

Online Business Basics

A Practical Primer for the Newbie Netpreneur



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The Beginner's Action Guide to Making Money on the Web
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Welcome! A Few Words from Angela ...



Online Business Basics received a lot of positive feedback.

Apparently it's hard to find basic, down-to-earth information like this. I've been told time and time again how much people appreciate this eBook - one of the main reasons being that it answers a lot of questions that people are afraid to ask, fearing that others may think they're 'stupid'.

The way I see it is, we've all been 'newbies' at some point. And starting an online business can be confusing, with everyone throwing around terms you don't understand, like 'FTP your affiliate program doorway page to the server, or use a redirection URL instead of your coded link'. The beginner's typical response to something like this is ...


... **Huh?**

This eBook will give you some of the information beginners need to know. Making money online is an ever-changing process. Things that work today may not work tomorrow.

The way I see it is, doing business on the 'net is a continuous learning process. Although I make a good living online I'll never call myself an "expert" - I think of myself as a student, always learning something new and constantly experimenting until I find something that works (or works better!).

In this book you'll find some of the things I've learned along the way. Those of you who already know me from my websites or newsletters already know that I won't hype anything up. Everything here is based on my personal experience.

This eBook is a short primer to the Online Business Basics members-only website. There's a description of the site near the end of this book ... but if you'd like more information on it now, please visit <http://www.onlinebusinessbasics.com/>.

 The Online Business Basics members site is updated weekly. If, at the time of writing of this eBook, a certain topic has been covered in more detail on the members site, you'll see the information symbol to your left. Simply login to the site if you're already a member.

You should be connected to the Internet in order to get full benefit from this eBook. There are "live" links located throughout the text that will take you to useful websites. Happy Reading!

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So You Want to Make Money Online?



Ever heard the phrase, "Build it and they will come"?

On the web, it's more like, "Build it, promote it consistently, distinguish yourself in some way, and **maybe** they will come".

There are millions upon millions of websites. It's simply not possible to slap together a website, dump it online, and wait for the money to come rolling in. Making money online **can** be done - all sorts of people are doing it: retirees, students, stay-at-home parents, blue-collar workers, technical professionals, people with disabilities - but all of these people have **worked hard** to achieve what they have.

This eBook is intended to be starting point for 'newbies' to the web: people who want to start their own online businesses but aren't sure where to begin.

Before we get started, here are a few things to think about ...

- **Are you comfortable with your computer?** Most online business information focuses on marketing, and rightly so; marketing skills are vital to your success. However, you're going to have a hard time if you don't have how to effectively use your computer!

Go To: [The Newbie Club](#) is by far the best site I've found for, well, newbies. :-)
Inevitably you're going to run into computer problems - we all do, unfortunately - so click here for a free membership to [The Newbie Club](#). You'll get access to 90 experienced technicians who will help you with your computer troubles, plus a wide variety of tutorials.

- **Do you have a little money to invest?** I will be the first to say that you can make money online without spending any -- however, let me also point out that it's much harder and it will take much more time ... if you last that long! Although you don't need a lot, you should be prepared to spend some. You'll find a checklist later on in this eBook that will list a few startup costs to consider.

Go To: The [US Small Business Administration](#) website. There you'll find some options for financing your business.

Most people continue to work their full-time job (if they have one) and work on their business part-time. This is how I started myself; I used part of my earnings from my job to finance my business.

- **Are you willing to make a time commitment?** One thing I've always believed is that there is a vast difference between building a business "part-time", and building one in your "spare time". I mean, let's be honest here ... how often do you feel as if you have "spare time"? Building a business online is just like building a business offline: it takes commitment. Resolve to spend a certain number of hours per week

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working on your business, and then just do it. The more time you can spend, the faster you'll become profitable!

This next article ran in several newsletters in 2000, and received a lot of popular feedback. I'm going to use it here as a sort of "pep talk". If you're already trying to build an online business, you can probably identify with this article! Here we go ...

Bringing Your New Business Back to Life

You drag yourself into the kitchen after a hard day at the office. Staring glumly at the empty fridge, you try to block out the sounds of the kids squabbling, the dog barking to go outside, and the blare of the TV in the background.

You are just **so tired**.

Day after day, week after week, you promise yourself that you're going to work on your business.

'What business,' you think bitterly, 'The one that still hasn't produced a single thin dime?'

That's the one. It is incredibly easy to get discouraged when your business isn't making money ... and even more so when your life is filled with other priorities. You're just plain worn out - and you don't savor the prospect of spending your precious free time struggling with a business that has yet to turn a profit.

But the simple fact of the matter is: If you don't work your business, who will?

To get anywhere in life you have to work hard. It may involve some short-term sacrifices ... that's where you'll have to sit down with your family and figure out whether those sacrifices will justify the end result. Here are a few tips to help you get back up and work on your business:

Drop the negativity.

For example, instead of moaning about how you still haven't made any money, focus instead on how great it will be to make your first sale. Believe me, that first sale is an incredible feeling! It energizes you in a way that's hard to describe.

Take it one small step at a time.

There's no point in setting a lofty goal, only to fail at achieving it. Keep your goals realistic. For example, you could make it your goal to do 5 small advertising or promotion activities every day. A bunch of small steps will eventually lead to the achievement of the larger goal.

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Don't be afraid to ask for help or encouragement.

You can find a lot of supportive people if you just ask. A good place is right here on the Internet, on message boards. You can start looking for forums that interest you at <http://www.delphi.com/> . Or join the [Small Business Community](#) to both share advice with other small business owners.

Re-prioritize.

There is no way that anyone can do everything. Let small things go while you concentrate on your business. The house does not always have to be perfectly clean, and a garden with a few weeds won't hurt you. Ask others in the family to help out.

Be willing to make a few smart investments.

While we would all prefer to spend nothing and make millions, it's simply not realistic. Many of us have heard the phrase, "It takes money to make money" - well, there's more than a grain of truth to it. Smart investments save us both time and money in the long run. Do your research, and don't be afraid to spend a few dollars. This is a business, after all, not just a hobby.

Force yourself to do a little most days.

I know it's hard; I literally dragged myself to my computer every single day for about two months and made myself do 5 small tasks - despite having already sunk several hundreds of dollars into my business and not having seen a single sale. It was hard, all right ... but in the end it paid off: it took me one year to build my business to the point where I could quit my job.

Stay 100% focused on what you want.

Keep your final destination firmly in mind: do you want to be able to spend more time with the kids? Do you simply want to leave the stress of the corporate world? Do you want the independence and sense of achievement that comes from running your own business? Imagine what it will be like once you achieve it. Focus on **why** you want the business in the first place; it will help to keep you motivated.

Only **you** can change the course of your life. So what are you waiting for? Get going! :-)

Debunking the Myths of Making Money Online



Spend a few days online and you'd think that the Internet is a community of multi-millionaires.

Everyone seems to be making \$10,000 each and every month using a simple, guaranteed system that requires virtually no work on your part ... and they're all kind enough to want to share it with you.

Forget it. If they were actually making that kind of money, why would they have to resort to spam and hype?

I truly believe that the Internet offers one of the best opportunities for the "average" person to make a good living from home.

However, there are a lot of misconceptions about making money online - I know from personal experience - I fell prey to some of them myself! Let's examine some of the myths of doing business online ...

Myth #1: The Internet is a great money-making opportunity for everyone. Anyone can succeed!

Reality: If that were true, we'd all be rich. The Internet is a goldmine of opportunity, no doubt about that ... but it's just like any other opportunity: some people will do well, others won't. The Internet only gives you the opportunity; YOU have to shape that opportunity.

Myth #2: Once you have a website, you can just sit back and watch your bank account grow.

Reality: Ha ha ha! This is one of the most ridiculous lies told. There is no such thing as easy money. You will not be able to pay a few bucks for a "24 hour cash machine" website and become an instant success. You're going to have to work hard and do plenty of learning. Toss a site onto the web, sit back, and do nothing and you'll reap exactly that: nothing!

Myth #3: Yeah, but **some** opportunities can make you rich really fast! Some guy emailed me and said he made \$2000 on his first day.

Reality: Maybe he did and maybe he didn't. Most people involved in these so-called "opportunities" are merely **hoping** to make that kind of money. They usually reap some benefit from signing up others (ie. **you**) ... Remember the old saying, "If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is ..."

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Myth #4: All I have to do is build my downline and I can live off their sales ... I won't have to do anything!

Reality: Maybe ... but I doubt it. Many people jump into and out of opportunities equally fast. Most never make money.

The fact of the matter is, the only person you have control over is yourself. You cannot force anyone else to learn how to market online; you can't force someone to work hard or work for a certain number of hours a week.

I'd recommend that you concentrate on building YOUR income. Support your downline, sure, and if they do end up making some money then it's just "extra money" for you. :-)

Myth #4: You have to be an HTML expert in order to create a website.

Reality: HTML is simple to learn, and there are many excellent books and tutorials on the subject. Two popular books are "HTML for Dummies", by Ed Tittel and Stephen N. James, and "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Creating a Web Page", by Paul McFedries. Both are available online through Amazon.com or simply drop by your local bookstore. There are also many tutorials on the Internet; a good one can be found at <http://www.pagetutor.com/>.

You can also use what's known as a "WYSIWYG" editor. WYISIWYG is short for, "What You See Is What You Get" -- it's a type of editor that lets you create web pages without having to know HTML.

Myth #5: You have to learn to do everything yourself.

Reality: It's good to know something about everything when you're running a small home business. But if there's something you cannot do, just hire someone. I know that it may sound daunting; after all, who has that kind of money when you're first starting out? Don't worry; there's a way to get **professional, affordable services** - simply hire a **freelancer**. By using a freelance community, you will be able to view each freelancer's rating to find out what their previous customers thought of their work. Plus you will be able to review their portfolios. You can register for this service [here](#) (it's free).

Myth #6: The more money-making opportunities you join, the more money you'll make.

Reality: It's best to concentrate on just a few select opportunities; otherwise you end up spreading yourself too thin. Start with one opportunity and work with it until you're satisfied with your progress; then add a second. Multiple streams of income is a great advantage of doing business on the Internet - just be sure you do it gradually. It's better to have 2 or 3 money-making products, then to have 20 unprofitable ones!

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The Big, Bad Monster Named HTML

HTML stands for **H**yper**T**ext **M**arkup **L**anguage. It's the language used to create web pages ... and one of the biggest sources of fear for newbies!

Don't feel intimidated. HTML only sounds scary because it's something new. It's the same way with anything new; until you understand it, it confuses you (like your new VCR!).

Let's get one thing out of the way first: HTML is **not** a programming language! The word "programming" often evokes images of "techies" or "geeks" cloistered in some dank basement, madly creating a complicated piece of software. Thus, being told that you have to "program" HTML is sometimes enough to send newbies screaming into the night.

HTML is actually a simple **formatting language**, much like what the old word processors used to use.

I personally think that it's good for every Internet home business owner to learn enough HTML to get by. That way you'll have control over your site and be able to make changes when **you** want them done, not when your web designer has the time. Plus you'll be able to do things the way you want them to be done.

This doesn't mean you have to do everything yourself! If you're not good with website design (I'm talking about the layout and aesthetics here, not the HTML), you can always hire someone as a consultant - better yet, find an appropriate message board and post a request for a site review. Be forewarned, though: if you ask for feedback, chances are you're going to get it -- both good and bad!

Of course, you can always hire someone for "extras" as well, such as scripts, forms, or whatever else you're not comfortable doing yourself. Look for free stuff on the Internet first ... if you can't find what you're looking for, you can get professional help for affordable prices by [hiring a freelancer](#).

Basic, everyday HTML is simple to learn and not at all intimidating once you know it. When you start doing it all the time, it becomes almost as natural as breathing!



You can find 38 low or no-cost resources from the [OBB members site](#). Find out where to get free scripts, plus free or affordable logos, email programs, HTML editors, domain registration, hosting, and more - without sacrificing quality!

How do you learn?

Take some tutorials, read some books. One excellent (online) tutorial is located [here](#).

Another excellent resource for beginners is the [First Website Builder](#). It's a 4-volume library with a section written by a newbie just like you. It makes website ownership a

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reality! You'll get step-by-step instructions, from beginning to end, on how to create a website and publish it on the Internet. Get your **free trial** [here](#).

Scary 'OI FTP and Other Techie-Stuff

FTP stands for **File Transfer Protocol**. It's a method you use to transfer files to your web host, or transfer files from your web host to your own computer. It's simple to learn - and before you know it you'll be using it quickly and easily!

This book isn't meant to go into this type of thing. The point of this section is to simply say that you can learn this stuff if you choose to. If you get a headache just from thinking about it, there's a solution for you too.

If you want to learn to do "techie" stuff on your own, or if you're having computer troubles, visit the [Newbie Club](#). They have an excellent set of tutorials and books that explain everything in plain English. No jargon! Their motto is, "I'm a Newbie, not a Dummy - Just Show Me How!". Well said!

If you want to steer clear of anything remotely technical, the [Site Build It!](#) tool has everything you need to get your site up and running - including traffic! All you do is come up with the content. I personally think that [Site Build It!](#) is an excellent solution for beginners; it reduces technical issues to simple button clicks; it saves you a tremendous amount of time; it provides you with smart advice every step of the way; and it's quick and easy to use. The downside? It's not nearly as flexible as creating your own site - for example, you will not be able to install CGI scripts (programs that add interactivity to your website). However, it's a very nice solution for people who don't want the hassle of learning the "technical" stuff.

Setting Up and Protecting Your Computer

Okay, okay, I know this section is bound to put a few people to sleep. But let me tell you that this is one of the most important sections of this book. Very few newbies will bother to take this step - until it's too late. Take a bit of time to set up your computer properly before you get engrossed in your business. It doesn't take that long but it has great benefits. I'm talking about three major things:

1. Get some anti-virus software.



A **virus** is a malicious software program that can cause irritating but relatively harmless problems - or it could cause massive computer failure that will leave you frustrated, angry, and unable to use your computer.

Viruses are often transmitted through email attachments. You know how you sometimes get email where you can click on an attachment to see what it is? Well, if

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that attachment is a program - or if you save it to disk and then run a program - you could be in trouble if it's infected with a virus.

If you don't have anti-virus software, get some now. It's a worthwhile investment. You can get some at any local computer store, or even online. Two of the most popular are [McAfee VirusScan](#) and [Norton Anti-Virus](#). You can also get free anti-virus software called InoculateIT! . Once it's installed, you want to make sure you:

- ✓ Regularly update the virus data files. These data files contain information on the latest viruses so that the software can properly detect or remove them, or clean any infected files.
- ✓ Update the software. You may be able to get free upgrades to the software - at least for a little while. Take advantage of these; updated software provides further protection against new viruses.
- ✓ Leave your anti-virus software running all the time (while you're on your computer, of course!). This will help to catch viruses before they become a big problem.

2. Install a **firewall**.

Firewall software ensures that your computer is "stealthed"; it prevents others from seeing your computer and launching an attack against it.

"But why would anyone try to attack ME? I'm just a small home business!"

Sure. However, with sophisticated software anyone can become a **hacker** - if they're bored or just want the challenge or a thrill, they may break into your computer via the Internet. They might just poke around and do no harm, or they may do something nasty. You never know.

Don't be left vulnerable. There are lots of firewall programs available. One you can get absolutely **free** for personal use (small charge for business use) is called [Zone Alarm](#). It's an excellent, easy-to-use program that I personally use everyday.

3. Make regular backups of your files.

This is so important. It's also the one thing that everyone seems to hate to do (myself included!). It is vital that you create backup copies of your files just in case something should happen - your web host disappears, your computer breaks down, whatever.

Keep your backed up files on a medium that's **not** on your computer. For example, don't only back up your files to another directory on your hard drive (although you can do this too, for easy access to previous files); back it up to a floppy disk, CD, zip

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drive, tape drive ... there are plenty of back up devices available to you. Just ask your local computer store for help.

Definitely back them up after every major revision you make to your site. This is especially important because the changes you make could kill sales; if they do, you want to be able to go back to your old design and wording. I usually back up my own files once a week and after every major revision.

Don't blow this off. I know it's a pain, and it's easy to say "I'll do it later" -- but I'm speaking from personal experience when I say that it's **very** easy to accidentally delete files you didn't mean to ... especially when you're working late, you're tired, or you're distracted. Those are the times I give thanks that I've backed up my files!

You'll also want to take a few minutes to set up a good directory structure on your computer. **Directories** are like folders, places where you can group together related files. I've seen people whose computers are an absolute mess - a confusing, jumbled-up conglomeration of files that are thrown together with no real structure. Make it a point to be organized right from the very beginning; you'll be thankful for it later.

The same thing goes for organizing your email. It's guaranteed that you'll spend a great deal of time using your email software! More on that later.

How to Recognize a Scam




People struggling with the day-to-day frustrations of their jobs want to believe in all the get-rich-quick hype that can be found all over the Internet today. Unfortunately, many people are so desperate to escape their jobs or earn some extra income that they quickly put their hard-earned money into some unscrupulous opportunities - and never see any returns from their "investment".

Don't get me wrong; there are legitimate money-making opportunities out there. Unfortunately, for every legitimate opportunity there are probably dozens of scams. Here are a few pointers that should make you pause before opening your wallet:

- ◆ **They tell you that you can be rich very quickly.** This should put you on alert! If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. While we would all like to be able to make \$500/day, starting from our first day and continuing into infinity, it isn't very likely.
- ◆ **You're told that you don't need to do any work - they do it all for you.** You cannot be successful without putting in a lot of hard work.
- ◆ **You're told that ANYONE can make money.** Again, not true. A lot of opportunities use a great deal of hype to sign you up (and get a commission off you). But every job requires a different set of skills, and being told that anyone can get rich off their "program" is misleading.

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- ◆ **The website is unprofessional and full of typos and grammatical errors.** Shouldn't a legitimate company be able to afford to hire a good web designer and copywriter? On the flip side, just because a site **looks** professional **doesn't** mean it's legit!
- ◆ **You can't figure out how you make money.** Vague information should raise a few alarms in your head. And if you have a nagging suspicion that you're getting paid to recruit people, **beware!** You might be getting yourself in a **pyramid scheme** - an illegal opportunity where the focus is on recruitment rather than on selling products.
- ◆ **You have to send money in order to find out what the opportunity is all about.** Hey, they want you to work for them, right? If you were looking for a traditional job, would you pay the company to tell you what type of work you'd be doing?
- ◆ **Telephone calls or email inquiries to them remain unanswered.** If they don't want to talk to you, there's probably a reason.
- ◆ **The company uses high-pressure sales tactics to get you to sign up right away.** If the opportunity is legitimate, it will still be around tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year. It won't disappear overnight.
- ◆ **Most people have had bad experiences with them.** Join message boards on the internet or find others who have had some experience with an opportunity. Try not to use the testimonials the company provides you with. Seek out your own. And if the vast majority of people have had bad experiences with a company, one good experience doesn't make it okay! Try to take a step back and look at the opportunity objectively.

 Click on the "Scam Alerts" link on the [OBB Members Site](#) for an explanation of some of the most common scams - as well as for links on where to go for more information and research.

Internet Opportunities and The Self-Replicating Website

The power of the Internet (and of various techno-geeks) provides web businesses with the ability to provide people with the wonder of the **self-replicating website**.

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

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

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Sounds simple, doesn't it?

It's not. I've seen companies claiming to have taken care of 99% of the work by providing you with your very own eCommerce website ... if that's true, then the last remaining 1% of the work is by far the toughest.

Marketing and advertising is going to play a huge role in whether or not you make money online. Your beautiful website, quality products, and handy shopping cart software that allows customers to easily make purchases online, is **nothing** unless you can drive traffic to your site.

This is an important point so I'll state it again: **Without traffic, you have nothing.** You can have the most skillfully designed website in the world, with the most sought-after products and the easiest, most convenient online ordering system imaginable ... but unless people know where you find your site, you will not make any sales. Sitting back and letting someone else design your site and submit it to the search engines will guarantee one thing: you **won't** make any money.

That's not to say that the stuff other than traffic isn't important. They're also an integral part of a successful online business. But most people find that attracting potential customers is the single most difficult part of doing business on the Internet.

Hugely Fabulous Dot-Coms vs. the Home Based Business



Ever hear of Pets.com?

It was a huge Internet pet superstore, with a giant staff that took care of regularly updating website content, writing articles, checking inventory, fulfilling orders, providing customer service, and performing all the other duties that go with running a business.

I've often heard home business start-ups wistfully declare that they wish they had the resources that big websites have at their disposal.

I say: why?

Pets.com went out of business in 2000, as did many other big Internet companies. They weren't able to raise the amount of venture capital required to make it worth their while to do business online.

With the exception of the first few months - where I made lots of stupid and stubborn mistakes - I have consistently turned a profit each and every month since I started. I don't try and compete with the big companies. Heck, I'm **not** a big company - there's only me running my websites and newsletters. As one-person operations, it's essential for home business owners to make smart decisions.

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Keep your expenses down.

Don't buy non-essential items. Don't buy expensive advertising with an untested ad. There are ways to test your ad copy using free or low-cost resources before you go and blow \$200 on advertising. Use auction sites and competitive "free-market" websites when you need work done; an example is to [hire a freelancer](#). Don't spend big money on extraneous stuff like graphics or fancy interactive scripts. Learn to write your own HTML. Don't buy web hosting packages that offer far more than you'll ever need.

In short, spend as little as possible until you start to make money. Then you want to spend as little as you can for the highest possible return. That's why testing **everything** you do is so important!

Make a few select investments.

I tried to do everything myself: I visited sites offering free information and tried to piece everything together. The only problem was, there was plenty of conflicting information and I didn't know what to believe. So I tried it all.

That's what got me into trouble in the first place: everyone told me ezine advertising was an "easy" way to make money. I tried it. I lost hundreds of dollars and didn't make a single sale. I was told Free-For-All (FFA) sites were great for driving traffic to my website. I tried it. I ended with hundreds of spam messages, which I'm still dealing with to this day (although it's dropped dramatically since then).

As a home business owner, you are everything: the webmaster, content provider, writer, janitor, sales staff, administrative assistant, marketer, and customer service.

There are several key things you need to be able to do: one is create an effective website; the next is write persuasive copy; and finally you need to be able to generate traffic.

The Beginner's Startup Checklist



Here's a quick checklist of costs to consider when starting your online business. You may not need them all, but it will give you a good idea so that you can starting planning.



[Members](#) can find a list of 38 quality low or no-cost resources to help you save money on startup.

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One-Time Costs

▪ Computer System

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

Be sure to get **anti-virus software** and a **firewall** as well. See the next section for details.

▪ Reference Books

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

Check online auction sites such as eBay to if you are particularly interested in a certain Internet marketing manual, you may be able to find someone who's willing to sell it to you cheap.

Also look into quality free services before you buy. Although in general, I strongly believe that you get what you pay for, there are some excellent free resources available to you (for example, HTML tutorials).

▪ Email Software

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

▪ HTML Editor

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

Beginners often like **WYSIWYG** editors. WYSIWYG stands for, "What You See Is What You Get". All this means is that you'll be able to drag and drop items using this editor so that you can immediately see what your web page looks like. In other words, you don't need to know HTML.

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There are advantages and disadvantages of using WYSIWYG editors ... the obvious advantage is that they make it easy for beginners to create web pages. Disadvantages include not-so-clean HTML (it's "cleaner" and easier to maintain or modify if you hand-write it), plus you give up some flexibility.

Which type is "better" is just a matter of personal preference. You can pay anywhere from nothing (free) to well over \$100 for an HTML editor.

▪ **Permits, Licenses and Company Registration Fees**

Check with your local authorities for costs and instructions. Many bookstores carry publications on this type of thing as well. One place to start is your local tax office. They may have free information for small/home business owners.

▪ **Furniture**

You actually don't need a whole lot. Just a computer desk, chair, adequate lighting, and perhaps also an additional working surface (for when you're doing stuff by regular 'ol paper & pen) and a filing cabinet.

Auctions can be a great source of excellent furniture and cheap office supplies. Check your local newspapers for more information.

▪ **SE/Index Reviews**

You can get a great deal of targeted traffic to your website from the major search engines and indexes. This is definitely worth your while; because people specifically search for a particular topic when using the SEs and indexes, they're highly targeted and much more likely to be interested in what you have to offer.

Unfortunately, most of the major SEs are charging for "express" reviews now. These are just for **reviews**; they **don't** guarantee a listing.

Warning: don't submit your site until you've done everything you possibly can to be "ready!" This list is just to give you a general idea of what it will cost for a review ... if your site is rejected you'll have to pay the review fee again, so be prepared!

Major Search Engines:

- [Altavista](#): USD \$199. Free submissions still accepted.
- [Excite and Webcrawler](#): Express Submit is USD \$199 (guaranteed 48-hour review); Basic Submit is USD \$99 (approximately 8-week wait). Free submissions still accepted.

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- [HotBot](#): free submissions still accepted.
- [Lycos](#): free submissions still accepted.
- [Northern Light](#): free submissions still accepted.

Major Indexes:

- [Yahoo!](#) - mandatory USD \$199 per review (USD \$600 for adult sites) for commercial websites listed in the two most popular categories.
- [Open Directory Project](#) - free submissions still accepted. Highly selective index that uses human editors to look at each submission.

Note that although you can still submit your site for free to some of the major search engines, you're **not** guaranteed a listing. Even back in the days where all of them accepted free listings, you usually had to wait **months** to get listed - if you were lucky to get listed at all!

▪ Ad Tracking Software

This is probably one of the most overlooked parts of building an online business. Tracking software "codes" your URLs so that you know exactly which ads are working best, and which ones aren't working very well at all. It allows you to "tweak" your ad copy, target your audience better, and more. Tracking software is absolutely vital; if you don't use, you're just throwing away your money.

I've seen tracking software available for monthly fees ... however, there are some great ones that only require a one-time fee and its yours to use however you like. We'll cover tracking software in an upcoming issue. Typical costs: \$10-20/month, some are free, some require a one-time investment (varies widely).

Recurring Costs

▪ Internet access fees

I wouldn't recommend using free services - they tend to be slower and more prone to service interruptions. Shell out a few bucks a month for a reliable connection. Monthly fees typically range from \$10 (dial-up connections) up to \$50 or even more (high-speed DSL or cable connections).

▪ Website hosting

Don't even think about free website hosting - free hosting providers stick an obscenely big ugly ad at the top of every web page on your site. It's okay to test

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on free websites ... but when you're ready to go "live", pay a reputable web host for dependable hosting services.

- **Domain name registration**

You can prepay for one year at a time, or several years. If you prepay for several years, you won't have to worry about so often (if you don't pay up, your domain goes back into the pool of available names!).

- **Autoresponders**

Your web host may offer some already. **Autoresponders** are email addresses that will automatically answer emails sent to it with a predefined message. There are lots of terrible ones and a few good ones. Most free autoresponders have ads stuck at the top of your message. If you are using your autoresponders to sell something (as opposed to sending out an article, for example), pay to make them ad-free.

Autoresponders will be covered in an upcoming issue. Just keep in mind that even if your web host does offer them as part of your hosting package, they might not be adequate. Autoresponders typically cost from \$10 to \$20 a month.

- **Mailing list management**

Most "experts" agree that starting your own free newsletter is a great way to keep in touch with your visitors. If you decide to start one of your own, you will need to find a way to manage your subscribers list and send mailings. Some list management services are free (they stick an ad at the top of your mailing to keep it free). However, I'd suggest paying for ad-free messages. We'll discuss list managers in more detail in our upcoming series on Starting Your Own Newsletter.

- **Advertising**

There are lots of ways to get cheap or free advertising that's highly effective (that's a topic for another issue!). This is likely to be one of your highest expenses, if you choose to pay for advertising. Usually a combination of free and paid advertising works best.

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

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- **Office supplies**

Hey, you're working online - you barely have any need for office supplies! I've found that my biggest expense is printer cartridges. Buying them in 'bulk' (two or more) can save you a little money. Bulk packages of printer cartridges can be hard to find; ask your local computer store for help.

- **Phone, voice mail, fax**

Many home business owners start out by using their current phone line as a double for their business line/Internet access. That's okay. At some point, though, if you get lots of phone inquiries you may want to get a second phone line or look into getting DSL service (see the Q&A section for more information). A fax machine is also not a necessity (just a convenience).

You can also use a local service such as [Mailboxes, Etc.](#) They offer the use of a mailbox, fax, and other business services for a fee. I've found them to be rather pricey; for example, in my city it costs a whopping \$3.50 to send a 1-page fax! But if you don't need these services very often they may still save you money over buying your own fax machine.

- **Post Office Box**

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

That Dirty Four-Letter Word Called SPAM



Spam.

A dirty word for those on the Internet. Also called **UCE**, or **unsolicited commercial email**, spam is when someone sends you their offer without your express consent.

Pretty much everyone has received spam. You know the type - email with loud proclamations such as "Make \$10,000 in time for Christmas!" or "Send \$5 to the address at the bottom of the list ... (blah blah blah) ... and in one month you'll be \$60,000 richer!".

Spam provokes a variety of responses: some people simply scowl in irritation and delete the message; angry, frothing-at-the-mouth victims fire back nasty emails; annoyed techies meticulously pick apart the email header to find the right ISP to lodge a complaint. I think it's safe to say that most people are fed up with offers and opportunities clogging their emailboxes.

Quite simply, spam wastes people's time and makes them angry. It also causes

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problems for Internet Service Providers who generally have an Acceptable Use Policy stating that there will be consequences for anyone caught spamming.

Don't become an unwitting spammer! If you annoy someone enough, they could report you to your ISP. And it's not only techies that can do this - there are a number of sites where you can get help in reporting spammers! You could end up losing your ISP account, get kicked off any affiliate program you promote in your email, and ruin your reputation. Your protestations of innocence ("But the list was **opt-in!**") probably won't do you any good.

You've probably come across services offering "opt-in" email lists. "Opt-in" means that the people on the mailing list have specifically asked to be there. And **true** opt-in lists are a fabulous way of making your offer known to interested prospects.

But beware! In their quest to make a buck, providers of some so-called "opt-in" lists could just be selling you a whole lot of trouble.

Before you run off and purchase that magical email list, consider the following:

Understand Exactly What "Opt-In" Really Means

Legitimate opt-in lists ask users to choose topics they're interested in, and then subscribe to the appropriate mailing list. Usually there will be some sort of double safeguard" or "double opt-in system" - the user requests to be added to the mailing list; they get an email sent to the address they provided; and finally they must reply to the email in order to actually be added to the mailing list. This protects the user in case someone else tries to add their address to a list without their knowledge or consent.

Opt-in lists also provide a simple way for its subscribers to "opt-out" (unsubscribe) at any time.

Find a Reputable Broker: Cheap is Not Necessarily Better!

Real opt-in addresses do not come cheap. While you may be able to find 100,000 addresses for \$30, you will find yourself bombarded with angry email (also known as flames). Worse, your ISP will be flamed!

So even if \$30 seems like a great deal, it isn't. You could end up losing your ISP account and web host when people complain (and they **will** complain!). And your ISP could charge you for clean-up fees!

Ask others for their opinions and experiences with a particular email broker.

Don't Assume the List is Opt-In Just Because Someone Tells You It Is

People want to make money (gee, that's pretty obvious - bear with me here). Online marketers who have heard that email is a fabulous way of making

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money need a mailing list. True opt-in lists are not cheap (usually starting from about 10-20 cents an address); and when aspiring Internet marketers discover an offer where they can rent 100,000 addresses for \$30, they may think they've hit gold!

Not so. The people selling these extremely cheap mailing lists are also out to make a buck; they know that with the right price and some convincing words, they can get people to purchase their lists. They claim their lists are "opt-in" so that their prospective customers won't get scared away.

Don't be fooled! The providers of these "spam lists" harvest email addresses from classified ad sites, FFA sites, newsgroups, chat rooms, other email lists, and wherever else they can find them. Fabulous writing can be very persuasive ... but using one of these spam lists can cause you far more trouble than it's worth.

Subscribe to the Email List Yourself First

Join the mailing list yourself. That way you'll see exactly how they gather their addresses. Do they require you to verify your subscription by mail or on the web before you are actually added to the mailing list? Is there a statement at the beginning of each email you receive that states how you can opt-out of the list? Is there a privacy policy that states that your email address will never be sold or rented to others?

The bottom line is **protect yourself** by doing your research. Your email campaign can be a fabulous success if you do it right!

And the #1 Way to Run an Ethical Email Marketing Campaign ...

[Start Your Own Opt-In Newsletter!](#)

A Few Words About Professionalism on the Web ...

One thing that I still find shocking is the distinct lack of professionalism online.

People tend to think that because they're on the Internet, they don't have to follow normal business rules of etiquette. Not too long ago, I had someone spam me an advertisement with a subject line of, 'Stick this in your ezine!'. Hmmph - Not very professional.

Business online is still **business**, and you should treat it as such. Here are a few general guidelines:

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- ✓ **Greet the other person.** A simple "Dear _____" or "Hello" or even "Hi" is just fine. Don't assume the other person is a man; I don't know how many times I've received email beginning with the words, "Dear sir"!
- ✓ **Introduce yourself.**
- ✓ **Be courteous.** We can't see each other when we write email; try to express yourself clearly in your writing. Sometimes a request sounds rude if you do not take the time to phrase it properly.
- ✓ **Don't make demands.** Chances are, a lot of the businesses you get in contact with will be small, home-based businesses run by one or two people. Do not demand that they help you with some task or research; they are under no obligation to provide free advice. Most are more than willing to help in whatever way they can, but if all they did was help everyone who wrote to them, they'd never get anything done. Ask nicely and you're more likely to get a helpful reply. And I cannot emphasize how important it is to take the initiative to browse their website before asking questions! A lot of the time, your questions will be answered somewhere on the site.
- ✓ **Spell check your writing.** It's difficult to read text that's riddled with spelling errors. Running a spell-check takes only a few minutes.
- ✓ **Get to the point.** Everyone's busy these days; be concise.
- ✓ **Be specific.** People online are often involved in several things at once. When you write to someone, tell them the name of the opportunity, product, proposal, or whatever it is you're interested in. Don't just ask for "more info please".
- ✓ **Don't spam.** Nobody appreciates junk mail.
- ✓ **Follow guidelines.** This is especially important when you're approaching another home business owner with a proposal or a question. For example, writing articles and offering them to others with reprint rights is a great way to get some free advertising. Each newsletter editor will have article guidelines. One of my own is that sales letters are definitely **not** welcome ... and yet every week someone attempts to spam me a poorly written, thinly disguised ad that they're trying to pass off as an article. **Respect** others; you'll do much better.
- ✓ **Answer your email.** I know, I know; it sounds obvious but you'd be surprised at how many online businesses ignore email or don't answer them in a timely manner.
- ✓ **If you must send attachments, virus-check them first.** It's best to send email in plain text and leave the HTML and fancy stuff to the web. But if you have to send an email attachment for whatever reason, make sure you scan it for viruses first.

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- ✓ **Sign your emails.** Don't just abruptly end your letter. At the very least, sign your name at the end of your email. Display "real world" contact information if you like.

Choosing a Target Audience



One of the most common mistakes people make is to try and be everything to everyone. You see websites littered with ads for dating services, pet shampoos, cheese graters, outdoor wear, and dozens of other unrelated products. And it's probably pretty safe to say that these websites generate little or no income.

Why? Because when people are online, they're looking for someone specific. If you're an avid gardener, for example, you may be looking for information on plants that you can grow in your area. A gardening website filled with information on plants and gardening tools would interest you. A website that offers gourmet cat treats alongside humidifiers and insurance quotes would not.

Carefully select a target audience. Who are you trying to attract? Is it corporate workers? Tarantula owners? Programming geeks? Moms-to-be?

Whatever audience you choose, **focus** on what they want. Give them information that **they** find useful. Offers products that **they** want. Don't be fooled into thinking that the more products you offer, the more money you'll make. Concentrate on just a few select, high-quality products that specifically cater to the wants of your target market.

Your chosen target audience determines everything you do - how you write your sales copy, what products you offer, even how you design your website. So take your time and choose carefully.

By the way ... it's always best to find a product that suits your audience, rather than try to find an audience for your product! You can't force people to want what you offer. Research carefully; visit select message boards or online forums to see what types of things people are interested in.

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But What Am I Supposed to Sell? I Need a Product!



Before we go any further, let's just get one thing out into the open:

Create content first. Sell products later.

The vast majority of people come online for **information** (not to buy stuff). By creating a content-rich site that entertains or provides useful information, visitors to your website are more likely to return. The more they come back, the more of a relationship you develop with them. **Give your visitors a reason to trust you.** Trust is a big part of buying online.

Now onto the product. You obviously have to sell something in order to make money. One of the reasons I hear most for **not** starting an online business is that people don't have a product or service to sell.

Good news! You don't have to have your own product: you can sell other company's products or services in return for a commission. These are known as **affiliate programs**.

Even if you already have your own product or service, adding one or two good affiliate programs to your website can generate an extra income for you.

This book is not meant to go into detail about affiliate programs, but here's a quick primer ...



Login to the [Online Business Basics members site](#) for a comprehensive 3-part series on making money with Affiliate Programs.

How Affiliate Programs Work

When you sign up as an affiliate for a company, you are usually given a special website address. This address has a "tracking" code attached to it. When you promote the company's products and services, you always use your special URL -- that way the company can track how many sales you've made. You get paid a commission for every sale you make.

Note that your only job is to promote the company's products. The company handles all the billing, shipping, inventory, customer service, and so on. It's *your* responsibility to get people to visit the site.

Income Potential

I get asked all the time how much money you can make from affiliate programs. My answer is always, 'It depends on YOU'.

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Okay, maybe that might seem too vague for you, but it's the truth. How well you do depends on how much effort you're willing to put forth. And it's not just the effort you put in, but also whether you *test* your efforts (by tracking your ads and traffic), and what *types* of marketing you use.

What do I mean? Well ... let's say you send out 1 million spammed emails. You might make a few bucks - maybe you'll even make a lot, who knows - but once you get reported to your affiliate program for spamming (and believe me, you WILL get reported!), you can kiss your commissions goodbye. Most affiliate programs do not condone spam and will kick you out of the program.

On the other hand ... if you take the time to learn how to optimize web pages for the major search engines ... if you create an informative and interesting content-rich website ... if you publish your own opt-in newsletter ... this type of marketing is far more effective in the long run.

Yeah, But Can I Make a Decent Income from Affiliate Programs?

In a word: yes.

As I said before, it depends on YOU. But let me tell you that, speaking from personal experience, affiliate programs can bring in a steady, significant income. It's how I started; in just a year, working part-time, I was able to quit my corporate job. Not bad at all!

And it's not just me. I know many others who have worked hard to build a decent affiliate income stream.

6 Myths and Realities about Making Money with Affiliate Programs

Ever seen an affiliate program that claims to do '99% of the work' while all YOU do is advertise?

Yes, the company handles the inventory, billing, product delivery, customer service, website maintenance ...

... While **your** only job is advertising. And for every sale you make as a result of your advertising, you're paid a commission. Sounds pretty easy, doesn't it?

Don't be fooled into thinking that affiliate programs are an easy way to make money. If that were true, we'd all be rich instead of scouring the 'net to find new ways of earning an income. Even if it IS true that you're only doing '1% of the work', you're doing the **hardest 1%**!

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

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Sadly, it didn't work that way. Here are a few things to keep in mind when you consider becoming an affiliate:

1. **More Isn't Better.**

One common mistake is to join every affiliate program that looks good, hoping that you'll be able to make more money that way. It's just not true. Focusing your efforts on a few good programs is the best way to steadily build your affiliate income.

2. **Don't Depend on a Monthly Pay Cheque.**

Many affiliate programs require you to earn a certain amount in commissions each month before they pay you. If you don't reach that minimum commission level, your earnings are rolled over to the next month. You get paid whenever you reach the minimum threshold.

This can be very frustrating; after hours and hours of hard work, you may not see the money you rightly earned at the end of the month.

One suggestion I often make to 'newbies' is to join Commission Junction, an affiliate management website that consolidates all your earnings into one pay cheque. < <http://www.buildyourhomebiz.com/commissions.html> > That means you'll get paid more often! With over 1000 affiliate programs to choose from, you're sure to find something that fits your target audience.

3. **Advertising is Hard Work.**

Sure, your only job is to advertise - but that requires a great deal of learning and effort. It's nowhere near as simple as throwing up a banner on your website or placing free classified ads. You have to put forth a consistent effort in order to make money; if you're not motivated, you won't do well. Take the **free Affiliate Masters Course** for surefire ways to improve your profits, <mailto:tamsbenefits@sitesell.net>.

4. **Your Downline Will Not Make You Rich.**

Two-tiered affiliate programs tempt you with notions that you can make more money 'with no more effort on your part' just by signing up more affiliates.

Don't depend on it. Unfortunately, most affiliates don't make money and assuming that your referrals WILL is just setting yourself up for disappointment. Some of your referrals will make money, of course, and may even make quite a bit if you're lucky. Just don't count on it: concentrate on your maximizing your own efforts, rather than on dreaming about the efforts of others.

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5. No Product Will 'Sell Itself'.

We've all come across websites claiming to have products or services that 'everyone needs'. Regardless of whether or not this is true, people on the 'net are impulsive creatures and buy what they WANT, not what they 'need'!

No product will sell itself. It might be the most wonderful product in the world that can wash your hair, balance your checkbook, walk the dog, and feed the kids ... but you have to SHOW your visitor how it will enrich their lives and make them WANT to buy.

This is even true when you're giving away free stuff. Why should your visitor bother to request your free gift unless it can do something for them? It's much easier to surf away with a simple click-of-the-mouse!

6. You Probably Won't 'Make Money Instantly'.

Put up a link on your website or place a free ad, and presto! You'll instantly make sales.

This isn't very likely to happen unless you have a high traffic, targeted website that is a good fit with your affiliate program ... and even then, it's not guaranteed. To sell ANYTHING online, you need to have lots of targeted traffic, quality products, and strong copy that persuades your visitor to buy.

Depending on the individual, making money with an affiliate program may take a week to several months. Put forth a consistent effort and you'll see your earnings gradually increase over time.

This isn't meant to discourage you from joining affiliate programs. To the contrary, affiliate programs are a great way for the average person to make a solid income on the web. But, like everything else, you need to venture into the opportunity with your eyes wide open; don't get caught in the hype. With hard work, motivation, and persistence you can soon be well on your way to earning a good living online!

Are You Guilty of Affiliate Greed?

Drumming your fingers on the desk, you impatiently wait for the web page to load. Finally! After an agonizing five- minute wait it's done.

And what do you see? Links to dozens of products, from cyber-dating services to Internet marketing books that claim to make you \$10,000 in 2 weeks, to all-natural pet shampoo, to the miracle herbal weight-loss remedy that will let you lose 20 lbs in a week without dieting or exercise! You're in consumer heaven! Or are you?

More than likely you're going to surf away - if you haven't already done so after being forced to wait for what seems like HOURS for the web page to load.

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Entrepreneurs entering the world of eCommerce have been told that "multiple streams of income" is the best way to make a decent income online. That's true, BUT ...

... You have to *target* your market. People surfing the web are looking for information on a particular topic [note: I said they're looking for *information*, not necessarily for *products*]. If you're looking specifically for information on how to care for the iris in your garden, you probably won't be especially receptive to offers for the Ultimate Cheese Grater for a mere \$12.99 (plus shipping and handling).

On the other hand, offers for gardening tools and specialized fertilizers may catch your eye.

You can still create multiple streams of income. Just group together all the similar products (eg. products of interest to one particular target audience) on one website. Group together others that go well together and promote them on yet other websites.

Only select a few of the best products to offer on each website. By limiting the choices, you will be helping your visitors focus on only those products that are of interest to them.

Create a website that's high in relevant content (people are looking for *information*, remember?), quick to load, attractive, and well-written. The result? More affiliate sales.

Remember that "more products" isn't necessarily "better". By all means, create multiple streams of income - just be sure that you do so in a focused manner, by targeting your audience and selecting the best products you can.

To Buy or Not to Buy? A Money-Making Tip for Affiliates

A few days ago, a member of one of my affiliate program downlines contacted me with this email:

'I've been promoting this product for nearly 5 months now and I haven't sold anything. I've tried everything you can think of! I'm about ready to give up. Do you have any suggestions?'

After looking at his website and a couple of his ads, I wrote back with a simple question:

'Did you buy the product yourself?'

His answer: No.

Maybe I'm coming from a biased point of view (as his affiliate sponsor), but to me, it was obvious that he didn't know the product very well.

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Most people don't want to believe it, but one of the best ways to sell an affiliate product is to *buy the product*, use it, and then provide a personal testimonial (assuming it deserves one, of course).

'But that costs money!' some people moan. Yes, it does; but so does wasted advertising dollars and effort. You're in business, remember? The phrase, 'you have to spend money to make money' is well-known for a reason: it's true.

Oh, you don't have to spend a lot; that's the beauty of the Internet. But think of it this way: why should your visitors buy a product that you wouldn't buy yourself? Investing in the product gives you several advantages that you can use towards making more sales ...

- You'll have first-hand knowledge of the product or service, and can answer most questions that come your way.
- You'll *know* the quality of the product you're selling. Offer your visitors top-quality products and you'll have a much better chance of converting them into repeat customers. That means more money in your pocket!
- You can offer a personal endorsement of the product. This goes a long way, particularly with those you've developed a good working relationship with (newsletter subscribers, for example).

Now I can understand putting off the purchase of an expensive, high-end product ... but if your affiliate product is only a few dollars, then why hesitate? Many people spend far more on advertising than it would cost them to purchase the affiliate product.

So what can you do if you don't have much money to spare?

- Bite the bullet; buy the product and eat the cost. If it's only a few bucks it probably won't hurt you.
- Attempt to make a few sales. Invest in the product once you make enough in commissions to do so.
- Buy the product, eat the cost, and go for some effective no-cost advertising to offset your investment. For example, you could swap or barter for website or ezine advertising.

Can you make good money selling affiliate products without buying them yourself? Sure. No doubt there are a few people who do. But most people have trouble selling *anything* online, let alone a product they know nothing or very little about. Which path will YOU take?

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9 Tips on Becoming a Top-Selling Affiliate

"Put up our banners on your website or use our pre-written ads ... we'll do the rest!"

Ugh.

It's unfortunate that some affiliate programs tell you that making money with them is as simple as that. New affiliates are often under the impression that it doesn't take much to earn money with affiliate programs - when nothing could be further from the truth.

Unless you have a high-traffic, highly-targeted website you're going to have to put in a great deal of effort if you want to do well - not just selling the products, but learning HOW TO market them on the Internet.

What's the difference between a top-performing affiliate and one that doesn't even make enough for a cup of coffee?

1. Top affiliates buy the product they're selling.

It's important to know what you're selling. First of all, you want to be sure you're selling a quality product that offers great value. Your reputation is at stake, after all! You have to really KNOW the product in order to describe it honestly to others.

Buying the product you're selling is a MUST. Why should someone else buy a product that you're not willing to purchase yourself?

2. Top affiliates take the time to learn.

Learn what? It always amazes me when I receive email from someone who joins an affiliate program, but then asks me exactly what it is they're selling and what they're supposed to do.

Know your product. Know the website. Spend some time surfing through the site to familiarize yourself with what you're getting into.

3. Top affiliates are fresh and original.

Many affiliate programs provide their affiliates with pre-written emails, advertising copy, or articles. They also usually provide a number of banners that you can choose from.

After you've seen the same tired old ad time and time again, it simply becomes ineffective. People will ignore it since it's been used too many times. It's much more effective for you to come up with a new way of telling people about the product -- something fresh and original.

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4. Top affiliates provide content.

If you are advertising a product on your website, try adding some solid content to your offer. Then tie the content into your offer, and show your visitors how the product will benefit them.

5. Top affiliates don't use hype.

What I mean by this is: don't make false claims about your product. If you use hype you'll end up with a dissatisfied customer who may return the product and spread the word about you. Keep your customers happy and they'll come back.

Be truthful. If you do not honestly like the product, then don't promote it.

6. Top affiliates answer their emails promptly.

Sometimes you may get a visitor that's still a little unsure about purchasing a product. That's when they may email you with additional questions.

Answer these emails courteously and in a timely manner. If you don't know the answer, either find out or forward their email to someone who can help them.

7. Top affiliates endorse the product.

Once again, this goes back to the all-important step of buying the product you're selling. If you truly do like the product you'll be able to write a sincere endorsement. Sincerity shines through!

8. Top affiliates experiment.

Some promotion methods will just naturally work better than others. Experiment, learn from both your successes and your failures, and try to improve.

9. Top affiliates concentrate on only a few programs.

Select a few excellent programs and focus your efforts on them. If you try to promote too many, you'll end up spreading yourself too thin - you'll be less effective, and may end up only making a few pennies here and there. Concentrate your efforts on making a decent income with just a few good programs.

There really is no "trick" to making money with affiliate programs. It took me a couple of months before I started seeing any money ... but once it started, it just got easier and easier. They're a fabulous way to get started online!

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Registering a **Domain Name**

This is one of the most important things you can do for your online business. People know the difference between a simple and professional "www.mycompany.com" and "www.afreedomain.com/directory/subdirectory/~yourname/yourpage.html". Don't look amateurish by refusing to spend a few dollars on your own domain.

Your own domain will instantly provide you with many benefits:

- ✓ **Credibility.** You look like a serious business, instead of somebody playing around on the web hoping to make a few bucks. People are more likely to trust someone with their own domain than someone who's just fooling around and could disappear any day.
- ✓ **An advantage with the search engines.** Search engines are an excellent source of free, targeted traffic. You definitely want to take advantage of them! Some search engines are starting to ignore sites hosted by free providers, and Yahoo!™, one of the biggest and best online indexes, won't list you if you don't have your own domain.
- ✓ **Name branding/name recognition.** It's much easier to remember a simple www.mycompany.com than one of those long URLs from a free domain.
- ✓ **Email and autoresponders with your domain name in the address.** Instead of an address like workfromhome3848@somefreedomain.com, you'll get one that says webmaster@mycompany.com. This makes it easier for the recipient of your email to connect you with your website.

How to Choose a Domain Name

It's best to think of several different domain names, in case your ideal name isn't available. Try to come up with a domain name that:

- ✓ **Describes your business.** For example, if you're in the business of building custom log homes, then try to have the words "log homes" in your domain name.
- ✓ **Ends with .com.** You can register all sorts of different extensions such as .net, .org, and country-specific extensions ... but people are most familiar with .com. The exception: not-for-profit organizations may prefer to use .org.
- ✓ **Is short and memorable.** For example, even if your company is called "Luxury Custom Log Homes", a good URL would be www.customloghomes.com or simply www.loghomes.com. Don't use the first letter of each word in your company name to get the domain www.lclh.com - it's too hard to remember.

By the way, **don't pay a company to "park" your domain.** All parking does is put up an electronic billboard on your domain that says something like, "Coming soon! This website is currently under construction", plus an ad for the company parking your

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domain. Once you pay for a domain, it's yours for the duration of your payment term (one year, two years, etc).

Also don't choose a domain registrar based solely on price alone. I've seen domains as cheap as \$11 a year - but that doesn't mean you're getting the best deal. The company you register with should have reliable, friendly customer service: when your domain comes up for renewal, you want them to remind you. Imagine building and branding your business, only to lose your domain because you forgot to renew it!

Recommended

You can register your domain at a number of different places online. I use a company called [AllWebCo](#), because they've always provided fast, reliable, and friendly service - and you pay only \$25.00 per year. If you register through Network Solutions (probably the best-known service), you pay \$70 for the first two years and \$35 per year afterwards.

How to Choose a **Web Host**

Now that you've got your cool new domain name, the next step is to select a **web host** that will provide you with the service and features you need. Web hosting ensures that your new domain is accessible to everyone on the Internet. Once again, it's important not to choose your web host based solely on cost alone!

Choosing the right web host is a decision that will affect your online business in a big way. For example, a poor hosting company that has a lot of downtime ends up costing you in lost profits ... not to mention a great deal of frustration on your end!

Some of the things you want to consider when choosing a web host include:

Fast, reliable connection to the Internet.

Your site must load fast - one of the major reasons visitors click away from a website is slow loading time.

Excellent uptime.

If your web host's servers go down, then your website also goes down! That translates to lost profits. Find a web host with an excellent uptime record.

Site/data backups.

It would be pretty devastating to lose all your hard work. Find a web host that performs daily backups. [On that note, you should also be backing up your own data on a regular basis ... it only takes a few minutes!]

Plenty of storage space.

How much you need will depend on what you envision your site to be. Make sure

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you leave room for growth; be sure to have more than enough space for both your current and your future needs. This includes your normal web pages, graphics, scripts, and anything else you may want to use for your website.

Keep in mind that there's no such thing as 'unlimited space'. There is ALWAYS a limit to the amount of space a web host can offer; this is not a bad thing - you just be sure that it's enough to cover you and your future needs. Storage space by itself is not a deciding factor.

Adequate transfer space.

Everytime someone views a web page, they're actually downloading data. Read the fine print in the contract to see if you are limited to a certain percentage of system resources. Web hosts may charge you extra if you go over the transfer limit.

CGI scripts.

Many web hosts will provide you with some standard CGI scripts for things such as counters, forms, and passwords. Also make sure you have the ability to create and upload your own CGI scripts - you should not be restricted to what the web host offers.

Secure server capability.

Secure servers allow you to transmit pages in an encrypted format. This is necessary if you plan on selling something directly from your website. Look for a web host that offers secure server capability for low or no additional costs.

Free autoresponders, email aliases, and mailboxes.

How many of each you'll need depends on your business. But look for a host that will provide you with a least a few of each. You can always purchase more.

Free mailing list software.

Many web hosts offer a feature where you can create your own mailing list. Handy for when you want to start your own newsletter!

Visitor demographics.

Analyzing your traffic is an important part of doing business online. Your web host should offer some demographics - the more, the better! Look for number of page views, number of unique visitors, referrers (where your visitors are coming from), browsers, and other such information.

Unlimited, free, and responsive customer service.

Make sure you can get the help you need, when you need it. It can be very frustrating if you run into a problem and can't find anyone to help you! With a

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good web host you won't need support services very often, but when you do you want to be able to contact someone right away. Be sure that you can contact them by phone, too - it's much easier and faster to resolve a problem over the phone, rather than emailing each other back and forth.

Online management toolkit.

This is handy for when you need to do administrative tasks, such as setting up autoresponders, email aliases, uploading/downloading files, and so on. Instead of being forced to wait for your web host to do it for you, you can do it yourself anytime you like.

Money-back guarantee.

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

No minimum contracts.

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

Take your time and select the right web host. Doing it properly now will save you time and frustration later - you'll be glad you did!

! [AllWebCo](#) also offers website hosting. They're extremely affordable, and they give you far more than you'll probably ever need! Professional hosting packages start from only \$9.95/month. Plus their customer service has been exceptional!

Accepting Credit Cards Online - It's Easier than You Think



Most of us have been told about the necessity of getting a **merchant account**, which would allow you to take credit card orders online. After all, Internet shoppers are impulsive people, and unless you can accept credit cards you're going to lose a lot of sales. And what's more, credit cards are a convenient way to make purchases and they provide some protection to the consumer.

But if you take a look at what it takes to get a merchant account, you will come to one inescapable conclusion: they're **expensive**. They are also difficult to get for the small home business. And they may even be the wrong decision for you if you're just starting out.

There are usually setup and application fees, monthly fees, sometimes transaction

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charges, statement fees, or other hidden costs. In addition, you may be "locked-in" to a contract so that even if your business isn't working out you are still liable for paying all fees for your lock-in period.


My personal opinion is that it's better to start off with **third-party processing companies**. These companies handle credit card transactions for you. Many will handle most major credit cards (not just Visa and Mastercard). They usually charge a small setup fee, plus a per-transaction fee typically somewhere between 7 and 20 percent. At the end of a pay period (however they define it), they mail you a cheque for your sales, minus their transaction fees. Third-party processing companies often also charge a small cheque-processing fee and/or require that a certain percentage be held back in case of customer returns or chargebacks. They then release the holdback amount to you after a certain period of time.

Even with the transaction fees, third-party credit card processors offer a fabulous deal to home businesses: if you don't make a sale, then you don't pay anything. With merchant accounts, you **always** pay the monthly fees - even if you don't make a sale all month.

Two third-party processing companies stand out for me. You will want to research others before you come to a decision, of course. These two companies are:

1. Clickbank, <http://www.clickbank.com/>. Clickbank only handles those products or services that can be delivered electronically. Examples include newsletter advertisements, website memberships, and eBooks. I use Clickbank myself, and have been very happy with their service. They are always prompt with their pay cheques.
2. CCNow, <http://www.ccnnow.com/>. CCNow handles 'hard' goods, shippable products. An example is a printed book. **Update (January, 2001):** CCNow apparently went through some "maintenance problems" recently, and their services became unavailable for at a couple of days. Not a good thing for the businesses that used them! If you're considering them, email them first - and see what they have to say.

You can always choose to switch to a real merchant account once your sales justify doing so. In the meantime, third-party credit card processing companies provide an excellent service for the fraction of the price.

 [Members](#), click on the "Accepting Credit Cards" link for a comprehensive review of over the most popular third-party credit card processors. There you'll find information on their fees, restrictions, reserves, and more.

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Effective Use of Your Email Program



You probably already have an email program. Some of you use whatever came bundled with your web browser, if available; or you may have had email software pre-installed with your computer.

Your email software is a vital part of your online business. What you choose is just a matter of personal preference: some people prefer lots of features and maximum control, others go for software that's intuitive and easy to use.

Generally speaking, you should look for at least the following features in an email program (most recent email software have these features):

Filters

Filters allow you to sort and process your email automatically. This is a very powerful benefit in that it saves you from doing it all yourself manually. I use filters extensively; by doing so I can tell with a quick glance what needs immediately attention and what can be left until later.

Folders / Mailboxes

The terminology may differ from software to software, but basically you should be able to create email folders for different purposes - it's similar to creating file folders to stick in your filing cabinet. Email folders allow you to effectively organize your email.

Signatures

Email signatures are small blocks of text that are automatically added to the end of each mail message you send. You can use them to promote your business. An email program that allows you to create numerous signatures and store them for later retrieval will save you time; each time you send a message, you can easily select which "sig" file you want to use.

The other consideration is their vulnerability to viruses. Microsoft's Outlook Express email software is one of the most widely used - and it's also frequently the target of malicious viruses. There are better email programs around; the one I highly recommend is [Eudora Mail](#). Eudora has loads of useful features that make managing your email a breeze. If you're willing to view ads while using it (the ads are pretty unobtrusive), you can get the full-featured software for **free**. There's also a "light" version for people who don't want to view ads, plus the paid version that provides all the features and no ads. Definitely worth your time.

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Whatever you decide, you'll find helpful email tips in the following article.

Are You Driving Your Customers to Your Competitors?

It makes my teeth ache when I am ignored.

How many times have you emailed a business and never received a reply?

My guess is: plenty. I can sympathize with you; in this day and age of lightning-quick email, it is beyond frustrating to send out a legitimately interested email to someone about their website or product ... and not even receive the courtesy of a reply.

That, to me, is unforgivable.

And to you, the small business person, it should be as well. It is well known that poor customer service leads to poor sales - perhaps not at first, but bad service **will** eventually get around by word of mouth!

Someone who emails you is likely very interested in some aspect of your business. A lack of response is going to cause her to go elsewhere - more precisely, it will drive her straight to your competitors! Here are a few tips on handling email inquiries:

Try to answer emails within 48 hours - 24 is even better.

Set aside time each day to answer your email. I do it three times a day - first thing in the morning, mid-afternoon, and just before bed. That way I can ensure everyone gets a timely response.

Learn to effectively use email filters.

You can set up filters to automatically file your email into separate folders, as well as to discard spam. For example ... my own filters automatically slot my email into folders called 'Sales', 'Ezines', 'Visitor Feedback', 'Inquiries', and others ... This saves me from wasting time sorting it all out myself. I know I can ignore the 'Sales' and 'Ezines' folder for the time being. The email in the other two folders get answered promptly.

Be courteous and professional.

We all have 'off' days when we just don't feel like taking the time or making the effort to properly answer an inquiry. And let's face it: we all get questions that are plainly answered right on our website. If you've got that itchy, hot, gotta-get-away-from-here feeling, then take a break and relax. Tackle your email after you're feeling better.

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If you can't answer your email promptly, let people know.

Whatever your reason, announce your new schedule. Make use of autoresponders, post it on your website or in your newsletter ... just make sure people know when they can expect to hear back from you.

Never expose someone's email address to others.

On occasion you might need to send out an email to a group of people. If your email program does not allow you to personalize and send each message out individually, make use of the **Blind Carbon Copy (BCC)** feature (I've yet to see email software that does not offer this feature). This will hide the list of email addresses from the others in the list.

Why do you need to do this? Quite simple. You don't want to unintentionally expose someone's email address to a spammer. Even if the people you email do not spam, they may forward it to someone who does. Don't even give them a chance.

Keep a stash of 'standard' replies.

Some questions are asked often. Instead of typing in the same thing over and over again, keep a standard reply that you can cut and paste into your response ... then tailor it to specifically address your visitor's inquiry.

If you can't do it yourself, hire someone.

If you really hate answering email or you simply can't keep up, hire someone to do it for you. Choose someone that's friendly, knowledgeable about your business, prompt ... and who has a good grasp of English. I don't know how many times I've received an incomprehensible response to an inquiry! Choose carefully; the person you hire will be representing your business.

Ignore your customers, and lose them to your competitors. Treat them well and you'll build customer loyalty and improve your bottom line!

Autoresponders: One of the Netpreneur's Best Friends

It's going to be another long day.

Your heart sinks as you stare at the dozens of emails sitting in your mailbox, awaiting your response. Most of them are asking for approximately the same information, yet you have to answer them all manually. You want to provide excellent customer service - which means no bulk email - and so you also need to respond within the same day.

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But the very thought of wading through these emails makes your head throb.

As every online business person knows, answering emails like the above can be somewhat tedious. Heck, sometimes it's downright agonizing!

This is where **autoresponders** can help.

Autoresponders are simply email addresses that automatically answer requests with a message that you create.

For example, if you had a website about pets, you could stick an autoresponder on your site saying, "Top 10 Considerations Before Choosing Your Pet" and ask for your visitor's email address so that you can mail them the information.

Your autoresponder would automatically answer the email with the message you previously created - and without any additional effort from you! Not only that, but your visitor also gets the information he or she wants right away - no waiting for you to answer your email.

Autoresponders also have the potential of generating more interest in your message. Put up an autoresponder on your website, add a catchy headline, and you'll attract more requests for information than you otherwise would have.

That said, choosing the right autoresponder can make a huge difference. Look for the following benefits:

No Size Limit

There's nothing worse than coming up with a great sales letter, only to have to edit it down.

Quick Response

Your autoresponder should reply to a request within a few minutes. Careful with this one; many autoresponders claim to answer emails within minutes, but few actually do.

Instant Access to Your Message

You should be able to change your autoresponder message any time, and have it take effect immediately.

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No Charge for Changes to Your Message

Success on the Internet depends in large part on experimentation, testing, testing, and more testing. That means you'll be continuously trying to improve your autoresponder message; you shouldn't have to pay for it.

Ability to Send Unlimited Follow-Up Messages

Ideally, you want an autoresponder that will let you send follow-up messages to your prospects. It usually takes 7 or more exposures to a message before you can close a sale. For example, your main message is sent out immediately. Three days later, a follow-up message could be mailed out automatically, and two days after that a third message could be mailed out.

No Limit on the Number of Requests

If someone requests a message from your autoresponder, then they should receive it. Period.

Request Summary

You should be able to view every request sent to your autoresponder, including the date of each request. This way you can place your autoresponder in various spots on your website, or promote your autoresponder using different methods and immediately know how well each is working.

Ability for People to "Opt-Out"

Every autoresponder you use should give the recipient the option of removing himself or herself from your mailing list. If you don't provide for this, you could very well be accused of spamming and ending up with a whole lot of trouble!

Your autoresponder should handle this automatically for you - the recipient of your mailing should be able to send an email to a specified address and your autoresponder immediately removes their address from your mailing list.

No Special Subject Required

When someone sends an email to your autoresponder, whether it's by filling out a form or by sending an email, they should get your message regardless of what's in the 'Subject' line of their email. Some autoresponders require that the sender put a specific 'code' in the subject line in order to receive certain information.

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Don't use these; people make typos or forget or don't follow instructions. Make it easy for your visitor to get the information he or she wants.

No Long-Term Commitment

This is usually only applicable to paid autoresponders. If you're paying for an autoresponder, you don't want to commit to any long-term contract; businesses come and go all the time on the Internet, and there's no guarantee that the autoresponder you've chosen will be around in the long term.

Ability to Send Out Messages with No Ads

Free autoresponders are a popular choice, but the vast majority of them have one big drawback: They're offered free because other advertisers pay to have their own message added to each message YOU send out. That means in addition to seeing YOUR sales message, the recipient also sees an advertisement for someone else's product or service.

Now, this may be acceptable to you when you're sending out purely information. If you're trying to sell a product of your own, however, you may want to upgrade to a "premium" version. Your sales can increase dramatically when your reader doesn't have to view an ad for someone else's products!

Take the time to carefully choose the right autoresponder. If you end up changing autoresponders because you don't like the one you currently have, it will cost you in terms of additional effort to remove all of your old autoresponder links, setup your new autoresponder, and promote it.



[Login](#) to read our 2-part series on how to profit from autoresponders. Includes a review of 7 popular autoresponder services, tips on setup, suggestions for where to use them, and reader Q&A. Members also get complete reprint and re-sell rights to the eBook, "Autoreponder Magic".

Make Your Internet Life Easier with an HTML Editor

No, you don't have to purchase an HTML editor. Heck, if you like, you can use "Notepad", the simple text editor that comes with Windows. In fact, it might be better to use Notepad when you're first learning HTML.

But once you know HTML, specialized editors are great for saving time, and they're much more convenient than generic text editors. HTML editors have simple shortcuts to help you write HTML quickly, online help or HTML reference guides, the ability to see exactly what your web page looks like from within the editor, and so much more.

It's just a matter of personal preference. Talk to others to find out what they use; you'll want to choose an editor that **you** are comfortable with.

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! For those tight on cash, [Arachnophilia](#) is a **free** editor that has received several excellent reviews, including 5 stars from ZDNet.

Promoting Your Business

Most of us home business owners are on a fairly tight budget (or **no budget** at all!) when we're first starting out. Thus the more effective free advertising we can get, the better. In the end a combination of free and paid advertising tends to work best for me - but **it is possible to make money without spending a single dime on advertising**. But first of all ...

Why Most Free Advertising Doesn't Work

Ahh, free advertising. Who wouldn't use it and love it?

Free advertising seems like a good deal: for no money at all, you can promote your business and drive up your sales!

Too bad this isn't usually the way it works. Free advertising tends to appeal more to the person posting the ad than to the person the ad is intended for.

Oh, I'm not talking about **all** free advertising. I'm talking about the most popular, the most hyped: free classifieds, free banner and link exchanges, and Free-For-All (FFA) sites.

Hopeful online entrepreneurs post free classified ads everywhere, taking advantage of every promotional opportunity they can find. But how often do you read the free classifieds, or visit the links on an FFA site? How often have you clicked on a banner?

Classified ads are effective - in certain situations. For example, classified ads placed in [ezines or newsletters](#) can make you a tidy profit if done properly.

People most often search for what they want by using the search engines, subscribing to newsletters, links from sites with great content (the sites people actually explore), or through an email offer.

Promoting your business by using free classified ads or links is usually over-hyped. There are literally thousands of sites out there where you can submit your ad for free. But many of these are low-traffic sites or they're sites which are not well known.

I've tried it. I even went out and bought submission software (if you're not familiar with this, it's basically a program that will automatically submit your classified ad to hundreds of sites, so that you don't have to sit there reptitively typing in the same thing over and over). For three months, I faithfully submitted my ads, re-wrote and tested new ads, and submitted again.

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And, quite frankly, the tiny trickle of hits I received from these submissions was downright pitiful. Now that isn't to say all free advertising is bad; quite the contrary. There are some methods of free publicity that product excellent results. That's the subject of our next article.

Strategies for Making the Most of Free Advertising

I gleefully fired up my expensive classified ad submission software and posted hundreds of free ads. What an opportunity! By using this software I was able to post ads automatically - I just started up the software, gave it the ad I wanted to post, and it did all the rest.

Faithfully I repeated this process every day for over a month. After all, the advertising was **free** - and what netpreneur wouldn't love some free advertising?

Hah. The reward for my frenzied efforts was this: I ended up on every spammers list in the universe. I was bombarded with offers to make \$10,000 in one week, to lose 50 pounds without diet or exercise, to get in on the "ground-floor" of every MLM in existence ... To make it even worse, I didn't make a single penny in sales.

Free classifieds, Free-For-All (FFA) sites, free link exchanges, free banner exchanges ... There are countless free resources available to all the hopeful netpreneurs trying to make a buck online.

But the unfortunate truth of the matter is that some of these free resources appeal more to netpreneurs than they do to potential customers. How often do you visit FFA sites to search for a product, service, or opportunity?

This isn't to say all free advertising is bad. To the contrary, there are several excellent methods that can yield great results:

Link Exchanges with Other Webmasters

Try negotiating a link exchange with another webmaster. All this means is that you place a link to their site, and in return, they place a link to your site. That way you both have the potential of getting extra visitors. Some search engines - another great source of free targeted traffic - will place you better if you have more websites linking to yours.

Look for someone who has about the same amount of traffic as you (or more), and whose business complements yours rather than directly competes with it.

! Try visiting [HitBox](#). Search for websites that cater to the same target audience as yours, and contact those that interest you. But please be professional: approach the other webmaster with a reasonable and fair proposal.

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Use Signature Files

Sig files, as they're commonly called, are simple text blurbs that are automatically appended to the end of your emails or newsgroup postings. They're just a few lines with information about your business or products, plus contact information.

Start Your Own Opt-In Newsletter

There's nothing like your own newsletter to develop a relationship with your visitors. Make it your goal to provide honest opinions and quality information. Listen to your subscriber's comments, good or bad, and then take steps to improve what you offer. Your readers will come to trust you ... so when you recommend a particular resource, they're more likely to consider it.

! See the section on "Starting Your Own Newsletter or eZine" for more information.

Search Engines and Major Indexes

These are probably **the** best method for free advertising today. Some search engines, such as GoTo.com, are already charging for listings. So while the major search engines are still free you should be taking advantage of them.

It does take time and effort to learn how to properly use the search engines. You need to learn how they work (what they look for on your web page) and how to improve your ranking. For example, if you want people who are searching for "wholesale directories" to find **your** website, then you need to be ranked within the first 30 (preferably first 10) listings. It's no good to be listing #138475 out of 1437593 others; no one will ever find you.

That being said, search engines can bring in a **huge** amount of traffic - and all for free! Because people are looking for something specific when they use search engines, those that click through to your website already have an interest in what you have to offer. This is free, targeted advertising at its best.

Recommended

The bestselling eBook, ['Make Your Site Sell!'](#) has comprehensive, step-by-step instructions on how to get traffic from search engines. The volume on generating targeted traffic was what got me my very first sale a few days after I implemented their suggestions (I had already spent months and hundreds of dollars without making a single sale). For around USD \$17, it is an excellent investment and one I would suggest to anyone interested in building an online business - regardless of what you're selling.

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Ezine Advertising

Next to search engines and major indexes, I've found ezine advertising to be the best method for generating traffic and sales.


Ezine advertising is so effective because you can advertise in those that cater specifically to your target audience. So if you're selling pet accessories, you would find an ezine that caters to pet lovers, who are naturally more receptive to your product.

Keep in mind that the placement of your ad plays a big part in what kind of response you get. If you place an ad that's crammed in with 50 others in a "classifieds" section at the end of the ezine, people are most likely to skip that section entirely.

But if you place an ad by itself at the top of an ezine, there is a much greater likelihood that people will read it.

⚠ There are a number of ezines that offer free ads. Visit [The Directory of Ezines](#) to find them. This comprehensive directory is a huge time-saver; it's organized into categories and there's an excellent search tool. Plus when the time comes for you to place paid ads (which work better than free ads jumbled together in one big mess), members often get discounts. This can save you a bundle all in itself.

⚠ Track your advertising campaign! You'll never know which ezines work best for your target audience, or what ads pull best, unless you track each campaign.

 Information on how to use ad trackers and website demographics services (and where to find them) is available from the [Members Site](#).

⚠ You can get excellent exposure in an ezine by submitting content-rich, targeted articles to ezine publishers. See the next section for article writing tips.

Ad Swaps with Ezine Publishers

For those of you with your own newsletters, ask to swap ads with another ezine publisher with the appropriate target audience. You don't even have to necessarily look for an ezine with the same number of subscribers. If your ezine has 1000 subscribers and the other ezine only has 500, you can propose to run their ad in one issue of your ezine. In return, the other publisher runs your ad in two issues of their ezine.

⚠ To find other publishers who will swap ads, visit [The Directory of Ezines](#).

⚠ If you don't have an ezine of your own, you can still swap ads. Try swapping an ad or a link on your website in exchange for an ad published in an ezine.

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In summary, not all free advertising is created equal. The methods that tend to be far less effective than others include:

- ◆ Free-For-All (FFA) sites (spammers love these!).
- ◆ Most free classified ad sites (again, spammers like to use these to harvest your email address).
- ◆ Free banner exchanges (banners are often ignored).
- ◆ Free link exchanges (can sometimes work okay, but is usually not targeted enough).

Concentrate on free methods that yield **results**:

- ✓ Negotiate personal link exchanges with other webmasters
- ✓ Develop your own opt-in email newsletter
- ✓ Learn about the major search engines, a huge source of targeted traffic
- ✓ Form an ezine advertising campaign that provides you with the best possible exposure.

The beauty of the Internet is that it allows you to run a business with very little money. The "secret" is knowing which of the available free resources are worth your time!

Making Use of the Best Free Advertising Available



What is it?

Your knowledge! **Writing articles** and submitting them to other publications is probably the best free advertising tool around. At the end of each article, you simply include a "resource box" with your website URL and email address. Readers often click on these links after finishing your article.

For those of you who quake in your boots when you think about writing, consider this: You don't have to be a professional writer or an Internet 'guru'; you just have to write from your own experiences. People appreciate a 'real' voice.

I submit articles regularly to other publications ... and with great results! After an ezine publishes one of my articles, I get a flood of new visitors - especially when I get published in one of the larger ezines with thousands of subscribers.

Tips on writing articles:

- ✓ **Be professional and polished.** You don't have to have perfect grammar, but try not to use slang (which some people may not understand). Keep your paragraphs short.

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- ✓ **Less is more.** Let's face it: we're all busy people. Shorter articles are more likely to be read. Try to keep your articles under 750 words.
- ✓ **Check your spelling!** You lose credibility if there are spelling errors scattered throughout your article.
- ✓ **Use lots of white space for easier readability.**
- ✓ **Send your article as plain text, and include it in the body of your email.** Attachments can contain viruses, and many publishers won't open them.
- ✓ **Format your article to 60-65 characters per line.** Make it as easy as you can on the publisher.
- ✓ **Include a 5-7 line resource box.** It's best to do an "About the Author" spiel, with your URL and email address.
- ✓ **Submit your article to targeted ezines.** For example, if your article is on family issues, submit it to other family ezines. Don't submit it to an Internet marketing ezine.
- ✓ **If you don't have a mailing program that can personalize each email** and don't have the time to do it manually, then be sure you **use the "BCC" field** ("Blind Carbon Copy"). **Never expose someone else's email address to others!**
- ✓ **Be professional; do not send advertisements.** Articles have real content; ads - or sales letters disguised as articles - are a nuisance.
- ✓ **Include a brief letter to the publisher.** Inform them where you saw that they accept articles, and tell them your publishing guidelines (eg. free reprint rights so long as your resource box is included). I usually ask that they notify me of their intent to publish.

So how do you find publishers that accept articles?

1. Manually search through ezine listings in the appropriate category using the [Free Directory of Ezines](#) **OR**
2. Use the comprehensive and searchable [Directory of Ezines](#). A great time-saver.

Starting Your Own Newsletter or eZine



One of the most lucrative opportunities available is to publish a free newsletter.

You may be asking, 'But if it's FREE, how am I going to make money?'

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Glad you asked. Newsletters improve your bottom line in several ways:

- **Builds credibility** and your reputation as an 'expert' in your field.
- **Helps you to keep in touch with your visitors and develop a relationship with them.** Remember that people prefer to buy from other *people* - not from a cold, faceless company.
- **Gives you 'leverage'**; an established newsletter with a loyal following gives you a valuable 'trade' when entering into Joint Ventures with other companies or individuals. This in itself can bring in some pretty significant income!
- Gives you an **additional income stream**, if you choose to sell advertising.
- **Provides more traffic.** Assuming you provide a link back to your site in every issue, some of your readers are bound to re-visit your site. You can also boost your traffic by archiving issues on the web, and by redistributing your original articles to other editors.

If you're already scared off by writing your own newsletters, **don't be**. There are lots of reasons why having an ezine is good for your business, and you don't have to be a professional writer. You simply need to write from the perspective of your own experiences.

Let's start with some of the advantages of publishing a newsletter:

- ✓ It helps you keep in touch with your customers and visitors. They can tell you what types of things they want to see from your website or newsletter, and what types of future products they're most interested in.
- ✓ It nurtures a relationship between you and your subscribers, and develops trust.
- ✓ You earn credibility. By publishing useful and informative articles people begin to think of you as somewhat of an "expert" in your field.
- ✓ You have an easy way of promoting your products to an opt-in list.

Now if you're gun-shy about writing, you can:

- ✓ Write your own articles and hire someone to edit them for you.
- ✓ Hire a ghostwriter. Ghostwriters will write articles for you on the topic of your choice, and give you the copyright. In other words, the articles become **yours**. You can find freelance writers at <http://www.buildyourhomebiz.com/elanceindex.html>.

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- ✓ Occasionally publish articles from others. I say "occasionally" because it's good to have your own fresh content; otherwise many of your subscribers may have already seen "recycled content" published in other ezines.



Read our comprehensive 4-part series on [How to Start Your Own Newsletter](#).

8 Essential Questions For Aspiring Ezine Editors

While publishing a newsletter can be a very profitable venture, the fact of the matter is, they're also a lot of work. Here are a few things to think about before you get started.

1. What Type of Newsletter Do You Want to Write?

The type of material you include in your newsletter is as endless as your imagination. Some suggestions include:

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

2. Where Will You Get Your Content?

Will you write all the content yourself, get others to write it for you (ghost-writers), or use 'recycled' articles from other writers?

Fresh, original content is best. It gets tiresome when you see the same article in 7 different newsletters! If you don't think you can manage writing *all* of your content, perhaps you can compromise: mostly your own writing, with the occasional third-party article thrown in.

3. How Often Do You Plan to Publish?

One of the advantages of offering a free ezine is the opportunity to build a relationship with your readers. They come to know you and trust you, and you, in turn, learn what types of products or services they're interested in.

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A newsletter that's published too infrequently runs the risk of being forgotten by its readers. On the other hand, one that's published too often may annoy its readers and cause them to unsubscribe or delete the message.

Many popular ezines are published once a week or once every two weeks. Use that as a *guideline* for determining your own publishing schedule.

4. Can You Afford a Professional List Manager?

A list manager automates the tedious task of subscription management. In other words, it automatically handles subscribe and unsubscribe requests from your readers.

There are many good list managers available. Some are 'free'; that is, you may use them for free if you accept third-party advertising in your message or, alternatively, delivered to your mailbox.

Professional list managers will require an investment. They will allow you to send out ad-free messages (and keep your mailbox free of more advertising!) and typically offer a number of features not available in the 'free' version.

5. Will You Accept Advertising?

New editors often choose to offer free ads to new subscribers. This is supposed to help them build their lists more quickly. On the other hand, you could end up with subscribers who join just to get a free ad, and who never bother to read your newsletter.

Most newsletters start to charge for advertising around the 1000 subscribers mark. If you choose to do so, take a look at similar ezines within your niche market to see what types of rates they charge.

6. Should You Publish an Email or Web-Based Newsletter?

There are advantages and disadvantages to both. You could choose to do both: send an email newsletter and archive each issue on the web. Another alternative is to publish on the web, but send out an email notification with a brief blurb about each article. Include a tracking URL for each article and you'll be able to see which topics interest your visitors the most!

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7. How and Where Will You Promote?

There are many free ways to promote your ezine. The question is, Do you have time to do it? Free methods include:

- Ezine directories
- Message boards, where appropriate
- Article submissions to websites and other editors
- Ad swaps
- Signature files
- eBooks
- ... and more.

Ezine promotion requires ongoing effort. If you don't have the time, desire, 'know-how' or traffic to build your subscription base on your own, you may have to consider using one or more of the 'pay-per-subscriber' services available online.

8. How Much Time Do You Have to Devote to Your Newsletter?

This is the bottom line. How much time can you spare to produce a quality newsletter? Write a couple of sample issues to get a feel for how much time it takes. You may need to make adjustments; for example, you might decide to cut down on the number of articles you offer in each issue, but publish more frequently.

4 Success Strategies for Ezine Promotion

It's your masterpiece.

You've worked hard to put together an informative and interesting newsletter. Your current subscribers often write to tell you how much they enjoy it. So why are you having so many problems getting new subscribers?

The fact of the matter is, there are countless free newsletters available to anyone who wishes to receive them ... so unfortunately for ezine editors, "free" isn't enough to draw people to you.

Here are a few suggestions to help you build your list ...

1. Be Consistent.

Marketing your newsletter is the only way you're going to find new subscribers. You need to first let people know that your newsletter is available ... then persuade them that you have something unique and valuable to offer. Come up with an informative description that stresses the benefits of subscribing, and then start promoting. Some ways to promote your ezine include:

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- Submit to ezine directories
- Use announcement lists
- Promote your ezine in your sig file
- Write articles and leave a link to your ezine in your resource box
- Put a signup box on every page of your website
- Experiment with pop-up subscription boxes
- Propose ezine co-opts with other editors: you can promote your newsletters together for extra exposure
- Include subscription links within your eBooks or reports.

2. Consider Using Pay-Per-Subscriber Services

No doubt you've heard the phrase, "Time is money". Marketing takes a lot of time. More and more, editors are turning to pay-per-subscriber services to help them grow their newsletters. An example of one such service is FunEzines.com.

These services charge you for each subscriber they find for you. I've seen prices ranging from an affordable \$0.10 per subscriber to a whopping \$0.85! Shop around. These services will usually charge you more if you use the double opt-in method than if you use single opt-in.

Reasons why you might choose to use these services include:

- You don't have enough website traffic to get a steady stream of new subscribers.
- You don't have enough time to spend marketing - or a lack of desire to spend the time necessary to promote your ezine.
- You want to build your subscription base as quickly as possible.

3. Don't Be Shy - Introduce Yourself.

One of the big advantages of having your own newsletter is the leverage it gives you with other editors.

Don't be shy. Approach other editors in your niche market and offer to swap ads or run other joint ventures. This is a great way to increase your exposure without paying any out-of-pocket expenses.

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Remember that editors are busy people, just like you. Make it easy by providing them with all the information they need to make a decision ...

- Address the editor by name, if at all possible. Mention his or her ezine name. Personalized email is always appreciated.
- Introduce yourself and your ezine. Tell the editor key pieces of information, such as the ezine's focus and circulation.
- Tell him or her what type of joint venture you have in mind. Let her know how it will benefit her.
- If you are proposing an ad swap, include your ad for her convenience.
- If the editor agrees to your proposal, let him know when his ad will run in your ezine.

4. Be Yourself.

You've already made the effort to get subscribers ... now make the effort to keep them! There are thousands upon thousands of free newsletters available ... what makes YOURS different?

Let's face it: great content is vital to the success of your ezine ... but by itself, it isn't enough. There are plenty of editors who consistently turn out a high-quality, content-rich ezine.

What helps to differentiate one newsletter from another is the editor. If you inject your own unique personality into your ezine, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at how much your subscribers will appreciate it. I have many loyal subscribers who tell me that they like how I come across as a "real person".

Publishing a newsletter can be very profitable. Stick with it and you'll reap the rewards!

The Power of Joint Ventures



A **Joint Venture** occurs when you team up with someone else; typically they send you their product and you review it. If you like it, you endorse it in a special mailing to your newsletter subscribers or on your website. You share the profits with the other person or company.

This is an extremely powerful way to earn some extra income. It

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is well known that your endorsement goes a long way - particularly with newsletter subscribers who have developed a relationship with you during the time they've been reading your work.

Once your business begins to "make a name for itself", you will no doubt start receiving proposals for joint ventures. Are they always a good deal? That's the topic of the next article. But before we go there, I want to emphasize something:

If you approach someone for a joint venture, be professional: introduce yourself and your business, tell them what you can do for them, make them an offer, and be courteous. Do not send them a spammy-sounding advertisement. I've received these myself numerous times, and it never fails to annoy me. Into the 'delete' folder they go, automatically. Take the time to write a professional email and you'll better your chances of receiving a positive reaction.

Proposed Partnerships: Is the Extra Money Worth It?

Every day, sometimes several times a day, I get an email from someone asking if I would like to partner with them.

This is different from the typical "let's trade links" deal; these people propose that I personally endorse their product. They basically want me to declare to my readers or visitors that *I* personally love the product and don't know what I'd do without it.

In return, they usually offer to either a) endorse one of my products, or b) pay me a percentage of the profits made from my endorsement.

Sounds like a pretty good deal, right?

Well ... not necessarily.

You see, as an online entrepreneur my reputation and credibility are based entirely on how I present myself online.

Endorsing someone else's product is great - but **only** if you truly believe it to be a high-quality product that delivers great value. That means you **must** first use or sample the product yourself.

Just imagine: Someone approaches you and offers to pay a generous commission for every sale he makes due to an endorsement you place on your website or mail to your subscribers. Your visitors/readers then view your endorsement and purchase the product because they trust you.

Soon you begin to get irate emails - people are unhappy with the product and angry with **you** for leading them to believe that the product was worth having.

Some of you are probably howling, "But it's the **customer's** responsibility to exercise due diligence!".

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Sure, I completely agree. Only it doesn't matter: it's your customer's **perception** of **you** that counts. By putting your personal "stamp of approval" on a shoddy product just to make a few extra bucks makes you seem like ... well ... like someone who's only in it for the money. Someone who has absolutely no regard for anyone else ... Like a **scammer**.

Be very careful of what you choose to endorse. Doing it "just for the money" may make you some short-term profits (even significant short-term profits), but you still lose in the end: you lose the trust of your visitors, and consequently you also lose potential or repeat customers.

It's okay to refuse a partnership opportunity. If the product or service isn't something **you** would personally purchase and use, then don't endorse it. Simply write back a courteous email and decline the offer.

On the other hand, if you genuinely love the product, then go for it - publish an endorsement! Chances are your visitors will also love it. They get something they want; you look good for suggesting it and make a nice profit as a bonus. Everybody wins!

In Conclusion ...

Starting your own business is an exciting challenge - and a very worthwhile one. Let hard work, time, and plain old determination be your friends. And please remember that...

Success Comes in All Forms

Money, money, money. It's **the** accepted measure of whether or not you are succeeding with your business.

Being in business, by definition, means that you are trying to make at least **some** money. But if you ask people **why** they started a business in the first place, you'll get all sorts of answers:

- "I wanted to help contribute to the household expenses."
- "It's just something for me to do to kill some time."
- "I want to be able to stay home with the kids."
- "I want to be able to do something for myself - to prove to myself that I am capable of running my own business."
- "I can't stand office politics anymore ... get me out!"

... and the list goes on and on.

What you'll notice is that only a small fraction of the reasons provided have to do with money. Money, of course, is a nice bonus - but people have plenty of other reasons for starting a home business.

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So why do we always seem to measure success in terms of how much money we make?

We need to be more open to other measures of success. For example, the mom who left a high profile/high paying job for a home business that pays only a small portion of what she's used to could still be a success -- she may have left her job to have more time with the kids. And if her business allows her the flexibility to spend time with the kids, then good for her! She is successful.

Similarly, the retiree who starts his own business because he doesn't want to financially burden his children may only make \$500 a month ... but if it provides him with enough additional income to maintain financial independence ... then he is successful.

So is the person who left her job due to stress and now runs a home business - and is happier and healthier for it, regardless of how much she makes.

Money is not the only measure of success; it truly does come in all forms. Only **you** can define success for yourself!

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The Online Business Basics Newsletter



The information you just read is a small example of the type of stuff you would receive as a member of Online Business Basics.

As a member, you'll receive much more detailed information - not just **how** to do business online, but also **where** to find the right resources.

Beginners often find that the hardest part of trying to start an Internet business is simply sorting, organizing, and then taking action on all the great information available. There are plenty of excellent members sites - they're packed with more information that you can possibly imagine ... the problem is, most of us **intend** to put it to use ... but when faced with such an overwhelming amount of information, we put it off and eventually end up doing nothing.

Online Business Basics takes the guesswork out of making money on the web. Every week we'll focus on one particular topic. You'll find out exactly what you should know, and get a step-by-step tutorial or an action plan so that you never have to guess. By concentrating on one small step at a time, you will work towards increasing your online income.

I know what it's like to build an online business part-time, while still working a full-time job and trying to keep up with family obligations. That's how I started too. And I also know what it's like to be on a limited budget! Online Business Basics gives you solid advice on how to build a business on a shoestring budget. Everything is written from my own experiences; you won't have to make the same mistakes I did!

It's that simple. Online Business Basics has already received rave reviews because it delivers solid, practical, honest information about what it takes to be successful online. You'll find some of these testimonials on our website. Please join us! Visit us now at <http://www.onlinebusinessbasics.com/>.

We're growing more everyday. New issues come out weekly, and your suggestions are always welcome!

Hope to see you there!

Warm Regards,
Angela Wu

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Online Business Dictionary

Affiliate Program: An opportunity where you paid a commission for every click, lead, or sale you generate from a special coded link.

Autoresponder: An email address that will automatically reply to any request with a message that you set up.

Banner: An electronic "billboard" advertising a product, service, website, etc. Can be found on most websites.

CGI Scripts: Computer programs often used to add interactivity to websites. For example, CGI scripts can send you data that a customer types into a request or order form.

Demographics: Information on your website visitors, useful for analyzing your traffic and the effectiveness of your site. Examples include most popular web pages; time spent on each page; referring URL (ie. how did they find your site?); number of page views and unique visitors; and more.

Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL): A form of high-speed Internet connection. You use a special modem to access DSL. It does **not** give you a second line; but it allows you simultaneously talk on the phone and surf the web.

Domain: Your address on the web. It's the www.yourcompany.com - what people type into their web browsers in order to locate your online business.

Download: The transfer of a file from the Internet to your own computer.

Downline: Members you recruit to join an opportunity "under" you; typically you make a percentage from the sales made by your downline. Often hyped up as the "easy way" to make extra money.

eZine: An electronic newsletter. Most are emailed directly to the subscriber's mailbox, but they can also be published on the web.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP): A program that allows you to transfer files from your computer at home to your web host. May already be pre-installed on your computer.

Firewall: A program that protects your computer from unauthorized connections to or from the "outside world". In this context, it protects you from programs that try to connect to the Internet without your knowledge or consent; similarly, it protects your computer from incoming requests for information (eg. a hacker trying to scan your computer).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Exactly what it sounds like: answers to common questions. Most business sites have a FAQ page.

Hit: A request for an "object" on your website. For example, a web page with 2 graphics on it will generate 3 hits: 1 for the HTML page + 1 for each graphic.

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Hype: Making misleading, unreasonable or unsubstantiated claims, such as "Make \$5000 in three days with just a \$2 investment! Guaranteed income, no selling involved!"

HyperText Markup Language (HTML): The formatting language used to create web pages. Don't be scared off by HTML; although some people refer to it as a "programming" language, it's not. It's a simple formatting language that's similar to what the old word processors used.

Index: A list of web sites grouped together by category. Probably one of the best known indexes is Yahoo!.

Internet Service Provider (ISP): The company that provides you with access to the Internet. You can get free Internet access from some places if you're willing to view advertisements while you're online. Otherwise it typically runs anywhere from \$15/month for basic dial-up service, to as much as \$50/month for high-speed DSL or cable connections.

Link: Those "clickable" pieces of text you see on web pages. Made clickable through HTML, the web page formatting language.

Joint Venture: A partnership where you agree to endorse someone else's products or services - typically in return for a percentage of the profits.

Mail bomb: A continuous flood of email messages that can clog your ISP's mail server.

Merchant Account: Allows you to process credit card orders on your website. You have complete control; however, merchant accounts tend to be very expensive and it can be difficult for a home based business owner to get approval.

Multi-Level Marketing (MLM): Any opportunity where people can make commissions from the sale of products and services, and can recruit others into their downlines to do the same. You make a percentage of your downline's commissions.

Newgroup: An interactive discussion group focused on a particular topic. People post messages and others respond.

Page View: The number of times a web page is viewed on your website. Each time your page loads, you have one page view.

Park: As in, "park a domain". All this means is that a company puts up an electronic billboard stating that your website is "coming soon" (or something similar), plus an ad for their own company. Don't pay for parking!

PDF: Stands for "Portable Document Format". A document that's formatted in PDF is viewable by anyone who downloads the Adobe Acrobat Reader, which is free to everyone. Many online documents are published in PDF format.

Privacy Policy: A statement indicating what types of personal information your company collects and what it does (or doesn't do) with it. Every business should have a privacy policy.

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Pyramid Scheme: An illegal "opportunity" where people are paid to recruit others. In other words, the focus of the opportunity is on recruitment rather than on the selling of products and services.

Search Engine: A website that indexes sites from all over the Internet. Visitors use search engines to look for specific information; if your website is indexed and fits the search criteria, it is listed in the search results. Great way to generate free, targeted traffic.

Secure Server: A computer that can encrypt sensitive data, such as credit card information.

Shopping Cart Software: A program that allows users to add items to their online shopping cart. Good for sites that sell a number of related items. For example, an bookstore uses shopping cart software so that people can browse and add several books to their cart before buying.

Sig file: Short for "signature file"; a few lines of text about your business - automatically added to the end of every email message you send. Many people use their sig file to provide contact information and a short blurb about what their business does.

Spam: The slang term for unsolicited commercial email, or UCE. Spam is when someone sends you an offer or an opportunity that you did not explicitly request. Bad business practice; just don't do it!

Spider: A software robot that crawls the Internet looking for something specific. For example, search engines use spiders to look for websites.

Third-Party Credit Card Processor: A company that will handle credit card transactions for you, so that you do not need to shoulder the expense of a merchant account. They charge a per-transaction fee and sometimes a one-time setup fee as well.

Traffic: Refers to generating visitors to your website.

Unsolicited Commercial Email (UCE): Also known as spam, it's when someone emails you an offer or opportunity that you did not ask for. Can get you into real big trouble with your ISP or web host!

Upload: The transfer of files from your computer to your web space.

URL: The short form for "Uniform Resource Locator". Just a techie thing that refers to the <http://www.yourcompany.com> addresses you see.

Virus: A destructive program that can be transmitted to your computer via email, downloading from the web, or running a program. Investing in good anti-virus software will help keep your computer virus-free.

Visitor: The number of **unique** visitors to your site. For example, if someone visits your site and views 5 pages, that is still only one visitor.

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Web Host: The company that makes your online business / domain accessible to the world. They give you a place to store your files and scripts. Web hosts are the ones that give **everyone** the ability to surf to your website. Typically costs anywhere from \$15/month for the most basic hosting package, to around \$40-50/month for more features.

Webzine: A newsletter published on a web page.

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