

# Hit Exchanges and Pop Windows

By Stuart Reid

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Everywhere you look these days there seems to be a new startpage program or a new link exchange system. Some people spend hours a day clicking and clicking to drive visitors to their sites. Do these programs work?

Well, yes and no. It all started with banner exchanges. With a banner exchange for every banner impression you show you get one of your own shown in return. The ratio might differ, e.g. 21 (2 of their banners for 1 of yours). Although banners are pretty much old-hat these days the principle remains valid. You are driving visitors from your site to somewhere else hoping for the same in return.

Fads change in advertising, especially web advertising, all the time - and when something works you'll find a lot of sites jumping on the bandwagon. Most people will now say banners don't work that well. The next big things were startpage exchanges. These work like banner exchanges except you are exchanging your entire site. Every time you start your browser you are shown someone's page, and your own page gets entered into someone else's browser. How often though do you leave this page open?

How often do you think someone stops to see your own page? Look at <http://www.startblaze.com> for an example - and this one uses some MLM techniques to enable you to get some of your referrals hits too.

In an attempt to stop this habit of closing pages as soon as you get a credit some sites now force you to leave it open for 10 seconds or more. This at least ensures your page loads fully - but it doesn't ensure the person actually takes time to look at it. Many people use auto browsing software or just open multiple windows and leave them.

The next thing to hit (sorry) were exit exchanges. These are better IMHO because they don't intrude on your web viewing. They pop a window up that loads `beneath` any open windows you have after you exit a site. This means that you don't even notice it loading. When you close your open windows after viewing them then bang! there it is - waiting for you to look at it. The best exit exchange is found at <http://www.exitexchange.com>

Another example is <http://www.subscriberdrive.com/> - a neat twist on the idea that exchanges

newsletter subscriptions.

Pop windows are similar to those exit-exchanges except they pop up when you first visit a site. Usually they are not entire web pages but small windows with an ad or a link. These can be effective, and they are certainly more effective than banners. You don't necessarily have to trade impressions either as the window can be your own. A simple line of Javascript can make it appear. It is recommended that you only have one pop window on your site as they can quickly become annoying and that will defeat the objective.

So are these various forms of in-your-face advertising affective? Yes - if used carefully. I tend towards favouring exit exchanges and pop windows as they don't detract from your site. Too many banners can look messy and you don't have much control as to what appears. With exit exchanges the visitor

has already left your site when they appear, so they are in effect bonus hits you wouldn't already have had. Pop windows are usually small and unobtrusive and can get a quick message across. Start pages are too much work - I've got better things to do with my time than sit here clicking `next site` all day! I've

even seen advice that tells you to spend an hour or two every day running 5 or more startpage exchanges simultaneously. Ouch! Who wants to do that?

One last note - if your preferred exchange lets you select which sites your own will appear on then use it! This is a limited form of targeting and it will at least ensure that the visitor who gets your site or popup will already have been somewhere similar.

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