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Introduction

One thing I quickly realized when I got started online was the fact I needed to generate quite a lot of traffic to my websites if I was to make any money online. In the early days I fell for the paid traffic scams that promised a huge amount of traffic for a small investment! None of those methods delivered any results, the 'hit's were probably automated or from visitors that were so un-targeted that they would never bring any real results.

So I tried my hand at PPC (Pay Per Click) traffic, mostly Google AdWords, with that comes a whole new level of stress, first of all you have to set up your campaign, have it approved, bid for keywords, track results, etc. This was something I was never able to turn into a profit as I was always having to pay over **50 cents per click** for decent keywords. So after losing a few thousand dollars and wasting hundreds of hours researching and testing I decided I wasn't going to pay for my traffic.

Then I tried my hand at SEO. (Search Engine Optimization) Unfortunately, with the vast amount of competition out there, there's just no easy way to approach SEO. Plus I have heard horror stories of people spending years perfecting an SEO method that starts to bring results only to see the mighty Google change its algorithm and the traffic stops overnight.

You see, the problem with paid traffic and organic search engine traffic is it can disappear overnight. If you remember the famous Google slap a few years ago that basically put thousands of marketers out of business overnight by making PPC keywords so expensive they couldn't be bid on you will know what I mean.

Then we've had the famous penguin and panda updates that have seen poor quality websites disappear off the search results altogether. While this is not a bad thing if you provide quality content it did kill off thousands of businesses.

Thankfully I don't have to worry too much about anything the mighty Google does, in fact Google could close tomorrow and it would have very little impact on the amount of traffic I receive. That's because I have learned tons of traffic generation methods that bring in thousands of visitors to my websites every single day and most of them **don't involve Google**, and it's these methods that I want to share with you in this eBook. In fact, once you learn my **proven techniques for traffic generation**, you will be worlds ahead of the web amateurs who want to buy their way to real success. (Someone I used to be)

Once you finish this book, you will be capable of generating thousands of visitors per day to your websites and you won't owe anyone a cent!

Let's get started...

Chapter 1

You've Built It...But They Will Not Come!

Didn't the old expression go, "If you build it...they will come?" Yes, so imagine how disappointed website owners are when they spend thousands of dollars on a new website (probably complete with flashy animation, cool artwork, tons of photos and a great online store)—and yet no one comes. It's discouraging enough to kill a web marketing campaign entirely.

However, it's important to understand that building a website is merely "step one". Creating great content is "step two", and then there all of the steps afterwards, and **this is what many website owners forget**. Creating a website is just the first part of an aggressive campaign of content development, community outreach and linkbuilding.

So, if you have created a website (perhaps even overseen its development for a few years) and yet things are stalled as far as traffic, it's time to re-evaluate your strategy.

Understanding the Role of the Website

One common misconception is that a website is like a brick and mortar store built right in front of a crowded highway. Chances are, if you build a McDonald's in front of an old highway you're going to get some decent foot traffic, because they all see the development. However, a website's development is practically invisible to the masses, unless you happen to buy the "JustinBieber.com" domain.

Instead, websites have to be "discovered" and there are only a handful of ways to do this for free. Furthermore, the website is not the catch-all solution that web hosting companies and marketers make it out to be. A business website is just one avenue in a complete set of business applications that can be used online.

In the coming chapters, we are going to discuss multiple traffic generation methods that can be exploited, and all without you having to spend more than a couple of dollars.

How Websites Are Found by Search Engines

A refresher course on how websites are discovered may prove helpful as you start your free traffic campaign. No website is instantly “Googleable”. Rather, a site’s content is written and then you as the webmaster will “inform” the major search engines that there is new content to “crawl” and then “index.” Based on each search engine’s unique algorithm, your site will then be ranked and your Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) returned based upon keyword requests from users.

The question is: *“How do you get the attention of search engines?”*

When the Internet was young, the best way to do it was to simply submit your URL to a search engine’s “Suggest” page. However, times have changed and there are simply too many sites and too many pages to take into consideration. Now, companies prefer that you notify search crawlers by way of “pinging” search engines when new content is available. There is an automatic way to do this (which we will discuss a little later), as well as a manual submission method involving visiting the site you want to be indexed by, and submitting your sitemap document.

Keep in mind that just because a search engine has been “pinged” does not mean you’re going to get the royal treatment. While some popular sites and search-friendly sites have the privilege of practically “live” search results, less popular, new and rarely updated sites will only be crawled and indexed on a periodic basis.

For that matter, if your optimization methods are poor, you may actually be listed...but appear far down in the rankings that you might as well not be listed at all. This usually happens when you disregard advice about proper “optimization” techniques. For example:

- Each page should have a proper title;
- Each page should contain meta tags and descriptions;
- The domain should be keyword friendly; and
- The website should be updated on a regular basis.

You also have to remember that some search engines customize their own SERPs. Thus, while Yahoo is powered by Bing, results can vary. Yahoo definitely plays favorites and favors websites that: (A) pay the Yahoo business listing fee, and (B) link to multiple subdirectories within the Yahoo URL universe. Many search engines are powered by Google, but actually individualize search results based on various algorithm "tweaks", and their own human editors' judgments.

There are multiple factors a search engine application will consider when listing your site for various domains and they can include everything from content-centric reasons, to keyword usage, to local interests or even personal affronts—that's right, you can inadvertently annoy the search engines and they will penalize you!

Free Vs. Paid Traffic

Of course, this book is about free traffic generation, but just in case you're second guessing the decision to buy traffic outright, let's just cover the basics.

Paid guaranteed traffic is 99% scam. Sure, there is a 1% variable in there somewhere, however, statistics show that if you force users to view your website (usually through black-handed techniques like URL hijacking, malware installations, pop up ads and the works), they are NOT going to be the least bit interested in what you have to offer. Unfortunately, this is what most paid traffic sites give you.

You can also take the commercial traffic approach and blindly advertise your website with local signage, TV/movie commercials, print publications, radio spots or even banner ads on a major search engine. True, you will get guaranteed views...but there is no telling whether you will connect with your audience.

The best way to market your website is through text related content (or SEO, to generalize a term), because this means **targeted advertising**. You only interact with traffic that admits to being interested in your products or services. Statistically, this is a no brainer. You are directly connecting with your best audience. All that matters now is the presentation.

Building Your Traffic Generation Strategy

In the next chapter, we are going to discuss why Search Engine Optimization is the best technique for web advertising. This will be followed by a discussion of other online avenues.

Long before you start trying these techniques, however, it is important to build an effective traffic generation strategy. Consider it a sort of mini-business plan, focusing exclusively on your online marketing methods. Without a traffic generation strategy, you will not really understand how effective your marketing is...nor will you be able to figure out the ROI - Return On Investment - for all of your time spent.

Your basic need here is to create a comprehensive plan, and then track your success, just as you would with an operational business plan. Based on the results you observe, you will be able to determine your next course of action.

Truthfully, (and as we are going to emphasize in this book) the best way to approach any marketing strategy is to **work on as many traffic generation methods as possible**, rather than intensifying efforts in one area—a plan that could very well backfire. (It's the old, all your eggs in one basket analogy)

You want a complete web marketing plan that is going to establish your website through diversified content development and linkbuilding.

Ultimately, the Internet is only a collection of connected links. Within your site are a number of internal pages that allow viewers and search robots to find all the pages available. When your site links to another site via an external link, more connections are made, making it easier for people to discover you through this large collection of links. It's basically a computerized version of the whole "friend of a friend of a friend" dynamic.

You want your company, indeed, your brand, to be all over the place—all over the Internet! This is precisely what huge websites like Wal-Mart, NBC, Disney, Exxon-Mobile and so on have. They spread themselves thick and they do it everywhere. So let's discuss how to do just that!

Steps to a Successful Traffic Generation Plan

Step 1: Develop a complete step-by-step strategy, based on the information we are going to uncover in Chapter 2-6.

Step 2: Create a list of realistic goals, specific and based on your online progress. (i.e. total number of links, PR rank, #1 for targeted keywords, total traffic, sales conversions, leads, total sales, profit in sales, etc.)

Step 3: Create a means of tracking investment for time spent, any expenses you use, and compare profit/loss to determine if you are generating cash flow.

Step 4: Install analytics software on your site; either through individually pasting code into each page, or installing an application that analyzes your log files. Note trends and discuss these with your leadership team. Most web hosts offer site analytics for free, though Google also has its own

Step 5: When you are ready to begin the campaign, make changes to your site (based on our upcoming recommendations) and notice positive trends that you can capitalize on.

Chapter 2

Search Engine Optimization—Keywording Your Way to More Traffic

Without SEO (Search Engine Optimization) your site is nothing but a store in the middle of the desert. You know it's great, and anyone who happens to be in the middle of the desert also sees its great features. However, until word of mouth gets around, your site is stuck in virtual limbo.

This is the entire basis of SEO theory—that you must reach out to your audience. Sure, you could take a traditional advertising approach and post a banner ad or an offline ad but when you do so, you are losing one of the best advantages of SEO—targeted advertising.

Targeted advertising means you maximize your time and investment by only selling to customers who have already indicated a strong interest in the products you sell. Enter the search engine (Google, Yahoo and Bing), the only true way to reach targeted traffic.

You target, or qualify, your audience by the keywords you focus on. Each search engine company has a web crawler application that scours the Internet looking for fresh new content. As the search engine finds new content, it will “index” each of the pages found, saving the content in a large database.

And if the Internet truly were omnipresent it would be an awesome thing. Unfortunately for new webmasters, the Internet entity is not all knowing and does not have access to every computer in the world. No, this emphasizes the point that you must alert the search engines whenever you publish new content. We'll talk a little more about this later. For now, just try to grasp the concept of a worldwide series of link connections, which is basically what the Internet is. When you create a link, you create a connection to another website page.

It is essential to understand that without links (yes, even linking your own pages together) no search engine can possibly find you. Therefore, effective linkbuilding and

properly formatted HTML pages are just as important as the development of new content.

At this stage, your reader types in a keyword request into the search engine and based on this request (how it matches with text content within your webpage) the search engine is going to send back SERPs, or Search Engine Results Pages.

What determines which websites are ranked higher than others? This is indeed a contentious issue in the world of advertising, as most of the major search engines are intentionally vague about what factors their “algorithms” consider. Still, the overwhelming message is clear: if you want to be highly ranked (and everyone does, since most users never even click past the first two pages) you must develop high quality content. That brings us to the first point of effective SEO marketing.

Creating New Website Content

The best way to be noticed by search engines and to reach your audience is to create excellent content. Now we’re not going to spend dozens of pages taking baby steps. You probably already know the difference between good content and low quality, keyword-inflated “fluff”.

Good content is:

- Professional (Grammatically correct and with proper spelling)
- Readable (In the same sense as news articles or magazine articles)
- Informative (Teaches the audience something about the subject)
- Entertaining or Conversational (Not merely dry information)
- Original (Is not merely a copy of another article)

You know good content when you read it because the language is riveting—it keeps you interested. This is the type of writing that is rewarded—and that’s regardless of how many “Panda” or “Penguin” algorithm updates are invented.

More and more, we see evidence that low quality sites, particularly content mills and some article directories (notorious for low quality “expert articles”) are being penalized by rapidly improving search engines. It’s important to remember that search engine companies are striving to invent artificial intelligence with their algorithm changes, so that robots can start picking up on poor quality writing, as well as other unethical practices.

Poor quality content is very quickly losing its value online. Customers are not finding it helpful and in turn, search engines are burying the pages (and in some cases the entire site) in SERPs.

What is poor quality content? Who is to say what is low quality content and what is “magazine” or “expert quality” writing? Poor quality writing can be identified by the following trademarks.

- Many sentences that merely take up space
- Various grammar or spelling errors
- Hyperbole and “sales” type writing rather than thorough coverage
- Common knowledge rather than expert insider tips

Here we see what is at the root of the problem: lazy writers and company heads that really don’t care enough about human traffic. They prefer to play games with “robots” (the web crawlers looking for keywords) rather than to create interesting and lively content. So ask yourself, “Is the content I am paying for or writing about truly informative? Is it written for human beings, just as a magazine or a newspaper article?”

We can safely say that if you’re planning to launch an SEO campaign built on high keyword density and “filler” articles, you are wasting big money! Your readership is demanding...don’t let them down!

The Importance of Proper Keyword Strategy

Not only should you be striving for higher content but you should also be focusing on popular and niche keyword phrases. After all, regardless of what great content you come up with, if you don't strategize with your keywords you are not going to reach that targeted audience. Targeting your traffic is key...otherwise, you might as well be buying mindless, redirect traffic. (You know the type of user that closes your window before he or she even reads the first line)

Devote some time to keyword research using a Google keyword research tool or any number of other research applications. It is best to factor in all avenues including:

- Estimating what phrases your customers search for;
- Viewing the chosen keywords of your competitors;
- Looking up low competition keywords;
- Looking up high request keywords;
- Taking online or offline surveys of some of the market segment;
- Researching keywords that tie seamlessly into a sales presentation;
- Keywords for local area traffic; and
- Niche keywords or "long tail keywords" (long phrases or entire sentences).

Once you determine the most important keywords to your campaign, you can begin building content. It is far better to use this approach rather than prepaying for content and then trying to work in strange keyword phrases in at the last minute. Search engines place high priority on articles and features that read "naturally."

This is an important factor to remember when planning keyword density. In the past, a high density of 5% or more was acceptable. This manipulated outdated algorithms and helped build site popularity in a short period of time. However, the newest algorithm updates penalize sites for the practice of "over-optimizing." Besides the implication of low quality writing (or "recycled writing"), that phrase likely refers to the overuse of keywords.

Ideally, high quality writing does not require “keyword density.” Quality writing is governed by the theory of natural repetition—using recurring words and statements only for emphasis. This was a flaw of the early Internet world, which could only index webpages based on their page titles and high density of recurring keyword phrases.

The newest algorithm updates seek to correct this issue and actually penalize websites that needlessly increase keyword repetition. Your safest bet is to research your keywords carefully and aim for *below* 1% density—whatever the article dictates based on intelligent human reading.

So let’s say you’ve got the writing and the keyword research down pat. What comes next? Beware that improper optimization techniques are not bringing down your otherwise ready website. Let’s talk about consistency.

Free Content Management Systems

One of the most common problems of yesterday was keeping up consistency in all of your web pages. On any given page, you could find issues with broken links, improperly formatted text, badly devised HTML (which could easily block communications with search engines) and even complex issues of canonicalization (or bad domain pages). It was a headache for sure...and this type of mess drove some companies to pay thousands of dollars to a webmaster to take care of all web related issues.

Times have changed! What Windows and Mac OS did for operating systems, now CMS (Content Management Systems) are doing for building a website. WordPress, Joomla and Drupal are the top quick build sites and they go one step further than the old Front Page Express tool (or MS Word), which used WYSIWYG technology. With CMS, you don’t simply cut and paste...you standardize the entire site by way of a customizable template. You can customize, add or change with ease, and without having to individually create pages.

Besides convenience and, of course the fact that CMS is completely free, the second best reason to create a CMS generated site is because of traffic-generation features. For example, installing a WordPress site provides these advantages:

- You can automatically insert META tags just by typing;
- You can easily name page titles and highlight subtitles, both crucial for SEO;
- Auto canonicalization and link creation of all pages;
- Auto plugins for search engine submission;
- Auto integration of your site to your other pages (like social network pages); and
- Automatic conversion from website to mobile website.

Lastly, using WordPress for creating an official website or a blog site can benefit you because of the site's huge popularity overall, and their link popularity. Both of these factors are important in establishing high SERPs.

Using link positive associations for your site, like the top 10 in the world caliber WordPress site, can only help you, whereas staying in the virtual ghetto of a small webhosting company using only a simple WYSIWYG editor will not do you any favors.

Free content management tools will make it easy for you to create, save, edit and publish new content for sales copy (your pages) as well as for posting content.

Creating a Blog(s)

That brings us to the next question. Should you start a blog or should you be content to create multiple posts on your website? Blog posts, in general, are company sponsored articles that are often (A) conversational, (B) highly focused, and (C) of higher quality, representing the company's expert opinion. There is no real philosophical difference between a blog or a web article (or a directory article for that matter). It's simply that some users hold their most in-depth posts for blogs, as blogs have a certain prestige to them when it comes to search engine friendliness. (According to many in the SEO industry, blogs are actually considered a more reliable source of information than article directories, as they have more quality control)

Some websites will differentiate their blog from their website posts by either creating a subdomain within the same site, or by starting a blog at a free site like Blogger.com. True, creating an external blog site may help you create more quality links...but creating a blog domain within your own website will help you with domain leverage, very important in matching keyword requests.

When writing a blog, and with a specific eye towards traffic building, be sure to tag your blogs, not only going after mainstream traffic but also targeted traffic—as if qualifying the readers who are going to eventually find your blog. They may stumble upon your site and then bookmark it, visiting it to see whenever you publish new content. They can even configure their computer of choice to receive automatic updates as soon as you publish new content via an RSS feed.

Of course, this is dependent on playing it smart and focusing your attention on your blog. If you blog about random things, without any sense of structure, you will never build a large audience base. By focusing your theme, and discussing one industry or one avenue of your industry (even better), you can build niche traffic and eventually start a relationship with your readers, who will soon take your blog as a legitimate source for new information.

Blog Commenting, Blog Hopping and Blog Guest Hosting

Starting a collective of “fans” is what is meant by the term blog hopping. Like any niche market, you may find that the people who do discover you will remain loyal—and perhaps even befriend one another—as bonds form easily when there is a common thread. Take full advantage of this and make every attempt to be accommodating.

We are going to consider social media marketing in the next chapter, and this is where we will really discuss being *very outgoing*. That said, even in the context of a blog, where your main concern is creating valuable content, do everything you can to encourage the creation of a community.

Always create posts that ask questions of the audience and encourage interaction. When someone replies to the post, make an attempt to follow up on that person’s thoughts. Always remain respectful of others, even if you plan to use controversy and disagreement to your advantage. People actually love to argue...they want to feel as if they have a voice in this public forum. They can earn publicity through your blog while also showcasing their own abilities. (The only exception...don’t be so generous with spammers. Spammers leave nonsensical comments in the hopes of establishing cheap links...they do no one any good and may actually chase away your real readers.)

Not only should you try to follow up on comments, but you should also try to reach out to the blogging community and comment on your visitors’ own blogs. If you use a system like Blogger, or even WordPress, you can easily link your site to the other bloggers’ sites, and everyone can benefit from the mutual exchange. Before you know it, friends of friends bookmark your blog (or simply click their way to it through mutual friends) and you have a big party line.

Make no mistake; this is the secret to blog traffic—not simply writing great content. Do you ever notice how all the top blogs on the Internet (that is, quality writing blogs...not celebrity blogs!) are filled with comments? They are on top because they stimulate conversation among a devoted audience.

Article Directory Marketing

Article directory marketing refers to the process of writing articles for top ranked directory sites. These directories don't really have a theme...they are a virtual playground of knowledge where practically anyone can write on a topic and receive expert accreditation.

In a way, they are no different from blogs (at least when it comes to writing technique) besides the fact that they are located on a neutral site and thus cannot blatantly advertise the user's company. (Instead, writers/site owners receive one or two links in exchange for an article) Within a matter of months, a site could create hundreds of backlinks, and thus earn the attention of Google. (Oh yes, you will get their attention... but...)

Just a few years ago, article marketing was the all the rage. Linkbuilding (which is basically the process of building links across the Internet that lead back to your site) was of vital importance, and while links do matter, recent algorithm updates have changed the way links are counted—particularly “low quality links”.

One of the easiest ways to identify low quality links, or so thought Google in May 2012, was to discriminate against the article directory website. It's easy to see why Google made that assumption, even though it might not be entirely fair. While there are some quality features on article directory sites, many other low quality pages can pollute the site and bring the search rankings down.

Article directories claim to have an editorial process, and truth be told, you can still find some top rated SERPs from article directory pages. However, experts within SEO have noticed a trend of article directory penalization. So, the safest thing to do is to diversify your linking strategy, perhaps investing a little bit in article directory marketing, as well as blogs, guest blogs, and press releases.

Press Releases

Press releases are articles that are written solely for news purposes, and are intended to get attention from editors, website owners, agents, and all sorts of other news sources. Whereas writing a press release that gets picked up by a national magazine is somewhat difficult, writing a press release that passes online syndication's standards is fairly easy.

Press releases have to be:

- In professional article format, not conversational text or sales copy;
- Newsworthy, as in a mainstream news story; and
- State an item and then provide increasing detail with a link and contact information.

Press release distributors will not pick up poorly written press releases, and this is an especially rotten feeling to experience—especially if you've spent big money on press release distribution. (Some sources like PRWeb charge upwards \$200 for each submission.) The good news is that a press release can easily make the "news" tab and receive maximum exposure in a small period of time, if it is deemed truly newsworthy.

Topics for news angles could include subjects like inventive new products, customer incentives, celebrity endorsements, big name client signings, news trends, charity partnerships, and the like. Stuff that would actually make the news and not just a conversation between search bot and WordPress!

In fact, sources like Yahoo and Google only pick up popular stories that are published and syndicated. Most of the top press release distribution sites don't archive old press releases, and so are limited to 30 days of maximum exposure. Some press release sites do archive old stories permanently and these are usually free sites, not major publicity companies. Still, free press release submission can certainly help you build

quality links, and certainly cannot hurt your standing as long as you keep the content high caliber.

Choosing Your Links Wisely

Last but not least, let's share an important lesson about linkbuilding before you start spreading links everywhere you go. It's not the quantity of links that matter but the quality. This means not only paying close attention to the article writing itself, but also to the anchor text (as in keyword placement and not just "click here to learn more!") and to the site you are linking to.

The search engines are looking for quality links all around so you do have to protect your reputation. Search engines can actually penalize you for hanging out with the "wrong crowd", and that could include anything from poorly ranked article directories to spam sites or content mills, backdoor sites, plagiarists (or "scrapers") and even web hosting companies that support such unethical sites.

So, think twice before you so generously accept a random person's request to exchange links. Your own reputation is on the line. Sometimes a new company site can have more leverage than a site that has suffered massive search engine penalties. In the next chapter, we're going take SEO into the new age...the age of fast, accessible and fun social networking.

Chapter 3

Social Networking—Get Out and Mingle!

Social networking is not just fun and “in” for 2012—it is also a guaranteed way to get free traffic. After all, social networking is free and it means hours and hours of free publicity for your company...that is, if you can get the lingo and the “culture” (if you will) of sites like Facebook and Twitter.

This first point to understand is that social networking is not at all like sales, or even anything like your official website. When someone visits your website they want to read sales information and content about your industry and your services. However, when people are in the mood to socialize, they simply want to chat, goof off, share information, share links and stories and generally have fun.

In fact, coming across as a “company” or speaking only about things that concern you and your great products is probably going to rub people the wrong way. This is against the very nature of social networking—a place that is more like a playground or like a lunch break room than an “office.”

So, how can you use social networking to increase traffic? This is an issue that still confuses many business owners, as their pages may only receive a handful of likes and never stimulate conversation. Inevitably, the site owner wonders, what did I do wrong?

Here’s the secret: you must learn each individual social networking site, and use its unique features to draw in traffic. You must become not just part of the crowd, but part of the Facebook crowd, part of the Twitter crowd. Let’s take Facebook as an example..

Facebook’s Features

Facebook is a website that capitalizes on personal user relationships. Facebook is the place that boldly brings together friends, family members and acquaintances from all walks of life. In fact, many people actually avoid talking or even listing their business and instead just enjoy time off with their friends. We can blame a series of well-

publicized Facebook “Fails” for this...you know the boss is always watching when you make fun of the company in a public forum.

So yeah, that and the fact that no one wants to swear in front of grandma, just keeps Facebook a very work-less environment. The moment you start mentioning work, people become annoyed. (Unless of course, you’re complaining about work!)

On the other hand, no one really cares what you say on your profile, because it’s perfectly fine to say who you are, what you do and where you work. It’s the sort of conversation you would have at a bar, right? Besides, people do actually want to know who you are...they want to know of what “use” you are to them. For example, if you say you’re a doctor, everyone will definitely take note of that and call you up the next time they have a question.

It’s the same principle with anything you do - as soon as you say that you work in a certain field, you are deemed the expert and your associates identify you with your products and your business. No, they don’t want to talk about it. They don’t want to hear you rattle off catchphrases and talk about great deals. However, if an issue comes up they will definitely click your profile and visit your website. They will be seeking you out, looking help with their customer needs.

This is the secret to social networking, and quite frankly, the secret to all sales in the new millennium. Do not try to sell on Facebook. Attract your customers. Besides the ability to create a detailed profile full of links, Facebook also has these other advantages:

- **The Ability to Share Photos and Videos:** Facebook allows you to share photos and videos among friends, which can be funny, touching, motivational or controversial. These are great at stirring reaction, and the more people you have chatting, the more your brand is getting around. After all, your goal is to be the brand. So, not talking about business is not really a big deal if you are using your personal time to promote your company’s values.

- **The Ability to Connect with New People:** Facebook lets you connect with old friends (who it actually seeks out according to your personal Internet logs... creepy, huh?), reply to messages and send private messages. It also has various forms of communication, from direct conversation to status updates, to highlighting articles you have read, which others might be interested in. The point is, you can engage your audience on a social page and earn their respect as a friend, long before you ever bring up business. Creating a long list of contacts is the first step to using social networking, as you are building a large and personally invested audience. Remember to make your page public if you hope to get extra publicity. You can also like or share pages that are not only interesting to you—but reflect the values of your company. In essence, your behavior is part of your brand. Out of curiosity, people will “stalk” you just to see what you like, what you say and what you believe. It’s all great for publicity!
- **Facebook Groups and Pages:** Another example of Facebook’s unique environment is the fact that you can create your own groups and pages and unite people (and secretly build an audience) to promote something you believe in. Now, you cannot convince them all to “join” your company. True, you can ask people to “like” your company and bribe them to do so as well—but it’s not as effective as drawing their attention away from business and towards a free group or fan page. Instead of trying to break down their resistance, distract them from business talk by focusing on another common agenda. Like a group of people united by a common interest, or a group of people who gather together locally to discuss issues. Creating a community away from business can actually draw people to your business, as they will soon realize you’re a natural born leader and know a great deal about your industry (and how it affects them). Start by searching for existing groups and taking part in that discussion. The great thing about Facebook is that you never have to sign up to new groups. You simply use the same ID and can converse freely in a variety of connected “worlds.” If your niche interest (which is also your business) doesn’t exist, be sure to create it. You can also create movie pages, celebrity pages and product pages just to get attention from the mainstream world—all of which may take an interest in your

life and career. Be sure to research the keywords and determine what your group name should be called in order to drive more traffic to you. Keyword research tools or even Facebook searching tools can be of help here.

- **Facebook Places:** See Chapter 6 under Local and Mobile Marketing.
- **Facebook Events:** Users can create events and gatherings and invite all of their friends to join them. Even if all the VIPs cannot RSVP, they can still comment on the event and offer moral support. Little events (whether a night out at dinner or a huge festival in town) sponsored by your company are a great way to get a dialogue going with others, or even to brand your name as an official sponsor of a "meet up" in person. For even better traffic generation, provide the details of your involvement at your official website.

Twitter's Tips

Twitter is the abbreviated version of Facebook, and while its options are not as complex, many people find it simplicity very useful. One great thing about Twitter is that it allows you to develop more professional and casual relationships, not necessarily "friends" but followers. In fact, Twitter is far more often used as a means of advertising new pages of content, recruiting employees and clients, answering customer service concerns and other business concerns.

- **The Real Time Search:** This option allows you to search topics on what people are talking about and is a great to discern trendy new subjects and other market research. In fact, one of the latest rumors is that Google will buy Twitter, and incorporate an even more effective means of searching the entire web and matching keyword content. Twitter and other social networks are arguably more popular than email services, since users can check their messages from any location (including mobile devices), and thus are easier to contact.
- **Interact with the Latest News:** You have a choice of interacting with the latest news stories or commenting on the website's most popular keyword searches. You can click the Discover or the Connect tabs to explore your options. You can

find more friends or even surf the new categories option for a Yahoo-like approach to various channels in the Twitter zone.

- **Followers:** The key to earning traffic through Twitter is to create a huge list of followers. The best way to do this is to focus on writing excellent niche content. Give serious thought to your tweets and try to make all of your microblog posts informative or entertaining. Some individuals (not celebrities!) have actually earned millions of followers just because they kept a running journal of thoughts and stay in touch with their circle. One way to earn bigger traffic is to take a look at other users who are operating in your “niche”. Find them and look at their followers. Follow them and correspond with them about the subjects they find interesting. In this respect, you can use Twitter like a blog site, and build your own community of users.

Just remember to keep tweets regular (there are actually programs that help you schedule tweets) and—once again—to avoid repetitive company promotion and actually hold a conversation with your followers. You can gain more traffic by reposting good tweets, by linking to excellent resources, and replying to all tweets sent to you, thereby building online relationships. (And these sources may eventually become your customers)

LinkedIn's Linking

LinkedIn is not as popular as Facebook or Twitter but it is quickly gaining a reputation as a serious business site. And when you first log in to LinkedIn, you may be alarmed at its setup, which is far more complicated than your typical Twitter or Facebook page.

LinkedIn, although it has been following some of Facebook's new layout designs, is actually more interested in creating connections with business associates than socializing with friends.

The question is: How can you boost traffic to the site since you won't be relying on your old Facebook-esque “look at me!” tricks and tips? Notice some of LinkedIn's best features:

- **Questions and Answers:** While Yahoo Answers may be a top rated site for questions and answers, the LinkedIn Q&A section actually is taken far more seriously, and thus has better quality answers to pertinent questions. These are questions asked by professionals and answered by professionals, all parties eager to represent their brand with class and intelligence. By showcasing your knowledge, in this rare instance, a case where people actually DO want to talk about business concepts, you can draw people to your profile which contains all of your social media links and website URL. Another idea to consider: carefully choose the questions you answer, knowing that “big name” company spokespersons will be among the first to reply. Rest assured, they all read the comments, and will notice your name (and company representation) if you impress them. LinkedIn is special in that it’s a great place to meet new customers and new clients at the same time. Just be sure to avoid giving the same answers to all new questions.
- **Profile Stats:** You can actually see trends and statistics on who viewed your profile, a great way of finding potential new business links or customers.
- **Find Jobs:** You can search for jobs directly using the jobs tab and can post jobs, apply for jobs or post a resume online, which could lead searches to you.
- **Find Companies:** You can search for individuals as well as company-grouped profiles, or follow companies you find relevant to your industry.
- **See News:** Check out the latest news from the “news” section and see how various companies relate to it. Follow influential people and their actions. You may even link with them, which will work wonders for your traffic if a big name ever blurbs you.

Google+’s Extras

Google Plus, to some, seems like a bit of overkill—or at least it did when it first debuted. It’s not as sociable as Facebook or as simple to use as Twitter. However, some of the newest features of Google + are making the site extremely competitive—perhaps even

more so than before, since Google is buying up so many companies and dominating the entire Internet when it comes to searches.

Like Yahoo, Google gives credence to its own sub-company links. Therefore, being friends with Google, by integrating its technology, is a win-win situation for everyone.

Google Plus also boasts the following traffic generating features:

- Video chat (ideal for conferencing or hosting video Q and As);
- Easy integration with file storage, thanks to Google Drive;
- Sparks is a trending content option that lets you find inspiration or lets you monitor how people search for you or link to you searches;
- The Circles option lets you group your followers so that you can better target pitches and status updates. This may go a long way in helping you to effectively target certain groups for certain messages, and thus not upset the entire association of your followers with niche type postings; and
- The +1 feature is the Google equivalent of a like button, but it promises more search friendly options, as “popular sites” will inevitably be the ones with hundreds or thousands of +1 links.

Pinterest

A relatively new phenomenon in social networking is Pinterest, a website that exclusively uses pictures—art, photography and motivational imagery—in the creation of its social network. Pinterest is all about branding and it has to be as subtle as possible, since no blatant advertising is going to work. Instead, users concentrate on creating communities, inspiring responses and photo shares (or re-pins in its own terminology) and in finding mutual interests in relationships.

Most experts state that the secret to gaining traffic with Pinterest is to be yourself, to be real and true to you and your company’s values—and to let the pictures tell the stories. Pinterest doesn’t have much in the way of advanced interaction features, but it does

have an easy setup, and a simple process that allows users to “pin” images of the same size.

All of these images can include a link back, available upon a double click. Statistics show that Pinterest is one of the fastest-growing social networking sites, and all the more so when it comes to generating external traffic. Make sure that all of the photos and images you post match your business, which is a key point in integrating all of your different pages.

Like any site, be sure to update the content regularly and launch daily pin themes. Don't limit yourself to products...use Facebook style multitasking and post images of tidbits, tips, and even products of other users. Last but not least, use the key phrases on the board to reach out for those targeted viewers.

Forum Feats

Forums don't have the clout that they used to have. After all, before there was such a thing as MySpace (the first big social media site that slowly died over time) there was the Internet forum, or in archaic terms, the “chat room” or the bulletin board system.

These applications were the predecessors of social networking and helped bring people of highly varied niche interests together long before there was a universal network that connected everybody together.

Well, guess what? They haven't gone out of style. Sites like Facebook and Twitter are actually so big that many people avoid them, figuring that aside from friends and family, it is too difficult to find people that actually share their most important interests.

However, web forums still have the capacity to bring niche audiences together, especially if you create forums that cater to keyword interests, and visit other forums to post as a guest (or even a part time moderator). When you join a forum, you discuss all of the niches that really matter to people—the type of topics that bring you devoted followers, not just casual surfers. Forums also give you:

- Special tools like polls;

- Easy cross platform logging in abilities thanks to Facebook and Twitter integration;
- A chance to find your target market and interact with them;
- A chance to build community trust; and
- A signature, which is basically a link back to your company, and an opportunity to make a statement about your credentials and your company's values.

When focusing your efforts on forums, try doing some keyword research to target the best audience to work with, and don't forget to actually add the phrase "forums" to your search so you can filter out all the social network pages and content mills.

Last but not least, remember that all social networking—regardless of which site you use—is useful to you as the medium is a form of free advertising. The only rules of thumb are:

(A) You cannot be lazy about it—you have to update consistently.

(B) You cannot blatantly promote...try to be creative and sociable above all else.

(C) You cannot be boring. Even if you're just giving free stuff away, try to be fun and interesting.

Social networking sites have two great traffic advantages: first, they create quality links for your site. In fact, with the latest search algorithm updates, social media pages actually showed an increase in traffic, whereas content mills and even article directories showed significant decreases. Second, social networks create a great quantity of links leading back to your site - the more that your content or links are shared amongst the community.

The biggest mistake new business owners make is clear: they do nothing with their page rather than going out and recruiting people by befriending them, sharing with them and (gasp) yes, even promoting their business. It's the cyber equivalent of hosting an

event. So by all means, invite people...mingle and have fun with the latest trend in free online marketing.

What about email marketing? Some say email marketing may be a thing of the past... especially since instant messaging and social networking sites are stealing the thunder. Gee, I wonder...have you received any SPAM email offers lately? Of course! The medium is not dead. However, you must take an assertive and smart approach to email marketing if you want to generate serious traffic.

Let's consider how to find traffic through email in our next chapter.

Chapter 4

Email Marketing—Making “Friends” with Your Customers

Email marketing is vastly misunderstood by many business owners, who either loathe SPAM (and don't we all?) or by business owners who want to use SPAM to get cheap traffic and attention. Sure, SPAM is a great way to get people to look. Virtually screaming about cheap drugs, sexy products or “books that will change your life” do get noticed quickly.

However, the huge proliferation of SPAM ever since the Internet first launched in the public eye has destroyed the reputation of legitimate email marketing. (SPAM is essentially, cold-emailing people with a business proposal...and especially with hyperbolic text promising the world) SPAM is also associated with overseas scam operations. Luckily, most of us are too smart to respond to these sneaky emails.

Now if you can look past the SPAM approach, and convince your audience that you are not “one of them”, you will be able to generate traffic. The hard part comes in establishing a stellar reputation.

The Difference between Real Email Marketing and SPAM

SPAM is not necessarily an unheard of concept. After all, it's a slightly less targeted means of direct mail marketing, a long-time tactic used by local companies. The only difference is that it is online. The broad mail marketing approach is comparable to a banner ad or a commercial on TV. You're taking a big chance by cold-contacting your audience with a “personalized form” pitch. Mail marketing has the advantage of the mail presentation; people have to open the letter and then read the headline. Something that a TV or radio ad does not offer. Usually, research is only limited to neighborhood segmentation; i.e. targeting the poor or the wealthy, or according to rural or urban areas.

However, the online version of direct marketing clearly has some superior technology working for and against it. Online email can be automatically arranged. No real return contact information is required, since fake email addresses can be easily created and

IPs can be faked. This has led to many unsavory users creating scam companies and launching huge email campaigns to sell their faux products.

Why is SPAM illegal in some areas? Why is it banned by virtually all webhosts? Why do ISPs go through great pains to separate your SPAM from personal email messages? For that matter, is it really unethical to SPAM somebody?

SPAM suffers from bad associations, having been “pioneered” by scam artists and poor marketers. What truly offends people about SPAM is the robotic nature of the campaign. Messages that are sent are practically soulless, even if they use a customer’s name.

Therefore, if you want to use email marketing to gain traffic, your first order of business is to separate yourself from the rabble of the profession. What is the ultimate customer complaint about SPAM? That these guys are emailing them non-stop all without any consent or the slightest hint of permission!

So, step one is to get that all important consent form, and the best way to do that is to use an opt-in form. True, you can actually cold-email companies and ask for consent. This is a 50/50 proposal, and you may be ignored, or you may be replied to, based on your proposal idea. Before trying the direct approach, be sure to scout the company and make the introduction letter sound as professional and yet as personalized as possible.

Otherwise, the only way to go about serious email marketing for traffic generation is to go the opt-in route. Simply put, you get consent to send email messages to your audience on a regular basis. This has three advantages:

- Your audience is less likely to unsubscribe if they have willingly opted in;
- The fact that they have opted in convinces them that they are interested in the product; they are more likely to buy; and
- You separate yourself from spammers who send messages indiscriminately.

When it comes to opting in, some campaign managers are happy with one opt-in form (usually an email signup box) while others elect for double opt-in signups, which may require clicking a link inside of an email message after signing up, or checking a box before submitting an email address.

Once you have permission to send emails, and actually have their FULL attention (meaning no instantly deleting emails or a software program automatically sending it to a spam folder) then you can focus attention on creating an intricate email campaign that communicates on a personal level with your customers.

Many Internet users actually prefer email communication when it comes to sealing a deal or making a sale. They want that one on one attention if they are to spend their money...they prefer the assurance of a human being rather than a robot auto responding to their purchase. So in lieu of this, though you are going to be using auto responding tools, do not make your email content seem like a form. Instead, take advantage of this secure and private connection and make an attempt to personalize letters and personalize responses to questions if you have the time. After all, many purchases still go through email (using PayPal, or freelancer sites like Elance.com or auction sites like Ebay) rather than social networks or even home websites.

Mailing Lists

The next step is to create a mailing list so you can email all of your customers (or perhaps just a segment of your total leads) by simply clicking a few buttons. This is sure more convenient than drafting 1,000 individual email posts! You have two options: you can assemble a mailing list on your own, or you can use software that automatically stores all of your new leads' email addresses for you. You can manually enter the email addresses in a database, or install a CMS site plug-in that stores info for you, or you can use a freeware auto responder program which stores lead information and also helps you organize multiple email campaigns.

AutoResponders

AutoResponders are computer programs that answer emails sent automatically. While they are a form of artificial intelligence, they can be personalized and designed to mimic one on one conversation. They can be used to manage new email campaigns, welcome new members to a newsletter, advertise new products or highlight company announcements, or confirm subscriptions (the double opt-in).

These email-marketing tools can be either installed on a user's own server (a more complex option) or can be outsourced and actually operate on the provider's infrastructure. That way, users simply access the application from an easy to use control panel.

When choosing an AutoResponder, it is important to choose not only a free product, but also an operational one—one that protects against SPAM and bad SPAM associations. For instance, some outdated autoresponder applications can generate email backscatter, which will instantly label real messages as SPAM, sending it straight into the junk folder.

AWeber is one of many autoresponder programs and lets you access email signup forms (which you can easily install as HTML on your site), auto response mechanisms (meaning your customers will always be contacted quickly after taking an action) and provides easy ways to create and manage multiple mailing lists for various projects.

Users can also choose between various HTML templates, customize signup forms, use RSS to email, and even analyze email analytics. Yes, you can actually track the behavior of your users to see which messages are opened, which campaigns are the most successful, and which campaigns did less than stellar.

Creating Newsletters

Now comes the tricky part. How do you make such an automated approach to business SEEM personal? The personal connection is key...yet, we insist on using automated software to save time and money, don't we? There is a solution.

You can customize your email messages to fit your target audience, to seem personal and more importantly, to address the customer's needs.

Your customers are pretty smart...they are not going to think that you are emailing them personally. It doesn't really matter if you use a personal name or just a generic title. What matters to customers is how you make the personal connection and if you address their shopping needs.

In discovering ideas for traffic generation through email, it is essential that you do three things:

- Arouse the reader's interest with a great title, one that speaks to his or her targeted needs;
- Keep the person reading by making the information focused and of excellent quality; and
- Direct them to a specific homepage or a landing page on your website to continue the intimate conversation.

True, your website presentation probably won't be as informal as your email messages, especially the "newsletter", the personal pitch that comes month after month (or sometimes week after week) advertising the latest news from the company. However, you should aim for a smooth transition from the familiar email marketing message (the pitch that arouses and holds interest and then addresses the need) to website sales (the call to action stage).

Besides directing traffic to your website, it also helps to include a signature or "author box" at the end of the message to say a little bit about you as a person and as a businessperson. Avoid using affiliate links in an email, as this could turn off your audience.

Last but not least, just as you study SEO analytics and social networking metrics, study the analytics for email. Determine which messages increase traffic and which themes don't seem to work. Adjust your campaign accordingly.

Another tip: do not be content with just one avenue of information. Just as with article marketing, you can actually increase traffic to your website by finding more than one newsletter to publish your material in. As long as you're researching the niches and focusing your content, you can find upwards of 10 or more newsletter sites to post information.

Up until this point, we have only been discussing the mediums for traffic generation. In the next chapter, we are not only going to discuss video and audio content production as a means to produce more traffic...we are also going to discuss the theory behind "Viral" content. That is, what truly makes people stand up, listen to you and decide that you have valuable content worth sharing?

Ultimately, producing lots of "viral" content is the best way to generate an awesome amount of free traffic. So let's get to the bottom of this mystery...

Chapter 5

Create a Traffic Monster—The Thrill of Going Viral

Ultimately, you will never earn “big” traffic unless one of two things happens: you get a big following after years of building a loyal customer base, or two, you go viral and get a little instant fame fast. Remember what Andy Warhol said about everyone getting their 15 minutes of fame? Well, when you create “viral” content online you can actually get multiple sessions of 15 minutes. You can get literally thousands of unique visitors within a few days, or perhaps even within a few hours if you hit it big.

Just how does one create “viral” content, the type of content that creates a media sensation and causes the “snowball” effect? The snowball effect is essentially what happens when friends share content, and alert more people to do so, and then eventually everyone wants to see it because the world starts discussing it. And it has happened countless times before, whether we’re talking about an adorable baby video, a great article, a swell interview or even an urban legend that spreads all over the world!

Of course, it’s not so easy to simply create something “viral” and wait for the snowball effect to happen. Very many pages have been created, sometimes according to the formula of viral content and with every intention of creating a storm of controversy...but then they were ignored.

It’s hard to predict what the Internet (and what a million of friends of friends) will find interesting and what they will deem worthy of sharing. Bear in mind that no one feels compelled to share anything, just because the content is there. In order for someone to want to share interesting new content with other people, that person has to emotionally respond to it.

To some extent, it’s reasonable to say that people want to share “unique content.” Something that is new and hasn’t been seen a hundred times before does sometimes get a big reaction. This is precisely why many people choose to create video content in hopes of branding their image.

Video and Audio Content

The majority of business sites don't have video and audio content, unless of course you're talking about corporate sites. As recently as 10 years ago, small to midrange businesses usually never thought in terms of visual presentation or virtual face-to-face sales. This is precisely why many businesses are now creating video content online—because of the idea that no one else is doing it. Well, that was the attitude when the big viral boom first began.

Nowadays, a lot of small business are getting into the act and are producing their own instructional videos, their own video presentations, and even their little comedy skits and short films. It all makes for great publicity. Even if you don't "go viral" and get millions of hits in a week, you may still make a lasting impression on your leads and that may very well convert these leads into paying customers. A lot of paying customers will make for a traffic increase, even if you're not the next Dramatic Chipmunk phenomenon.

Audio presentations are also very big right now, especially if you plan on reaching targeted customers on Smartphones, PDAs, eBook players, multimedia players and the like. Some businesses have found great success in hosting a radio show or podcast, and speaking on issues that are directly related to their business. Not only can an audio show (or audio clips) help to improve listening traffic on your site (though you will likely have to store content offsite...more on this in the next section), but you can also direct the show's listeners back to your website to push merchandise.

The most important things to remember when preparing video or audio content is:

- Keep it professional (rehearse dialog and prepare the scene with a director's eye, paying attention to detail);
- Use only quality cameras to shoot video;
- Keep all videos and audio content relevant to your business;
- Do not hard advertise; simply reflect your own professional values in the content you distribute;

- Make the content informative or entertaining, not merely video covering familiar or “done to death” subjects;
- Look for “niches” that have not been done yet; use a search engine to search for existing videos of your idea. Create the most search-requested videos that don’t exist yet; and
- Remember also to tag your content with text, or else your content may not be searchable at all. However, it may surprise you to know that Google is already promoting new audio search technology that may vastly improve in the near future.

Where to Host Your Content

This is an easy step, right? Not necessarily. Many people actually do want to host heavy video and audio content on their main site...they will definitely benefit from all the traffic if the content goes viral. However, this will take up huge amounts of web space and “bandwidth” (trust me...you don’t really have “unlimited bandwidth”) and you may end up having to opt for a dedicated server (big bucks) sooner than later.

No wonder many business owners prefer to work through a free storage site, or perhaps a social networking site that allows the storing of very large files. Some of the most obvious sites for storage include YouTube (you can even create your own channel and links and store all of your videos in one location), Facebook (you can store videos on your own page) and a handful of other sites like DailyMotion, MetaCafe and so on. (For some reason though, MegaUpload doesn’t seem to work anymore...)

Besides these two options, you have a third one: host your large content on a storage site and then simply link to it with your social networking page or your official website. The good news is that a few cloud storage services (the biggest thing in online business today) are free. Cloud servers are a great idea, as they allow you to remotely back up your content so that data damage is never an issue anymore.

Some servers even have auto update features (meaning you auto save new files on the cloud server just as soon as you save it to your hard drive), and the ability for a user to access his content from anywhere and using any device. Some even allow video playback!

Free cloud servers include:

- DropBox (2 gigs free)
- SugarSync (5 gigs free)
- ZumoDrive (2 gigs free)
- Team Drive (2 gigs free)
- Ubuntu (2 gigs free)
- iDrive (5 gigs free)
- OpenDrive (5 gigs free)
- Syncplicity (2 gigs free)
- SpiderOak (2 gigs free)
- SkyDrive (2 gigs free)
- Google Drive (5 gigs free)

Pretty Pictures

Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words...and sometimes a simple picture can go on to outstanding viral success, perhaps earning a website or an individual's Facebook page thousands of shares, likes and reads. Just think if you could associate your brand name with a popular picture that goes viral.

The million-dollar question is; how do you create an image that really captivates attention and boosts traffic? First and foremost, make sure you have the proper avenue. Do you notice that many of the pictures you find on Facebook have the same

“group” name? These are actually groups created solely for the purpose of gaining a following through picture sharing. They are found through Facebook’s search engine, though they also link to one another and are shared among friends.

So, the first secret to using pictures is to find an audience that appreciates your images, whether they are inspirational, funny, dramatic, controversial or witty. Rather than waste time developing something that is brilliant, spend more time developing an image that your customers will appreciate. Sometimes a picture can be something as simple as a high quality photo of a new car (great for building an automotive readership) or perhaps a witty saying that supports your company’s values.

Be sure that all of your images are optimized, in that they accurately reflect the keywords you want to target. You can verify image SEO integrity by saving the file name as the targeted keyword you want, and by providing alternate text that is a keyword. You can also add a caption stating the keyword. Last but not least, type the keyword out in the article or on the social networking page, clearly stating what it is. Proper labeling will ensure that your picture is either found on a search engine or distributed across social media with proper identification. The same applies for all videos; label them whenever possible.

Last but not least, try to tell a story with the video content you use. Sometimes a story can be conveyed in images; a subject, a situation, a problem or a resolution. This is how commercials on TV are formatted and it’s also how print publications approach advertising.

More to the point, not only should you tell your audience a story visually, but you should also try to address the “needs” of your audience in the image. Usually, when you think of “needs” in marketing, it’s all about the sales pitch. However, it’s good to remember that you can actually poke your customer’s needs in incidental marketing, such as in creating images, videos or just through typical social networking interaction.

For example, consider the average “millionaire marketer” personality. He doesn’t really sell his company when he visits bloggers, or comments on people’s pages. However, he does talk about his lifestyle. You see, he is very subtly calling attention to the fact

that he's happy and living the big life—something that others will definitely pick up and want to know more about.

You can use the same concept when you create viral video. Tell a story and address—however subtly as possible—the needs of your customers. Better yet, you could use a site like Pinterest to link all of your images together and tell a continuing “story” of your values, your company directive—the things, the images that matter to you. Even though you're blatantly advertising, you are saying quite a lot.

Unique Content

If you don't have any ideas for video, or don't see any use for video, then don't bother making any video clips. There are way too many boring, amateur and pointless videos out there. If you would rather write, then write—but focus on creating outstanding creative text pages that can go viral and earn you lots of traffic.

Oh, your work is cut out for you, all right. Basic texts and even fairly good articles don't go viral...they simply get occasional traffic. If you want to get loads of free traffic then you have to focus on making your content thoroughly unique and dynamic in concept. You want your audience to think that they cannot and will not see anything like this ever again—and this will move them to share it with their friends.

That emotional reaction is pivotal. Not we're not saying you have to write something that's going to get everybody misty-eyed. (Might not work very well if your goal is selling beer) But the emotional reaction you are looking for can result from anything that the audience sees as useful, including content that:

- Is useful in achieving their own ambitions;
- Is very entertaining; makes them laugh, or produces another positive emotion;
- Conveys important news or trends developing;
- Makes them think about nostalgia;
- Makes them think they are learning something top secret;

- Helps them to be sociable and find other people with their niche interest;
- Identifies a problem and solution that has not been explained anywhere else;
- Introduces new ideas; or
- Shows something amazing, outrageous or hard to believe.

Of course, you have to be sure that the unique content you're developing is both relevant to your industry, and that it identifies a "need" that already exists. So be careful about introducing new ideas that are not proven to have a need or a market yet. These can oftentimes amount to time-waster pages. Great ideas...but no audience for them.

Social Bookmarking

Next, consider the topic of social bookmarking, a new trend in web surfing that is the link equivalent to file sharing—an application that allows you to share website links and website content, and also organize it, store it, manage it and search for similar content. This form of social bookmarking, also called tagging, can help users search for niche content all over the web and promote themselves, as well as others. It is similar to a social network, as far as sharing goes, but is more focused on promoting good text pages than merely interacting with others.

Descriptions are added along with bookmarks via metadata, so that context is immediately understood upon loading the link. Users can also comment on the content, vote on the subject, or vote on the quality of the article. Some sites even allow you to keep track of all changes and statistics, including how their bookmarks are shared and tagged by others. Bookmarks can also be emailed integrated with social networking.

Some of the top social bookmarking sites include Delicious, Digg, Reddit and StumbleUpon. These are excellent traffic boosters as they can help you to go "viral". They are also content-centric, meaning they are less concerned with images, and more concerned with articles of high caliber and of unique content.

You can submit your own writings to such sites to consider, but ideally, (and just like with all the Web 2.0 applications we have been discussing) you want to help promote other

people's content as well. Don't blindly recommend things as a chore. Help to promote content that you believe in—ideas your company can stand behind.

What is the most common reason why articles fail to go viral on these sites (which are meant to draw huge traffic to individual web pages)? It is usually because:

- The content just isn't that unique or interesting;
- The content is good but the information is too obscure;
- The content is good but the headline is not catchy enough to draw in readers;
- The description does not highlight the material as a must read;
- Bad formatting (i.e. long paragraphs) or a boring introduction;
- A bad choice of keywords;
- You haven't made it easy for people to bookmark your site;
- You're submitting on a bad schedule. (Usually, your content will only give you a headline or front page coverage for 24 hours) The best time to submit a link or an article is later than 10 AM central time, and as late as 3 PM central time. Beyond or before this, the competition may be too great;
- Improper categorization;
- No profile (Maybe it won't hurt your traffic...but what a waste if you can't direct all that traffic to your site!);
- Not reaching out to the community and joining a network of friends (like social networking, social bookmarking is a waste if you don't want to go out comment, promote and interact with others);

Lastly, consider that social bookmarking and having a text page for "viral" can often times be a deceptively easy task to accomplish. Many webmasters are excited to see

when a story receives thousands of hits in a day. However, if he doesn't capitalize on that success with a series of similar topics, all that traffic is just going to drop. It will be 15 minutes or fame. So decide if you want just 15 minutes or hours and hours in the spotlight!

Applications, Games, Tools and Other Multimedia

If you're all out of text and picture ideas, or perhaps you just want to diversify your viral strategy then think about a developmental approach—creating applications, games tools and other multimedia projects exclusively for your customers. This yet another form of incentive and many, many companies are willing to invest hundreds or even thousands of dollars in creating a tool that will be useful to their customers.

After all, if you host this tool on your own site, your customers will flock to it, wanting to use the tool. Along the way, they will see your brand, your web design and your prices and may be convinced to give your company a try. Giving just a little bit extra upfront is a great way to recruit interest.

You're probably thinking... "That sounds all well and good...but I am not a programmer!" Of course you're not. Most of us aren't...but that doesn't mean you can't outsource the job to a programmer or perhaps even download a public domain tool that you can install on your own site and brand with your own name. This is truly outside the box thinking, as it can cater to the short-attention span of many Internet viewers, or capitalize directly on their stated need. (i.e. someone is looking for a calculator made just for home financing...and bingo, they find your tool.)

The Secret to Creating Viral Pages

Lastly, we come to the secret of creating viral pages. The only secrets are consistency, and having a pulse on what the world is thinking...a few days early. You have to be consistent, because for every page you create that does go viral, you will have many others that never find a massive audience. Keep sending them out there on a regular basis and do your research. That way, you will know what "type" of content grabs hits, and thus what type of future projects you should be planning.

It also helps to read up on the news as to what is happening around the web, including viral sensations, as well as general interest news. Understanding what the world is thinking about, looking at, and how they're laughing it up at the moment, is always a good thing to remember for when you create content of your own.

It is definitely recommended that you make time to develop viral content because this is a great way to boost traffic without having to pay.

In our final chapter, we are going to consider some other great and not so great ideas that might be free to low cost. Of course, we're pushing the "free" in this book so just be warned...

Chapter 6

A Few More Great and Not So Great Ideas

We've discussed the best ideas when it comes to free traffic generation, SEO, social networking, viral content and email marketing. Now we're going to consider some other avenues that might work well for your business—depending of course on the business model and on your strategy. Remember, you're looking for free here...and really, free is the best to do, as all of the most effective methods we covered are free.

So the idea of paying for traffic, or paying for impressions, is not a great one—unless you can afford it, and unless you can develop a budget and a strategy to make it worth your investment.

Banner Advertising

Take banner advertising for instance. Usually, this involves paying a website to host your banner ad, and when a user clicks on it, he or she is directed back to your site. This is the relatively cheap cyber equivalent of a commercial—something that's relatively targeted (at least in demographical information; i.e. advertising baby products on a site that caters to new moms) but still not as targeted as search engine traffic—which actually penetrated the user's mind, and uses the same keywords he or she is thinking.

Of course, banner advertising does not have to be paid advertising. Here's an idea: create multiple sites (but do NOT duplicate content) and then place banner ads taking your users from one site to the next. Or, you could barter with other websites in exchange for a banner ad. Banner ads don't really count in estimating overall links (the stuff that gets you high ranked), at least not to the extent that organic SEO links can.

However, if you have an artistic or commercial design skill, you may find it useful to go ahead and create a banner ad using fancy font text (still appropriate to your site theme) or other decorative shapes or objects. In general, avoid GIF animation, and opt instead for Flash or another dynamic technology. Of course, some users hate flashing banners

altogether, regardless of technology. Keep banners simple and make sure you convey a message...not merely an attitude or a thought that leads nowhere.

There are “standards” of banner sizes to consider. Here are standard sizes to choose from:

468 x 60	Full Banner
728 x 90	Leaderboard
336 x 280	Square
300 x 250	Square
250 x 250	Square
160 x 600	Skyscraper
120 x 600	Skyscraper
120 x 240	Small Skyscraper
240 x 400	Fat Skyscraper
234 x 60	Half Banner
180 x 150	Rectangle
125 x 125	Square Button
120 x 90	Button
120 x 60	Button
88 x 31	Button

In addition to trading banners with other companies, networks or search directories, you can also set up banners for affiliate network opportunities or even for self promotion. So yes, it is a smart idea to create a banner now before you suddenly find out that you need one and have nothing in the works!

Ad Swaps / Link Exchanges

Speaking of trading links, is it true that trading banners or text links with another company similar to your own (or in a related field) is a waste of time? Not exactly. True, there has been a lot of publicity lately stating, in so many words, that link exchanges are not as effective as you once thought them to be. And this makes perfect sense.

Consider, that for a while, many poor marketers online were creating “mutual benefit” link exchanges with each other in hopes of artificially inflating their external links—and thus getting special attention from Google for being a high PR site. That’s not really the same thing as a small company that actually works hard for its links by creating press releases, blogs, articles for directories and other mediums.

So yes, many SEO “experts” were stopped dead in their tracks as Google and other big wigs informed the world that link exchanges are simply not valuable in most cases. Namely, when companies just use them as a means of leverage.

This is not to say that mutual link exchanges are always a bad thing. When there is a good reason for a link exchange, as in a “blog roll” of authors who write on the same subject, then the search engines will count that as a legitimate link. In some cases, mutual link exchanges may work...but only if you prove to search engines that you are actually working together (such as, guest blogging) and are not mindlessly exchanging links for cheap traffic boosting purposes.

PPC Advertising / Text Links

PPC is usually not something associated with free web traffic generation...because by nature it costs companies to use its technology. This is an alternative to SEO, and while it does use similar logic to the search engine algorithm, it is more about whoever bids the most per click.

Not only do you publicize your company through text ads, but you also benefit by “impressions”, which are the number of times your company text (or banner) is seen by an online audience. They don’t have to “click” to get an idea of who you are. PPC

companies (like as Google and Facebook, the two most well known examples) make money not only by the total number of clicks you pay for, but also because they demand a high impression count so that they continue to make money.

How does this concern you as a business owner going after free traffic?

First, there are free introductory PPC deals you can look into. Why, even some web hosts are now giving away \$50-100 of free text ads. There are also true-blue [free PPC sites](#) out there, such as seen at Squidoo (a popular directory that lets you create individual web pages).

Of course, “free PPC” is only a few steps away from “affiliate linking” opportunity (our next topic to discuss), since both methods involve trading clicks and impressions from one company to another. Of course, with affiliate networks, you also have the option of making money or paying money.

Affiliate Programs and Joint Venture Campaigns

Affiliate programs, in this context, do not exclusively refer to an affiliate sales program such as the one offered by Amazon.com; though some programs are interconnected through a single network. Rather, it means that you can associate yourself with a network and benefit from their traffic boosts—while also earning money for your traffic or paying money to receive more traffic.

In essence, it is a glorified version of a link exchange, with some pivotal differences. An affiliate program acts as an intermediary between web publishers (known as the affiliates) and retailers who want to sell their products. You may choose either role if you sign up with an affiliate...though you will only be able to work within the network. You must also abide by the terms of the network as far as content goes, though you can negotiate various issues such as banner sizes and placements, text ads, anchor text ads and various other options.

You can benefit from the popularity of other websites within the network and enjoy a blog-like community dynamic when you sign up for an affiliate program. The only thing

is, you have to consider questions such as: Does my site fit the theme of the other sites on the network? (This is not only important for branding purposes, but also for traffic, since you are only going to receive benefits if you can interest users from those other sites.)

Basically, with an affiliate program you can expose your website to more traffic sources and reach a larger, hopefully more mainstream audience. Of course, the retailer is only interested in promoting the program to the publishers who are doing publicity for the products.

Of course, revenue sharing and Cost-Per-Click or Cost Per Impression models are not of prime importance to you, not if you want to earn traffic the fastest and most effective way. The bottom line is that you can take your website and your stats directly to advertisers and make more money without any content restrictions or other annoying rules that you might encounter at an affiliate network.

Many entrepreneurs have worked with affiliate networking programs and passed their minimum traffic requirements...only to realize that there wasn't much money to be gained besides a few pennies a day. That, together with the fact that only hanging large banners on your site seems to increase revenue—and that this may be in violation of new search engine standards—make this a questionable opportunity

Joint Venture opportunities are similar to link exchanges and affiliate marketing but only involve working with one or more large companies and establishing your own sort of mutually beneficial “network”. Once again, this will only prove effective if you focus on joint content development, or perhaps guest blogging. Keep things interesting and don't let the links do all the talking. Make sure you including some interesting text and anchor text along with your links.

Giving Away Free Stuff

If worse comes to worst, you could always offer direct incentives to your audience in exchange for their visit. For example, free giveaways, free coupons, free meals and so on. Honestly, it is a good and fast way to boost popularity and website traffic—

especially if you're giving away something truly amazing. (The best way to do it is to start the fire on your social networking page and then direct them to your homepage for contest details and entry forms) Big traffic all around with this approach.

However, don't fall into the trap of paying for traffic—as in spending more money on gifts than you actually make. What many web entrepreneurs and store owners are trying right now is the gift of knowledge—the gift of viral content. It only costs you time and that could be cheaper than giving away a lot of expensive prizes.

Then again, if writing 10 free articles costs you more in time than buying a few customized company hats, then maybe it's time to reevaluate the situation.

Local and Mobile (Free) Advertising

Lastly, we come to the next big thing in traffic: local and mobile advertising. Who would have thought that computers and the almighty Windows OS would play second banana to cell phones, Smartphones, and Linux and Apple-based operating systems?

Indeed, many people are using Internet ready cell phones, e-readers and multimedia players...and are ditching their computers entirely. (Or at least keeping them locked away in a distant armoire somewhere). Take advantage of this. Chase your audience wherever they go—even if they go mobile.

Mobile marketing exclusively focuses on mobile device users, and involves creating content, links, apps and text messages for traveling users. Much of this effort will be in creating text messages for marketing (which will be similar to social networking status messages), since users on the go don't really have time to read articles. (Although some websites do find it advantageous to create a mobile app or a mobile version of the site for better loading time)

However, it combines the theory behind email marketing as well, as you are focusing attention on subscribers to your texts. (And you also want to use the double opt in system for this, since people will NOT appreciate SPAM text messages)

Lastly, consider the new technology of local marketing, made possible through mobile devices which can localize all of your Internet information. The biggest local sites to consider for your mobile marketing campaign include:

- Google Maps
- Facebook Places
- Google Places

Signing up at all of these sites can help you to reach the attention of people within your local vicinity. Google Maps takes advantage of localization features and can actually direct local web traffic using mobile devices to your company because of your close proximity.

One of the newest Google algorithm updates, Venice, helps to increase the SERPs of local companies in the area who are creating content for local customers. Google Places and Facebook Places are search engine giants for local business, and can help direct mobile traffic and regular web traffic towards your company based solely on where you (and the target customer) are located.

Conclusion

We have learned a lot about earning traffic for free throughout this book. How great it is to know that you don't have to spend thousands of dollars, and be subject to the whims of a publicity firm or marketing company just to reach your targeted audience. In fact, you can reach out to your local or national community simply by using the free Internet tools that are available to you.

The key to success is being active and being ambitious. Stay persistent and connect with your wonderful world of customers for the best success. Thanks for reading!