

The Affiliate Connection to Higher Income

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Whether you sell a service or a product you can increase your income base by partnering with companies through affiliate programs. Affiliate programs allow you to offer a greater range of services without actually having to deliver the product. This is one of the few opportunities inclusive to E-Commerce and well worth the extra time. Not only will you make more money but you will increase options for your clients as well. However, there are a few key elements to making affiliate programs really work for you and to collecting commission checks that make it worth your time.

When joining an affiliate program consider if the service or product being sold compliments the theme of your web site. If for instance you sell nutritional products for horses, selling entertainment CD's won't blend with your theme. This type of marketing will confuse your customers and give them the feeling that they are being mass marketed to (instead of) taken care of. You want to maintain credibility so join programs that compliment your own efforts and give your clients a sense of continuity.

CONSIDER THE REPUTATION BECAUSE IT BECOMES YOURS

Before partnering with a company carefully consider their reputation. A less desirable repute will directly reflect on you. At times this will be unavoidable but a little research will go a long way to protecting yourself and your customers. In other words, ask questions, and evaluate the product or service as if you were purchasing for yourself.

While I firmly believe that it's better to own what you sell, it isn't always necessary to buy the product before you promote it but, it must meet your standards before you resell it.

PLAN YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

As with any aspect of your business, planning is very important. If you approach this addition by simply throwing it at your customers you can expect sketchy results. Instead, integrate your affiliate program promotions into your business plan. Use rotating banners at your site to promote the various programs. Write testimonials into your weekly newsletter to promote one or two programs a week. Most often your personal recommendation or endorsement is all you need to be really successful at affiliate promotions.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN AFFILIATE PROGRAM

Continue to explore the affiliate possibilities. A few sites to consider are:

1. Associate Programs at www.associateprograms.com
2. Refer-It at www.refer-it.com
3. Commission Junction at www.commissionjunction.com

These resources will help you stay informed on the latest affiliate programs. Each maintains a directory of programs along with details such as payment plans and the application process. A comprehensive view of affiliate programs is available through The Active Marketplace website at <http://www.activemarketplace.com/cgi-bin/store/deliver.cgi?index-1228>

While each person searches for different information -- focusing on the following points will help you select the best affiliate program for you to join:

1. COMPENSATION: How often and how much?

Most likely one of the most important areas you will consider before becoming an affiliate for any program is, "How high is the commission and how often can you expect your checks"?

Find answers for:

- (a). What is the starting commission rate?
- (b). How many sales do you need before you get paid?
- (c). How often will payment be made?
- (d). What happens if a customer returns a product?
- (e). How will sales be tracked and reported?

Do your homework! Do not let any question go unanswered, as it is vital to your success to know every detail.

Make certain you get paid well for your time. The Company may be providing the products, but you're the one doing the work. Don't waste your time selling products for peanuts.

2. MARKETING TOOLS: Do they provide banners, links and ad copy?

The second most important area of any affiliate program is whether or not they provide you with adequate marketing tools. Search for pre-made banners, text links and/or ad copy for marketing within e-zines or on your website.

Many cyber-savvy entrepreneurs are learning to double their sales by combining their offline marketing with their online promotions. Will the Affiliate Company provide you with off-line marketing tools?

Remember, the less they supply, the more you will need to create for yourself. Before creating your own materials, make certain the pay rate is worth the extra time involved.

3. LONG TERM (RESIDUAL): Do you get paid on the first purchase or every purchase?

Being involved with an affiliate program that shares the same customer with you (over and over again) is by far, the best relationship to consider. However, if you join a program that pays only for

the first purchase, it would be ideal for you to collect information about that buyer before they leave your website. Without asking your visitor to supply you with their information, you've essentially lost the ability to capitalize on future sales.

You can obtain the information you would like to collect by creating a simple "HTML form" page and asking the visitor to provide you with selective information or you can visit the CGI resource center [<http://www.cgi-resources.com>] and use a script to capture certain information for you. Once you've collected the necessary data you can then create a mailing list that will afford you the ability to send them a thank you card for any purchases they make or follow up later with additional product offers.

YOUR OWN AFFILIATE PROGRAM?

Of course the last strategy to affiliate programs is to start your own if you are selling a product or service. Affiliating your product or service is one of the strongest advertising opportunities available online. It costs less than conventional advertising and increases your exposure quickly and effectively. To gain insight on how to start your own affiliate program, I invite you to read more information through The Links to Sales website at <http://www.linkstosales.com/cgi-bin/store/deliver.cgi?index-1180>

By offering partnership and becoming a partner in affiliate programs you expand your options for online success.

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Rozey Gean is the founder of the Marketing-Seek.com website where ezine publishers and writers are brought together in an easy-to-use, friendly interface.

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