

Smoke and Mirrors

By Bob Osgoodby

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With the increasing number of new people joining the Internet every day, the scamsters have an ongoing supply of new potential suckers. At first blush, the Internet Newbies are overwhelmed by the technology, and don't do a whole lot. Many are retired, and simply want to keep in touch via email with friends or family. Others are living on a fixed income, and are looking for a second source of income.

Eventually, finding their comfort level they sally forth, and are found by those wishing to separate them from their hard earned money. Suddenly, their email increases with offers for everything imaginable under the sun. Getting all this information in their mail boxes, seems to trigger a synapse, and many view the web as their road to riches.

Where else could they work in their PJs, when the mood strikes and supplement their income? In their travels about the web, they find what they think is a great affiliate program, and plopping down a few bucks, start their journey into the world of the online entrepreneur.

Three or four months go by, and they haven't done anything except fill the coffers of the affiliate program originators. Wondering how those experts can claim five figure monthly incomes from their Internet businesses, and they aren't earning squat, they cast about looking for something else.

What they don't realize is that they can't sit around eating "bon-bons" all day, expecting the world to beat a path to their door. As with all businesses, online or off, it takes more than a casual approach to truly make a business work.

Many beginning opportunity seekers are misled by the hoopla and marketing pitches. If anyone is trying to start a business on the Internet, they must approach it as a real business.

The number one priority is to get your own web site, and you should avoid the free ones offered by your ISP. The price of web space today is extremely affordable, and you can get a full blown site, including the registration of your own domain name for \$4 and change a month. For an example, visit <http://www.bitshack.com>, to see what I mean. There are also tools available to help build your own site, and with a little experimentation, you can have your site up and running quickly.

Build your web site based on your interests, and over the long term it will be much more successful. It should be filled with useful information and resources. Look for experts in your field to work with you in exchange for exposure. Keep the content of your site constantly updated, which will encourage repeat visits.

Build a mailing list by having your guests register at the site. This mailing list is a valuable marketing tool, but your efforts here should be low key. It could take the form of a newsletter geared toward your target market, and include a column that you write - you can have your ad in the author's resource box. Don't make it a thinly disguised pitch for your product or service, but give good solid information, which will be useful to your readers.

If you are going to be involved with an Affiliate Program, be careful with your selection. Look for programs that pay well, and have a solid reputation. Most importantly, pick one that you believe in, and use their products or services yourself.

Don't use their affiliate links as your primary web presence. The web site will never get listed in the search engine directories, such as Yahoo!. While the sites supplied by the affiliate program are well designed, many are basically Smoke and Mirrors, aimed at making their affiliates feel they have joined the "big time". The prospects of getting visitors to it are slim, unless it is a direct result of your marketing efforts.

With your own site however, and with a strong informational approach, you stand a good chance of getting decent ranking with the search engines. Smoke and mirrors may gather a few prospects, but a well thought out approach will provide what is necessary for achieving long term success utilizing affiliate programs.

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