

# Affiliate Programs to Avoid

By Rosalind Gardner

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Rosalind Gardner  
ros@123ebusiness.com

123eBusiness.com <http://123eBusiness.com>

As an affiliate marketer of Internet dating services, I'm always on the lookout for good quality dating sites and products to offer my single visitors. Merchants help me out when they let me know about their new products and affiliate programs.

I was therefore thrilled when one of my friendly affiliate competitors got in touch to tell me that he'd started his own Internet dating service and affiliate program.

Having launched a community membership site myself last year, I could fully appreciate the huge amount of time and money my friend had invested to develop this new site. He was justifiably proud of his accomplishment and I was excited by the prospect of having a product to promote that would benefit everyone - my customers, my friend and myself.

Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out that way.

The first stumbling block was the low commission he offered. His top rate was 30%, with no commissions on recurring sales.

This puzzled me. As an affiliate marketer of dating programs, he should have been aware that new sites offer at least 50% on new and recurring sales to entice good affiliates to sign up. If commissions on recurring sales are not offered, then the rates on new sales should be increased to between 70 and 100 percent.

In most cases, his affiliate program would have struck out for me at that point. However, as this was my friend's site, it occurred to me that perhaps his product was so unique that the potential for

high volume sales might offset the lower commission. Hoping for the best, I continued my review.

When I got to the site, the first thing I noticed was '6 registered members' prominently displayed at the top of the homepage. That normally wouldn't be a problem, except for the fact that my customers are looking for friends and soul mates. If I send them to a site where there are only six people to meet, they'll likely be disappointed. Worse, by wasting their time, they lose trust in my judgement and then I will lose them as customers.

That's not good. My customers are literally my bread and butter. Giving them what they want and expect is how I stay in business. Paying for traffic that I send to a merchant site where there is nothing to buy, will put me out of business.

(This is how a membership site should be structured. When starting a dating service, the merchant pays for advertising to bring people to their site. To entice visitors to sign up as members, he will initially offer his services for fr\*ee. When the database is large enough to attract paying customers, the affiliate program manager then invites potential affiliates to join their program.)

Although my friend's program had already struck out for my customers and me, I was still curious, so I kept on looking.

Next I clicked on a link labeled 'Dating Resources'. Expecting to find Internet dating tips and advice, I found links and banners pointing to Lavalife, FriendFinder and other affiliated dating sites instead. When I asked him about placing affiliate programs on his site, my friend said he simply wanted to supplement his income until the dating service got \*rolling\*. I can understand his motivation. However, what he doesn't understand is the concept of customer 'hijacking'.

As an affiliate, you pay good money to get visitors to your site. You presell your merchants' products and expect the merchant to honor their end of the bargain by making the sale and sending your commission check. You don't pay for the merchant to send YOUR customers to THEIR affiliated merchants.

I didn't need to look any further. I told my friend that I would hold off on signing up and why. Fortunately, he understood and has already alleviated some of the problems I mentioned.

Knowing when NOT to sign up for an affiliate program can sometimes

be a tough call. However, you can simplify the process considerably. Put yourself inside your customer's head. If the product won't work for them, the program strikes out. Simple as that.

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Rosalind Gardner is the author of '123eBusiness: A Beginner's Guide to Online Profits' and the 'Net Profits Coach' ezine.

Her online success has been profiled in 'Secrets to Their Success' and 'Six Figure Income' magazine. To learn more about how you can build your own lucrative eBusiness, please visit:

<http://www.123eBusiness.com>

Email - <mailto:ros@123eBusiness.com>

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