

# Affiliate marketing programs that can add value without costs to Web sites.

By Eric T. Brassell SR.

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Affiliate marketing programs that can ad <http://www.geocities.com/whyclickhere/article.htm>

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Many small businesses have found ways to earn money from visitors to their Web site, even though their sites are not equipped to handle Internet transactions. How? By joining an affiliate marketing program.

After taking the time to create and promote your Web site, you, too, may find that joining an affiliate marketing program is a cost-effective way to enhance the value of your own Internet investment. That type of "virtual" alliance may help you increase revenue without increasing costs. In addition, an alliance can increase the value of your customers' visits by increasing the quality of your Web site, thereby encouraging more visits and increasing your opportunities to establish and maintain relationships with your customers.

What is affiliate marketing?

Affiliate marketing programs came into their own during the Internet boom of the mid- to late-1990s. Organized to create virtual business relationships, they are an agreement between two companies to steer business in the form of Web traffic from one Web site to another in return for compensation. If organized correctly, they are a win-win situation for both partners. They help large companies with elaborate, transaction-oriented Web sites increase their Web traffic while providing increased cash flows to smaller businesses with brochure-style Web sites.

How do affiliate programs work?

When you join an affiliate program, you will be able to download an icon or button to add to your Web site. Visitors to your site who click on that button will be sent to the transaction portion of your partner's site. Your partner should have specialized internal computer systems in place. Those systems track all sales generated during the visit that originated from your Web site. In other words, you will own a portion of all sales generated during that visit. If the visitor places an order, you will receive a percentage of the proceeds of the sale, based on the original agreement. A typical

revenue-sharing arrangement is for 5 percent of the total sale, regardless of the size of the sale.

Choosing an affiliate partner:

Keep some important points in mind when choosing your affiliate partner:

\* Don't partner with a company that charges a fee or requires a minimum level of sales to waive a fee. An affiliate program should not cost you a dime. Programs with conditions are little more than pyramid schemes and should be avoided.

\* Do choose a company with which you already have a working relationship. If you've worked with a large supplier or customer over a period of time, you know whether they are trustworthy or not, and have a good idea of the kind of reputation they have in the local or national business community. That gives you the opportunity to avoid partners who are not ethical.

\* Choose a partner that will enhance the value of your site to your customers. By making a link to a company on your Web site, you are making a statement about the quality of that company to your customer base, your most important corporate asset. You don't want to jeopardize the goodwill you've built with your customers, so choose your partners wisely.

Potential benefits:

A well-planned affiliate-marketing program can accomplish two important goals for your business without increasing costs. The first and most important is the real opportunity to grow revenue. Second, by aligning with the right partner, visitors to your site may find it a good jumping-off point to the rest of the Internet. That could turn your site into a "portal," which could help get your customers into the habit of visiting your Web site more frequently.

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