Make Money Blogging

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Introduction

This introduction answers some common questions among aspiring bloggers. If you already have a blog and know the basics, feel free to skip to Chapter 1.

Do I Need a Domain and Hosting?

It is fine to get started on a hosted solution like Blogger.com or WordPress.com. They will allow you to learn the basics of blogging and web publishing without spending money. As soon as you nail down these basics, however, it is vital to buy your own domain name and to purchase a web hosting package with some company.

Why? There are several reasons. First of all when you use those hosted services you don't really own your website, and they could shut it down if they believe you have violated one of their policies.

Secondly, with your own domain and hosting

account you will have more flexibility and features on the technology side. This means that you will be able to choose different content management systems to install, special scripts and so on.

Finally, having your own domain name will add a lot of credibility to your blog, as most beginners (and spammers) use free hosted solutions.

The question then becomes: What kind of domain name and hosting should you purchase?

Here is a rule of thumb you can use. For the domain name, aim for something with **two words and a .com extension**. If you have a blog about diets, for example, you could try dietspot.com or alldiets.com. But be warned, finding a good and available domain is not easy, and you will probably need to spend days on the task.

For the web hosting, choose a shared hosting plan based on **Linux** (as opposed to Windows), and make sure that it uses **cPanel** (the standard software for hosting management). If you don't know how to identify these two things, just email the customer support of the company asking whether or not they have it.

What Software Should I Use?

WordPress (the software, not to be confused with the hosted solution WordPress.com) is by far the best CMS (Content Management System) for bloggers and small web publishers. It is an open

source project, so you won't need to spend a dime. On top of that it offers more features than any other software, and it is supported by a huge community.

If you have a hosting plan that uses cPanel, as we recommend above, you should find an icon called “Fantastico” inside your dashboard. This is a script you can use to install a wide range of software with just a couple of clicks. You can use it to install WordPress, too. Alternatively you can download the software at WordPress.org and install it manually (they have a “how to” manual for it).

Aren't Blogs Just Personal Diaries?

While blogs emerged on the web as personal diaries, over the years they have evolved into much more than that.

It all began when people realized that the blog platform could be used for a wide range of purposes. Some started sharing news on their blogs, others humor pieces, and others yet started writing articles on their fields of expertise.

The key aspect is the fact that blogs transformed monologues into conversations. Before their appearance, you had a small number of mainstream websites that were responsible for the production of all the content online. Users like you and me could just absorb that content passively. With the appearance of blogs, however, the access to web publishing was democratized. Suddenly anyone, anywhere could share his ideas and content with the rest of the world.

Today the line between blogs and mainstream websites is blurring. You have popular blogs like TechCrunch.com competing head to head with established publications like Wired.

We could say that a blog is nothing more than a type of website. It is a platform that anyone can use to publish content on the web. As for what that content must be, there are no rules.

Is It Really Possible to Make Money Blogging?

The answer is “yes.” TechCrunch.com makes over $1,000,000 per year. Popular blogs like PerezHilton.com, Mashable.com and HuffingtonPost.com follow closely.

Obviously most of those blogs resemble mainstream publications these days, with several paid writers, a specialized sales team and the like, but they all started with a single blogger writing about his passion.

And you don't need to go to the very top to see the money. I don't consider myself to be particularly gifted, yet I make six figures per year online. All that money can be traced back to my blogs. Some of it directly, via advertising and affiliate marketing deals, and some indirectly, via online projects that were launched thanks to the blogs.

So yes, it is definitely possible to make money blogging. At his point many people ask: “But is it easy or quick?” Well, that is a completely different question, and unfortunately the answer here is a big “no.”

Making money blogging is no different than making money with any other venture, be it online or offline. As such, **it will take time and require a heck lot of work**.

Blogging has several advantages though. It allows you to write on a topic that you are passionate about, to work anywhere and anytime, to network with many interesting people, and it can also become a real business.

What Should I Blog About?

Choosing the right niche for your blog is tricky. If you want to blog merely as a hobby, then feel free to write about whatever you want. The important thing here is to have fun.

If, however, you want to make money with your blog and possibly grow it into a business, you will need to choose your niche more carefully.

The first mistake to avoid is making the blog gravitate around your person. This includes using a domain with your name and surname and writing excessively about personal matters. This has worked for some people, but most of them already had some notoriety before they started blogging. Don't get me wrong. Putting yourself in your blog and sharing your related experiences with the audience is perfectly fine, but your site should have a topic on its own, say *small business* or *Microsoft Windows*, as opposed to being a personal blog.

The second mistake is trying to cover too many topics with the same blog. You probably have many interests and passions, but you need to choose one of them for your blog. If you write about technology, politics and fitness, you will have a hard time developing a core audience. The sharper the focus of your blog, the easier it will be to attract readers and to monetize it.

The third mistake is choosing a niche that you are not passionate or knowledgeable about. This usually happens when people see someone making good money in a certain niche, and they decide to imitate it. As I mentioned before, making money blogging will take time and hard work. If you don't love what you are writing about, you won't have the motivation to stick with it long enough.

Finally, **try to focus on just one blog instead of creating a myriad of them**. It is easier to make money with one authoritative blog than with a bunch of mediocre ones.

Chapter 1: The Content

It all starts with the content. Why? Because in order to make money with a blog you need to have traffic, and quality content is the best traffic generator.

Ask 100 bloggers what factors contributed to their success, and I am sure that pretty much all of them will mention the content.

In this first chapter we are going to define what is quality content, and list some strategies that you can use to improve the content on your blog.

1.1 Valuable, Unique and Engaging

Quality content must be valuable, unique and engaging.

It must be **valuable** because people need a reason to visit your blog. This value will have different forms, depending on the type of blog that you have.

Readers of a tech news blog, for example, will get value if the posts keep them informed and up to date with the latest tech developments. Readers of a humor blog, on the other hand, will get value if the posts entertain them and make them laugh. The important thing is to make sure that your readers will get something in return for the attention they will lend to you.

Quality content must also be **unique**, else people won't need to visit your blog to read it. If you start a news blog and simply write about all the stories that appear on the *New York Times*, for example, you will have a hard time finding readers, because most people will prefer to visit the original source.

Finally, quality content must be **engaging**. Blogs became immensely popular on the Internet because they transformed monologues into conversations. If you want a popular blog, you need to build a community around it. Practically speaking, this means that you should write with a personal touch, share your opinions where appropriate, ask direct questions to your readers, use their comments as base for your posts and so on.

1.2 Killer Articles

A killer article is nothing more than **a post that packs a huge amount of value for potential visitors**. Once you publish a killer article, you want people who will come across it to have the following reaction:

"*Wow! This is awesome. I 'd better bookmark this article. Heck, I'd better even Tweet and blog about it to let my friends and readers know about it too.*"

Killer articles are usually long and structured posts, but that is not necessarily the case. Suppose you have a personal finance blog and you discover a trick that will help people save a lot of money with their phone bills. Writing about this trick, even if with a few words, would be a killer article, because it would be incredibly valuable for potential visitors.

Killer articles should be the cornerstone of your content development strategy. Why? Because they generate traffic, attract backlinks and establish your authority inside your niche.

Here are some types of killer articles that you can use in your blog:

- Lists (Example: 43 Web Design Mistakes You Should Avoid)
- Resources (Example: 35 Incredible Free Icon Sets)
- In-depth analysis (Example: A Guide to Semantic Technologies)
- How-to articles (Example: How to Copy a DVD With VLC 1.0)
- Elaborated interviews (Example: Five Link Development Experts: A Group Interview)
- Breaking news (Example: Amazon Buys Zappos)
- Rankings (Example: NxE's 50 Most Influential Bloggers)

Most killer articles will take a lot of time and effort, but the results are worth it. In other words, don't be afraid to put hours of work into brainstorming, researching, writing and formatting your killer articles.

Finally, aim to publish your killer articles with a regular frequency. One killer article per week is ideal. If you don't have enough time for that, aim for one every two weeks or one every month at least.

1.3 Normal Posts

While killer articles are paramount to attracting new visitors and establishing the authority of your blog (in the eyes of both people and search engines), **normal posts are the ones that will build a community around the blog**, because they allow you to talk directly with the readers and to engage them.

Moreover, normal posts will make the content flow more smoothly in your blog. Publishing killer articles every day would consume a huge amount of time, and even if you could do that you would probably be overloading your readers with more information that they could absorb.

Here are some types of normal posts that you can use in your blog:

- Quick tips (Example: The Power of Analogy)
- Questions to the readers (Example: What Are Your Top 3 Life Goals?)

- Opinion pieces (Example: Malcolm is Wrong)
- Polls (Example: How Long Have You Been Blogging?)
- Quick links (Example: 8 Tips for Aspiring Entrepreneurs)
- Events (Example: Win Tickets to Social Media Success Summit 2009)
- Blog updates (Example: New Design and New Features on Shomeoney.com)

1.4 Headlines

Most copywriters defend that you need to spend as much time working on the headline as you do on the rest of the copy. This principle applies to blogs too, where you need to make sure that your post titles are as good as they can be.

Why is the headline so important? Because it is the first thing a person sees, and unless you craft it smartly, it will also be the last one.

The headline, in fact, will affect both the people who are about to visit your blog and the ones who are already visiting it. Suppose that one of your posts was submitted to Digg.com, a social bookmarking site. If it has a poor title, people will not click on the link to visit your blog (let alone vote on it). Similarly, even if someone is already inside your blog, he might decide to leave if the titles of your posts don't grab his attention and encourage him to read the rest of those articles.

A good headline has two main factors. **First of all**

its wording is aligned with the mindset of target visitors. This is important because it will communicate to web users that your content matches exactly what they are looking for.

If you want to discover how your target visitors word their needs and wants, use the Google AdWords Keyword Tool. It is a free service, and once you input a certain keyword, it will create a list with 150 related terms, including their respective search volume in the Google search engine.

Choose columns to display: Show/hide columns

Match Type: Broad

Keywords	Advertiser Competition	Local Search Volume: July	Global Monthly Search Volume	
Keywords related to term(s) entered - sorted by relevance				
renewable energy		550,000	823,000	Add
solar energy		673,000	1,000,000	Add
energy conservation		165,000	201,000	Add
wind energy		368,000	550,000	Add
alternative energy		246,000	368,000	Add
energy costs		27,100	40,500	Add
green energy		201,000	201,000	Add
clean energy		165,000	135,000	Add
geothermal energy		60,500	165,000	Add
energy		16,600,000	24,900,000	Add
energy management		165,000	135,000	Add
energy sources		74,000	165,000	Add
energy source		74,000	90,500	Add
biomass energy		27,100	60,500	Add
energy resources		74,000	110,000	Add
hydroelectric energy		9,900	33,100	Add
energy cost		74,000	74,000	Add
power energy		301,000	201,000	Add

Suppose that you just wrote a killer article with 20 tips to clean a house efficiently. Your first idea for a title is “20 Tips to Clean Your House.” Upon using the AdWords Keyword Tool, however, you would discover that “tips to clean house” is a term searched only 28 times per month. A much more popular term is “house cleaning tips,” searched 4,400 times per month. So you would probably get better results with the title “20 House Cleaning

Tips.”

The second factor that makes a good headline is an emotional hook. The headline should be crafted in a way that will trigger a certain emotion in the reader, encouraging him to click on the link (in the case of someone outside your blog) or proceed to read the rest of the article (in the case of someone already inside your blog).

Here are some examples of headlines that work:

- 24 Car Chases That Will Give You Skid Marks
- Do You Make These 7 Mistakes When You Write?
- How To: Backup And Search All Your Friends' Tweets In Google Reader
- 5 Incredibly Impractical Sexual Fetishes
- What Does the NFL Have in Common With Iran's Clerics?
- Quick Way to Make Real 3D Image Flipping Effect
- 75 (Really) Useful JavaScript Techniques
- Do You Know the Japanese Food Secrets for Beautiful Skin?
- Top 10 Most Ridiculous Band Names in Rock
- Warning: People are Ignoring Advertising. But They do Read News.
- 17 Images You Won't Believe Aren't Photoshopped
- What You Should Know About Home Equity Lines of Credit
- The 9 Most Badass Bible Verses
- 39 Creative Flash Designs

1.5 Content Ideas

Sooner or later most bloggers struggle to come up with ideas for new posts. The first step to combat this problem is to **develop the habit of writing your ideas down**. Whenever you come across something that could lead to a blog post, write it down. Use pen and paper, a white-board, or even a text processor in your computer. Just make sure to have a place where you can store and organize your ideas.

Another tactic that you could use is to **leave many post drafts ready to go**. Once you are sure that one of your ideas could indeed be a good post, go to your blogging software and write the draft for that post. Include the headline as well as the main points. Then whenever you feel like writing on that topic, open the draft and finish it.

If despite using the methods above you are still lacking ideas for new posts, here are some tricks that you can use. The first one is the Google AdWords Keyword Tool. Simply go there and input some keywords related to your niche. If you have a video game blog, for instance, run the tool for keywords like “video games”, “playstation”, “xbox” and the like. After that you will just need to check the long tail of results to identify topics that you could write about.

You can also use **social bookmarking sites** to find what is hot around the web and get ideas for new posts. Here is list with some popular ones that you c an use:

- Digg.com
- StumbleUpon.com
- Reddit.com
- Delicious.com

Finally, take a look on **external places** and try to identify ideas that could be adapted inside your own niche. This include mainstream websites, blogs on other niches, newspapers, print magazines, television programs and the like.

1.6 Posting Frequency

When people start blogging, they often wonder if there is an ideal posting frequency. The answer is "no." There are popular blogs out there where the author only posts once a week, while others get updated several times per day.

If you need to choose between quality and quantity, therefore, go with quality. In other words, only publish a post if you believe that it will add value to your blog and audience. **A bad post is worse than no post at all**, because it might damage the image of your blog and make you lose readers.

That being said, if you want to make significant money with your blog, you will need to have **both quality and quantity**. It is no coincidence that most blogs on the Technorati Top 100 list publish new content every day.

If you can't publish daily posts, at least make sure that you have a regular schedule. For example, post two times per week and stick with it.

It would also be a good idea if you could post on the same days every week, and even at the same hour of the day. This regularity would give your readers the confidence that they will always find some fresh content on your blog.

Chapter 2: Design and Usability

In the early days of your blog you will inevitably need to spend some time working on the design and usability aspects. In this second chapter I will share with you some tips and tricks that you can use on your blog.

2.1 Free Resources

If you are just starting out, there is no need to spend money on your design. WordPress users have a wide range of free and beautiful themes to choose from. Your first destination should be the official Themes Directory. On top of that you also have many sites and blogs that compile lists with the best themes around. Here are some of them:

- 83 Beautiful WordPress Themes
- 100 Best WordPress Themes
- Top 50 Free WordPress Themes

- 45 Must See WordPress Themes
- 45 Free Premium WordPress Themes

WordPress themes are also very easy to customize, making it possible to add a unique touch to your site even if you are using a free theme.

I also recommend that you learn the basics of HTML and CSS, as this will be useful for the rest of your "online career." The w3Schools.com website has a structured lesson plan for both of these topics. Another site that has an excellent teaching material for web design is HTML.net.

2.2 The Logo

When you get some money available to invest in your blog, spend it on a logo. Why? Because a logo

can be attached to any template or design, and **it will give a unique look to your blog and reinforce your brand**.

By far the best website to purchase a logo from is 99designs.com.

You basically create a contest for your logo, specifying a prize, and their community of designers will submit entries. You will be able to interact with the designers, and after one week or so you will choose the winning entry. I have seen awesome logos being submitted for prizes as low as $150 (which is the minimum amount).

2.3 Priorities

There are literally hundreds of things that you could want visitors of your blog to do. Examples include:

- read at least one post,
- read as many posts as possible,
- read your most popular posts,

- subscribe to the RSS feed,
- subscribe to the email newsletter,
- click on affiliate links and make a purchase,
- click on ads,
- submit a post to a social bookmarking site,
- check your profile on social networks,
- check the blogs on your Blogroll,
- leave a comment,
- bookmark your website on the browser,
- email one of your posts to a friend,
- download your ebook, and
- purchase your product.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to design a blog in a way that all of those things will be encouraged. Some people try, but the result is a lot of clutter that only confuses visitors, creating a terrible user experience.

This means that you will need to prioritize. I recommend that you write down five top priorities, and then design the elements of your blog around these priorities.

Whatever does not support the priorities should be removed, or at least moved to a place where it won't get in the way of the user experience (e.g., the footer).

Obviously the number five is just a rule of thumb, so feel free to change it. **The key message is: the fewer things you “ask” your visitors to do, the higher the chances that they will actually do them.**

2.4 Subscription Calls

In the previous point I mentioned that you should choose five priorities for your blog. Well, one of them should be to get as many subscribers as possible. Why? Because **subscribers represent a guaranteed audience for your content**. Secondly, it is easier to build relationships with people who read your posts regularly.

Traditionally blogs use RSS feeds to let people subscribe to their content, but you should not limit yourself to that. Make sure to offer subscriptions via email as well (you can do that with Feedburner), and possibly to have a Twitter account that will be updated with all new posts.

As far as the design of your blog is concerned, you should reserve two spots for your subscription calls. One of them must be above the fold, which could be either in the header or on top of the sidebar. The second one should be at the bottom of single posts.

In the section below your single posts you could include a message to encourage visitors to subscribe.

2.5 Your Best Content

Another priority that you should have is to showcase your best content to first time visitors. This will improve their chances of sticking around, bookmarking your site and subscribing to your RSS feed or email newsletter.

There are two ways to do that. **The first one is by creating a "Popular Posts" section somewhere in your layout** (you can name it any way you prefer). The most common spot for this section is the sidebar, but there are also bloggers who use the header and the footer for it.

As for the list of popular posts, you can either choose it manually and add the links with HTML code, or use a WordPress plugin like WordPress Popular Posts to automate the task.

The second option is less intrusive, and it involves creating an internal page on your blog that will list your most popular posts. You could divide the posts by category or month, for example. Once the page is ready, simply link to it from the main menu (calling the link “Best of”, for instance) or from the sidebar. To create a better visual effect you could also use an image instead of text to link to that page.

2.6 Usability Mistakes

There are some usability mistakes that bloggers

tend to make over and over again. We will list them here, so that you can use it as a checklist.

No search box: Internet users resort to the search box whenever they need to find something specific. Some people even use search to navigate around websites. If you don't have a (visible) search box on your site, those users will get very frustrated.

No archives: It is essential to have a page where the visitor can browser through all your posts. Apart from improving the user experience, this page will also be healthy for your search engine optimization, as it works as a sitemap.

No contact page: It is very annoying for visitors if they have something to tell you and can't find a way to get in touch. Secondly, you risk losing valuable feedback if that is the case.

Complex navigation: Try to make your navigation structure as simple as possible. This involves using a main navigation bar, having a link back to the homepage on all internal pages, avoiding drop-down menus and so on.

Bad typography: If people can't read your content *comfortably* they will just head somewhere else. Make sure that your font is big enough, that the letter and line spacing is adequate, that you have enough white space surrounding the content and so on.

Invisible links: Hyperlinks are cornerstones of web

navigation, and they should always be easily recognizable. Try to make your hyperlinks underlined. If you don't like that, at least make sure that their color stands out and that users won't get confused regarding what is clickable and what is not.

Too many ads: Many bloggers tend to assume that in order to make money blogging they need to jam ads all over their sites. This is not true. To make money blogging you need to have quality traffic, and too many ads will reduce your quality traffic over the long term. Start with as few ads as possible, and move your way up consciously, always putting your visitors' experience first. We will talk more about monetization in the last chapter of this ebook.

Badges, buttons and widgets: This is another very common mistake. Since it is so easy to add badges, buttons and widgets, many bloggers fill their sidebars completely with them. Most of those items, however, won't add much value to your visitors, while cluttering your design and possibly driving traffic away from your site.

Chapter 3: Networking

In most professional fields, *who* you know is at least as important as *what* you know. Blogging is no exception.

If you have a good relationship with many bloggers and site owners they will be more likely to link to your posts, recommend your blog to other people and even help you sell a product or service.

In other words: **networking is key**. In this chapter I will list how you can network effectively online.

3.1 Genuine Relationships

The first principle to keep in mind is that networking is about **building genuine relationships**. This means that you should not approach people solely because you think they are popular, rich or important.

Instead you should approach people who you

respect and whose work you would be glad to recommend to others.

Why? Because networking is about finding win-win relationships. Before people help you, you will need to help them. You must be willing to support and contribute to the people in your network.

3.2 Make a List

I will try to highlight some practical tips that you can use for your networking now. The first one is to **build a list with all the active blogs in your niche** and possibly in related niches as well.

The size of the list will obviously depend on your niche. If you blog about technology, you probably should have at least 200 blogs there. If you blog about orchids, on the other hand, probably it would have fewer than 20. The important thing is that you make your list as complete as possible, because this will be the starting point of your networking activities.

Here are some tools and websites that you can use to find blogs inside specific niches:

- Technorati
- AllTop
- BlogRank
- Wikio Top Blogs
- BlogCatalog

3.3 Introduce Yourself

Once your list is ready, you want to introduce yourself to all those bloggers. Most blogs have either a contact form or an email address listed somewhere, so use either to get in touch.

Here is how you could craft your message:

- Be straight forward about the fact that you are introducing yourself.
- Mention that you blog in the same niche, and include the URL either in the message itself or in the signature.
- If you like the content of the blog, say so, and mention that you will link to it when possible.

Here is a sample message to illustrate these points:

Hi Mark,

I am writing just to introduce myself. My name is Daniel, and I also have a blog in the _____ niche. The URL is _____.

I found your content very interesting, and I will definitely be recommending it to my readers.

Best wishes,
Daniel

3.4 Link When Possible

A golden rule of networking is "**give before you**

ask.” If you want bloggers and site owners to link to you, link to them first.

I would recommend that you subscribe via RSS to all the blogs on your list. This will be useful both to keep updated with the trends in your niche and to spot good articles from those bloggers. When you come across one, write a post about it, add your opinion to the topic, and link to the source.

You could also write an email to that blogger mentioning that you really liked his article, and that you decided to share it with your readers.

Finally, keep in mind that linking out to quality and related content is always a good thing. Many bloggers fear that by linking out they might lose readers or Google PageRank. This is a myth. Your own readers will appreciate if you point them to useful content, and Google itself encourage webmasters to use external links to enrich their sites.

3.5 Support in Other Ways

Apart from linking often to people in your network, you should also try to support them in other ways.

Examples include:

- recommending their websites to other people,
- endorsing their products or services,
- suggesting them for an interview or award,
- submitting and voting for their posts on social,

bookmarking sites, and
- sharing their posts on social networks like Twitter and Facebook.

It is when you give without the expectation of getting something back that people start seeing you as a friend.

3.6 Share Your Best Content

By now you should be asking yourself: “Well, I will do all that stuff for the people in my network, but when will I get something back?”

If you try to help people genuinely as I mentioned, they will certainly notice it and be glad to return the favor.

One thing that you can do to encourage this, however, is to share your best content with them.

When you publish one of your killer articles, for example, you could send emails to the people in your network with a link to the article.

It is important to not beg for a link back, but simply to mention that you believe he or she will like the article. Here is a sample message to give you an idea:

Hi Mark,

Daniel from the XYQ blog here. I just published a post titled “The 20 Best iPhone Applications for

Students," and I believe you will like it.

The URL is _____

Best wishes,
Daniel

With this approach the person on the other side will be more likely to read the article, as there is no pressure involved. If he likes the content, there is a good chance that he will link to it. If he doesn't link, however, don't get frustrated or pissed off. Just keep working on your blog, and sooner or later that person will link to you.

Chapter 4: Promotion

Writing outstanding content is not enough. You need to make sure that as many people as possible will be exposed to that content. This is where promotional activities come in.

4.1 Blog Comments

Leaving comments on popular blogs inside your niche can be very effective at promoting your blog, especially in the early days.

If you write a funny, insightful or controversial comment, the readers of that blog might get curious and click on your comment link to check out your website. And since these readers are interested in your niche, there are good chances that they will like your content too.

You need to be consistent for this tactic to work, however. This means that you should comment on many blogs and write many comments

every day (e.g., 20 comments every day).

There are two mistakes to avoid here. The first one is to write useless comments like “Great post!”. Your comments must add value to the discussion.

The second mistake is to use keywords or the name of your blog in the name field. Keywords should never be used, as they make your comment look very spammy. Imagine getting a comment on your blog from someone named “Buy Cheap Car Accessories”....

The name of your blog could still be used, but make sure to precede it with your personal name. For instance, instead of using “CarsBlog.com” in the name field, use “Joe Smith – CarsBlog.com.” Promoting a blog is about interacting with other people. That is why you want to always have your personal name there.

4.2 Link Exchanges

Many webmasters believe that link exchanges are obsolete, but that is not true. If done correctly, they can still be effective for promoting a website or blog. In fact they can send you both targeted traffic and search engine juice.

You just need to make sure that your link exchanges will not violate Google's policies (and that of other search engines).

The first requirement for this is to **exchange links only with blogs that are relevant and useful to your own readers**.

The second requirement is to use a **natural anchor text**. This means that you should use the name of the blog in the link, and not some keyword that the blogger wants to target.

If you are still worried about getting penalized with a link exchange, you can use the rel=”nofollow” attribute on the links (and ask your partners to do the same). This will remove the sharing of search engine juice, but the links will still be useful to share traffic and brand awareness.

The most common place to put links is the sidebar of the blog. You could call them “Blogroll,” “Friends,” “Recommended Blogs” and so on.

Another place that you can use to exchange links is the RSS feed. Simply add a message at the bottom of your feed (you can do that with the RSS Footer plugin) with a link to your partner, and ask him to do the same on his RSS feed.

4.3 Guest Posts

When you guest blog, you basically write an article to be published on someone else's blog. This practice is common in the blogosphere because it has benefits for everyone involved. The hosting blog gets a free piece of content. The guest blogger gets the opportunity to showcase his expertise or ideas to a new audience. The readers of the blog get to read an article from a different author.

Guest bloggers can also include a byline on their articles, with a link pointing back to their blogs. If you manage to guest blog on popular blogs in your niche, therefore, you should be able to attract new visitors, new subscribers, and also to improve your search engine optimization thanks to the highly relevant backlink that you will receive.

Here is how you can structure the process:

1. List the blogs where you want to guest post.
2. Analyze the first blog on the list trying to understand what kind of content is popular there.
3. Write an article specifically for that blog.
4. Make it something valuable, possibly a killer

article.

5. Email the article to the blog owner, asking whether he is interested in publishing it.

6. If he accepts, you are are set, and you can move on to the second blog on the list.

7. If he rejects, adapt the article to the second blog on your list and send it to that blog owner.

8. Write a new article for the blogger who rejected you, and repeat this process until you have covered all the blogs on the list.

4.4 Social Bookmarking Sites

Social bookmarking sites allow users to store and share bookmarks of pages from around the web. Most of them use a ranking system to determine what bookmarks and submissions are popular among the community, and usually those get displayed on the front page.

One of the most popular social bookmarking sites is

Digg.com.

If one of your blog posts gets featured on the Digg homepage you can expect to receive anywhere from 20,000 up to 100,000 visitors in a matter of 24 hours. The drawback of Digg is the fact that it is hard to get promoted to the front page, as there is a lot of competition from larger websites.

StumbleUpon.com is another large social bookmarking site, and it works around a toolbar that users must install on their browsers.

The advantage of StumbleUpon over Digg is the fact even a small number of votes can bring some traffic to your site, and that traffic can last several days.

Other social bookmarking sites that you could try include:

- Reddit.com
- Delicious.com

- Mixx.com
- Propeller.com
- ShoutWire.com
- Fark.com
- Buzz.Yahoo.com
- Newsvine.com
- Faves.com

The important thing is to dedicate some time to using those sites and trying to understand the tacit rules around them. Analyze what kind of content gets promoted to the front page, how the headlines are crafted, what kind of comments the users leave and so on.

4.5 Social Networks

Social networks are useful marketing tools because they allow you to interact with your existing audience on different channels and because they can also be leveraged to attract new visitors.

The first network that you should use is Twitter, given its exponential growth on the web.

You could create an account with the name of your blog and use it to share posts from your blog and relevant links from around the web. Your goal is to create value through your tweets while interacting with as many people as possible.

Facebook is another popular social network you should try.

Create a personal profile for yourself there, and then a page for your blog. Make sure to explore the other features as well, including the ability to post pictures, videos, articles, and to interact with groups.

Finally, consider using niche social networks as well. They will probably be smaller and have less traffic generation potential, but you will be able to find a very targeted audience on them. Here is a list that you can use with over 400 niche social networks.

4.6 Promoting Killer Articles

Your promotional activities should focus on two points: promoting your blog as a whole (i.e., by leaving comments on related blogs) and promoting your killer articles.

In the first chapter of this ebook I already covered the concept of killer articles, but here are some tactics that you can use to promote those articles after you hit the “Publish” button:

- Email all the people in your network to let them know about the article.
- Email the owners of blogs and websites in relevant niches and let them know about the article.
- Ask a friend to submit the article to a suitable social bookmarking site.
- Give the submission an initial push by asking other friends and contacts to vote on it.
- Mention the article and link to it from your social networking accounts.
- Link to the article from other blogs and websites that you might own.
- If the article has a good chance of ranking high for a keyword, do some linkbuilding focused on that keyword.

Chapter 5: Monetization

If approached correctly, monetization is not that tricky. In this final chapter I will cover the points that you need to keep in mind when trying to make money with your blog.

5.1 Authority First, Money Second

I reserved the last chapter for monetization exactly because it should be the last part of your overall blogging strategy. In other words, before worrying about making money with the blog you need to make sure that:

1. your content is top notch,
2. your traffic is high,
3. your blog is seen as an authority inside its niche,
4. you have a loyal audience, and
5. your design is clean and ready to receive ads.

As this point many people wonder: “Should I avoid all sorts of ads on my blog initially?”

The answer is: “It is up you.”

Both routes have pros and cons. Starting with no ads keeps your blog cleaner, but once you add them some readers might be disappointed.

Starting with ads signals to your readers your intentions and it also lets you experiment with different revenue sources. The drawback is that while your blog is not established the ads might have a negative impact on the traffic.

The important thing, though, is that you focus your energies on the content, networking and promotion. Build an authority blog first, and then worry about making money with it.

5.2 AdSense

Most bloggers experiment with Google AdSense sooner or later, but very few manage to make substantial money with it. The reason is simple: CPC ads do not work on every website.

You need to meet two basic requirements if you want to make good money with AdSense:

1. Your blog needs to have high traffic (e.g., 1,000 daily unique visits or more)
2. A good percentage of that traffic must come from search engines (e.g., 70% or more)

Getting traffic from search engines is essential because those visitors are the ones who most often click on ads.

If you meet these two requirements, it will be just a matter of choosing the right AdSense units and positioning them effectively.

According to Google itself the most profitable ad units are the 336x280 large rectangle, the 300x250 rectangle and the 160x600 large skyscraper.

As for positioning, you must be willing to hurt the user experience a bit if you want to have a good CTR (click-through rate). This is so because ads blended with the content perform much better than ads isolated in the sidebar.

The best combination is usually the 336x280 unit on top of your posts, right below the headline.

If you want something less intrusive, try placing it between the post and the comment section, or try using a 160x600 unit on the sidebar.

Finally, if you don't want to annoy your loyal visitors with the AdSense units, you can use the Search Ads plugin to display ads only to visitors coming from search engines.

5.3 CPM Ads

If your blog generates a good amount of page views (e.g., 5,000 per day or more), regardless of where the traffic is coming from, you could experiment with CPM ads.

CPM stands for cost per mille, and it is a type of online advertising where advertisers pay for every 1,000 impressions on their ads (in Latin *mille* means thousand).

Here are some popular CPM advertising networks that you could try:

- Technorati Media
- Tribal Fusion
- Burst Media
- ValueClick
- Casale Media

The most common CPM banner formats are the 728x90 leaderboard, the 300x250 rectangle and the 160x600 large skyscraper.

Usually networks pay a premium price if you display the banners above the fold, so the trick to making good money under CPM deals is to have a design that supports all the three banners above the fold.

Above is a screenshot from PopCrunch.com, a celebrity blog that uses this monetization strategy.

5.4 Direct Advertising and Sponsorships

Once your blog achieves a certain size (there is no magical number here, it varies from niche to niche) you will find that selling your ads directly could be more profitable.

Basically you will reserve some spots for the advertisers, create an “Advertise with us” page, and start handling the ad sales yourself.

The advantage of this strategy is that you have more flexibility regarding where and how the ads will be sold, and you also cut the commissions of the middle man. The disadvantage is the fact that it will take some extra work to manage the whole process.

A common question among bloggers starting to sell direct ads is: “Do I wait for advertisers to approach me, or should I approach them first?”

If you are getting started with this monetization strategy you will need to approach advertisers. In fact, you will need to hunt them down!

First of all create a list of potential advertisers. Those are companies that are already spending money with online advertising and that have a product or service related to your audience. Here are some tricks that you can use to find them:

- Check who is advertising on the other blogs inside your niche.
- Search for keywords related to your blog on Google and check the companies that will

appear on the “Sponsored Links.”
- Create an account with advertising networks like SponsoredReviews.com and BuySellAds.com to check their advertisers.

Once you have 50 or so potential advertisers on your list, start contacting them via email. It is important to send a custom message to each of them, as this will improve your chances of success.

Here are some points that you should include in your message:

- Introduce yourself and your blog.
- Explain that you are opening some advertising opportunities, and that you believe the product/service of that company would be a good match to your audience.
- Give some basic statistics about your blog, including traffic and subscribers.
- Highlight the advertising options, including banner formats, position in the blog and price.

At this point you might be asking yourself: “All right, but how much should I charge for my ads?”

A rule of thumb that I use is to start charging a $0.50 CPM for 125x125 banners on top of the sidebar. If your blog generates 200,000 page views monthly, therefore, you 125x125 banner on top of the sidebar should cost $100 monthly.

Make sure to use the real page views of your blog for this calculation. You can find that with Google

Analytics, as opposed to software like AWstats and Webalizer that always inflate numbers.

If you want to use other banner formats or place them somewhere else you will just need to adapt that initial CPM. For example, if you want to use a 300x250 banner on top of the sidebar, you could charge a CPM of $2.00 for that, since that banner is roughly equal to four 125x125 banners. Again if your blog generates 200,000 monthly page views, you could sell your 300x250 banner for $400 monthly.

Finally, remember that this is just a rule of thumb to get you started. Over time you will find the optimal price level that will maximize your earnings while keeping your advertisers happy.

5.5 Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing can and should be used as a complementary revenue source on your blog.

First of all examine the products and services that you already use (e.g., books, online applications, web hosting, gadgets), and check if there is an affiliate program for them. If there is, write a review about the products, and use your affiliate links.

As long as you are honest in your reviews and upfront about the fact that you are an affiliate for the product or service, your readers won't stop trusting you or reading your blog.

Secondly, keep your radar on for the launch of new products and services that could be useful for your audience. Once you find one, approach the owner to see if he has or will have an affiliate program.

Finally, you can also join affiliate marketing networks like CommissionJunction.com or ClickBank.com and browse for products that are related to your blog. If you find some, experiment with them on the blog, using both banners and links inside blog posts.

5.6 Email Marketing

Ever heard the saying “the money is in the list”? Well, it is true. Having a large and responsive email list is one of the most profitable assets you could have.

Why? Because email is the most direct form of online communication, as it puts your message right in front of people. If on top of that you manage to build relationships with your subscribers, you will be able to leverage your list for a wide range of purposes, from driving traffic to your website to selling affiliate products.

The takeaway message here is: **start building your email list or newsletter as soon as possible**. There are some free services for email marketing available, but since getting emails delivered is a critical issue (due to spam problems) I recommend that you pick a paid service. Three reliable companies that offer email marketing

services are Aweber, iContact and ConstantConstact.

Once your list is ready to go, start experimenting with different techniques to get people subscribing, and focus on building relationships with them.

For the content part, try to send one message every week, or at least one every fifteen days, and make sure to add valuable information in every email you send.

5.7 Beyond Advertising Money

Generating advertising money with the strategies I described above is possible, and some bloggers make enough with it to live comfortably.

Limiting your blog to being a source of advertising revenues would be a big mistake, however.

A blog is a much more than that. It is your interface with the Internet (and consequently with the world). You can use your blog to:

- Make friends.
- Build an audience.
- Establish your expertise.
- Network with relevant people.
- Experiment with new ideas.
- Find Partners.
- Launch related projects.

In other words, you should aim to make money *with*

your blog but also *thanks* to it.

And the interesting thing is that you don't even need to know what you want to do in the future. If you manage to build a popular and authoritative blog in your niche, you will be able to leverage it for any type of venture, be it launching a product, publishing a book or landing a dream job.

To your blogging success,
Daniel Scocco
http://www.dailyblogtips.com