

# The Virtual Garden

By Bob Osgoodby

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When planting a garden, or doing a bit of landscaping, there are many factors which must be considered. Size of plants, colors, hardiness, and need for sunlight and water, all come into play. If any mistakes are made along the way, the garden will not flourish.

There are many parallels between starting a business and planting a garden. In fact, being in an online business is like planting a virtual garden. If any of the steps are overlooked, like a poorly designed garden, the business will not do well.

There are basically three things that those in an online business must do.

First - you must pick your program carefully. If you get involved with the wrong one, you will not reap the desired harvest. Just because a program has been around a long time, does not necessarily mean you will achieve success. Some of the affiliate programs on the web are overplayed and tired. You should also avoid the programs that make money mainly by garnering new recruits. At some point the new recruits will slow down and the program will go the way of most Ponzi or pyramid schemes.

Secondly, after planting, you have to care for your plants. Advertising is like sunlight, water and fertilizer for your business. A one time or sporadic ad will not get customers.

Exposure, Exposure, Exposure gets the customers. It is a common maxim in advertising that it takes 5 to 7 exposures to an ad to get someone to react. Your copy must also be geared toward your target market. It must be well written, makes an offer that gets someone's attention, and allows immediate feedback. If you are consistent in your advertising, experiment with your copy until you start getting responses. If your add doesn't pull, change it - couldn't be simpler.

Let's stick with exposure for a minute. It takes a dedicated person to place their free classified ads on an ongoing basis. Miss a week here and there and you are committing a big mistake. You are not being consistent.

Consistency means that you advertise in different places, and on a regular basis. Let's face it - any advertising program must use multiple ways to reach their audience. Search out publications that are geared toward your target market, and contract with them on a "long term" basis. Many offer discounts for ongoing ads. When someone sees your ad in different places, they start to pay attention. Enough exposure and they just may contact you for further information.

Which brings us to the third step in your program. If you don't use an auto-responder, you are simply not serious in your advertising efforts. The auto-response presents the details to them about your offer. They not only get your response within minutes, but you get their E-mail address for follow-up purposes. You can get auto-responders from a number of places, but perhaps the simplest is using the Eudora email client. If someone sends an email to a specific address, or with a specific subject line, it can automatically file it in a follow up folder and send a canned response.

I got a check yesterday from a person I never even talked with. She visited our web site and requested additional information, which was sent by our auto-responder. What a great way to do business.

The final step is the actual harvest, and you must have the proper tools. You must have a way to immediately close the deal and for the prospect the make payment. You can use a number of resources including your own merchant account, online checks or a service such as PayPal.

Advertising on the Internet has no magic. Unless it is done properly, however the world will NOT beat a path to your door. You must use the same techniques and procedures that you would use in any offline advertising campaign.

Those that do will have a successful business, and like the Virtual Garden reap a profitable harvest.

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