



The Discipline of Writing

By Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

"I've never really viewed myself as particularly talented. Where I excel is ridiculous, sickening work ethic." - Will Smith, actor

In my experience, I have found that the number one impediment to succeeding as a writer is lack of discipline. Even if you are someone who has all of the talent in the world, that talent will be of little use to you if you cannot cultivate the discipline necessary to devote a requisite number of hours each day or week to your success. It should be noted that I could be speaking more generally about your Internet marketing activities, as well, beyond the aspects of those that involve heavy amounts of writing. The reality is that for all of the good things that can be had by being a member of the Internet coaching program here at Christian Internet Income, the one thing that we cannot give you is that which is probably the most important component to your success: the discipline necessary to make all of this happen—the discipline to get up perhaps a little earlier each morning than you might normally otherwise, or stay up a little later each evening, so that you are putting in the work you need to in order to get all of this from the point of being a nice idea, to something that is actually paying noticeable dividends.

To look at this from another perspective, let me say that if there is one thing that will guarantee that you will be a failure at your Internet marketing efforts, it is this lack of discipline. It does not matter how much money you spend on tips and tricks associ-

ated with being an Internet marketing success or anything like that—unwillingness to do the work will kill you every time.

We have, in the past spoken about a gentleman named Sean Mize, who, at this writing, still has the most articles circulated through the terrific and highly useful article aggregator Ezine Articles (www.ezinearticles.com). Let me mention again that Mr. Mize has roughly 24,000 articles in circulation through Ezine. *24,000*. Do you think that someone who has created 24,000 articles and sent them throughout the blogosphere has any difficulty getting traffic to his own website? Hardly. That said, does this mean that you need to have 24,000 articles of your own in circulation in order to be successful? Not at all, but the number speaks to the discipline that some have to create blogs and other articles that serve as an overpowering engine in their efforts to attract customers.

In the end, the key to this will be forcing yourself, in the beginning, to adhere to a schedule that allows for the opportunity for your *wanting* to write to turn into your *needing* to write. Let me expound on this just a bit. Whenever you take on a the task of achieving a long-term goal that demands that you spend some time each day pursuing it, the key to its ultimate achievement lies in getting to the point where your daily task to that end becomes something that becomes so ingrained inside of you that *not* doing it would feel unnatural to you. People who are

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successful at becoming physically fit will usually say that once working out each day became as natural to them as eating breakfast or brushing their teeth, the battle was essentially won. For them, like writing for most of us, working out is an activity that they very much enjoy, and once they're actually doing it, they love it; it is the process of getting into the gym, or in your case, sitting at the keyboard, that becomes the most challenging part of this to master. When you force yourself to do it enough, as I mentioned before, the activity starts to become something that becomes ingrained in your DNA. Once that happens, and what you're doing is no longer a function of want but need, as in, you need to write each day...then success no longer becomes a question of *if*, but *when*.

That, then, is what this article is about—how to instill within yourself the discipline to sit and write each day, so that, for you, working on your website, writing your blog, or creating any other written piece for the Internet, is as natural as breathing.

Set Up a Writing Schedule

I think that one of the first, most helpful steps you can take toward instilling the necessary self-discipline on behalf of your writing efforts is to formally create a schedule for your habit. I'm not talking about having some "mental" schedule in the back of your mind, or otherwise just sort of carrying around an idea of about when or for about how long you want to write each day, but creating a written schedule that stares you in

the face. Many "success gurus" will tell you that goals and objectives you have become infinitely more "real" to you once you write them down. That simple act takes them from thought...to something tangible that everyone can see. It may sound hokey to suggest that such a simple act can make such a big difference, but it can. I can tell you from personal experience that when I began including my daily, appointed time to write in my planner, that went a long way to helping me to become a real writer. Writing became an appointment that I had to keep, just as though it was an appointment with a client, an appointment at the doctor's, or an appointment with my son's teacher.

As for just how to set up our schedule, you have to consider your own circumstances and come up with something that gets you to the keyboard every day, but is realistic in terms of your other commitments and also with regard to at what time of the day you feel that you function better. For example, if you are more of a morning person, your first thought might be to get up, say, an extra half-hour early each day and devote that additional 30 minutes to your writing. Conversely, if you are more of a night owl (that's me), you might find yourself deciding to stay up a bit later to do your work.

I mentioned 30 minutes in my examples above of how much time to devote to your work each day, but that's just a suggestion. If you can do more, great, but I would be sure to do at least 30 minutes. I think you'll find that 30 concentrated minutes of work at

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your writing is something that you can handle. As the writing process starts become a little more innate, it may be easy for you to bump that up to an hour or more each day, but, of course, that will depend on whatever other commitments you may have.

You should know that the terrifically-successful novelist Tom Clancy began writing in just this sort of way. Clancy was running an insurance business at the time he began writing, and decided that he would rise extra early each morning to work on his first novel. He still had a (relatively) young family at the time, and wanted to be up to work before both his personal and professional daily responsibilities kicked in. The finished manuscript became known as *The Hunt for Red October*, and we've all known Tom Clancy's name ever since.

Write Every Day

This is a continuation of the previous theme, perhaps, but it's important to understand that even more than having a writing schedule, per se, you need to be sure that you are writing every day. If you create a schedule that has you writing, for example, three days a week only, two potential problems will arise from that. First, that's not likely going to be enough time each week to make the kind of progress you want to make as an Internet writer, but also, it becomes easier to take your writing schedule less seriously when it's something that has you sitting down to work just a few times a week.

One of the objections sometimes made to this idea is that the creative juices may not be flowing ever day, and so sitting down to write under those circumstances runs the risk of sometimes being little more than an unen-

joyable chore. Well, that can happen. Unfortunately, the downside of not sticking to a daily routine can be far greater, which is that it becomes easy to put off writing altogether, and pretty soon you've accomplished nothing.

Something else that I can cite which defends this approach is that rarely do I produce nothing of value after 30 minutes to an hour of trying; my initial disinclination to wanting to sit and write something pretty quickly gives way to some streams of thought that begin moving through my brain and which in turn prompt me to get some words punched out. Pretty soon, I'm off and running.

This is not to say that some days won't be a real struggle—they will. That's just the way it is. My point, however, is that you will find that, more often than not, when you force yourself to sit in front of your computer, you will come away with something of value much more often than you will come away with nothing you can use. One thing you can do to ensure that is to give yourself the flexibility to simply make random notes as thoughts pop into your head while you're sitting at your desk. That is, you don't have to be piecing together the formal manuscript for a blog article every time you sit to write—if you aren't compelled to write about anything in particular in a sustained way when your schedule dictates that it's time to get to work, just write based on the random thoughts that come into your head. What you will often find is that your thoughts aren't quite so random, and that what you have jotted down is something from which something more meaningful can come.

Of course, as you're sitting at your computer, you need not do so with literally nothing

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more than a blank screen staring you in the face. By all means, surf the Internet. Use your computer as more than just a word processor, and if you're struggling with ideas, start punching your random thoughts into various search engines, and see what comes from that. That you have a universe of information at your fingertips is partly why I'm such a believer in "forcing" yourself to sit at your workstation each day, even if you feel you have nothing compelling to express at that moment. The access you have to the Internet changes the whole notion of contemplation for the purpose of coming up with an idea; you don't have to do it on your own anymore.

Let me reiterate briefly why we're discussing all of this—because we're finding that too many people are having too difficult of a time making it to, and *through*, Step 1. What is Step 1? Sitting down each day with the sincere intent of writing something. Learning all of the tricks associated with getting more bang from your writing efforts...creating more inbound links, for example...are of no use to you if you cannot get through the first step in all of this. I hear about this too often from members, and I want to be sure that you have in mind a few good strategies that you can realistically use to make the matter of sitting and writing a "no-brainer," of sorts.

Make It a Daily Goal to Complete a Minimum Amount of Work

One alternative to using a measure of minimum time to keep you honest in your efforts to ingrain all of this within you is to focus on meeting a *minimum standard of progress*. I can tell you that I have used this strategy to great effect with newsletter work I have done

in the past. For a financial newsletter that I was largely writing myself many years ago, I had the piece divided up into two columns for each page. I believe the newsletter was eight pages long, if I remember correctly. I had numerous other writing responsibilities at that time, so it was important that I had a reliable, workable way to meet the deadlines that I had to meet with each of my assignments. In the case of this newsletter, I would make it my goal to finish one half of a page, or one column, each day. That would mean that at the end of 16 days, that month's edition of the newsletter was complete.

One key benefit to using quantity as a benchmark is that it lends itself to encouraging more productivity from your efforts. In your case, your quantity goal might be to have 150 to 200 words completed each time you finish your work for the day. At that rate, you would probably have a new blog piece or other Internet article generated every two to three days. The important thing is that like the mechanism of the minimum time goal, you select a minimum threshold that is manageable, but at the same time is enough to ensure a noticeable amount of progress. That could be expressed in a variety of terms...a specific number of words or paragraphs, a page each day, whatever is best for you.

There are a lot of easy, manageable things you can do to help instill the inclination to the daily ritual that will allow you to develop Internet copy. We've covered a few good ones here, but the point is that all it takes to get you to bridge the gap from being a casual producer of material to regularly generating several weekly pieces that will drive traffic back to your site(s) is a little discipline. Master that, and your success is just a matter of time.

Finding Topics on Which to Write

By James L. Paris

One of the most persistent problems we tend to see here is the inability or difficulty of coaching students to find topics about which to write. This problem can even extend beyond the matter of writing topics, and can more generally be a problem of about what to base a blog or a website. Because Internet marketing life always seems to become infinitely easier once you know how to focus in on finding topics for one thing or another, I thought we would spend some time examining that issue here and see if we might be able to offer up some useful ideas.

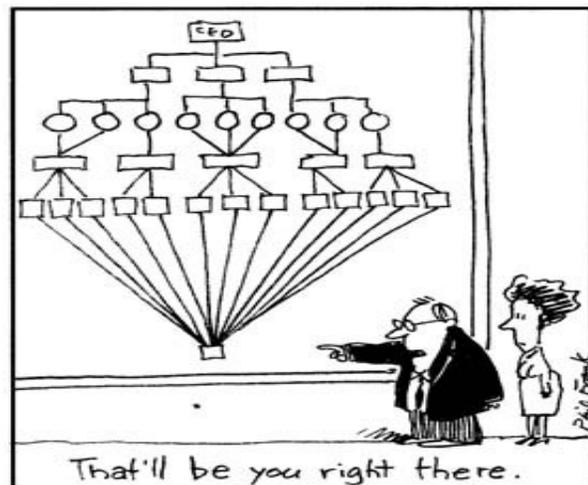
One thing that's always a good idea is to find topics that have some relevance...or can be made to have some relevance...to something going on in the present-day news. For example, if you are interested in having a website about weight loss, or are interested in writing an article about weight loss, you could do a Google search for news articles about that subject to see what comes up. For example, I was listening to Rush Limbaugh's radio show the other day, and he was talking about a man who had lost almost 30 pounds eating nothing but junk food. Right there is something that could potentially serve as the subject for an article you write. You could discuss the Limbaugh segment from more of a news reporting perspective, but a better way to go might be to take a position in agreement...or disagreement...with it.

One of the challenges I have as a financial writer, and particularly as someone who is responsible for developing a lot of financial content for his own websites and blogs, is breaking through the staleness and boredom that sometimes sets in when you've written about the same general subject for decades. In the case of many of you, you're just starting out at this, but rest assured, as your work

in Internet marketing becomes more involved and you see your career in it continue to extend, these sorts of issues will come to affect you, as well. Given that, I want to share with you a tool that I use to which I can always go that helps me to come up with new, fresh things about which to write, even all these years later—*Google Alerts*.

At the core of this is the goal of coming up with 15 to 20 words or phrases that relate to that about which you are writing. Here's an example: One of the topics on which I write a lot is scams. It's something that comes up a lot in the world of consumer finance, and so it's something that comes up a lot for me as a writing topic. Now, if I punch in the word "scams" into the Google search mechanism and filter the search as one for "news" on scams, I'll see, at the bottom of the search page, a message that tells me that I can "stay up to date on these results" by "Creating an email alert for *scams*." When I click on that link, it takes me to a page entitled Google Alerts. The Google Alerts page, in a nutshell, allows me to receive email updates of the latest, most relevant Google results that

**Not after you put the time in to
make this work, it won't.**



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are based on my search terms of choice, which, in this case, is the word *scams*.

I can tailor certain aspects of this feature to control the frequency and relevance of the items about scams to which I am alerted. In my case, because what I do here is my full time job, I have no problem being alerted as often as possible, which is a setting available to me. Once I finish making my selections and click the “Create Alert” button, my email account will receive an email from Google asking me to verify that I want to receive these alerts. From there, all I have to do is make the verification, and now I’m good to go.

Now, in this case, anytime something is posted to the Internet that uses the word *scams*, I will hear about it; it is essentially an ongoing, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week search for anything that contains the word *scams*.

Note that you will receive a lot of email on this. There are a couple of ways that you can manage this volume. One way is to go into your email program and create a filter so that all of your Google Alerts are deposited into a certain folder in your email account. Another way to handle this is to simply set up a second email account that can be the repository of your Google Alerts. The reason it’s important to be able to manage the Alerts is that given the frequency with which you will be receiving them, you will find it very distracting if you have them showing up in your regular email account. If you’re like most

people, you will want to check and read them as they arrive.

Anyway, the overriding benefit of this mechanism is that you can be alerted, in real time, whenever a new item is posted that is relevant to your topic word or phrase. This gives you the ability to choose, from the multitude of items you will receive, something on which you can base a new blog article or some other piece. Perhaps most importantly, the Alerts you receive will largely be about fresh stories from the news, so not only will you receive a steady stream of information on your topic, per se, but the information you receive will usually be breaking, in nature. This puts you in the position of being able to write *your* pieces based on the newest, freshest information related to your topic word or phrase.

Let’s speak a little more on why it’s so important that you write on something that’s related to a current “happening.” When people go to Google, they are generally searching for things happening in the news, and the top stories will catch their eyes. Oftentimes, they will filter search results on the basis of blogs, and so they will, of course, be directed to blog posts that have been written about the news item on which they were originally searching. Well, in your case, within your niche, you will literally be one of the first to know about these breaking news stories because Google Alerts will send you, automatically, the freshest information, which you can use as the bases for creating your own articles. I have a friend of mine, a computer

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engineer, who uses Google Alerts with several different relevant phrases set up that pertain to his field, and he will go into his boss's office whenever he receives an Alert of note and tell his boss about it. The significance of that to my friend, personally, is that receiving these alerts, and being able to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to news and developments in his field, has allowed him to gain great favor at his job.

By the way, another great use of Google Alerts is for spying on yourself, as funny as that may sound. You can take your own name, put it in quotes, screen it as a Google news search, and go the bottom of the search results to create Alerts for your own name. You would do this in order to keep an eye out for things others may be saying about you or what you write. Many of us who write blogs often Google our names anyway for that very purpose, and the Alert mechanism allows you to find the same things without having to manually search. Also, you can use the Alerts to sort of spy on your competition. Let's say your thing is recipes, and you model yourself after someone in particular, like Paula Deen or Rachael Ray; you might set up a Google Alert on one of those ladies. By receiving Alerts on your competition, whoever it might be, you give yourself the opportunity to remain as "ahead of the curve" as possible when it comes to new evolutions and innovations in your area.

Obviously, there is a wide variety of uses of Google Alerts. Accordingly, you may have several different words and phrases on behalf of which you might want to set up Google Alerts. Nothing stops you from having as many different Alerts in place as you want, and it is an excellent tool to help you grow and manage your business on so many fronts.

Email Marketing

By James L. Paris

One of the better strategies to which you can turn to help grow your business involves email marketing. If you have a website or a blog, it's a great idea to have a mechanism in place to help capture the emails of those who visit your site(s). You will notice that I do that at the home pages of each of my most prominent sites, www.christianmoney.com and www.christianinternetincome.com.

Email marketing is considered to be sort of a "passive-aggressive" way to make sales. That is, when you invite someone to become a part of your email list only, you are not soliciting a direct sale. Why, then, would you take this middle step first, before directly asking for the actual sale?

Most of the "gurus" will tell you that you're better off grabbing the email rather than making an attempt at the direct sale. The reason for this is that most of the people who visit a site for the first time will not buy anything on that first visit. So, unless you have a way to at least capture their email addresses, there's a good chance that you will lose many of those people forever. Even if you have a website that's not selling anything, you still want to have a way to dial in a more permanent connection with site visitors, and email marketing mechanisms are a good way to do that. If someone finds your website via random surfing, unless it really stands out to them in some way, that person isn't likely to bookmark it, and may not ever come back.

One solution to creating a more "captive" visitor base is to offer to give something to the person who passes along his email; it could be a free ebook, a free subscription to a simple newsletter you create (it could be just a page in length), or something else that,

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while modest, is still an enticement to get visitors to give you their emails. One thing that the professionals observers have noticed is that if you want to be successful at capturing a visitor's email, you *do* have to give him something in return.

I will say that I'm surprised at how few of our students are using opt-in email mechanisms to grab the emails of their site visitors. Think about the fact that you go to all of the trouble (and expense) of attracting visitors to your site in the first place, but then have no tangible method in place by which to at least try to keep that visitor better "tied" to your site. I have to say that my greatest business asset, overall, is my email list. It is a huge list, one that has taken years to build, but think about that more elementally on behalf of yourself: if you picked up just three names a day, over the course of a year you would have an email list of 1,000 names.

One way to use email is to do so in the form of "blasts," which are basically quick hits of information. Remember that your email blasts should be mostly objective content that your subscribers can use without having to buy something from you. If your blasts are principally solicitations to buy something from you, the recipients will likely unsubscribe at some point.

Another way that I will use email is to do so in the fashion of the *auto-responder* mechanism. The auto-responder is a more advanced use of the email marketing concept. What the auto-responder mechanism does is, upon receipt of the email subscriber's first name and email address, automatically sends a welcome email. In my case, where I use the ten free lessons as *my* enticement to visitors to the Christian Internet Income site who

leave their emails, the auto-responder sees to it that the lessons are automatically sent to the subscriber, once per day, for the ten days. Now, my purpose in doing this is to overwhelm new visitors with such a good free sample of what I do, that those same people will assume that the product for which they actually pay is going to be nothing short of great. Of course, you don't have to do what I do, and even if you don't, the auto-responder could still be a great mechanism for you. You could set it up to simply generate a "welcome" email that goes out whenever someone signs up for your weekly newsletter update, but that welcome email that comes as soon as they sign up can make a big difference in their perception, at the outset of their association with you, of your level of professionalism.

In order to install an email marketing mechanism like those that will allow you to do what we're talking about, I suggest using what I use, which is something called iContact (www.icontact.com). iContact will be able to do everything you realistically would want to do in the realm of email marketing, and the pricing begins at about \$10 per month. However, note that pricing varies principally based on the number of subscribers you want to be able to reach, so the pricing range, while beginning at \$10, can go up to \$700 per month for 100,000 subscribers, and they have specialized pricing and services in the event your list is larger than that (a nice problem to have). Another thing that's helpful about a service like iContact is that with all of the rules in place now about spam, iContact will ensure that all of your emails and associated mechanisms are compliant with current laws. That said, there's really no reason for you not to do this, as easy and cheap as it is...so get started!