

The Importance Of A Bridge Site

If you are like most Internet entrepreneurs, you start to collect different websites or web presences that are useful for generating traffic back to your site. Some of these places, like Digg, Facebook, or article archives can be a great resource in advertising your sales website on the Internet to specific demographics. However, many third-party sites have specific rules about the types of pages that people can use in their comments, their articles, and/or biographical information. Ezinearticles, for instance, won't allow you to link back to a sales page, and yet, this is at the heart of Internet marketing. You wouldn't be out there, if you weren't trying to get someone to buy something from you. So, what do you do?

That's where you start to realize that there are ways to get around the rules that others put in place to limit your Internet marketing activities, and bridge sites are an important strategy to exploit. Even when a third-party doesn't ban you for linking to a sales page, there are also other times when it's just jarring to go from a link, say like in Facebook, to a sales page. In some ways, social networkers will judge such a move as "too commercial" and you can lose credibility in your authenticity that way. So, again, you want to implement a bridge site to smooth the way.

Why Blogs Are Ideal Bridge Sites

Web logs, a.k.a. "blogs," are an excellent way to bridge from a site like a user-interactive social networking site to a commercial sales page. That's because they tend to be a mix of both. You have your daily blogs that you post, that are typically informal, casual in tone, and friendly, and you have links that are put on a blog that are expected to link to more commercial endeavors. The casual style is much in keeping with the style of social networking, and so it is less jarring to people who can be harvested from these sites and do not realize that they have begun to be marketed.

This gives you an edge because there is less buyer's resistance on this format. Also, as long as you own the blog, you can link to anything that you want to link to, so that makes it ideal as a bridge site. And, the major search engines love to crawl blogs frequently because of the way content is updated more regularly, so you get a wider audience.

In addition, you can put links in your blog posts that send people to different sales pages. You can set up a blog anonymously or with a pseudonym, and

thus, no one has to know that the links you promote are from your own website. Once someone visits your blog, they should have an easy to remember URL that is all yours.

Blogs can be addictive because the information should be updated once daily, if not more. As long as the information is informative and entertaining, you can get people to subscribe to your blog. This converts them from an anonymous viewer to someone who is now basically entering your sales funnel. You can then begin to offer them some deals or introduce them to the product lineups on other websites you own, that can convert them from subscriber to customer.

WordPress Is The Gold Standard

So, now you see the value in having a blog as an intermediary from third-party sites with massive traffic streams, to get potential customers into your sales pipeline. But, where do you start? WordPress is the gold standard of easy to implement blogs, and there are even some hosts that will put a site for you, which you end up customizing. However, there is a bit of confusion with WordPress that is important to clarify.

The WordPress.org is a shareware software package that anyone can use for free. Some commercial people took that software and built WordPress.com, the .com extension signifying it is a commercial endeavor. That's a community of bloggers with WordPress blogs with limited features and heavy-handed guidelines.

Some of the guidelines on WordPress.com don't allow you advertise the way you would want to do on a Internet marketing blog. In particular, you can't make any money off Google ads from your blog using WordPress.com. So, you want to make sure that you are using WordPress.org hosted on a site where the rights to add Google ads to the blog is not banned. That way you can make money through advertising too and you get all the features that are important to develop your Internet marketing blog.

Some Plug-Ins You Want To Use

WordPress features can be added through the installation of third-party software called "plug-ins." There are many different plug-ins that are beneficial to the Internet marketer as there are numerous developers who are interested in pushing this market forward. The following list is far from comprehensive, but it gives you a good idea of some plug-ins you definitely want to get and install:

- **Akismet**
This plug-in is a spam filter and can save you loads of time moderating comments. It follows a database that is regularly updated of known spammers, so you don't have to read every single comment that comes to your blog. It will automatically filter the spam out and put it in a spam folder where you can look at it at your leisure.
- **AdSense Deluxe**
This plug-in lets you even add AdSense code directly into your blog posts, not just the sidebar.
- **DoFollow**
If you have a "do follow" blog you are more likely to attract visitors and blog commentators. That's because no follow blogs do not give credit for a backlink, which is why many people post in the first place.
- **Email Users**
If you are going to use your subscription list as an email contact list for your Internet marketing activities, you will need to add this plug-in. It lets you send email to your registered users.
- **Gregarious**
This helps you to connect to other site by giving the option for social bookmarking posts to places like Digg, Reddit, Facebook, and more.
- **WordPress e-commerce**
You can add a shopping cart to your blog with this particular plug-in.
- **All In One SEO Pack**
A "must have" plug-in for Internet marketers as it optimizes your pages to get great search engine page results. It's a great way to attract a lot of attention from search engines with minimal time investment.
- **Subscribe To Comments**
This plug-in helps people to track a comment stream on a particular post and keeps them coming back to your blog.

Grabbing Traffic From Third Party Sites

Once you've set up the blog and understand how you will take people from there to your website pages, either via links in your blog posts or sidebar, you still need to get people to visit your blog from other third-party sites. And, which third-party sites should you try to get a web presence on? Let's go over a few of the different places you can begin to cultivate a web presence for the purpose of grabbing traffic, and how to use each one with your blog to lead people from that area to your own.

Other Blogs

Once you've set up a blog, the natural place to start looking for traffic is other more high profile blogs in your market niche. If you don't know who these people are, you need to visit Technorati.com and put in a few keywords that are in your market niche to determine who the big players are. You should make it a point to build a list of blogs that you can add to your blog roll and see if by doing so, they add you to their blog roll. The blog roll is a list of blogs that other bloggers recommend and by getting added to a blog roll on a popular blog, you'll automatically get more traffic from the target niche that you've selected.

Another way to get more traffic from blogs is to comment on the top profile blogs and leave a link to a blog post that addresses some aspect of the post. This way you play off on an already popular topic and you contribute to the conversation too. It's not considered spam to put your URL in a comment if it points to something that contributes to the conversation, not just a sales page. Again, you are using the bridge of your website to grab eyeballs and then once they get to your blog, you can market them there.

Finally, you can also go to blog communities like WordPress.com and look on their featured stories and categories. Find one or two blog postings that you can reply to and contribute to the conversation. Once these blog posts are put on their featured page, you will get a lot of traffic if you post something interesting with a link back to your own blog. Since you're dealing with people who already to subscribe to blogs, it's a natural for increasing your blog subscribers too.

Digg.com

Digg is a social news site where people submit stories and other people vote on them. The more popular the news story becomes, the more it is highly ranked by Digg. It can even land on the front page of Digg, which will provide a megabooost of traffic for anyone who happens to land there. You

can submit your story to Digg and get your friends and associates to vote for it. It can be a story you put on your blog on a popular subject. It doesn't matter that you're not an expert, as long as you can talk about the subject intelligently and make the story entertaining. If you know what subjects are generating controversy on the web, those are always a good subject to try to get into Digg, just be careful not to draw negative attention to your blog instead of positive attention.

Social Bookmarking Sites

Delicious.com is social bookmarking site that allows you to add different pages of your blog to a site where others can view it. Just be sure to use a permalink to a particular story, and not the entire blog URL. That way, you can tag each story with different tags and people will be able to zoom to them when they search the social bookmarking sites. There are many different social bookmarking sites, like Reddit too. They tend to have a large number of people and can be searched very easily.

Social Networking Sites

Facebook and MySpace are two examples of social networking sites. These sites tend to have strict rules about what you can post online on your profiles. Facebook, in particular, does not want people using their profiles to spam or soliciting other people on their business offerings and this activity can get you banned. However, there are ways to mine the rich vein of users that come to social networking sites to mingle online.

First, you will have to set up a profile with your own name, not your business name. You can put up a Facebook page for your business, as a newer feature for those people who are trying to use Facebook to market. However, the Facebook profile should be all about you, not your business. There is an area in your profile where you can list your URLs of interest, and that's where you can add some of your business sites.

The key to Facebook is to join in the casual atmosphere and network your way to more contacts. You can do this through groups, pages, friends, and networks. You should try to meet people who are in your market niche, but not to solicit them directly on Facebook. Instead, you can email and network through different commenting areas to get people interested in your blog. There are different applications that can help you insert your blog into your profile too.

There is a Blog Network application, now formally called NetworkedBlogs, that allows you to post your blog, claim it, and get people to become a fan of it. You can network with other bloggers on Facebook too, by visiting their blogs and becoming a fan of them too, since it lists them too. It allows you

to see blogs in your category fairly easily and to promote your blog to readers through the network. Send them a friend request to anyone that becomes a reader, to any other bloggers in your market niche, and now you have access to some of the audience that is in your market niche.

When you comment on the wall of people you have friended, all of their friend's will see your comment and it can lead them to your blog. Just be careful not to spam their wall and make any comments relevant and not a solicitation. The blog network will take them directly outside Facebook to your blog and provide a steady stream of new people looking at your blog who are involved in your market niche. It's actually pretty simple when you know what applications to use.

Another great feature on Facebook is the ability to create a page for your business, a brand or product, or if you are a performer, you can create one as an artist, band, or public figure. The difference between a Facebook page and your profile page is that you are allowed to actively promote your business on the page, but not the profile. And, your profile is limited to 5,000 friends, whereas the Facebook page is not. Some people even create a page for themselves when they hit the 5,000 friend limit, so they can continue to network on Facebook and add fans, if not friends.

Another feature is groups, where you can add a group on any topic and get people to sign up. Like the Facebook page, people will become a fan and then you have a captive audience there. You may not have their email address, but it's the perfect place (both on the page and in the group) to promote your blog and get many people to go from Facebook back to your bridge, so that you can start to collect their email addresses.

The funny thing about Facebook is that they are super paranoid about having marketers harvest emails. So, they don't add the email contact information in as text, it's an image. You can write the email down for each friend that you have, if it is showing in their information tab, but even sometimes it's not there either. So, it takes a bit of work to collect an email list from Facebook and if they catch you spamming or soliciting people with it, you risk losing your account. The smart way to do this is to simply entice them off Facebook back to your web log, where you have an offer that gives them something for free for providing their email.

And, since Facebook has a culture of non-commercialism, the blog is a perfect intermediary step from Facebook to your sales page eventually. If you were to link in to the sales page directly, you might end up being banned by Facebook or at least dropped by a few friends. No one really wants to be marketed harshly on Facebook, and it takes some finesse to get people to trust you enough to buy from you. So, don't spoil it by being overenthusiastic with your business on Facebook. Master the art of the soft sell, and use an intermediary space to set the stage for your marketing offer.

Article Directories

People all across the web are in search of quality content. Sometimes they go to article directories where anyone is allowed to post free content, as long as it meets the criteria of the article directory. EzineArticles is one such directory that you can sign up for and start creating content for other people to grab and post on their websites.

While it may seem counterproductive to create free articles that people can add to their own sites, as long as they reference back to you or the original article, it is just because of this feature that it makes it a great way to get traffic from many different places, not just the article archive. If your article becomes very popular, you may have several different places on the web linking to it, excerpting it, and all pointing back to you or the original article. This is in addition to the tons of traffic article directories naturally get from their own readers and the high placement in search engine result pages.

Now, every article directory gives you, the author, a resource box where you can link to your own enterprises. You probably won't be able to actively promote your links within the article, as there are strict rules forbidding linking from an article in an article directory to a sales page. However, you can post a link in your resource box pointing to your enterprises there and you are typically allowed at least two links.

As your articles grow in popularity, they can generate third-party traffic to your sites for an extended period of time. At first, you will get an instant boost because the article will automatically go on the front page for a period of time. After that, it will depend on how well you optimized it for Google keywords and popularly searched topics, as to how often it is read or accessed. So, you do have to do a little extra work to get your articles to be highly searchable for a period of time. But, after that, once they're up, you can forget about them and let the article directories, the search engines, and the topic do the work for you.

What's nice about submitting to article directories is that you can post multiple articles on different topics, related but not exact. So, if you have many different websites, you can post on different topics without creating a new account. Readers who like one story, will see other stories you have written and might be tempted to go further to look you up. Always give them a reason in your resource box to click on the link you provide to your blog where they can find even more material that is relevant to that article.

Social Search Engines

A great way to grab traffic is to go to a social search engine like StumbleUpon. This search engine doesn't use keywords to assign relevancy. All the pages are submitted by users of the search engine who categorize

them and they can even give them a “thumbs up.” Even if you don't get that many thumbs up, just submitting different posts from your blog can help to drive traffic there because the pages are randomly “stumbled” when people search for different topics. So, you stand a pretty good chance of showing up on anyone's pc if they use StumbleUpon as their search engine.

As with many other types of services that are social in nature, the less commercial you appear, the better it is for you. And, you want to keep submitting content to the search engine repeatedly to get more hits. That means your blog is ideal for submitting permalinks that go to different stories on your blog to attract attention there. Once people visit your blog, they can be lead to other areas of your web empire via links in the blog post, links in the sidebars, or promotional offers to subscribers of the blog.

In order to use StumbleUpon, all you have to do is install the toolbar into your web browser. From there, it's a simple matter to use the thumbs up button to quickly add your submissions to the search engine. Just make sure you add the permalink and not the entire blog URL, or you will have multiple copies of the front page instead of multiple stories showing up. And, of course, the story on the front page of your blog changes when new content comes up, so the categories and tags change too. It's always very important to use the permalink that will identify a particular blog post when adding submissions to search engines or other social news sites.

Groups

Yahoo! Groups and Google Groups both have a number of different categories of groups where you can join up to discuss particular topics. What's nice about these areas is that they can have a very large audience that already are discussing a topic relevant to your market niche, and signing up is free. Many groups are moderated, meaning you can't just sign up and then spam the front page. That will get you banned for sure. You can, however, introduce yourself and then set up a standard signature file that you can use to close out a posting. That's where you can put the URL to links to other activities you are involved in.

So, don't just post a “come see my blog” comment on a thread and expect to get massive traffic. All that will do is get you banned – very quickly! Instead, join in the conversation and contribute to it. It not only helps to get people to see you as an expert, but will eventually create more interest in your signature links, without bashing people over the head with your advertising. It's also better received by moderators.

Web Forums

Web forums are set up by web masters or niche marketers. They may require a membership fee to get in, or they may be free to join like Digitalpoint or Sitepoint forums. You have to abide by the terms of the forum posting rules. However, because they are usually technical or business in nature, you can get a large number of people who are interested in being referrals or affiliates, once they become aware of your programs.

A really clever way to attract traffic from web forums to your blog is to give away some tool, templates, or software aide that webmasters or Internet marketers are interested in using. It's not considered spam to post a link to your blog if what you are giving away really is helpful to them. However, if the giveaway is part of a marketing promotion, that they have to subscribe to pay, it may be less welcome.

Use the blog as a bridge to get them interested in your products or affiliate programs by showing them how they can make money using them. The audience for web forums tend to be a bit more high level that just consumers looking for an entertaining product. Many of them are online to ramp up online businesses, just like you. So, anything you post to get them excited about your affiliate programs and referral bonuses will lead them to your web log.

How To Bridge Successfully

It should be obvious now that you can link from anywhere on the Internet to your web log to bypass strict rules limiting marketing on third-party sites. And, in fact, it's an ideal way to build a contact list, more so than a sales page. That's because the format is much less commercial and people are eager to subscribe to information-packed blogs, whereas they may be a bit more suspicious about giving out email information on a sales page.

So, here are a few more things to make the bridging form one area of the Internet to your sales offers, much more effective.

Pay Attention To The Audience

Since you are linking in from various places on the web, you don't want to just have a standard page where everyone gets pushed to. That would be like having a sales page that just tries to cram a marketing offer down people's throats without bothering to even find out what they're there for. However, once you visit some third-party sites, you'll start to get a good idea of the type of audience that they attract, and can write a blog post that will appeal to that audience specifically. That way, when you insert a link to go back to your blog, it will go to the permalink that has that particular post.

This will make setting up different links to different pages in your web log easier and customized to the particular audience you are trying to attract.

Categorize and Tag Your Posts

Once you do get a visitor, they should land on the post that appeals to them as part of a larger audience (if you did this right). But, after that, they will want to check out other posts in your blog that might be relevant to them. That's why you want to categorize your posts as well as tag them. In addition, the tagging will set up indexes that search engines use to determine what your post is about and thus rank it.

The major categories that you choose can be displayed on your sidebar by going to the plug-in area and adding that in. You can even put the categories in a cloud format which is more visually appealing than a list. If you don't have a search box, you will need to add one to make it easy for readers to find different topics too, that may not be categorized or indexed properly, for whatever reason.

Decide On A Layout Good For Advertising

Many people spend too much time trying to get just the right look for their blog without considering the fact that the layout may leave little room for advertising, the main reason you need a bridge. So, instead of focusing on clean, one-column, formats that are more like newspapers with stories, try to find at least a two or three column format that will let you put links to other pages, embed images or buttons for your referral and affiliate programs too. You want to optimize the layout for the best screen placement for your ads. That should be the top portion of the screen as well as the right and left edges at the top of the screen. If your ads end up at the bottom of your post or web log, people will easily miss them.

Decide What Marketing Programs You Promote

Some people want to do Google AdSense to try to bring in money, but it can also give the blog a cluttered look. Others find that they make more money and find customization easier with AdBrite programs. There are so many different advertising programs that you will have to decide which you are using, if any.

Next, you will have to decide which products and programs you have on other websites that will fit into the market niche you are promoting in your blog. You can have one blog per website as a bridge, or pick a wider niche

and try to get two different website offers on the same blog. For instance, say you have two websites: one you sell clothing and in another you sell jewelry. Your blog can be about designer or luxury items and include posts on both. That way, it is easier to bridge from places like Facebook back to two websites, using one bridge web log. You don't want to create multiple blogs that need to be updated daily each time you put up a new website. The ideal would be to combine what you can in existing blogs to offer these products and services where they make sense in a larger market niche.

Offer Incentives To Bridge To Website

People have become desensitized to advertising, so even sending them to your web log first, it won't make them click the links there. If your ads look too commercial, they may block them out. Other readers are aware of what Google AdSense ads look like and skip over them mentally when they are reading. They may not even register. As for the links on the side of your sidebar, you will have to constantly bring your readers attention back to them to get them to click.

One way to do that is to offer people incentives for clicking on your blog links. Say, you are trying to get affiliates to join your program, you can offer the first 500 people some infoproducts for clicking on a signup link in your blog and joining your affiliate program. When you write your signature line in some of the postings you are doing across the web, you can even say, "Click this link to find out where you can get a free copy of "Best Affiliate Marketing Practices" or some other ebook you've written. They would click on the link, if they're interested, land on your blog, on the post that relates to how a top-notch affiliate program works, with your link either in the sidebar, the post, or both.

Contests are a great form of incentive and can be a way to motivate people to go from third-party websites to your blog. You can tell people that you are having a contest to determine the most creative ways to make money online. All people have to do is click on the link that takes them to your web post where you've detailed your choices. Then, they can add their own or vote for one of yours, by subscribing to your blog and commenting. At the end, you choose the winner out of a random drawing of the one you think is the most creative, whether yours or someone else's idea and you send them a prize, which can be money, a book, a product, or whatever. The prize description can be on your website where the contest is more fully detailed too. Another great way to bridge them to a commercial site!

Contests tend to draw tremendous attention to your site and can be a great way of introducing people to who you are. So, don't forget to have an "About Me" section in your blog where people can get to know more about you, your business, your products and services, and your future plans. Also,

provide some way for them to contact you, besides through the blog, for those that want to email you in private. Any contact that you make as a subscriber, or someone that emails you, can eventually become a customer because once you have their email, they have started the slide into your sales funnel already.