

Free Ways to Promote Your Affiliate Program

By Clay Mabbitt

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After learning of the success many online businesses have had increasing their sales with an affiliate program, you decided to follow suit. You hammered out a compensation plan both encouraging to affiliates and profitable to your business. You've got tracking software in place. You've turned the key in the ignition of your marketing machine... and nothing's happening.

Your army of affiliates can be viewed metaphorically as a tree. Full grown, it will thrive in rain and sunshine. Strong changing winds can shake its branches, but the tree will continue to grow. In the early seed stage, however, special care is needed if you want your tree to break through the surface.

You spent a great deal of time, energy, and likely at least a little money creating your affiliate program. You need to attract strong affiliates that can rapidly build your customer base and return your investment. How can you bring these powerful marketing dynamos into your camp, ideally without drawing on your already diminished cash reserves?

1.) Submit to Online Directories

The method that will show the most immediate increase in new affiliates is listing your program in online affiliate directories. These reference sites are the first stop for hungry potential affiliates looking for the income opportunity that is going to allow them to quit their 9 to 5 jobs. Many such directories exist, and obviously some will bring you better results than others. Since submitting to almost all of these directories is free, though, get listed on as many as you can. Here are a few links to submission pages to get you started, but by no means should you stop with

just these few:

<http://www.becomeanaffiliate.com/cgi-bin/add.cgi>
<http://www.affiliatesoftware.info/joinaffiliatedirectory.php>
http://www.affiliatescreen.com/suggest_program.php
<http://www.affiliatematch.com/cgi-bin/links/add.cgi>
http://www.2-tier.com/cgi-bin/add_url.cgi
<http://www.affiliatesdirectory.com/links/add.cgi>
<http://www.earnfind.com/addprogram-howto.php>

2.) Advertise in Your Own Newsletter

Hopefully you've been collecting email addresses from your website and sending a regular newsletter to your visitors. (If not, read this article:

<http://www.zeromillion.com/ebiz/creating-an-email-newsletter.html>)

Your newsletter subscribers are a precious handful of people that have expressed direct interest in keeping abreast of the latest developments with your product/service and company. Give them what they want! You can kick off your affiliate program with an article in your newsletter explaining the benefits and encouraging your subscribers to participate. Your future newsletters can contain short blurbs about the affiliate program and how it's progressing to inform new subscribers and remind your original readers.

3.) Post to Affiliate Forums and Newsgroups

Approach this method with caution. No one will be impressed if you post a blatant advertisement or a plea to join your affiliate program. If you find a forum that contains such messages, don't even bother making a post there. The forum probably isn't moderated, and almost certainly isn't read by many people. The place to include information about your website and program is in your profile (and in your signature line if other posters do so). A serious forum, read by the type of people you want to have as affiliates, will only contain posts with relevant and useful content instead of advertising fluff messages.

How can you add relevant and useful content? The first step is to read some of the existing posts and get a feel for the general personality of the forum. At best, reading old posts will spark questions that can be turned into relevant posts and generate interested responses. At worst, you'll see what's been talked about recently, so you don't make the awkward mistake of asking a question that was answered a few days ago.

If no topics come to mind after reading old posts, a possible strategy is to ask for the advice of some experienced affiliates in how you could improve your

program. You'll find different ideas on what constitutes a solid compensation plan, tracking system, or incentive program. Beyond getting attention for your program, this is a great opportunity to improve your program by picking the brains of people who've been in the game longer than you.

This list is obviously not comprehensive, but it contains a few forums worth investigating:

<http://www.ablake.net/forum/>

<http://iwiz2.richdad.com/jive/application2/forum.jsp?forum=33>

<http://www.affiliatesdirectory.com/forum/gforum.cgi?forum=7>

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