



Internet Insider

Financial Freedom Through Online Business

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Blog Commenting Strategies

Taking Advantage of the Principle of “Web 2.0” to Maximize Your Imprint in the Blogosphere

By James L. Paris

What do we mean by the phrase “Web 2.0?”

The proposition is that the Internet has grown from being a vehicle from which we broadcast information out to the public, to this Web 2.0 idea that suggests what we’re doing now is having a conversation. The difference might be analogous to comparing television to a call-in radio show, and the two-way conversation that is occurring in the world now is what we call Web 2.0. When we talk about the difference between a website and a blog, many times I use the analogy that a website is more like a magazine, and a blog is more like a newspaper. That said, there are a lot of differences between a website and a blog, really. One of the main differences is that you can read a blog post and then comment on it. That’s where the conversation...the Web 2.0...

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Find Online Writing Jobs

Yet Another Income Stream for the Earnest, Internet-Based Entrepreneur

By Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

If you’re like most people plugging away at Internet marketing, one of your primary interests is in generating enough money from your work, overall, that you can live a lifestyle more conducive to personal happiness. To most, that means more time with family, perhaps working full-time at home so that you no longer have to keep any sort of “regular job.” However, in order for that to happen, you have to cultivate multiple streams of income. In other words, your income won’t necessarily come from having one type of advertising on your website, or from selling just one or two products, but from a variety of Internet marketing-based activities in which you engage. What we want to talk about here is another stream of income that’s available to you, one that relies on the writing abilities you have developed in the course of consistently creating blog content on behalf of your own Internet presence: writing for online magazines and journals.

To be clear, I’m not talking about paid blogging. Paid blogging is perfectly good, and is another stream worth developing, but that’s not what this is. This also is not about Elance, or Guru.com, or any of the bidding sites through which you can market your time and abilities. This is about you being able to pitch an idea for an article to the appropriate online publisher, get the article idea accepted, *write* it, and get *paid*.

What follows are some key tasks in which you’ll need to engage in order to successfully jumpstart your ca-

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reer as a writer for online periodicals.

Become Familiar with the Variety of Available Online Markets

One of the first steps you will want to take is to begin the process of becoming familiar with different online resources that can help you to ultimately secure work. There are a bunch of them, to be sure, but I wanted to take a few minutes to highlight a few of the better ones for you.

Writer's Market (www.writersmarket.com) has served as the name of a popular directory book for many years now. It is the foremost directory of contacts for writers of all kinds – book writers, magazine writers, etc. It is a very comprehensive directory, and the hard-copy version is updated annually. Not only is the directory loaded with contact information and submission guidelines, but it contains a lot of good advice about things like approaching editors with ideas and other kinds of information that are very useful to people looking to gain a foothold with publishers. Any freelance writer who is at all serious about this has utilized Writer's Market for years now, and with the advent of the book's online presence, www.writersmarket.com, the resource has become even better.

One of the big advantages of utilizing the online version is that as information changes, it is updated in real time at the online resource. If you're relying exclusively on the book itself, information that changes during

the year will not be known to you until you grab next year's edition.

A one-year subscription at the online Writer's Market is currently \$39.99, and that's an awfully good deal for those who are serious about this. You can also go on a month-to-month plan if you're not sure about things just yet, and the cost is \$5.99 per month. That said, there's a way for this deal to get even better.

The deluxe edition of the book comes with an activation code that's good for a one-year subscription to Writer's Market.com. So, if you're someone who, at your core, prefers to read from traditional books anyway, this is an especially good deal. The deluxe edition of Writer's Market is available at this writing for about \$30 through Amazon, which means that for less than the cost of the annual, online-only subscription, you can receive both the regular book *and* full access to the web-based resources.

Journalism Jobs (www.journalismjobs.com) is a resource where you can post your resume for free, as well as browse posted jobs for free. You should know that while substantial news and journalism organizations will post jobs here, there are also plenty of jobs for people who are little more than casual bloggers. I point this out because if you first notice the job postings for opportunities that may be more significant than those for which you are looking or qualified, you might be too intimidated to look any further. Don't be. The website contains all sorts of oppor-

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tunities for writers at most levels.

Media Bistro (www.mediabistro.com). Media Bistro is similar to journalism jobs in makeup. Again, in addition to the part-time, freelance sorts of opportunities that are available here, there will also be postings by companies seeking full-time writers with a great deal of experience to work at their locations in a traditional workplace environment, so you will have to sift through those to find the kinds of opportunities that are more in line with what you are wanting.

Take an Active, Strategic Approach to Managing Your Writing Career

It's important that you don't sit by passively and plug away at this without consistently analyzing what works for you, as well as what does not. If you're having more success getting articles placed with a particular type of publication, or on behalf of a particular subject, the things that are working should be receiving the lion's share of your time and effort. It's tempting to want to focus on those things we *wish* would work out better for us, but the truth is that we're all better off gaining a foothold where we can and then using that as the foundation from which to try other things. Remember this concept when it comes to pay, as well. We all want to make as much as we can for our time and effort, but sometimes you're better off taking lower-paying opportunities. Very often, lower-paying jobs will have minimal demands and can be completed relatively quickly, which then frees you up to move on to the next job. For example, you might have an opportunity to be paid \$20 for writing a 300 word article, which is almost just a blurb. \$20 isn't much, but neither is writing 300 words. If you complete five such arti-

cles a week, you're picking up an additional \$100 in weekly income.

Be a Specialist – Write for Niche Markets

One great way to get ahead in freelance writing is to develop a focus on a specific area or two. You will find that many ads will specifically look for people who have a background writing in a particular area. For example, ads for people to write on areas related to personal finance will often ask that the applicants have a demonstrated track record for having written on that topic. Again, though, do *not* be unduly intimidated; I've seen ads where it was OK if the track record was developed in relatively informal writing areas, like blogging. The point is that even if you do not yet have a list of professional publications to which you can point when expressing interest in a job posting, if you have at least shown yourself to be a bit of a specialist at having written at really *any* level in a given area, that may be enough to help you to see a steady flow of work.

Be Sharp on Your Query Letters

The other side of landing work as a writer is to express unsolicited interest in writing for a publication that invites queries on an ongoing basis. This is different from responding to job postings, of course, and so it requires a different approach from that. Queries, and specifically query letters, are the most important part to landing a job as a writer for an online magazine or journal. The query is essentially your sales pitch for the idea you're presenting. That is, everything is tied up in a query letter: your introduction, your idea, your experience, and *why* your idea is something the publication should embrace. Here are some key points to note when assembling

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your query letter.

Know your (prospective) client. Part of your job in the query is to connect the dots for the editor who's reading it...from your idea to the publication itself. Be sure you've read the publication and are otherwise familiar with it. Additionally, know the submission guidelines. You might have to do a little digging for these, but before you query a publication, you want to be sure that you're doing so in a way that is acceptable to the editorial staff. On this point, remember *Writer's Market*. If you cannot find any information on the publication's website, you might want to next reach for *Writer's Market* (either the book or the web resource) to see what kind of guidance is available there. If *that* fails, email the publication directly.

Remember that a query letter is a call to action. While the query letter will, in part, discuss your historical biography and experience, it is fundamentally a sales mechanism. This means that you should be certain it contains compelling information that makes the editor reading it sit up and take notice. Let's say that you want to do an article on illiteracy in America. By having your query contain interesting facts and information about illiteracy rates, you will increase the chances that the editor will see value to your proposed article idea.

Keep the query short and to the point. Even though the query should pitch your idea and also discuss your background and experience, you want it to be as short as possible. Take it from me—editors love getting ideas, but also want to be able to digest them as quickly. One mechanism that can be very helpful in that regard is the bullet point format. Editors appreciate being able to quickly

gather what your proposed article is about. Another advantage to bullet points is that they help you establish clarity; if you're unable to outline your planned article using bullet points, you're not ready to send a query.

While the first part of your query letter should excite the editor with your pitch and justification, the last part will make mention of relevant aspects of your background and experience. If you are a published writer (at any level), mention that and direct the editor to where he can see samples of your work. Even if you do not have any published third-party magazine or journal articles, you should still reference even less formal blogs. An excellent place to start might be your own website or blog. If you are currently writing and posting fresh content on your own website, and have been doing so for a while, there may well be by this time a lot of written work that an editor can look at as examples of how you write. The point is that you don't have to feel intimidated when coming up with samples to provide.

Outside of answering job postings at places like Journalism Jobs and Media Bistro (there are others, as well), you will be soliciting online magazines and other periodicals directly, and so the query letter is key. Once you're done reading this article, Google "sample magazine query letters" and other variant terms to get in front of some useful samples. If you do that, be sure to look at several different ones, so that you get the best overall perspective. You can find one good sample here, at *The Adventurous Writer*: <http://theadventurouswriter.com/blogwriting/how-to-write-query-letters-for-magazine-articles/>. There are plenty, of course, but this is a good representation of how yours might look. Best of luck!

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kicks in: when someone writes a blog, another person can step in and comment.

A lot of times, people will set up a blog or a website, and then no one comes to their site or blog, and then they'll send me an email that reads something like, "Jim, this doesn't work; it may work for you, but it isn't working for me, as I'm not getting any traffic."

OK. Let's say you move to a new town where you don't know anyone, and you immediately decide to throw a party. You head out to the grocery store to buy a bunch of food, get a bunch of great music to play, and otherwise go to all of this trouble to make your event an unforgettable experience...and no one shows up. So here you are...you're frustrated and angry because you went to all of this trouble, spent all of this money to create a fantastic party experience, and nobody showed up.

Now, you would never do that, right? You would never throw a party in a town where no one knows you, and just expect people to show up. So, what would be more logical? To move into town and attend other people's parties for an extended period, and, with the names you cultivate from all of the connections you make attending these other parties, create a guest list and invite all of those people to *your* party. This is the same sort of thing you can do with blog commenting; you go to existing blogs with large followings and comment on them, thereby making your presence known in the same way you would make your presence known by attending other people's parties before throwing one of your own.

As a matter of fact, it might interest you to know that Huffington Post selects all of their

bloggers from a process of reviewing comments. So, if you wanted to become a blogger for Huffington Post, the path to doing that would be to go to Huffington Post.com and start commenting regularly on other people's blogs. (Note that the comments on my blogs are *moderated*, which means that before a given comment actually appears for public viewing, I have the opportunity to check the comment first to see if I want to let it appear to the general readership. I will basically always allow a comment to appear, unless it is spam, and I get a lot of spam comments. Spam comments are from people that are not really trying to make a contribution to the conversation; these are people that are coming to my blog and simply posting something for the overriding purpose of having a link that goes back to their own websites. They might say something like this: "That was a great post," and will follow that simple sentence with a URL back to their websites. I'm not going to let that fly, and most bloggers would not allow that because it is purely "comment spam." However, as a commenter, if you read the main article and then carefully crafted a thoughtful response that was at least a brief paragraph in length, that kind of response will surely be posted, as well as the link you include back to your site.)

So, to review, why do we want to comment on other people's blogs? Well, that's the proposition of this so-called Web 2.0...the conversation, right? It's the conversation that ultimately leads to people remaining attached to one another.

When you go into an obvious social setting, say a roomful of people, how do you handle that, exactly? One of the things I've learned over the years is how to work a room. One

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thing, in particular, I've learned is that, as much as possible, you want to ask others about *themselves* before you reveal anything about *yourself*. "Nice to meet you – how do you know the bride and groom," or, "Nice to meet you – how are you affiliated with this company," those sorts of things. Acting interested in people is a great way to build an immediate rapport with them.

In the same way, before people start coming to your blog and you become a player in the realm of blogging, you want to consider going out and commenting on other people's blogs. It's sort of your way of priming the pump – paying dues to gain entry to the blogging world in the way you really want to be a part of it.

You can set up a blog and get traffic through a lot of different ways – by way of the search engines, by going on radio and TV shows, and a whole bunch of others. However, I'm here to tell you that the best way to get traffic to your blog is to go on the Internet, find blogs that are like yours, and, after carefully reading those posts, make comments that are themselves thoughtful and interesting, and also, of course, include a link back to your own blog.

Here's how that might work: My topic is Christian finance. So, I would go to the Google search mechanism, plug in the terms "Christian finance," and screen the search solely for *blogs* by going to the "More" tab just above the search window and selecting "blogs." That returns to me all of the top blogs on the subject of Christian finance, and I can go in and locate the blogs that would be especially appropriate for me to comment on. Now, before I forget, I want to tell you about a great way that you can find content to

which you can respond, and find it automatically, all throughout the day.

Go to Google and get into the blog search section of the Google search page. Plug in your search phrase that's relevant to your own blog. At the bottom of the results page, you will see an opportunity to create an email alert for your search phrase. When you click on that link, you'll be taken to a page that will allow you to set up the ongoing search. For "Type," select blogs; for "How Often," select as-it-happens; for "Volume, choose all results, and then you will indicate your email and hit "Create Alert." So now what happens? Google will search 24/7 for new blog articles containing your search phrase, and you will be notified through your email of what Google discovered, with a link to those blogs. This is a tool that I use *all* of the time.

Blogging can be very effective as a marketing mechanism, but there is more to seeing success from it than simply having a blog platform of your own and making posts to it regularly. You have to be sure that you're putting yourself into a lot of conversations around the web by commenting on others blogs so that those folks will be interested in coming to the party that you're throwing at *your* house. A big mistake that too many make when trying to get ahead with all of this is to "see" only their own website or blog, and to be concerned only with what is happening there in and of itself. Blogging is not like that. It does not matter how great you're writing is, or how exciting are the topics on which you write; if you're not establishing a presence as a commenter on a variety of blogs around the web, you won't get near the traffic you're expecting, and then you'll wonder why this isn't working.

Think of Your Audience First When Choosing an Ebook Topic

By Robert G. Yetman, Jr.

When first considering an ebook, many people want to write about a “pet” subject or something that they *really* want to get out into the market. That makes a lot of sense for the writer – after all, writing can be arduous at times, and the best way to combat that is to make sure we’re doing something we enjoy as much as possible.

However, you cannot forget the other issue - money. Are you writing an ebook because you want to make some additional money? May be not; perhaps simply want to write an ebook because you have a particular interest that you want to share with the rest of the world, and you really have no concern if the book generates even a dime in revenue. If that’s the case, great, but if you *are* interested in seeing some money from all of your hard work, you would do well to remember this: When pondering a topic for your ebook, be sure to pay a lot more attention to what your prospective readers want than what it is you wish to write about. One of the classic mistakes that new ebook writers make at the outset is writing about something they want their readers to care about, or about something they think their readers want to learn more about, and not writing about a topic that actually strikes a chord and satisfies a true interest on the part of their readership.

Should you decide to deliver an ebook that satisfies a particular reader interest, be sure that you make a real effort to determine what that interest might be. Do not assume that you know what people want. That is a common error on the part of some writers who

sincerely want to deliver an ebook on a sought-after subject but who fail, for whatever reason, to engage in the effort to research what people are truly interested in reading about. There are a few ways to go about doing this research.

Email query. Use your email list to survey your subscribers. This is one of the best ways to go about nailing down your topic, because your subscribers are your built-in customer base. Not just casual visitors to your site, these are folks who have gone to the extra step of including themselves in your email blasts, which means that you and/or your topic resonate with them particularly well. Pay attention to what they have to say.

Blog post. You are surely writing blogs on a regular basis, and you can use that forum to help decide on your next ebook topic. There are a couple of ways to going about this. First, there’s the direct approach, wherein you use your blog column one week to simply pose the question about what topic(s) would readers like to learn more about. Alternatively, you can consider perhaps three or four possible topics on your own, and then write a new blog on each one of them in successive weeks and see which one generates the biggest buzz. That approach may take you a little longer to arrive at your topic, but some people are more comfortable engaging their audience less directly when it comes to getting ideas for a new product that they will eventually ask that same audience to buy.

Social media. Social media is another great

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way to reach out to people and find out more about just what it is they want to read about. You can be more obvious and say that you're looking for topic ideas for your next ebook, or simply ask people what topic in your subject area it is about which they would like to know more. If you don't have accounts at all of the major social media outlets by now, you should: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are three "have-to haves," and you should add others that you can successfully manage. On that note, be sure to integrate your social media as much as possible; Twitter and Facebook can be made to work together in such a way that your Twitter posts automatically post to Facebook. By keeping your social media highly integrated, you make it much easier to conduct idea queries.

Independent, online research. In place of, or in addition to, the aforementioned, you can research on your own for topics that seem to generate the greatest interest. This will be less formal and less scientific, probably, but you can see what sort of buzz you "feel" when doing given Internet searches on different topics.

One advantage of doing this research over querying your own base of followers is that it lets you know, in the broad market, what the most popular topics are. That is, while input from your followers is always excellent to have, you surely have designs on selling your product to as many people as possible, and not just to those who are "official" customers or fans at this point. Doing your own research can be very helpful in this regard. However, do not mistake "doing your own independent research" for "not doing any research and relying on personal assumptions." You still need to engage in some heavy lifting here – this is just another kind

of heavy lifting.

There is a wide variety of ways that you can research what's popular. While it's possible to simply do a Google search on a topic or keyword(s) and then look at the top of the results page to see how many total results were found, perhaps a better way for you to do this is with a keyword research tool. There are several good ones available, although some of them can be a bit pricey. The Wordtracker (www.wordtracker.com) mechanism is one of those, at over \$400 per year. One *free* option is the keyword research tool available from Google AdSense. Although it really exists to help AdWords bidders, it can be used by anyone who wants to gauge the popularity of different keywords as reflected by their Google search volume. Just search for "Google AdWords keyword tool" and you'll find it.

It might be tempting to discard all of this and simply go with what your gut tells you is best, or to write that book that you just *know* (intuitively) is the one to put out on the market. Fine. However, one of the biggest impediments to people persisting in their Internet marketing efforts is the inability to see any meaningful money fast enough. Problem is, a lot of these same people will do things to sabotage their own success, and writing to yourself and *not* to your audience can absolutely be one of them. Psychologically, you are much better off focusing on making money with your first ebooks and *then* concerning yourself with labors of love, if you're so inclined. That way, you can write with the foreknowledge that you're able to make money from this, so that if your pet writing projects don't go quite as well as hoped, it won't dissuade you from the idea of writing ebooks altogether.