

# The Proactive Web Business: Top 7 Sources of Prospects

By Mary Engel

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Mary Engel  
mary@copywriting.net

Copywriting.net <http://www.copywriting.net>

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The promise of the Internet is very seductive: you now have access to millions and millions of people, all just a mouse click away from buying buying buying and making you rich!

Hm. Well, sort of. Theoretically, that stuff is true, but it is also exactly the kind of thinking that actually causes people to fail.

Taking a passive approach to building your online business – just sitting back and waiting for the throngs to come and pour money into your web site checkout – is the kiss of death.

You have to get proactive to succeed here. Before you even think about sales, you must find and attract genuine prospects to your site – people who are not only going to read your offers, but who are likely to buy from you.

Where to find them? Here is my list of the top seven sources of online prospects.

Prospect Mine #1: Advertising

If are doing any type of advertising now – online or off -- you must give readers, viewers or listeners the option of contacting you via the Internet. That means listing your email address and Web site URL. "Duh!" you want to say, right? But you'd be surprised how many businesses fail to include this info.

Whether you advertise by broadcast, print or email, it's imperative that you get those interested folks into your database. The only way to do so is to get them to visit your site or to email you. The result is a list of highly qualified email prospects you can contact again with future offers.

For online advertising, I especially like newsletters. They come with the built-in advantage of having a very targeted audience -- for instance, a newsletter might be geared toward lawyers, or work-at-home moms, or affiliate programs. If your product or service is for this audience, that's the type of newsletter you'd choose.

Online newsletters are also relatively inexpensive. Many of these publications will run your ad for less than \$25 a week. Look closely at the circulation figures for any publication you choose, and track results.

Prospect Mine #2: Referrals

Referrals are an important part of any business. Email marketing makes it extremely easy for your customers to send you referrals – especially if you provide a link that takes them to a simple form or email message to instantly drop in a name and send it off.

If you send your customers any sort of info or newsletter, always encourage them to forward it to friends and associates. The simple act of asking your existing customers or subscribers for referrals is a fantastic method for generating new leads.

#### Prospect Mine #3: Existing Customers

Every customer you have now or had in the past is a great bet for repeat orders. These people already like you enough to commit money to your company. They're already aware of the quality you offer, and they're the ones who are most likely to purchase from you again.

What if you don't have the email addresses for your existing offline customers? Ask them! Call them or contact them by snail mail, and ask those who are online to send you an email or visit your Web site. If customers call you, be ready to verify or record their email address on the spot.

#### Prospect Mine #4: Direct Mail

If you do any mailings, encourage your customers to order online or contact you via email. Some people will use these options, and some won't, but you should make it a priority to capture the email addresses of as many of these prospects as possible. In addition to the cost savings of communicating via email, you can also test the results of your marketing messages sooner, since email is so instantaneous.

#### Prospect Mine #5: Giving Away Freebies

Freebies are a great way to generate leads. So how do you give something away without, you know, losing your shirt? One answer is to give things that have value but cost you little – for instance, a bit of your own expertise in the form of a report, an ebook, a sample issue of your online newsletter, or a consultation.

Naturally, these reports and so on would be on a topic that's in demand by your prospects. The information must provide something of value to the prospect and it should be related to what you are selling.

And don't forget your 'sig' lines -- at the end of the article include two or three lines that mention who you are, where to order online or how to reach you.

#### Prospect Mine #6: Your Web site

Gathering email prospects from a Web site is simple and almost free. Your site should include some reason for people to give their email address – as a way to be notified of any sales or specials, to gain customer 'VIP' status, to subscribe to an email report. These are called opt-in lists, meaning visitors choose to be on your list and be contacted by you.

However, it takes a high volume of traffic at your site to generate enough prospects from web forms alone. You can increase your web traffic through web advertising, display advertising, search engine registration, and site optimization.

#### Prospect Mine #7: Joint Ventures or Partnerships

Joint ventures or partnerships are a way to leverage the expenditures and efforts of other marketers who sell to the same prospects you want.

You create this sort of symbiotic relationship by first determining who else is currently marketing to your prospects, then contact them. Create a deal where, by sharing their existing customer base with you, or by recommending your company to their customers, everyone benefits – you, the other

companies, and the customers.

Let's say, for instance, you sell software for writers. Your partnership, then, might be with a company that promotes writing workshops or seminars. You'd contact this other outfit, and offer to do one or all of the following: ask to mention your product or service in their email newsletter; ask to send one email message to all their customers; swap ads in each other's newsletters or ezines; link to each other's sites or swap banner ads or logos. Your creativity in this matter is all that's needed – just think of ways to benefit yourself and other related but non-competing businesses, and you can increase your prospect list many times over.

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