

Case In Point: Developing An Ezine Built To Last

By Karon Thackston

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Jill Whalen is well known for her search engine optimization talents. She's equally well known for her ezine, High Rankings Advisor. From its inception in 2000 until today, she has built an exceptionally loyal subscriber base of over 15,000 that would literally follow her to the ends of the 'Net and back. How did she do it? We're about to find out!

KARON: Hi Jill... thanks for your time.

JILL: No problem, Karon.

KARON: Let me start with this.... many people decide to create an ezine simply because "everybody else has one." Why did you choose to launch a newsletter?

JILL: Well, for years, I was a heavy poster to many email discussion lists, and I had lots of people asking me to do a newsletter. Since I was always giving out free advice anyway, it made sense to share it with more people. When I made the decision to give it a whirl back in 2000, I had a partner. Together we decided on a name, created a Web site for it, and figured out how to host it, etc.

KARON: Now, you told me that you split from your partner later on. When that happened, how did you handle the "conversion"?

JILL: When we decided to part ways, we had over 9,000 subscribers, and there was no way I was gonna start over from zero! We agreed to each get a copy of the subscriber list and go from there. We mentioned what was happening to the subscribers, and that we would now have two separate newsletters. Anyone who wanted them both didn't have to do anything, and from that point forward, anyone could separately unsubscribe or subscribe to either of them on our respective sites.

KARON: Seems pretty easy. So basically, except for having some subscribers, you really had to start all over again, didn't you?

JILL: Well, the experience was there, too. I had been doing the list admin work for the other ezine for years, so it was easy for me to simply contact the list host and have them convert it over to the High Rankings Advisor. The hard part was coming up with the new name! When I did finally come up with the High Rankings Advisor name, I was happy with it. I think most people don't spend

enough time thinking about their newsletter names. We see the same names recycled between different newsletter publishers. I really believe it's important to be original and creative. Newsletter names don't come easy. They take a lot of time and effort to really come up with one that's exactly right for your publication. Like everything else you do with your newsletter, you should never just rush it. Once you do think of a name, you should check around to make sure nobody beat you to it. I had one I thought was great, but when I checked, someone else in my "space" was using something very similar.

KARON: I agree. Since the launching of Business Essentials, I've found three or four other email newsletters that have very similar names. Now, you have way more than 9,000 subscribers today. How have you gone about getting them? Which way(s) work best? Which way(s) stink?

JILL: At first, I contacted everyone who ever emailed me over the years (yes, I had saved them all!). I created a list of a good three or four hundred names, and sent out a mass email telling them that I was creating a newsletter and how to subscribe. I would never, ever, ever just sign people up. Nothing irks me more then when people do that. Grrrr!

After that, I put a little something about signing up for the newsletter in my signature line when I posted to discussion groups. That also worked well and still does.

One of the things that work best is the Moreover news feeds. Having news organizations spider your site and archives for new articles brings incredible exposure. You just have to figure out how to set up your own feed. I recently had a guest article on how to do that, which you can read here: <http://www.highrankings.com/issue036.htm#guest> . If you provide high-quality content, it's definitely worth the trouble to syndicate it.

I can't actually remember anything I tried that stunk at getting subscribers. I'm quite Internet savvy and very picky about the things I try. I can usually spot something that seems too good to be true and don't bother with it. Word-of-mouth works extremely well, too!

KARON: Now, I can attest from firsthand experience that you have one of the most loyal subscriber bases on the entire Web. Jill, what are you doing to keep your subscribers? What contributes to your extremely high subscriber loyalty?

JILL: Thanks, Karon. I'd have to say that the biggest thing would be just being myself. It's pretty obvious when reading my stuff that I y'am what I y'am. People learn quickly that I'm a straight shooter and tell it like it is. They don't always agree with me, but at least they know where I stand.

Also, I never try to trick people. I don't pretend that affiliate links are not affiliate links, and in fact probably go overboard by making sure that everyone knows it is indeed an affiliate link. Plus, I don't just put in affiliate links for the sake of having them there or for the sake of making money. However, there are some really good resources out there that cost money, but are worth every penny. When I find them, and believe my readers will benefit by them (like your Copywriting Course, for instance!), I will then promote the heck out of them. It's a win-win situation all around at that point. People learn about something that can greatly help them in their businesses, I make a little bit of extra money to pay for my list hosting and time spent on the newsletter, and the author of the great resource gets paid for his hard work.

KARON: Excellent points, Jill. (And thanks for the plug. grin) So then, let me ask you this...what would you say is the most important factor of consistently delivering a quality ezine?

JILL: I'd say you have to like doing it, because it's definitely a chore. If you think you can just rush something out the door cuz you have to get something done, it will show in the lack of quality. You

really have to set aside a certain amount of time to do it right. Plus, you gotta proof, proof, and then proof it again.

KARON: I agree 100%! Well, Jill, I've taken up enough of your time. I truly do appreciate you letting us in on your success secrets. :) It's always helpful to see how others work.

If you want to subscribe to Jill's ezine, High Rankings Advisor, you can do it here: <http://www.highrankings.com/advisor.htm> . You can also find past issues online at her site. Good info, I can promise you! I subscribe myself.

Want to learn exactly how to create a quality ezine and how to build your subscriber base? You can! Karon will take you step-by-step through the process and give you over 70 free places to promote your ezine. Get three FREE bonuses with your purchase, too! Get all the details today at <http://www.creategezines.com> .

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