

Stepping Stones

By Bob Osgoodby

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Many people, when they try to go into business, have at best a loosely defined set of goals. A goal is the purpose towards which any endeavor is directed, or in other words, an objective. While the ultimate goal is to make an income, that by itself is not a realistic goal to base a business on.

A simple analogy might be a stream with stepping stones. While the ultimate goal here is to reach the other side without getting wet, each stepping stone represents an intermediate goal that must be reached. If you miss one, you won't be dry when you reach the other side, and will not have attained your goal.

Business in general, whether it be "brick and mortar" or an internet endeavor, has intermediate goals. If you don't recognize these necessary steps, you will not reach your ultimate goal, which is financial reward.

In any particular business, the ultimate goal is to produce revenue, but there are numerous "stepping stones" that must be in place to do so. At the risk of stating the obvious, you must have a saleable product or service. While you might scam a few people with an inferior one, you will not be around for the long haul. I personally get a real "kick" out of those who send out what are recognized by most people as obvious scams such as chain letters, hoping to lure in the unsuspecting.

So if you do have a legitimate product or service, how are you going to sell it? First you need a place from which to sell your wares. A website to an online entrepreneur is akin to a storefront. This is where you will make your sales. It has to be attractive and the merchandise displayed in a conducive manner.

Next, you have to make people aware of its existence. This is your advertising goal. You must first identify a target market and aim your advertising at that market. But where do you advertise? Statistics have shown that the best possible vehicle is one which actually reaches your prospects.

Let's talk about ezine advertising, which is one of the stronger ways possible. Should you advertise in a publication that reaches 100,00 people, or one that only reaches 5,000? Don't be too quick to answer. The one that reaches 100,000 may not be aimed at your target market, while the one that reaches 5,000 might be. While a humor ezine may reach many thousands (who doesn't like a good joke), if you are trying to market an affiliate program, an ezine geared to them might just might be your best bet.

Next on the agenda is an easy way for your prospects to purchase your product. If you don't accept credit cards you are missing impulse sales. If someone is ready to buy, and you make them jump through hoops to purchase, the odds are they won't. If you give them time to "cool off" they will likely look elsewhere.

It is not that difficult to obtain a merchant account. Anyone who is selling a product or a service who doesn't have one is simply wasting their time. If someone has to send you a check or money order, by the time they get around to doing it, the impulse to purchase may very well be gone. And of course, you could use the services provided by "PayPal".

Do you have a personal presence on the web? If not, you are losing business. You don't have to give them your life history, but your picture and way to contact you goes a long way.

Do you need a toll free number. I always felt this was important, but have lately changed my thinking. A toll free number will generate a lot "tire kickers" but not too many sales. If someone won't "drop a dime" to find out about your offer, they are most likely not serious. We took out our toll free number and two things happened - the number of calls we received went down. But, the number of sales went up - go figure.

These are just a few of the stepping stones needed to reach your goal. While there are many others, if you provide these steps for your prospects, you will most likely meet your goals. If you don't, you will quickly lose heart and wonder why you are not getting any business.

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