

The background is a collage. The top and bottom sections feature scattered US dollar bills (including \$100 and \$20 bills) against a dark, textured background. The middle section has a background of red and orange flames. The title 'SUPER AFFILIATE SECRETS' is centered in the middle section.

# SUPER AFFILIATE SECRETS



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## Introduction

Many online entrepreneurs find themselves stuck in a spot where they haven't enough money to get started with anything that might be considered serious and, if they plan on going the route of product development, they simply haven't any ideas. This can sometimes serve as a barrier to new marketers who want to take their business online. There is, however, a very viable option which demands very little startup cost and which, while being easy to learn, can potentially serve as a means of introduction to some of the most complex parts of Internet marketing. That opportunity is affiliate marketing.

Affiliate marketing is easy to understand from both the technical and financial aspects. It requires very little in the way of a great knowledge of either and can serve as a way for new business people to break into the world of Internet marketing. Best of all, one's pursuits in the world of affiliate marketing tend to do better if one is choosing products based on their passions which makes this activity not only financially rewarding but also personally gratifying.

# Chapter 1

## The Basics

Affiliate marketing tends to be regarded with a great deal more confusion than is merited. For many people, it brings to mind images of very complex technical endeavors, a great amount of server space and possibly hundreds of webpages. While operations of such complexity do exist, this is hardly the norm.

The other principal source of confusion is usually regarding how one gets paid. There is a common perception that affiliate programs pay too little to be profitable without a great investment in technology and without such a number of affiliate programs being live at any given time that a multi-person effort would be required to realize any profit. This is also untrue.

One can begin an affiliate endeavor with no more than one product. Literally, just one product can be the source of decent income, particularly if that product happens to be in high-demand and if the affiliate marketer is savvy enough to position themselves as a resource for people seeking to avail themselves of that product.

Building the webpage need not be an overly-technical affair, either. A simple webpage with good content can do a lot to sell a product. The content will be one of the most vital parts of being a successful affiliate marketer and that subject will be explored to a great depth later on.

Getting paid is not hard to understand, either. Once one understands how these programs work, they are revealed to be something with which any marketer is very much familiar: commissions-based sales.

There are numerous companies looking for skilled affiliate marketers. As this book progresses, it will become apparent that this is because affiliate marketing is one of the most definitively win/win types of marketing in existence. The customer, the vendor and the marketer all stand to gain a great deal from this model.

## First Steps

### *Identifying the Market*

Some clichés earn that appellation because they happen to be true and every journey, indeed, does start with a first step. The first step in affiliate marketing is enormously easy. One simply picks something in which they have an interest. As one progresses through their interests, they'll quickly discover that there are certain things in which most people share a common interest and that those things tend to remain constant over time.

Products that cater to one interest oftentimes have an intertwined relationship with other interests, as well. For the sake of example, take something very esoteric and niche-sounding: palmistry. Palmistry is the reading of palms to tell fortunes. On the surface, this may seem like something which would appeal to only a very specialized niche. It would seem that way, that is, until a skilled marketer realizes all the potential markets that are tied to something as niche as palmistry.

Palmistry, of course, has to do with most individuals having an interest in knowing something about themselves and with some individuals having an interest in old traditions, spiritual practices and the paranormal. Those same individuals will be interested in the core appeals of palmistry when they manifest in different forms. Consider how personality tests, horoscopes and other products appeal to an individual's desire to explore their own personality.

This sort of exploration of a market is the beginning of an affiliate marketing page. A marketer who starts out with the palmistry niche can easily expand their page to include other products that would be of interest to those who enjoy palmistry and gradually become a recognized authority in the various means by which people explore their own personalities. When one considers the amount of money that changes hands in the niche market of horoscopes, it's easy to understand how much profit such an endeavor could generate!

When exploring a potential future as an affiliate marketer, remember to make a diligent exploration of one's own interests. This will play into one's overall success.

## *Finding Products*

Once one has their target market in mind, one should endeavor to find good products that have affiliate programs attached to them. This is done by testing those products. This testing will be a major part of one's success.

When individuals surf the Internet, they're generally looking for information as opposed to looking to spend money. In order to be a good affiliate marketer, one needs to first be an excellent source of information. This comes down to knowing the products for which one is serving as an affiliate marketer.

Definitely order one of the products and test it out. The worst thing that can happen to a marketer is that their name becomes attached to a lousy product in the mind of the consumer. If a product seems substandard, don't sell it. The main rule is to never put one's reputation behind anything that's of low-quality. Visitors to one's affiliate website will be seeking concrete information that is reliable and that can help them make purchases that go along with their interests. If a product happens to appeal to the marketer's interests, it will likely appeal to the members of that market's interests, as well.

The marketer's knowledge of the product they sell plays a big part in making the sale. This will be detailed later on.

## *Getting the Site*

There are few things cheaper right now than getting a website up and running. A domain usually costs under \$10 to register for a year and hosting is very affordable. Once one has indentified a product and wants to get on their way marketing that product, it's time to develop the site.

Most affiliate sites have a URL that corresponds to the product being advertised. Obviously, the masthead URL will likely belong to the company but one should make an effort to tie their URL to the product in some memorable way.

A good example can be derived from the palmistry site. If one were fortunate enough to have a name like Pam or Paul, they could title their site "PaulsPalmestry.com" or some similar,

catchy name. This makes it easier for visitors to remember the name and makes it more likely that they'll come back in the future.

One thing to avoid is awkward attempts to shoehorn the point of the site into the URL. For example "My-Palmetry-Webiste.com" would be a rather sloppy example of trying to choose a catchy URL. This technique is used for search engine optimization purposes but it's ineffective for simply choosing a name by which one's site can be remembered. Hyphens, though they were in vogue for a time, should generally be avoided in URLs as they add a layer of confusion for the visitors when they try to remember how to reconstruct the URL.

Remember to keep products in theme with the URL. Putting a great variety of items on a site detracts from the sense of purpose, especially when those products tend to diverge a great deal from the actual URL's name. It also has the effect of making the site look as if it's simply a sales pitch for a whole host of items rather than a site that specifically caters to the interest implied by the URL.

Also remember to explore the competition. There are some products which have huge numbers of marketers working to sell them. One may wish to find products where there isn't so much competition. A good way to do this is to look at the paid advertisements that appear alongside the results of an Internet search. If there are too many players in a given field, consider a different product.

Be sure to check out the competitor's sites. There may be elements to those sites which can be improved upon on one's own site to great effect.

There are a few rules of thumb for determining whether or not an affiliate site is likely to appeal to the target demographic. Some successful marketers compare a good site to walking into someone's home. Is it comfortable? Is it easy to look around and explore? Is the point of the site easy to understand?

The last element calls back to the importance of keeping a site focused. If the site is scattered, filled with products that logically appeal to a wide variety of interests and demographics and has no unifying theme, the effect is likely to be tacky. Remember to keep the site focused on the same topic as is the URL.



Remember that, because an affiliate marketer relies a great deal on their personal credibility, there should be an "About Me" page on the site. As one gains more experience, this section of the site will grow. However, even a marketer with only limited experience can make a good About Me page. Inject a bit of humor, make it personal and don't be afraid to use a photo if doing so doesn't cause worries about one's privacy. Some affiliate marketers use pen names rather than their real name and this is wholly acceptable. If it makes one more comfortable, go ahead and invent a pen name. Authors have done so for hundreds of years for the exact same reason: privacy.

## *Conceiving the Content*

While putting together the site, remember that the content will be the main reason why people visit in the first place. Developing good content will be key to one's success as an affiliate marketer.

The best affiliate sites appeal to their audience by offering the marketer's expertise to the reader. This means that the marketer should always strive to have good, unbiased content on their site. While this may seem counterintuitive for marketing purposes, it's really not at all.

The "review" site format is one of the most popular formats for affiliate marketing sites. The affiliate can really only produce a good review site if they adhere to the rule about testing every product they advertise and only advertising those products that they would use themselves.

Reviews should be unbiased in any regard. This means that the sales pitch is not deliberate but flows from the author's positive experience with the product. One does not want to give away too much about the product, especially if it happens to be an EBook where the content is the main part of the product. However, the author does need to make an effort to explain to the audience why they like the product and what it's done for them. "I bought this product and I learned X, Y and Z" is a good example of a review format that entices without giving away too much.

Some sites market several products that appeal to an essentially identical demographic alongside one another. This can be made to work very effectively.



Consider a scenario where one has three books on Palmistry. One book is 100 pages and pays a commission of \$15 per sale, the second book is 150 pages and pays \$12.50 per sale and the third book is 200 pages and pays \$17 per sale. While the third book would be the best sale from the marketer's point of view, the marketer should allow the customer to make their own decision. This can be done without promoting any of the three books in a way that's detrimental to the others.

A review of all three books can contain all of their individual advantages but should also contain what the marketer didn't like about each one. Remember, the visitors are looking for information, not to spend money. Information that proclaims any product as perfect is an obvious sales pitch and will likely lose the visitor's interest in short order. Honesty is the best policy. Read all three books and see what is good and bad about each one and say as much on the site.

Other content to include should be the results of one's own research. In the example of a palmistry site, one can include interesting facts about the practice that one has gathered from their own reading. This gives the readers an incentive to visit the site even if they don't plan on spending a dime and helps establish the credibility of the marketer. Affiliate marketing, to a large extent, is about giving the customer something before anything is asked of them.

It's very important that any product that the marketer believes to be substandard is not promoted as a wise investment of the customer's money. This is a sure-fire way to reduce one's credibility and to thus reduce the effectiveness of one's site over the long-term. The ideal affiliate site is one which customer's visit because they know the information will be valuable and honest.

## Chapter 2

### The Markets and Income Models

There are essentially endless ways the markets available to affiliate marketers can be understood. Some of them are spontaneous markets that erupt because of an event. Think of Y2K. No one's buying Y2K-compliance software anymore though it was once a huge market. Others are what are called perennial which means that they are essentially always fertile. Other types of markets are defined by the products themselves, such as membership sites, EBooks and so forth. A good affiliate marketer can greatly increase their profits by understanding the markets available and by leveraging resources to create a presence in those markets.

### Large Markets

Some marketers are understandably turned-off by what seem to be very large markets with a lot of competition. A good example of such a market in the Internet world would be online dating sites. There are literally millions of searches done every month for online dating and there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of sites that cater to this market. By understanding some of the specifics of this market an affiliate marketer can learn how to stand out, even in a market as large as that centered around online dating.

### Niches

The online dating market is a good example of how smaller markets derive from larger ones. In the dating market, one will find pages that appeal to young professionals, senior citizens, the gay and lesbian community, specific ethnicities, specific religious backgrounds and so forth. Finding the right niche in which to market goes back to the philosophy of honesty.

One can start by making themselves the guinea pig. For example, if one happens to be a younger individual with a growing career in marketing, one could try out one of the dating sites geared toward that demographic—several, preferably—and see what sets apart the good from the bad. Sometimes, these sites will allow a reviewer to get a free membership in exchange for publishing a review about the site. One generally needs to be an established affiliate to get this sort of a deal but it's worth it to ask.

Test every part of the site as if one were a regular customer. See what features are offered, which features work and which ones don't work. E-mail customer service with some minor question and see how long it takes to get a response and how well the response addresses the question raised. If the customer service doesn't respond in a timely fashion with good information, the site is probably something that one shouldn't invest their reputation in promoting.

Likely, within any given niche related to a broader market, one will find numerous products to review and good ones to promote. Remember to take notes as these reviews will become the essential part of one's affiliate site.

Don't be too afraid of a lot of competition. If one is doing research on online dating sites, it will quickly become apparent that there are numerous affiliates working this market. Remember that the idea is to create an affiliate site that stands head and shoulders above the competition. This is how one deals with competition in the marketplace. One could certainly opt for a smaller market but, of course, there would be less potential business in that market so stiff competition should not be a reason for overall discouragement in pursuing the marketing of a product.

## **Small Markets**

Smaller markets have their advantages, as well. There is less competition and, generally, bidding on keywords for advertising campaigns will be less expensive than it would be for more in-demand products.

When marketing to a smaller demographic, don't go overboard with the site. Remember that there should be some correlation between the site's size and the size of the market to which it appeals. If one is marketing to a large market, go all out and build a very large site. For a smaller market, make a site that is more compact and to the point.

## **Perennial Markets**

A perennial market is, in many regards, the most desirable type of market. These markets are characterized by being related to those things for which people never lack desire. A few examples make it clear what these markets comprise.

Consider the online dating market. This is a perennial market in that it appeals to people's need for love. Of course, this market never diminishes in size or enthusiasm making it one of the definitive perennial markets.

Another good example is beauty products. People always want to look attractive. This means, of course, that there is always a market for products that make people feel beautiful or help them to look more attractive.

When trying to identify perennial markets, think about people's base desires. These usually include love, attractiveness, wealth, health and longevity. Sometimes, marketers liken these markets to those which apply to the vices defined by the classic "Seven Deadly Sins". The sins—gluttony, wrath, greed, pride, lust, sloth and envy—are perhaps a bit of an extreme example and, of course, some of them are outright malicious. Perhaps a better metaphor is that a perennial market is one that always addresses the basic elements of selling any product: it reduces pain and increases pleasure. Think of any universal and constant pain under which people suffer and any corresponding product that addresses that pain is likely one that constitutes a perennial market.

## Online/Offline Markets

This sort of market presents something of a unique challenge. To explain such a market, the example of a treadmill will be used. This product, of course, benefits from a perennial market—health and fitness—which makes it a desirable product to sell. Of course, when one endeavors to be honest in their reviews, it becomes apparent that there are two problems with this market that need to be addressed before a useful review site can be built. These problems will be characteristic of certain products but they can be addressed with a bit of creativity.

- **Testing:** A treadmill is a product that, obviously, cannot be tested online by the reviewer or the customer.
- **Reason for Buying:** Most individuals will tend to buy such a large product at a store, not online. They need a compelling reason to buy online.

- **Pitch:** There will need to be a comprehensive set of reviews that address all the advantages and disadvantages of each model which means some significant research must be done without being able to test all the various products.

Addressing the first problem is fairly straightforward. In fact, one can turn this situation to their advantage.

While a customer may not be able to test a particular treadmill online, they can certainly test that treadmill out at a local store. This does create the hazard of losing the sale to the brick-and-mortar vendor but it's one of the only realistic ways the customer can see for themselves how the device performs in real life. Once they test the device, they need to be drawn back into making that purchase online rather than at the store.

Price point is usually the means by which consumers are encouraged to make a purchase online. This is generally an easy sell as most online vendors offer better deals than do their local competitors. The sticker price in the store may well make this sale for the affiliate, in many cases. Other reasons for buying online may include getting a better deal on a treadmill a few levels up from that shown at the store.

Some pitches are not necessarily based on the product being the greatest thing on the market but, instead, on them being better deals than others. For example, one may say that "While this treadmill offers Feature X, for \$200 less one can have a treadmill that is of equal quality without that one feature which doesn't necessarily justify a \$200 increase in the price." This is sometimes called "anti-marketing" and the technique has to do with making negative comparisons, to a certain extent, between what products offer. Generally, these comparisons address the fact that the consumer may be paying too much for too little and would be better off getting something simpler for a much better price. Think of it as showing the consumer that a certain feature of a product fails to address a real pain and, in fact, causes a real pain by adding an unnecessary cost to the product.

## Affiliate Income

There are several different ways in which an affiliate marketer can make money. This is the source of some confusion among many new Internet marketers. The model probably suffers a bit from some of the terminology having the effect of confusing the issue. "Affiliate link", "affiliate income" and other terms refer to very well-established and understood models of making money that should be familiar to any salesperson, experienced or new.

### *One-time Income*

This is the simplest type of affiliate income. Essentially, it's nothing more than commissions-based sales income. The marketer sells the product for the merchant and the merchant reciprocates the marketer's services with a cut of the profit.

Affiliate programs are not all created equally. Some offer very high affiliate payouts—as much as 50% from some vendors—and others offer much less. There are also some programs which are more reputable and established than others.

When investigating a new source of affiliate income, be certain to email or otherwise contact the merchant before doing anything else. Just as in the case of investigating the product, determine if their customer service is up to snuff. Remember that these people will be the people sending checks so it's imperative that they're communicative, reliable and honest. It doesn't hurt to do an Internet search for any affiliate program which one is considering to see if they have a good reputation among the marketing community.

Some of the largest names on the Internet have affiliate programs. While not all of these programs pay very high percentages to their affiliate marketers, they do benefit from the name-recognition they carry. This can help makes sales more brisk and eliminates the need for the marketer to establish the credibility of the brand to the consumer. While the commissions may not look all that enticing, keep in mind that an established brand that pays a slightly-lower affiliate commission may well outperform a less-known brand that pays a very high-commission simply due to the brand being recognized among consumers.

The merchant will supply affiliates with a link that lets the merchant know that the affiliate is responsible for a sale. Most of these merchants have real-time tracking systems that allow

affiliates to see how many sales they've made and how much money they have coming in from their sales. Any merchant that doesn't have such a system should be treated with a bit of skepticism. This is a fairly basic backend setup that should be offered to any marketer doing the work of affiliate sales for a merchant.

## *Recurring Income*

Recurring income is one of the most rewarding types of sales that any marketer can make. In most cases, this sort of income is garnered by selling memberships to sites such as the aforementioned dating sites. Over time, this can be very profitable.

The first month's subscription may not seem like it awards a worthwhile sum to the marketer. After the costs of advertising and the other expenses related to getting the visitor to sign-up are calculated, a \$20 membership with a 50/50 split may only result in \$3 of income, for example. However, the next month that income will be the equivalent of the full \$10 as it will every month thereafter as the affiliate, in the best programs, will continue to benefit from the subscription they sold for the merchant. Making this happen requires a bit of creative marketing.

Obviously, it's to the marketer's benefit if the customer signs up for a multi-month membership rather than a one-month membership. Most membership sites have built into them a funnel that makes this happen which takes some of the pressure off of the marketer. However, it's still in the marketer's best interest to point out to the consumer the benefits of signing up for a few months. At the dating site, as an example, one could emphasize the financial benefits of signing up for a few months along with pointing out the fact that one isn't likely to meet their perfect match in just four weeks. Encouraging customers to sign up for at least 3 months is usually enough to turn a nice profit off of a sign-up at any membership site.

It's worthwhile to seek out sites that, by their very design, encourage these sorts of long-term memberships. Dating sites are a good example. Other good examples would include health sites that have constantly-updated information or other sites that provide regularly-updated content for their members. This, of course, should be part of the pitch and emphasized in the reviews of the merchant site posted at the affiliate website.



## ***Fraud and Other Concerns***

There are always going to be nefarious individuals who make efforts to steal commissions which belong to others. This has received a great deal of attention in marketing circles but, to a large extent, the problem has been exaggerated.

While it's inevitable that some affiliate marketers will lose income to such scams, understand that the system by which these programs work are really very secure. The affiliate link provided by the merchant identifies any visitor who linked to the merchant from the affiliate's site as that affiliate's sale. If the person buys a product as a result of clicking on that link, the affiliate gets paid. The customer may well go back to the site at a later time without using the affiliate link and, thus, the affiliate marketer will lose that sale. However, it's best to concentrate on the 95% of sales one gets rather than to endlessly lament the 5% that are lost. Five percent, incidentally, would be a very large figure. Two or three percent is more realistic.

The most important thing is to make sure the merchant is reputable. Remember to interact with them before signing up for any affiliate program to determine that there's a real person and a viable system behind the affiliate program. Doing this can relieve a lot of stress about missed commissions.

## **Contacting the Merchant**

After a market and a product have been identified, one must contact the merchant and present themselves as an affiliate marketer. This is best done with a bit of thought and work put into the site beforehand.

The last thing one wants to do is contact a merchant and say something along the lines of "Hi, I'm a marketer and I want to sell your product to make a lot of money." This makes anything but a good impression. One should already be informed about the product and be prepared to offer some compelling reasons why they're a good choice for an affiliate marketer.

One's site should already be developed a bit before making the initial contact, as well. One should definitely have a working link they can provide to the merchant to shore up their pitch to be an affiliate. Its best if this site has content already included.

The ideal content would be material related specifically to the product being sold. This may mean actually purchasing the product or a subscription to the site beforehand so that there's something impressive at one's site that the merchant can peruse. Credibility is imperative for marketers in every phase of their work and part of a marketer's work, of course, is establishing themselves as a good way to move a merchant's products.

If one cannot develop content beforehand, there are article services that can provide related content upon which a full site can be built. Be sure to check into the terms of how this content can be legally used. Most often, these articles can be used provided a link to the author's page is included at the end of the article. These articles, because of this requirement, can be considered "leaky" as they encourage visitors to surf away from one's own site. They are best used for the shortest-term possible.

There are online freelancing sites where a website owner can network with writers. These provide a good means of finding individuals who can generate interesting copy about just about any subject matter. This is a good way to fill up one's site with related content before presenting one's self to a merchant.

The cheapest way to generate content, of course, is to write it one's self. If this is the case, make sure it is interesting, related to the product and that it entices the reader to purchase. Again, the best way to convince a merchant is to have this copy directly related to their product.

## Chapter 3

### Getting Up and Running

By this time, the marketer should have their product, the basic elements of their site and their affiliate link ready to go. To make sure, compare one's situation with the following checklist.

- The URL directly relates to the product and is memorable
- The site has good content and is easy to read
- The affiliate link for the merchant is ready to be added
- The merchant has been verified as reliable
- The site is accessible and functioning correctly
- There is an "About Me" page on the site

If all of this has been taken care of, it's time to begin promoting the site and generating traffic. It's also time to begin developing the site in such a way that any visitor will be likely to return after their first visit!

### Advertising

Advertising one's site for affiliate marketing is a bit different than advertising the average website. Fortunately, the differences are actually elements that make the affair a bit easier. Some strategies that work may surprise beginning marketers as they're not quite intuitive.

### *Keyword Bidding*

On just about every search engine, there is a sidebar where advertisements appear related to the search executed by the user. These advertisements are purchased by bidding on the keywords. When one is advertising their site, they should first investigate what keywords are drawing in visitors.

The dating site ad, for example, will have some obvious keywords which will be of great value when promoting an affiliate site. These would be words such as "online dating", "dating site" and, if one is working with a particular niche, variations such as "senior dating", "Indian singles" and so forth. Many novice marketers believe that they need to be the first result among those various side-bar advertisements. Those same marketers are oftentimes

discouraged by the amount advertisers bid to be that first result and realize it's out of their budget. The first listing, however, is not necessarily the best.

Individuals who are truly interested in a product will generally want to spend some time investigating that product. This means they will be more willing to click through a few pages of search results and that they're more likely to click on more of the advertisements that appear on the side-bar as opposed to simply clicking on the first advertisement they see. This is a good thing for the marketer.

These clients are more likely to result in conversions for the affiliate marketer than those who are clicking on anything and everything. Remember that the goal is not to get traffic but to get sales. While high traffic numbers are nice for the ego, they're not necessarily useful for the pocketbook. Bid to be the third or fourth advertiser on the sidebar and one is more likely to find themselves getting good conversion rates.

Choosing keywords for those sidebar advertisements has elements of both an art and a science. It will take time to learn how to write effective pitches for these advertisements. Most of them offer very limited space for words so an economy of language is very important here. There are some basic techniques that work, however, and which provide a good starting point from which one can develop their own style.

- **The Crisis**

One could use a headline that implies that one's site contains some vital information toward protecting the visitor's interests. "Avoid online dating scams!" for instance, would be an example of such advertising.

- **The Keywords**

There's certainly no harm in including the exact keywords for which one bid in the advertisement. In fact, it makes perfect sense. "Meet East Indian singles here!" would be a good example.

- **The Authority**

Since one is setting up what is essentially a review site, it makes sense to let one's potential visitors know as much. "The Best Online Dating Site Reviews" is an example of such advertising

There is no value to be had in a "bait and switch" tactic for the customer or the marketer. When one promises something in any of these ads, the page to which that ad links should deliver. In the first example, the page to which the advertisement links should contain information about some common online dating scams and how to avoid them. Information about one's personal safety online would be an obvious fit with such an advertisement, as well. This will establish one's credibility with their visitors.

### *Search Engine Optimization*

Search engine optimization is certainly a buzz-phrase these days. It includes any effort to make a site more visible in search engines including content development, keyword usage and other elements. For affiliate marketers, one of the primary means of SEO flows naturally from pay-per-click advertising.

The more traffic a site gets, the more search engines will regard it as a good site. This means that all the traffic generated from the pay-per-click campaign feeds in to the search engine optimization effort.

Some affiliate marketers spend a great deal of time on other SEO efforts and some do not. It's really up to the individual marketer. Some successful affiliate marketers rely entirely on the traffic their paid advertising drives to the site for their SEO and get good results from doing so.

Remember that good content is a major part of SEO today and that keywords and other meta-tag dependent methods have diminished in importance.

One thing to avoid is any sort of attempt to "trick" a search engine. A common example of this is putting text which is the same color as is the background on a page in an effort to "stuff" keywords. Search engines catch on to this, and other tricks, very fast. Once they do, count on

the site being eliminated from the index. Read the various policies of the search engines and follow them to the letter. Provided that there's good content on one's site, expect to be rewarded with good placement after the site has been around long enough to attract a decent amount of traffic.

## *Email Lists*

For many affiliate marketers, email lists constitute their second-most important form of marketing, behind pay-per-click advertising. Getting a good list and properly managing it are imperative concerns in making a successful affiliate marketing site.

Offering a newsletter to visitors is a great way to build a list. The best spot in which to place the sign-up link is usually the upper right-hand side of the page. This tends to make it very visible and not easily confused with the navigation which is typically at the top or left-hand side of the page. If one's content is good, clients will likely find some potential value in signing up for the newsletter.

Once one has their list together, be sure not to saturate the subscribers with advertisements. There is probably nothing less attractive than this pitfall and it has the effect of making the marketer come off as if they were spamming their clients which is definitely something to be avoided.

Send out newsletters with relevant, interesting and timely information. This is akin to writing a blog in which the goal is to actually offer something of value to the customer rather than to simply try to entice them to buy a one product or another. When subscribers get used to informative and interesting newsletters from an email list, they'll be much more likely to take any sales pitches that they receive from the marketer that much more seriously. The marketer's credibility, again, comes into play.

One's email list is one of the most important marketing tools available. This list should be maintained and kept free of erroneous addresses and any clients who unsubscribe should be immediately removed from the list and receive no other contact via email other than a confirmation letter. To do otherwise risks running afoul of the spam policies of the ISPs.

Remember that one can use one's newsletter as a way of building up to a new product. One could have interesting articles regarding a particular topic that directly relates to a new product that one is about to begin marketing. This is a good way to build interest without over-pitching anything to subscribers.

There is something to be said for keeping in contact with the list members, especially if one wants to make a sales pitch. Generally, it's very bad form to email nothing out to the list members and then to suddenly hit them with an advertisement. In most cases, such an advertisement will be simply ignored and many of the list members may simply opt-out of the list based on feeling like they're being offered nothing from their membership aside from the occasional sales pitch. If, for some reason, it's impossible to send out regular emails to one's list for a period of time, be certain to send out a few non-sales oriented newsletters before approaching the list members with a new product pitch.

## **The Site and its Content**

While blogs have been credited with changing the face of media and this is, to a large degree, entirely true, they have also changed the definition of a website. It is possible and even advisable to develop an entire affiliate site around a blog model.

There are numerous blogging technologies available which are easy to install and setup on a web server. They provide a very easy means of updating content and can automatically display any given number of past posts and information. Management of the content and making sure it is of high-quality is key. It's also important that one not misuse their digital real estate.

## **Articles and Content**

The articles contained on the blog, as is the case with the newsletter, should not be solely directed toward offering sales pitches. There should be interesting content included. This means that one must either be able to write themselves or that they must contract the service out. There are free methods of getting content, some of which have already been described, but these must be used intelligently.



If one is writing their own content, be certain that it is related to the topic of the website. If one sells dating site memberships and treadmills, for instance, content related to one or the other should probably not be made to coexist on the same site. A good axiom is "Make a theme park, not a mall."

One does not want a site that has articles about everything under the sun. Remember the advice about how people surf. They're often looking for information, not for an excuse to part with their money. The affiliate's job is to provide them with information that has an actual value to it. Endless sales pitches are not valuable to anyone, including the marketer.

If one happens to have no particular love of writing, consider hiring the services out to professionals. As was stated, there are freelancing sites where one can network with such content providers. There are a few rules of thumb here that make certain that the content received is worth the money spent.

Preferably, the writer hired should have some expertise or, at least, some interest in the topic at hand. One wouldn't want to engage the services of a committed skeptic to write articles for their palmistry site, for instance. There are some service providers on these sites who come enormously cheap. One generally gets what they pay for, in these cases. If one's blog is in English, be sure to hire a native English speaker to write the content. Preferably, hire an individual who lives in the same country, as well.

Press releases and news articles can be a fun addition to a blog and lend a quality of relevance to the content. Remember that most content cannot be used beyond a few lines without permission. If this content is chosen, it should be a small excerpt that links back to the original story. Remember that these links are "leaky" and that they do send visitors off to other sites so their use should be limited. Better than using the news article itself; simply write an article based on the content.

Blogs can provide a way to gear-up for a new product release while still offering one's visitors something fun and informative. Tying one blog post to the last is a good way to do this. A series of blogs that is well-written will tend to make visitors return to read the next installment and will still be valuable as archive material long after the product has been introduced to the readers.

There are various cliffhanger type techniques that can make this work. For instance, one can take a cue from the old serial films and television shows—"Tune in next week to see the exciting conclusion!"—or one may make the "click here for more information" page a direct link to the product. Doing so, in this case, is not being deceitful as the blog post has already primed the reader for the pitch and, if it's well-written, that post will have opened up the reader's mind to the idea that the product may be just the thing for them.

## ***Sidebar Advertisements***

There are various advertising programs that allow a site owner to add advertisements to their blog. These function in the reverse fashion as do the advertisements on a search engine. Instead of paying for a click, the site owner gets paid when a visitor clicks. These advertisements are generally related to the content on the site. There is a significant debate regarding the value of these advertisements.

One may literally earn as little as a few cents each time an individual clicks on one of these ads. Consider the treadmill advertising example to gain an understanding of how these ads can be counter-productive. If one is working off of a 25% commission and a treadmill sells for \$500 there is \$125 to be made for every unit sold. Selling that treadmill, of course, will rely on the visitor being persuaded by one's content. One can easily see that there is little use in losing a customer due to a sidebar advertisement which pays a few cents in exchange for losing a potentially large commission. Also keep in mind that, sometimes, these advertisements constitute anti-advertisements against one's own products. An advertisement fed to a sidebar on a site that deals with treadmills may well say something to the nature of "Treadmills: Are they a scam?"

Sidebar advertisements are fine in some places but only use them intelligently. It's important to keep in mind that one wants to develop a credible, useful site and not a cluttered sales brochure, as well.

## ***Site Design***

A good metaphor for a well-designed site is a banker's business card. While amateurs frequently give out business cards decorated with tons of graphics, a lot of color and many

different fonts, a professional's business card, such as that carried by a banker, is straightforward, easy to read and classy. A well-designed site is one that demonstrates this aesthetic.

Be sure that all the navigation on the site is consistent. There is probably nothing less professional-looking than having the navigation appear on one section of the page for one part of the site and in an entirely different location on other pages. Consistency is key. Using the many available blog templates avails one of professionally-designed navigation that is easy customizable.

Color schemes should be easy on the eye. In general, a white or slightly-tinted background with black fonts is the easiest to read. The more contrast between the background and the letters, the better. There are some cases; however, where a bit of an unusual touch may be beneficial.

While yellow text on a black background may be somewhat odd for most sites, it would be perfect for a site about beekeeping. Black text on a yellow background would also give the same effect and be easier to read. Keep these small touches in mind when designing one's site.

How long copy should be kept up on a blog is essentially up to the site owner. Some blogs go very far back and have extensive archives. Others simply rotate content out after a month or two. Remember that more content means using more storage space on the server. If media is included with the content, these storage needs could become quite large.

## Persistence

A good affiliate site can generate a lot of profit but it's not going to happen overnight. Running such a site requires, above all things, that the site-owner believes in their site and in themselves. It also requires that they be willing to adapt to changes in the market.

One must track their site in great detail. It's imperative that the site owner know which ads are driving traffic, which content is getting sales and how much they are spending on any given effort versus how much they're receiving in profit. This profit margin may be very small to begin with but it will grow over time.

As more people visit the site, the search engine placement will improve, the amount of sales made will grow and the popularity of the site is likely to get more impressive as a result of these developments. Give it time to happen. While there has been much made of getting rich quick on the Internet, most successful affiliate marketers are persistent more than greedy and they're certainly not afraid to work.

Remember that a particular program may be a slow-starter but it may take off in a big way if given enough time to grow. Any low-performing site is an opportunity to tweak one's methods, to improve one's content and to make one's advertising more effective. If something really doesn't work out, it can always be dropped but the low costs of operating these sites makes it feasible to keep even a moderately-performing site up and running for the long term.

As a part of being persistent, be consistently honest with customers. There will be opportunities that come along to sell a cheap product here and there. If one finds that product to be essentially worthless, so will their customers. Always make certain that any new products are tested before being offered. Consistent quality control will ensure that visitors feel like coming back.

## Conclusion

Affiliate marketing is one of the best opportunities for those who don't have a lot of start-up capital to spend but who want to begin their career as an Internet marketer. It is not, however, a get rich quick type business. It takes time to grow these sites.

These sites grow based on having good content that is directly related to the product being offered. Oftentimes, these sites take the form of review sites that offer unbiased assessments of various products within the market. Honesty with one's visitors is key to making these sites work.

One should purchase a URL that is directly related to their products. Avoid clunky URLs like "My-Best-Treadmill-Place.com". Be creative and avoid using hyphens.

These sites are easy to construct and there are many free blogging software packages that can be used to get them up and running. These are not temporary solutions, by any means, and they can make a good, enjoyable and classy permanent site.

Pay-per-click advertising is one of the most effective types for this type of marketing. Don't endeavor to be first, try to be the third or fourth advertiser on the page. Remember, conversions are the goal, not just raw traffic.

Most importantly: Be persistent. These sites may take a bit to get going full-steam. Once they do, however, they can be a very reliable and consistent source of income.

Remember that the marketer will become their own brand. Customers will begin to believe in the marketer and rely on the marketer's reviews to provide solid, reliable and honest information about the various products on the market. Don't let the customers down and they'll likely return the favor in spades.