

The other aspect of placing the kind of links we are talking about here, is that they are relatively permanent. Oh, there will be some flex in them over time, but generally, once placed, they go on getting you that same traffic each month. If the site you placed the link on grows, then the amount of traffic from that site will grow also. This means that if you place just two links per month, it builds power exponentially each month.

Reciprocal links have a little less power than one way links (links that are not traded), but they still have the ability to get your site more traffic. There are four aspects to reciprocal linking:

Site Quality – You want to make sure that the sites are good quality, and don't trade links with sites that have been banned. Because you are indulging in a trade, their site being listed on your site will affect the quality of your site as well. So be sure that you only link to good quality sites.

Pagerank – Higher pagerank helps you more. This is not a reason NOT to link to new sites, it is a reason to seek links with sites that are a step above yours if you can. Now, the thing about that is, it is harder to get links on higher ranked sites! And some of those lower ranked sites will eventually be higher ranked, so in the long term, getting in on it early may be a real benefit.

Relevancy – Topics that are relevant to your topic will be better trades. Search engines place more importance in links that are for similar topics. But sometimes a relevant link won't appear that way to the search engines, and sometimes one you think is not highly relevant will be to them, because of the keywords that are used. So get them when they seem a reasonable trade, and don't obsess over this detail too much.

Placement – The area of the site where your links are placed can make a difference. Links on Link pages are not worthless, but links on content pages are given more weight according to some sources. It makes sense that they would be, because content pages are prime web real estate, and you only typically put things on them that pertain to the page information.

Directory Links can also be a bit of a hassle to get. The trick is differentiating good quality directories from Free Classified sites and other sites that won't help you any. The distinguishing factor is often that a good directory will have a real person reviewing the sites that come in. This means that in order to get in, your site has to be good quality, or they won't list you! But that is also why they are good links to get, because many niche directories have very good pagerank.

Unfortunately, a growing number of directories now put in dynamic links that do not index through the search engines, which means that you do not get as much benefit from the listing. There are ways to check this, but it is fairly technical. JavaScript links typically do not index, and some PHP links do not (others do). There are also a few sources online that keep listings of the directories that do and do not provide "static" links (the better ones). The problem here though is that there are SO many directories out there, that nobody can keep track of them all.

I recommend that you get links in directories. Even if you do not get the full benefit from them, they can still provide you with traffic directly, and if just half of them get you search engine ranking benefits, then you are still far ahead of your competition.

Article Marketing is one of my favorite things, but that is probably because I like writing. It can be much harder for someone who does not write well to take advantage of this powerful form of marketing – because it is much more than just a means of getting links! It is also a way to begin to build customer relationships with people you have never even met, and never would be able to reach if you just placed articles on your own site.

Article Marketing is viral – that means you send it out there, and it then spreads itself far beyond what you could anticipate. That is, it will IF you write good articles that other people want to use! If you write glorified ads or garbage, then nobody will use it, and it will not even be accepted by the article directories.

Do not use PLR articles for this unless you have completely rewritten them BY HAND. I cannot stress this enough. There are no shortcuts to quality writing! There are plenty of ways to get banned from article directories though, and this is the fastest way to do it!

If you cannot produce a persuasive article, then it may be well worth your time to hire someone to do it for you. Because this can be one of the most powerful forms of link marketing, and it is also one of the least expensive, even if you DO hire some of it out.

Paid Links are considered to be frowned upon by search engines. But personally, I feel that they are like reciprocal links, in that if you show up with a whole bunch of them at once, then you are manipulating the search engines. If you pay for them one at a time, and select them carefully, on sites that are selective about whom they allow to advertise, then they aren't a lot different than reciprocal links. **But that is just my opinion, you must choose for yourself whether you want to go there or not, and accept the risk if you do.**

What is certain is that Search Engines do NOT like it when you go out and buy a ton of links at once. That IS considered manipulative. Some people say that search engines will not penalize you, merely discount the links if you do that, because someone else could do that to you if they banned you for it. But other SEO experts say that it is a practice to avoid, and that it can actually harm your pagerank. I don't know which is the case, but if, at its best, it will do nothing (not even anything good), and at its worst it can harm you, then why waste your money?

Paid links also have the same issue as Directory listings, in that many paid ads are simply ineffective with search engines. So before you pay, make sure you know what it is that you are paying for!

In summary, text links are more effective than images, and the more natural the link appears, the better.

The Sites You Must Never Link To

Getting inbound links is only half the battle. The other half of the equation in Search Engine Rank is the quality of the content on your site. Since many links are reciprocal, and since more sites are being built with reprintable articles, this part of the picture has more relevancy than many people think.

Most site owners think that they'd never link to a site with a bad reputation. But how do you know? How can you tell when a site is not just ok for now, but on the verge of being banned? And every time you place a reciprocal link on your site, or post an article by another author, you are running the risk of having a "bad" link on your site. If you know how to avoid that, then it significantly reduces the risk.

Sometimes you cannot tell, but there are certain types of sites, no matter their status now, which you know will eventually get banned. And you can check at any time to see if a site has already been banned from Google, just do a net search for "google ban tool" and see what you come up with.

Some people prefer to use the Google Toolbar, but I have a thing about toolbars, because they are almost always used to collect some kind of surfing data. I just don't like spyware of any kind, even if it does give me something in return. I can get that info in other ways, and I do.

Besides checking to insure that a site has not been banned before you list it on your site, you'll need to actually LOOK at the site. I suggest looking at at least two things:

1. **The home page.** It should be unique. It should not have an open directory format where anyone can submit anything without review. And it should not be a classified site. It should not have anything dishonest, illegal, or unethical on the pages. And it should not use "black hat" SEO tactics.
2. **The Links page.** Check to insure that they are not linking to disreputable sites. If they are, then they will soon be banned.

When you post reprintable articles on your site, it is important that you check the links in the article and in the Resource Box to insure that it is not dishonorable also. Do it in the same way you would check any other site.

These tips are especially important if you operate an article library where people can submit content to your site, or if you operate a directory of any kind. You need to insure that every link is good quality so that it won't kill your credibility.

If you have a guestbook, or a forum, then you also need to be vigilant. I would not recommend EVER having an unmoderated guestbook on a site, they just fill up with spam.

Now, once in a while, errors do occur. And overall, Google is forgiving of a link or two that is not normally acceptable. After all, sites do change, and you can't control everything. **But if you don't check the links, then you won't just have a little error. You'll have a huge problem that you did not know was coming.**

You see, when you allow a disreputable link onto your site, the person who put it there will do one of two things: **They will either begin to send you more like it, or they will post your URL onto the forums and boards of people who are banned from the search engines.** They are desperate to get links, and usually they are selling illegal items or dishonest ones, so they will use ANY means, fair or foul, to get their sites promoted. If you open the door just once, you'll be swimming in filth within hours. **I cannot begin to tell you how aggressive they can be if given the chance.**

So screen everything that you allow to be posted on your site, no matter what its source. And don't trust anyone until you check them out. Then, check them out again periodically, to insure that they have not pulled a switch on you.

When the link is on your site, it is your reputation on the line. So perform a quick check, and you'll be glad you did.

Viral Linking

Viral links are distinguished from other links in that they spread themselves. They do this because somehow, they provide a reward or benefit to someone if they pass them on. Viral links can occur in a number of ways, including Affiliate Programs (commission reward system), Article Marketing (good content gets passed on with links), Humorous Emails (reward is a laugh, sig line gets passed on), Reprintable Jokes with author credits attached, free download links (this can have a backlash), and other forms.

Notice, we have NOT included links in eBooks, links in software, or other forms of viral links that do not offer a Search Engine Optimization benefit. Those are all valid marketing strategies, but the links in them do not give a Search Engine benefit. They can be used as an enticement to encourage people to link to you IF you invite people to link to the download page. Be warned though, some people will simply link straight to the download, and bypass your site entirely, and make the download appear to be theirs instead of yours.

Back to viral linking... **Like catching the flu, a good viral linking tactic will spread easily.** This means it not only has to have an enticement to pass it on, it has to be one that people actually want to pass on. **Give them something good, and they will share it naturally.**

Probably the best known form of viral linking currently is Article Marketing. And it follows a classic pattern for viral linking.

1. It logically incorporates your message and URL.
2. It can be done fairly easily, without complex software or memberships.
3. It provides something of genuine value that people are seeking.
4. It multiplies far beyond your own sphere of influence.
5. It assists with marketing objectives as well as linking objectives.
6. It provides good search engine pagerank benefits if done right.
7. It is easy for other people to pass on.
8. An entire distribution channel is already established, which you just need to plug into.

One reason it is so powerful is that it accomplishes marketing goals of increasing trust with prospective customers, and with helping to establish a good reputation for the business. It becomes a form of vicarious relationship marketing, which helps the prospective customer feel they can trust you ahead of time.

It also only works if it is done right. Your signature line has to reflect your marketing goals, and it should provide an encouragment to visit your site. And **there are a range of other factors also, but the most important one is quality writing.**

I read an article recently which was actually picked up for publication by another site. I was appalled at the sloppy writing, and wondered whether the person who placed the article on the site had even read it! Each paragraph was constructed of a single rambling run-on sentence, and there were frequent spelling and grammar errors. The content itself was mostly vague inferences instead of actually conveying any useful information. Things like: "When you do this task things will probably get harder when you get inside and start doing it, so be careful when you choose the object to do the project on." He followed that with stern instructions to look over the object very carefully, with plenty of details about which parts to look at, but no information about what to look FOR. Lots of illusion of information there, but nothing of real use. The overall impression was that of a bad writer trying to think of something to say. Some of my kids have turned in better essays in Junior High than that. My 17 year old son read the article and said, "So when is he going to actually tell me something useful?"

An article must be well written, and it should contain at least ONE tidbit or guideline that could cause someone to say, "Ah-ha! So THAT's the key to that part!", yet not tell it ALL, so that they will feel that there is more that you can illuminate for them.

The quality of other viral linking items must also be good. No matter what it is, it must possess a little bit of a "wow" or "ah-ha" factor for people to feel that it truly is something they want, and not just another worthless freebie in the suffocating flood of valueless freebies floating around the net.

The great thing about viral linking is that you set it up once, and then it goes on doing its job, sometimes for months, sometimes longer, depending on how dated the material is. You can use viral linking for a range of things, but be sure that you set it up in such a way that it encourages people to actually place a link that benefits you.

Changing Content

It is pretty much accepted as fact that if you change the content of your site regularly, it will get indexed more often by search engines. You can pretty much watch this in your stats if you know how to track it, and I have seen it happen with both my sites, and with client sites. This information applies to infosites and product sites, but most of the focus of this and the next chapter are on infosites because that is where most of the problems are with people cutting corners.

When I have rebuilt sites that were unchanged for a long time, indexing increased in frequency. Then it decreased again if more than a month or two went by without additional changes. For an infosite, this means adding a page now and again, or adding content to a page. For a product site, that means adding or deleting products, or expanding product descriptions, adding an informational area to your site, etc.

The reason for this is that search engine companies DO want to keep the information in their databases up to date. But they don't want to waste their time. So if your site looks like it is just sitting there waiting, YOU'LL be the one waiting for them to come back to notice any changes you have made.

The need for updated content has given rise to the proliferation of all kinds of "automatic updated" sites. There are four basic variations on this, and some are better than others, but all have issues, and two have fatal problems:

1. **Sites that automatically gather posts from blog sites to repost on your site.** Since the blog posts are not screened by you, and since the software automatically posts things to your site based on keywords, the topics of the posts may or may not actually be relevant to your site content. Keywords are not totally accurate, nor can the judge the quality of the word usage. BIG gamble here, because no matter how much a search engine likes your site, if PEOPLE hate it, no one will be back, and your site will bomb.
2. **Sites that automatically search article databases and update the content based on articles with matching keywords.** It will automatically post the author credits also, so you are legally in the clear using this strategy, but you have the same problems as before. You are trusting a computer to judge whether an article is suitable for your site or not, and you will NOT end up with a quality site this way. It is not a stable framework around which to build a site.
3. **Article Site Builders, which do the same as #2 here, but they just do a one time search and create a quickie site for you from that.** You can customize the template to the topic that you are searching on. As advertised, these have the same problems as the two options above, with one great exception that can pull it from uselessness to genuinely useful – you can take the resulting site and remove the pages that do not have quality articles on them. And this is key – review by a real human being. Do that, and this can help you. Skip it, and you might as well not bother even putting the resulting site up.
4. **Article Site Directory Software.** This is a full website script that you install on your server, which allows visitors to login and leave an article. You BECOME the article database owner. This gives you a chance to get good quality stuff without having to write it all yourself. There are two drawbacks – people won't post unless you have a lot on there first, so you will have to find a way to gather some postable articles to begin with. Second, you HAVE to screen each article personally, and check the links the author puts into the article. Skip that, and you are right back with poor quality, spammy articles that nobody wants, and which dry up your traffic.

There simply is no substitute for putting personal work behind it. You can use software or a system to make the process more efficient, but if you try to remove all the work from the process and let the site run on auto-pilot, you'll soon learn there is a good reason why I am telling you this is not a viable way to run a website.

So, if you make your own changes, how often is enough? Generally, significant changes (addition of one or two pages) per month is a good minimum goal for each site. This can be done even if you have a large number of sites, without overwhelming you.

Monthly changes are sufficient to let the search engines know your site is fresh and that the owner is involved in it. **More frequent changes WILL get you indexed faster, but getting indexed faster does not necessarily translate to more traffic unless the pages you have actually contain information that people want.**

Frequent indexing is only useful if there ARE regular changes, and if those changes are good ones.

This means that overall, frequency of indexing is not something you need to sit around fussing about.
There are ways you can tell Google to index you on a schedule, using a sitemap, but that is a topic for another chapter. Basically, I don't worry too much about it, and my sites get indexed well simply because I keep them updated, and I keep adding things, just a little, once in a while.

Content Shortcuts

Automatically generated website content is just one of the solutions out there that are being pushed as the easy way to keep a site up to date and maintained. Just as those types of sites are either an outright bad idea, or at best, just a way to cut a little of the time required, the other shortcuts all have a nasty "gotcha" if you don't use them in the right way. Used in the right way though, some of them can genuinely save you time.

1. We covered **automatic site generation** in the last chapter, but it bears mentioning here, with the understanding that any site generated in that way must then be customized by at LEAST reviewing the articles for quality, and checking the links. At best, you should also shorten the filenames (they tend to generate impossibly long ones), and add some commentary to each page to make it more original.
2. **Replicated sites.** The problem with replicated sites is that they are identical to other ones. Not only that, the site design tends to be rather mundane, and the quality of the articles included in them is often highly suspect. I have seen some that could not compete even with a site built by an amateur with good intentions, because sincere unique content will outdo bad content any day. A replicated site must be subjected to a systematic customization and cleanup process before it is uploaded, or it will be a certain failure. The good news is that if you DO that, it can still save you time over building from scratch, especially if you are a novice.
3. **PLR content.** If you get a site with PLR content, you MUST personalize it HEAVILY. That means, basically rewrite the articles from the top to the bottom, changing the wording of every sentence. If you fail to do this, your site won't even get out of the gate.
4. **Templates.** What does a template have to do with content? If you use a template, either create one yourself, or customize a ready made one, then you'll save time doing that, giving you more time to gather or write content.

The absolute best way to create content is to write it yourself if you can do so competently. There simply is not any other way to get it that is quite as powerful. Search engines DO give higher marks for totally unique content in a new site. Sure, some of the old established big names share articles around, but they are unimpeachable sources of information. You don't have that status, so if you do things that look like you might be cutting corners, it will take you longer to get established traffic. 25 pages of solid, completely new content on the web can get more attention in less time than 200 new pages of reprinted content.

If you are producing your own content, there are still some time savers which can help you. Write a good outline for the site, and include articles you have written previously on the topic if you have any. Otherwise, write a site outline similarly to how you might write a book outline, with the page links in place of chapter headings. Divide the information into logical topics. Then write them in one page at a time. When you write, do not pay attention to length. Just make sure there is enough on each page to justify clicking on the link. If a page is extremely long, you might divide it into two, but if some are longer and some are shorter, that actually helps you, because it looks absolutely natural.

20 -30 pages of content is enough to build a solid site around. 50-100 pages is probably more likely to benefit you long term, but you can start small and build. You'd be amazed how fast a site with 20 pages can be built, and then more pages can be added later to keep the site fresh.

If you use shortcuts, remember the rules. If you don't, then make sure you can produce a high quality and readable informational resource, because even the "right" way is wrong if it yields a poor quality site.

The Duplicate Content Argument

Search engines DO penalize for duplicate content. But it isn't as simple as using the words "duplicate content" because there are "acceptable uses" and "unacceptable uses".

Now, some of the sellers of Replicated sites will tell you that there is nothing to be concerned about. They quote a Google official who stated that "honest" website owners did not need to be concerned about duplicate content.

Here's the problem – YOU are honest. The person who sold you the replicated website without warning you about the duplicate content issue, or who told you it did not matter is NOT honest. And their dishonesty is going to get YOU into trouble!

Google and other search engines penalize duplicate content to prevent three situations:

1. **Something called "scraping"**, where someone uses a computer to spider the web and actually duplicate website content from the ground up. They may actually replicate your entire site. This is a violation of copyrights, so Google bans sites that do this, giving the search engine traffic to the site that is the oldest.
2. **Precisely to prevent people from using replicated sites.** You see, a replicated site does not just have identical content, it has identical EVERYTHING. Filenames, page tags, colors, layout, content, everything! Top to bottom the page code is identical. And when Google talks about not having to worry too much about duplicate content, this is NOT what they are telling you not to worry about. This is EXACTLY what they are trying to prevent! This is a shortcut, it provides nothing new to the information archives online, and they will penalize you and ban the site, if they even index it in the first place. Anyone who has used one will confirm this (except those who are selling them, who insist on touting them as a shortcut that will take all the work out of it). I actually sell some of these, but they have FULL instructions for customizing them, and I NEVER tell a client that they are not work.
3. **Use of unaltered PLR articles for lazy site content.** Again, they add nothing new to the substance of the web, except copyright confusion.

So, what are the legitimate uses of duplicate content that Google IS telling you not to worry about?

1. **Printer friendly and standard site pages for the same item.**
2. **Similar product listings on two different sites that you own that overlap in content.**
3. **Reprinting items that you have the rights to reprint with author credits.**
4. **The odd duplicated page in your site that happens for unusual reasons.**
5. **A replicated site that has been customized, so that it has "value added" features on each page. This DOES add something new to the information online.**
6. **Honest reasons for duplicate content, or honest mistakes in having duplicate content. This is not the same as deliberate use of duplicate content, which replicate sites are classed as.**

So, when they tell you to go ahead and buy their site and upload it and don't worry about duplicate content, they are lying. And yes, there is no other conclusion but that they are doing so knowingly, because they have heard the complaints, and seen it first hand.

It is NOT dishonest to sell a replicated site, but to do so while telling you that it will work without problems IS dishonest. Replicated Sites require a systematic and consistent step-by-step process to take them from duplicate, to completely original. It CAN be done, and in less time that it would take you to build the site from scratch, BUT, you really need instructions to do it, and you need to know which things matter. **Full instructions for that are in the Membership area of the Tired of Hype site (http://www.tiredofhype.com/),** or they come with any replicated site purchased from our site.

So if your intent is to upload a site that will work to earn you money over the long term, then you'll want to avoid the duplicate content trap, and get started right.

The Google SiteMap

Google has been pushing webmasters to create a sitemap for their sites. It serves two basic purposes: To tell the search engine how often to index it, and to list the last date that specific pages were updated.

Many SEO experts and webmasters are stating that you must have a sitemap in order to rank with Google, and touting the virtues of having one. It is apparent that the benefits would be greater for a larger site than a smaller one, and that the most significant benefits here are going to Google, because a sitemap reduces their workload.

Google states that it provides the following benefits to the site owner:

1. **Faster indexing of your entire site.** Because you can submit a sitemap all at once, all of the pages get indexed. But it still does not get you around the initial delay that Google imposes.
2. **The ability to tell Google how often to spider your site.** But I suspect if you set this too frequent, Google would just ignore it anyway.
3. **The ability to list the last date that a page was modified.** Google can then spider the page or not, according to whether changes have occurred.
4. **More detailed stats reports** on search engine results for your site.

I suspect the benefits will be much less obvious to smaller site owners, for the following reasons:

1. **Since it does not eliminate or mitigate the initial indexing delay, it may not in fact speed up indexing or traffic by any significant margin to a small startup.**
2. **You can use other means to tell the search engines how often to spider**, and more than one will pay attention.
3. **In order for the last modified date to benefit you, it must be changed every time you update the site.** This means you have to either manually change it, or you have to set up software on your server to automatically change it (Google has a link on their pages to download the SiteMap Generator script.)
4. **Detailed stats have little value to a startup site that isn't getting any traffic anyway.** This feature has much more value to a site that is getting at least SOME consistent traffic.

The last thing I don't like about it is that you have to register yet another online account to submit one. And if you have an AdSense Account, it won't accept the same login, so you'll have to create a separate account. And the Terms of Service for it are VERY contradictory – forbidding you to use any Google service for commercial purposes, yet the greater percentage of people submitting sitemaps are commercial entities!

The sitemap can help you get new pages indexed faster, but only on the next regular sweep through the site anyway. If the pages are not more than one level deeper than the existing pages, you'd get that anyway.

Whether you choose to build a sitemap or not, it isn't what makes or breaks a site. For some sites, it might make a difference, for others, it is not going to affect them significantly at all. You'll have to choose based on your own circumstances, and not allow anyone to persuade you that you are dead in the water without one. None of my new sites have one, and all have been fully indexed very quickly, and are getting higher traffic than the average new site. **Whether any site would do better with a sitemap than without, there is no way of knowing.**

The Ever Changing Rules of SEO

The Winds of Change are ever blowing over the world of search engine optimization. What is hyped as the secret to instant traffic one month is Black Hat the next and sure to get you banned.

So how can you be safe?

The safe path for SEO lies not in the specifics of WHAT you do, but in understanding the goals of the search engines, and giving them sites that help them meet their goals. The roadblocks that are put up by them are not meant to stop new sites from prospering, they are simply defense mechanisms in response to unethical abuses of loopholes in their code which are exploited by people who want to rise to the top on something other than their merits.

So when you understand that the goal of search engines is to provide a service that supplies the public with relevant and meaningful results to their searches for specific topics, and when you try to help them in that goal instead of trying to find a loophole, you are operating in a safe-zone that is exempt from the affects from changes as much as anything can be.

Focus on tasks that enhance the goals of the search engines, instead of trying to manipulate them. This includes:

1. Strategies that help you more accurately describe your site to the search engines.
2. Strategies that focus on original and genuinely valuable content – good products, solid information, and with a twist of creativity that makes them unique.
3. Honest linking tactics that get you inbound links based on the value that others see in your sites. Trade with people who like your site content. List in directories that focus on your topic. Write quality articles for article directories.
4. Use strategies, not tricks. Look for knowledge, not secrets.

The Search Engine world WILL change with the times to close the doors on those who would manipulate the results unfairly. When you realize that the goal of a Search Engine company, and the goal of any honest business owner is the same – to deliver people to your site who are looking for what you have – then you can work with them to insure that your mutual goals are met, and you need not fear that doing so will come back to bite you.

The question of what kind of professional to hire is largely dependent on the size of your business, and the needs that you have. I'll try to give you some clear guidelines though.

It is important that you understand the concepts that this book teaches, so that if you DO hire a pro, you'll know whether they are promising you realistic things, or whether they are using effective tactics, or worse, Black Hat strategies that could harm your site. The issues are pretty much the same whether you do them personally, or whether you hire it done.

Now, each professional will emphasize the importance of the different strategies just a little differently than others, but they should have a balance in the things they recommend, and they should not just focus on one thing to the exclusion of all else.

If your business is very small, your primary SEO assistance is going to be one of the following professionals:

1. **Your web designer.** They should be able to do much of what you need done as the site is built, or as an improvement to the site. You may have to choose the keywords, write the title, etc, but they should be able to insure that the site is search engine friendly, install the proper tags, etc.
2. **A good copywriter who is experienced with SEO issues, but who also understands the need for cost containment.** Remember I said that good quality text content is the most important feature that your site can contain to be accurately indexed? A good copywriter can make a huge difference for you if you cannot write the text yourself.

If your business is growing, and you have a larger budget, and a need to do more things than what are listed in the chapters on The 6 Most Important SEO Strategies, and More SEO Strategies, then you should consider hiring someone who specializes in SEO issues. Make sure that they are going to do more than what your web designer can do before you dive in though! And be prepared to pay more for someone with the expertise to do more.

SEO can be VERY expensive to make minute changes, so even when you hire, **you need to talk to the pro about how to do the things that will make the biggest difference for the least expenditure first.** Don't let them waste your time or money doing things that cost a lot, but yield relatively little in comparison to other possible strategies.

A good professional will have many options, and will recommend an improvement on the things previously done, plus an additional array of tactics to fine tune the function of the site. They will also be up front about costs, and realistic about potential returns.

Learn the facts for yourself, and be involved in the choices. You'll be more pleased with the results if you do, and you'll keep yourself from being taken advantage of.

Paying for Links

Talk about your gray areas! Opinions on paid links run hot and furious in both directions. Some experts claim that paid links are fine, as long as they are reasonable. Others say they are a no-no unless you use a tag to keep the search engine from counting them in link popularity ratings.

In fact, some search engines advise that if you pay for links, that you use a No Follow tag to keep the search engine from counting it. But in practice, very few sites ever do that, even those which are produced by people who quote that rule!

The other side of the coin is that others say paid links are fine, no problem at all. Of course, many sources that are saying that are SELLING links, so their recommendations are suspect!

What is certain is that if you pay for a ton of links (say 1000), that are placed overnight, then it is likely to hurt you more than it helps. Of course, we are then back to the sometimes argued position that Google won't penalize you for too many links, but there have been reports otherwise! For me, if there is a reasonable chance of harm, I am simply not going to take that kind of risk!

My personal philosophy is that as long as the paid links are not massive, and as long as they are on sites that would not even sell me a link unless my site was good, I go ahead and do a few. I don't pay for huge amounts of them.

This philosophy is mine alone though, and you must judge for yourself whether there is risk, and if so, how much, because it is not something that anyone can specifically define. No one can say, "If you get over 100 per month you are in trouble" because nobody really knows. In fact, I doubt Google knows exactly, because it is often very difficult to distinguish between paid and natural links.

So on this issue, find your own way. Chart your own course. Make a choice based on how much risk you are willing to personally assume, and then make sure that anyone you hire understands what your position is.

The Importance of Integrity

Honesty and integrity are not just a moral issue, they are good business. Consider the following situation:

You set up a business. You decide that you can cut some corners where no one will notice. You pay a lot for aggressive marketing, and your first customers come in the door and make a purchase. Weeks later your product fails to perform in one way or another, and the customer is dissatisfied. They not only do not come back, they warn their friends. You spend more money trying to get more customers. Eventually business dwindles and you have spent much of your profit trying to get customers. You are forced to start over and build another business. Where is the logic in that?

There is a saying, "You can shear a sheep many times, but only skin it once." There is a lot of wisdom there. To shear the sheep, and get the wool, a rancher has to care for the animal in between shearing. It is a win-win situation for both of them. If you skin it, you may get a little more once, but they you gotta go buy another sheep and raise it to be big enough to be worth skinning. Which do you think is more efficient?

One of the really cool things that happens with a reputable business is that over time it gains momentum. This happens because at first, you are educating people about who you are and what you do, and persuading them to give you a try. If your product is sound, and your customers service and return policy is good, people will come back. In fact, some customers will even come back after an error if you are strictly honorable. You don't have to spend nearly as much to keep a customer as you do trying to get one in the first place. That is a statistical fact.

The only way you can start with nothing and build a business, is on a firm foundation of honorable work and reliable customer relations. **Momentum won't build if you take liberties with other people's satisfaction.** Scammers spend months building up their scam, then they spend money on marketing their scam. It has one wild flare of frenzied success, and then it fizzles, and they are forced to start over. That doesn't happen with a reliable merchant. In fact, they can start with no marketing, and build slowly over months, and their business will grow and grow, and never dwindle and die. It can, in fact, be hard to STOP if you want to close the doors!

Customers expect integrity in all aspects of your business. And integrity filters through all the areas that the customer sees, and the areas that the customer does not see. You need to be honorable in paying taxes that are due, and keeping needed licenses up to speed. Tax penalties and licensing penalties are counterproductive, and will hamper your ability to make a profit.

Integrity has been described as "doing the right thing even when you think nobody is looking". And it makes good business sense. Being honorable in your conduct with your customers is one of those things that you may think no one will ever know about if you fudge on little things. But they do. It is apparent in your attitude about things that you don't realize are connected, and customers who are on the ball will feel uneasy if you are not scrupulously honest.

Sometimes you get into a situation where one customer is dissatisfied through no fault of your own. It is important in those times that you take the responsibility to make it right anyway. One dissatisfied customer may be the means of preventing many more from purchasing, and it just isn't worth it. Some people will never be satisfied, no matter what you do. But if you have tried in every way that is reasonable, then you can at least present your side to anyone who questions, and reasonable people will understand.

Honesty is now considered to be a optional indulgence. It is not. It is an essential element in growing a stable business that will last.

The Power of Cooperation

I learned a concept which has such power, I am not even sure I fully understand it myself. It changed my philosophy on marketing, and influenced my interaction with my clients. I'll try to explain this concept. There is no hype in this article. I wrote it very slowly because it was hard to find words to explain what I meant. Some people will catch the vision of what I am saying, others will only see the profit margin. But if you read this as thoughtfully as I wrote it, something grand will come of it.

Gotta get the edge on your competitors. Edge them out. Gotta get something in return for everything you give, and you hafta get paid for every service you offer. It's good business sense, they say.

In the past, when I have given advice to clients, I have told them to get their links out on every site they could. To look for complimentary sites, but not competitive ones. I have also advised many things in business that others do not - to give free advice when you know, to pay attention to the best interest of your customer even when it seems to not be in your own best interest. I always advise what I feel is the very best strategy for business long term.

I have always believed that when I truly applied the Golden Rule in my business that it would give me more financial returns in the long term than selfishness would. And my experience with customers who overpay me, and who call me even when I have stopped advertising long ago has convinced me that this is the case.

I believe that there is a broader application of the concept of cooperation than just thinking of things from your customer's point of view. I think that it has a very powerful application in marketing.

Business is terribly competitive now. Getting a toehold is a difficult thing for a new business to do. You must have either a lot of money, or a lot of patience and determination to start a business and to get it to succeed.

The advertising world is one of aggression and money. Places where you can legitimately advertise for free are diminishing. Ads that used to be inexpensive are now out of the range of many startups. And payment of money is no guarantee of results. Purveyors of "internet marketing secrets", "online business promotion", and "search engine optimization" promise you that all you have to do is pay your money and your business is guaranteed instant success. **But those promises and those payments have sucked the resources out of many small businesses without returning enough to keep them from sinking into oblivion.**

I believe in good and evil. And I believe that it is the goal of selfish and designing people to keep the little guy down, and to consign them to discouragement and a sense of hopelessness. Prices are rising, regulations are increasing, and if you start a business the "official" way, you'll be in debt for tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars before you even open the doors.

So what does this all have to do with cooperation, and how can it help you market smarter instead of more expensively?

The advice to get your link out there still holds, because one of the ways to get around the barriers is to have lots of links placed on other people's sites. But I am seeing it a different way now. I think that the Golden Rule, when taken literally in all aspects of business, including marketing, is the answer, not just another problem to be solved. I believe that applying it is the best way to sneak in the back door, through the carefully constructed barriers that selfishness of other businesses have built. Kindness is the one thing they cannot overpower.

So, here are some strategies:

1. Give something away. Oh, yes, this is an old strategy. But give away something of value - something that is of genuine help to others. Ask for a link in return. Just a link. The web gives you the ability to do this multiple times for each item, if what you are giving away can be downloaded over and over. Make your terms generous. Advertising is the only thing you'll ask in return. Find a way that you can give away something related to your product or service - Herbal Momma specializes in handmade soaps and personal care items. The owner also takes incredible photographs, so we established a photo gallery with free photos on her site. The only stipulation is that anyone who uses them needs to supply a link to her site.

2. Share your knowledge. Articles are a proven way of advertising. Give good information. **Give more information than is wise for your business by common standards.** Teach others about what you do and

how to do it. And let others pass your writing on - with a link at the bottom. **Kindness and honesty with the best interests of the recipient will build credibility and trust faster than if you say the same thing everyone else is saying.**

3. Exchange links. Ok, everyone knows this too, but here is where I am going to diverge. Share links with EVERYBODY who has a site that meets your moral standards. **Make sure they are honest, and clean, and let that be the only criteria.** If they are your competitor, do it anyway. Find complimentary products or services to cross link with if you want, but cooperate! Both of you are fighting the same uphill battle, which you each get a little closer to winning when you help each other! Put a link on every page on your site that invites people to exchange reciprocal links. Build a page for the links, and if it fills up, build another one. Advertising for advertising is a fair trade, even if it is from a competitor. Links on other people's sites are valuable even if the content is not compatible, because it will help your site get a small edge with the search engines, even if it does not directly bring you hits.

4. Replicate your site and give it away. Give someone else an edge and advantage in building a site like yours. Just ask them to leave links back to your site on it. Tell them how to make it work, and how to replace your affiliate links with theirs - just ask them to sign up for the programs under you so when they succeed, you do too. And tell them how to make it their site so it does not keep looking like a replica.

There are other applications of this too. Don't just go looking for ways to take advantage of other people. Look for ways to promote your business while helping someone else at the same time. I feel so strongly that this is the most powerful tool that a low budget business can have. Because if you follow the rules of the big guys, or of the experts who are only experienced with dealing with established companies, you'll fail before you even get started. We have to make our own set of rules, and it has to be founded on something that they have missed. This is it! Alone we do not have the power to fight the establishment. Together we can form our own niche and help each other succeed.

So email me about one of the ad boxes on my sites - You don't have to be able to afford $5 a month, or $25 a year. Just offer me an ad spot with equivalent value and I'll trade. If you need something that I can offer, and you have no money, talk to me about an advertising trade. If you need links, then email me and I'll offer you some suggestions for places to find them for your site. **Lets build the power of cooperation, and then give a hand up to others who are struggling to follow.**

Resources

http://www.ebusinesstutor.com/staticpages/index.php/searchenginesubmit – Search engine submission page listing.

Http://www.selfpromotion.com – Website promotion service, very good, pay if you can but use it free if you can't.

http://www.geekphilosopher.com/ - Free image downloads. Reciprocal link requested for use.

Http://www.creatingonline.com/ - Another free image site, reciprocal link requested.

http://www.adventuretech.us/google.htm - Google AdSense information. This is the one that pays YOU.

http://www.kanoodle.com/ - Another pay per click ad system that pays you for ads on your site. Different site criteria than Google, so some sites may qualify for this one that don't qualify for Google.

http://www.mals-e.com/ - Free shopping cart system with affiliate program plugin.

http://www.wecai.org/ - Women's eCommerce Association International

http://www.ryze.com/ - Business networking resource.

Http://www.maxincommon.com/ - Business networking resource.

http://www.nonags.com/ - Software download site.

http://www.downloads.com/ - Software download site.

http://www.ezinedirector.com/ - eZine Director, newsletter management service. Free up to 200 subscribers, reasonable price over that.

http://www.adventuretech.us/ipowerweb.htm – Our favorite low cost and free web hosts.

http://www.godaddy.com/ - GoDaddy.com, one of the lowest cost domain registrars. We don't recommend hosting through them (too slow), but their domains are good.

http://www.bravenet.com/ - Bravenet, has several easy to use tools for webmasters to use. We don't recommend all of them, but some are useful.

http://www.paypal.com – PayPal provides lower cost merchant account services for credit card processing.

About the Author

This book was entirely written by Laura Wheeler, owner of Adventure Tech-Web. She is a busy Mom of Eight children, five of whom are still at home. She homeschools, and works her business in around the needs of her family. She puts in long hours, and manages to complete the equivalent of full time work most days. She subcontracts some services to trusted sources, and works personally with her clients.

Way back in 1982, she took a two week course in computer usage. She failed it utterly, and could not understand the command line interface used at the time. About 14 years later, the family was gifted a Mac Classic. After a little tentative exploration of the use of it, she found that she could actually understand how to use it quite well. She bought a copy of Macs for Dummies, and within 6 months had reformatted the hard drive just to see if she could.

Within two years they upgraded their computer to a new model, and Laura was hired in a small school as a computer instructional aide. Her business was started a few months later. At first it was just printing, word processing, and data entry. Not many people had home computers in the small town they lived in, so she got a bit of work doing that. She kept learning more about computers, and built her first computer system shortly after. She learned graphics processing, page layout, and copy writing in this time period also.

She saw her first website in 1999. Five months later she was awarded a contract with the Town of Medicine Bow to redesign and maintain the town website. She began building websites for herself and others, picking up contracts with the Wyoming Dental Association, and the Historic Virginian Hotel, and several others. She built many websites for a variety of purposes, including craft sales, electronic specialty services, non-profit organizations, and many more.

When Laura began business, she had no money to spare. Her business was build around the ownership of a computer, printer, scanner, and later an internet connection. She bought software when she could afford it, and learned to use free software when she could not afford it. She knew that if she did things the "recommended way", she'd be heavily in debt, and might never crawl out from under it. There had to be a way to start with nothing but work and determination, and that is what she did. Since she was in a small town, her business evolved into several lines of work in order to fill local need. Her website services encompassed everything a client needed, because her clients could not afford to hire a team. This need gave her a broad base of skills in all areas of website design, layout, and administration.

In 2003, her youngest son was diagnosed with cancer. She resigned as web administrator for the Town and for several other contracts. Her business was streamlined so that it could be flexible enough to accommodate sometimes unpredictable medical needs. Her websites were closed down, and new ones were established which would adapt themselves to a more flexible work schedule. Basically, she took her experience and equipment, and started over. Most of her business lines involving house calls, building or troubleshooting equipment, and anything else that was not portable, was shut down. She began putting more effort into her own website work and instructional writing. She began building shopping carts, exploring more web marketing strategies, and developed more expertise in the home business market. During this time she did not make a lot from her work, but spent a lot of time laying a good foundation. When the work began to pay, it did so whether her schedule was predictable or not.

Life interfered again with a difficult pregnancy. Near the end she was put on bedrest and bought a laptop. Her baby died a few minutes after birth, and after a month of heavy grief during which she could not bring herself to face the task of writing down the story, she began hard work on her websites again. She feels that work saved her sanity during this time. The worst part about losing a child is the emptiness and the purposelessness. Work kept her occupied and she made rapid progress with her sites. Within five months she build and established over a dozen sites. Her client base began to grow again, and her ability to offer more extensive services grew also. Her business is now fully portable, and she has gained the ability to work in spite of family crises (which have occurred with regular frequency), and in almost any location.

One reason Laura is good at working with shoestring startups, is because she has done it. Not once, but twice,

and with multiple business lines. She knows how long it takes to get orders or traffic. She knows the inexpensive ways to get that traffic, and she understands what makes a customer or visitor feel comfortable on a site so that they will purchase or come back. She is also skilled at teaching other people what she has learned, and knows how to explain it in terms that they can understand if they have no experience with it.

The Town of Medicine Bow has reissued the web contract to Laura. They contracted with her to redesign their site, and to write an extensive website administrative manual for the Town. After the completion of this special contract, they will resume a standard maintenance and improvement contract with her. They feel she is simply the best person to do the job for them, in producing a quality site for them, marketing it effectively without unnecessary or ineffective expenditure, and in making good design decisions that suit the resources and specific needs of their small businesses. The Town Council also trusts her to give them accurate information about what is genuinely needed, and to honorably fulfill the terms of the contract.

Her experience and expertise are unique. She knows the backroads that nobody else travels, which can save time and money. She understands which of the "experts" are telling the truth, and which ones are just trying to get you to buy their product. She knows that there is one truth for large corporations with healthy advertising budgets, and another nearly hidden truth for small startups that don't have money to waste. She understands how hard it is in these times for the little guy to get a foot in the door and make a place for himself in a world that is dominated by the mega-corporations. And she understands which back doors will actually get you inside, and which ones will get you mugged. And she is good at assessing individual needs so she can give good advice on what is a useful feature and what is a waste of time or money.

Her niche is one that almost nobody else wants to occupy. The expertise required in this area is difficult to acquire, and it shuts the door on many of the perceived "cash cows" in the web business world - but for Laura, it opens up possibilities for herself and her clients that provide very real opportunities. Not only is it a tough niche to occupy, but many pros do not want it because there is no profit in telling people that they DON'T need the nifty gadget you just learned how to install! Laura makes her profit from building cost efficient sites for shoestring startups (her overhead is low so she can offer quality at affordable rates), and from producing information on various home business topics.

Life has taken her in an unexpected direction. Some of that direction has hurt, and then benefited her in unlooked for ways. All of the happenstance, strategy, and research that she has done to learn and develop a high level of expertise in helping startup website and business owners in all aspects of developing a successful web presence, combine together to give her a combination of skills which sets her apart from virtually every other web designer in the nation.