

How To Avoid Getting RIPPED OFF On-line

By Willie Crawford

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Millions of you dream of someday starting your own business and achieving financial success and independence--it's a universal dream. Many also discover the internet and are led to believe this is the perfect medium for making that dream a reality. Which is true, because you can accomplish things on the internet that you don't have the resources to accomplish off-line.

However, many of you looking to start a business on-line also have a big fear of being ripped off. And yes, there is very good reason to fear being ripped off! There is a good chance you will be ripped off by some half-witted money-making scheme. The fact is that there's even a chance you will be ripped off by someone who doesn't even know he's ripping you off!

"But how can you be ripped off by someone who doesn't even know he's ripping you off?" you ask. Many people with no real product create one by taking someone's advice -- often extremely bad advice -- and compiling it into an info product. By passing this along to you in an e-book or manual, and giving you a "clear road map" they not only waste your money...they make you worse off than you were before you started. This is true because you will waste time, money, and energy trying to make something work that has absolutely NO chance of working.

For example, the business of "making money, teaching others to make money, by teaching others to make money" is one of the easiest ways to make money. Agreed, there is a large market for this product. But, it's also a very dangerous place because common sense is often over-ridden by greed and very deep-seated dreams and ambitions.

So how do you avoid being ripped off? The BEST way IS using your common sense. Ask yourself if something makes sense. Also ask yourself, "If the person telling you how to do something has really discovered the secret, why isn't he using it to get rich!" There are very few "real secrets" -- information travels very

fast on the internet. Yes, there are many proven methods and techniques that do work, but if you look hard enough you will see them in everyday application. Go to any famous "guru's" site and make sure you see that he is actually using what he teaches.

Avoiding getting ripped off involves, to an extent, learning who you can trust. A trusted friend who really cares about you simply won't give you bad advice. A trusted advisor won't recommend bad products or services to you.

Here is a very big challenge I am faced with weekly: I get lots of people sending me trial versions of their products or review copies of their books. They want my "thumbs up"...my recommendation. I know that if I give this recommendation...this testimonial...and the product is not extremely good -- I will cause harm to a lot of people. I also know that I will destroy one of my most valuable assets...my goodwill, AND the reputation I have spent six years building with my potential on-line customers. So, I'm COMMITTED to closely guarding that trust, and putting my clients' best interest FIRST. You need to make a similar commitment BEFORE you even open your business.

Until you develop a few trusted friends whom you can call or email for recommendations, learn to ask a lot of questions. If you are thinking of buying a product or getting involved in a certain business -- ask around. Discussion boards are a good place to ask what people think about a given product or service. Ask in a way that you won't be perceived as trying to promote the product yourself, because that type of post will simply be deleted. Also ask in a way that you aren't bashing a product or individual. Discussion board operators don't want the legal hassles from a post on their board unjustly harming someone's business.

Also, just spend a lot of time surfing relevant discussion boards. Read the hundreds, if not thousands of posts already there. There are boards set up just to warn you about rip-offs. My favorite is the Friends In Business board. This board was started by a lady who got ripped off, and years later it's the perfect place to go to find out about hundreds of scams. That's the sole purpose of the board. In fact, you should add this board to your bookmarks. It's: <http://friendsinbusiness.com/>

Some of the best discussion boards are closed communities. These are member's-only sites; some with tens of thousand of members all banned together for a common purpose. Two of the member's-only sites I belong to are The Internet Marketing Warriors and The Affiliates Club. Both are "support groups" where you can brainstorm and bounce your ideas off people building on-line or home-based businesses. I am a moderator at one of these groups and have written many articles exclusively for the other (my articles are often published in The Affiliates Club before they appear anywhere else).

For more information on the Warriors, visit:
<http://www.WarriorPro.com/cgi-bin/w.cgi?35326>

For more info on The Affiliates Club visit:
<http://williecrawford.com/cgi-bin/tk.cgi?theclub>

When considering a business opportunity, one of the wisest things you can do is to ask for referrals. If they are as good as they say they are, they should be able to refer you to lots of satisfied customers. If you were considering getting involved in a franchise or business venture off-line this is how you would check it out. On-line should be no different. If it's a large investment you're thinking of making you'd be crazy not to. Email these references, or better yet, give them a call. There are things you can detect in a person's voice that you can't "hear" in email. Off-line, if at all possible, I would pay them a face-to-face visit.

Another common sense approach to avoid getting ripped off is to simply research the site or product that you are considering investing in. It's fairly easy to research an individual or company on the internet to see if their own businesses demonstrate that they really know what they are talking about. For instance, is the person selling the "How To Explode Your Traffic" ebook getting any traffic to his own site?

This can easily be researched by utilizing the Alexa Toolbar. The Alexa Toolbar shows how popular a given site is. It isn't foolproof but is a good indicator of how successful a site really is. It shows a sites "ranking." You can learn about and get the free Alexa Toolbar at:

http://pages.alexa.com/prod_serv/quicktour_new.html

Along the same lines, research the private site that's going to teach you "All the secrets of improving your SE ranking" by checking where they are listed in Google and AltaVista. If they are going to teach you this, they certainly should have already attained these results for their sites. Just this little bit of investigating, using the search engines, can save you from buying into some theory offered by someone who has NO CLUE what he is talking about.

We all know that there are no internet police. However, many parts of the community are self-policing. These are the parts of the internet community that agree to adhere to certain standards. Members who fail to live up to those standards are investigated, and if they are not adhering to community standards they are not allowed to retain membership. Two such communities that I belong to are The Better Business Bureau Online, and The International Council Of Online Professionals. You have to invest in an annual membership in both of these organizations once you qualify.

Both of the above organizations require applications, and you have to demonstrate that you are ethical and meet the organization's standards. They actually investigate your website and look at the products or services you offer. The Better Business Bureau actually sends someone to your place of business so that they can better understand your whole business operation. If you survive the application process, you are given an emblem to place on your website that is hyper-linked to their sites. A visitor can click on the emblem to continue investigating you before doing business with you. For more information on I-Cop membership visit:

<http://www.i-cop.org/RapSheet/ref.cgi?id=willieec>

Membership in BBB Online requires that you be a member of your local Better Business Bureau. That often requires that you have been in business for at least a year, and the application process can take several months. In the Northwest Florida Division, a committee reviews each membership application. If you're interested in BBB membership, look in your local phone book. Better Business Bureau membership is only available in the US and Canada.

Millions of you migrate to the internet looking for an opportunity to supplement your income. Far too many spend a lot of time and other resources trying to build a business -- only to be very disappointed. If you apply the common sense advice offered above, you GREATLY reduce your chances of becoming one of them.

Reread this article several times, then start applying what it teaches. Reading and knowing something without using it is actually worse than not knowing, since you have no excuse. Many of you already intuitively knew everything in this article. Yet by failing to apply that knowledge, you were still susceptible to being ripped off. Now, hopefully you're not :-)

Willie Crawford is an expert on internet marketing, joint ventures, buying and selling reprint rights, and building business through networking. His directory of seminars, workshops, conferences, and tele-events is at:

<http://InternetMarketingSeminarSchedule.Com>

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