

279 DAYS *to* OVERNIGHT SUCCESS

.....
BY CHRIS GUILLEBEAU
.....

AN UNCONVENTIONAL JOURNEY
TO FULL-TIME WRITING

How I Became a Full-Time Writer in 279 Days

The Complete Revenue Estimate for my Personal Site in 2009

The World Domination Strategy for Establishing Your Brand

Avoiding the Vampires who Want You to Fail

Why AdSense (and most other Web Advertising) Sucks

How to Stay Off the Digg Home Page and Still Get All the Traffic You Need

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INTRODUCTION

This is the story of how I created a new career in social media for myself in less than one year. More importantly, the personal story is a case study other writers and artists can use to build a community and create a full-time income in approximately the same amount of time — by doing exactly what they like to do.

A funny thing happened the other day. I woke up and discovered that I am now a full-time writer. Wow — I've become a [ProBlogger](#), without putting ads on my site, praying that an article will get ranked highly on Digg, posting five times a day, or many other conventional blogging strategies.

Of course, it didn't happen exactly like that — as we'll see, overnight success usually requires more than one night. In my case, I worked on it every night (and day) for at least **279 days**. My goal in the beginning was to build a following, and being able to support myself came later — but less than one year later, my new career is underway. In this report, I'll tell you all about how it worked for me, including the mistakes I made and the strategy I used to get it right. Nothing is for sale, and my hope is that this case study will help you in your own quest to become Internet famous.

These 12,000 words contain the most important lessons I've learned about building a community over the past 10 months.

279 DAYS: THE AUDIENCE

Most of my writing is for anyone interested in unconventional living. I call my target market “artists and entrepreneurs of all kinds who want to change the world.” Since I travel to at least 20 countries each year, I tend to attract fellow travelers as well.

This particular report, however, is not for a general readership. It's for bloggers, writers, online artists, and anyone otherwise interested in creating a new career *or* expanding their influence using social media. If you want your online presence to grow far beyond what it is now, read and apply.

Before I started my site, [The Art of Nonconformity](#), I spent nearly a full year watching and learning from many other great bloggers. What I learned from them was priceless, and I wanted to give something back. These 12,000 words contain the most important lessons I've learned about building a community over the past 10 months.

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YOUR MILEAGE MAY VARY (THE DISCLAIMER)

I'm going to be very candid in this report, and this is for your own good. No one likes to read something where the author is always saying, "Well, on the other hand..." We're talking about social media and the blogosphere, right? People like strong opinions, so that's what I'm going to give you.

If your experience is different — if you love Digg or AdSense, for example — then by all means, focus on the ideas you agree with or that make the most sense for you.

The problem is that for many of us who yearn to get paid for doing the work we love, Digg and AdSense don't work. If you look at some of the most popular web sites, you can get the impression that you need to write boiler-plate articles, get high traffic spikes, and then post off-topic, unattractive ads from Google to be able to make money. I'm here to give you the contrarian perspective on that, along with a few other things.

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In case you're in a big hurry, here's the abridged version of what I have to say:

- 🌐 If you want to, you can create your own full-time career in social media (or otherwise greatly expand your influence)
- 🌐 It takes more than 30 days or 12 steps to do this, but you can probably do it in one or two years
- 🌐 Unless you can regularly generate enormous levels of traffic, forget about advertising
- 🌐 Instead, ask your followers what they want and find a way to give it to them

If you want to learn more, just keep going. If this doesn't sound interesting to you, no problem. Go and change the world in another important way.

You don't have to live your life the way other people expect you to.

IN CASE WE HAVEN'T MET BEFORE (A QUICK INTRODUCTION)

You can read [a longer version here](#), but in short, I am a writer, entrepreneur, and world traveler. From 2002-2006 I worked as a full-time volunteer for a medical charity in West Africa, and I'm now on a journey to visit every country in the world before my 35th birthday in 2012. When I'm not taking off to places like Mongolia and Pakistan, I live in Portland, Oregon.

To kick off the formal launch of my site in the summer of 2008, I released a free, noncommercial manifesto (like this one) called *A Brief Guide to World Domination*. I'll tell you more about the marketing of the manifesto in this report, but if you haven't read it, you can [get your own copy here](#).

The most important advice in the World Domination manifesto is, "You don't have to live your life the way other people expect you to." As I said back then, you can close the report, begin taking that mantra to heart, and your life will never be the same. (If not, you get your \$0 back within 90 days.)

My goal now is to help people live life on their own terms while changing the world for others. If we haven't connected before, [I'd love for you to join me](#) in this crusade.

WHAT KIND OF SUCCESS?

Whenever anyone talks about creating success for themselves or someone else, the first question you should ask is, “What does success look like?” In other words, how is it measured?”

I am not in the business of telling people what to do. You define your own success, OK? But here’s *my* definition:

“THIS IS WHAT I DO EVERY DAY.”

When I meet new people and they ask, “What do you do?” I can now tell them I’m a writer.

In short, that is my definition of writing success. To be more precise, this year I’ll earn at least the average income for my part of the world strictly from my writing. If I wanted to, I could earn more — but I have honestly, deliberately structured my life to do what I want while slowly building a new career.

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Again, your definition may be different, but since you've come here to learn about social media and getting paid for work you love, I'm going to assume that it's somewhat similar.

THE ANTI-MARKETING CAMPAIGN

With that definition of success in mind, here's a few notes on what I DON'T do:

- 🌐 My site is not highly targeted, not part of any blog networks, contains no advertising of any kind, and only rarely receives big traffic spikes. As far as I know, I have never had an article ranked highly in Digg, StumbleUpon, or any other big network.
- 🌐 I write two articles a week, and only occasionally on topics related to current events. My writing is longer than most blog posts (many articles are at least 2,000 words), and definitely not for everyone. Sometimes I deliberately filter out readers who aren't a good fit.

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- ④ For the most part, my site does not attract a general audience. I have focused instead on building a dedicated, loyal group of readers interested in changing the world in their own way. The theme is *nonconformity*, thus targeting a minority of remarkable people by default.
- ④ Without working any kind of day job, I can now support myself throughout 2009 entirely on the income from my site, and I spend only about 10 hours a week on activities specifically related to generating income. At least 95% of my readers will never buy anything, and that's fine with me.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

While this report is partially about how to support yourself by doing what you want, it's also fair to say that I did not become a "real writer" to make money. On the contrary, I used to earn much more money as an entrepreneur.

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I feel fairly comfortable in saying that I should be able to earn at least \$48,500 in 2009 with the income from my 279-day-old site.

I decided to document how much money I make from the site because general information (“I’m doing OK”) doesn’t help anyone. With that in mind, these are the most conservative estimates of my 2009 income through the (less than a year old) site.

- ④ *Unconventional Guides* (includes two or three new products, on-going sales from three existing products, and affiliate income): \$24,500
- ④ *Webinars/Teleseminars and one “Big Project”*: \$18,000
- ④ *Consulting and Teaching* (I purposely limit this to one or two hours each week): \$6,000

Thus, I feel fairly comfortable in saying that I should be able to earn at least **\$48,500** in 2009 with the income from my 279-day-old site. The median income where I live is \$42,802, so this estimate puts me a bit above the average.

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The problem with writing about how much money you make, of course, is that it is entirely relative. Readers in India will be shocked to hear that a small site like mine produces “so much” money. My Internet marketing friends, on the other hand, will wonder how I can possibly be happy with such a “low” income.

For me, I relate money to happiness and freedom. Right now I spend about 10% of my time on activities that are directly related to generating income. The other 90% of the time I’m writing, connecting with cool people, traveling the world, and drinking coffee.

The point is that for this season in my life, I am deliriously happy. I’m happy that in just ten months, I’ve found a way to support myself through writing *without taking on any projects I don’t want to do*. I don’t freelance, I don’t send out dozens of queries in hopes of one positive response, and I’m not a hack of any kind.

That point is critical for lifestyle design, I think, because if you want to be a painter and end up painting the murals at Trader Joe’s, then technically you are painting for a living, but not really. Since I’ve always been self-

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employed and have never had the dreaded “real job,” adjusting to life as a “real writer” wasn’t that different from what I’ve done before. The main difference was learning to prioritize writing above all other activities — but we’ll come to that later.

I’ll tell you more about how I get paid in section two, but please understand that getting paid is secondary (really, truly) to doing the work required to build a following that is committed to your cause. First, we need to break down the more important side of things: creating an awesome platform for your work that attracts the kind of audience you need.

GETTING STARTED

When you’re setting up shop for the first time, there are a large number of blog posts and free reports about how to start and maintain a successful blog or other online platform. They’ll tell you how to get a WordPress theme and how to get your site listed in Google. You’ll learn how to sign up with Technorati and Twitter.

I don’t mean to belittle this introductory information in any way, because much of it is helpful. When you’re researching this stuff for the first time,

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you should definitely pay close attention. As we'll see, you can break *many* of the rules of online media, but probably not all of them at the same time. At the end of this report, I'll point you to [a resources page](#) where you can learn the basics if you're not already familiar with them.

But there's just one problem: for most of us, it takes more than that.

For every blog (or other online career) that “makes it,” a great many of them fail. The excited series of new posts that jumps on the screen in the beginning fades into irregular entries before ending completely. Before you know it, no new content has been posted in months, and sometimes the domain even elapses.

Goodbye, blog.

Of course, not every case of branding demise is a result of failure. In some cases, the publisher has moved on to something better. Perhaps the lifespan of the blog was naturally limited by something. But aside from those cases, it's fair to say that a lot of projects do not make it as far as their owners had planned. Instead, they crash and burn. I wrote this

report to help people avoid the premature death of their venture into social media.

THE BASICS (YES, DO THESE THINGS)

Start with the best design you possibly can.

Since most visitors make very quick decisions on whether they like your site or not, good design is important. I had two photographer friends do a half-day photo shoot with me around Seattle. I sent off for quotes from various blog designers before finding a great one who “got” what I was trying to do. After the site had been up for six months, we did a complete redesign to better reflect who I am and the goals of the site. All of these things took time and money, but they were definitely worth it.

Spend at least three months creating initial content before hitting the publish button.

This is not the same content that you’ll launch with — this is content that you’ll have in reserve. Yes, you’ll continue to produce new content on an ongoing basis — but having a backlog of excellent material will help you when life gets busy.

Decide on a clear publishing schedule.

And commit to it for a set amount of time, preferably at least six months or more. The specific schedule is not that important — the point is, make a schedule, announce it on the site, and stick to it.

Whenever I mention this idea, someone usually says, “But what about so-and-so? They publish whenever they want.” My response is to ask, “Are you Seth Godin?” If yes, keep doing what you’re doing and write another [3,000 thought-provoking posts](#) for the rest of us.

But assuming you aren’t Seth, setting a publishing schedule will help you communicate that you are serious about your project. You’re in it for the long-haul, and you’re not going to give up on the followers who commit to joining you for the journey.

As I said, those are the basics. I recommend you follow them, albeit with whatever variations you want. To take it further, of course, you’ll need to do far more than just that.

WORLD DOMINATION STRATEGY

I use the metaphor of *world domination* in some of my writing because it is provocative and illustrates the serious nature of pursuing personal goals. Some people get it, some don't — and such will be the case for your own metaphors as you become better known. Your task is to focus on the people who *do* get it and not worry too much about the others.

In short, this was my strategy for “taking over the world” during the past 9 months:

- 1** Create a Compelling Story and Be Remarkable
- 2** Clearly Answer the “Reason Why”
- 3** Prioritize Writing and Marketing Over Everything Else
- 4** Be Bigger than I Really Am
- 5** Build Long-Lasting Relationships
- 6** Carefully Introduce Products and Services

I'll explain a few things about the first five steps of the strategy below, and section two of the report will be all about the final step.

Remember, there is no “everyone” — you want to attract the right people, and part of that process involves gently steering the wrong ones away.

#1) CREATE A COMPELLING STORY AND BUILD FLAGSHIP CONTENT

If you want people to pay attention to you, the first step is to establish a compelling story. You should start telling your story when you feel like you have something important to say. I thought about it for at least two years, and when I kept waking up at night with ideas I wanted to share, I decided the time had come to start sharing.

My story was that I have been self-employed my entire adult life, I lived in West Africa for four years, and I’m on a personal quest to visit every country in the world. My goals are to educate people about living differently, help create more personal freedom, and challenge conventional thinking about life and work.

Is this story compelling to everyone? Absolutely not. I get emails every week from people who seem to enjoy telling me how wrong I am. But that’s OK — I get far more emails from people who *do* get it. Remember, there is no “everyone” — you want to attract the right people, and part of that process involves gently steering the wrong ones away.

What about you — what’s your story? Again, it doesn’t need to be compelling to everyone. But it does need to be compelling enough for your audience. There are a lot of voices out there, and one way to break through the noise is with *flagship content*. Chris Garrett has written [a great report all about flagship content](#), and I recommend you read it — but in short, flagship content represents the compelling story and clear benefits you offer new followers.

In my case, I spent several weeks writing a 29-page manifesto called [A Brief Guide to World Domination](#). It defines the way I see the world, what I’m trying to accomplish, and how like-minded people can be part of it. The manifesto has now been downloaded more than 100,000 times from at least 120 countries. Whenever new followers come into my network, I make sure that’s one of the first things they see.

#2) ANSWER THE “REASON WHY” AND “WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME?” QUESTIONS

If someone doesn’t know you, why should they care about what you have to say? Facing down this question can be humbling, but it’s also crucial to your success. You have to plan to answer the “reason why” as soon as possible. What’s in it for the followers?

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I think it's safe to say that the vast majority of bloggers do not sufficiently answer this question, and I have not been immune to this mistake either. In my case, I knew that my crazy goal of trying to visit every country in the world would attract a number of readers interested in travel and "limit-pushing" adventures. On its own, however, I also knew that this would not be sufficiently interesting to sustain a broad, diverse community. I had to go further.

By the way, there is some bad news about the reason why. The bad news is that you have to *continually* answer the question. It's not a one-shot deal. Some readers are loyal to the death, but most are loyal as long as they are finding the inspiration, education, or entertainment that originally drew them to you.

You can change it up at times, and no true fan will leave over one disappointment, but over time, you'll die a slow death if you don't continue to give people what they are looking for. That is the *reason why* they are drawn to you.

Unless you set aside dedicated time to produce your art, the art will not get made. There are some times when making the art is fun, but other times it's not — so if you want to build something sustainable, you have to find a way to keep making art during the not-so-fun times.

#3) PRIORITIZE WRITING AND MARKETING OVER EVERYTHING ELSE

This is another area where a lot of good intentions can fall short. I can tell you from experience that unless you set aside dedicated time to produce your art, the art will not get made. There are some times when making the art is fun, but other times it's not — so if you want to build something sustainable, you have to find a way to keep making art during the not-so-fun times.

As mentioned, in 2008 I kept a writing schedule of three essays or posts each week. No matter what else was going on, the three essays would go up. A few of them were uploaded at 11:55 p.m. from a bad wi-fi connection in a random South Asian guesthouse, but the principle was “no matter what,” they are not going to be late. Because I knew I'd be writing a book and I wanted to change things up a little, I switched the schedule for 2009 to two major posts a week, but the schedule is still sacred. Since launching the site in early 2008, I have never missed a scheduled day.

I don't have any illusions of grandeur over this. It's not so much that my readers would kill me if I don't have something posted for them on any given Thursday.

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The reason why it's so important to maintain the schedule is *because of my own weakness*.

I know if I missed a day and nothing happened, then it would be much easier to miss another day. Pretty soon I wouldn't have much of a schedule, and then I'd have less motivation. It's a downward spiral that I want to avoid, so I keep the schedule sacred.

These two tactics have helped me; feel free to steal them:

The 1k Words Requirement.

As a writer, my goal is to write 1,000 words every day, six days a week. I do a lot of different kinds of writing, so sometimes I need to do more than 1,000 words — but if I don't get the 1,000 words done, I won't be happy with myself. Naturally, if your medium is different, then the 1k words requirement needs to be adapted to the outputs you create.

Some people may be uncomfortable with linking productivity to emotional wellbeing as closely as I do. I say, hey, do whatever works for you. If inspiration comes your way, it's in your best interest not to question it

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too much. Creating art requires a substantial investment of emotion and energy regardless, so you might as well harness that power somehow

The 5 Marketing Actions.

Almost every day, I try to take five actions that will help promote myself, promote a product, or otherwise bring in new readers.

We'll look at marketing more in steps #4 and #5, but a selection of actions could include:

- ④ Publishing a “Daily Ass-Kicking,” passing on good information, and otherwise connecting with people through [Twitter](#)
- ④ Sending out review copies of my products and manifestos
- ④ Reaching out to other experts, colleagues, and readers
- ④ Scheduling and outlining a product launch

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- ④ Writing my affiliates to discuss their marketing efforts
- ④ Building relationships with journalists — perhaps through Peter Shankman’s [Help a Reporter Out](#) service or people I already know

As a rough guide, I devote about half my creative energy to writing and half to marketing. There is a chicken and egg relationship between these two tasks. To succeed as an artist, you have to be able to lock yourself in a room, turn off the internet, and create.¹ But to create a 279-day overnight success, you also have to get serious about marketing yourself. Instead of doing one or the other, it’s in your best interest to do both.

The Murakami Strategy

I’m a big fan of novelist [Haruki Murakami](#), and when he came out with a memoir that is about both writing and running — two things I love — of course I had to read it as soon as possible. *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* is a great book if you like at least one of those topics, and when I read this passage about how Murakami has structured his life around writing, I immediately latched onto it for my own model:

1 [THE WAR OF ART](#) IS A PHENOMENAL BOOK ABOUT THIS SUBJECT.

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I'm struck by how, except when you're young, you really need to prioritize in life, figuring out in what order you should divide up your time and energy. If you don't get that sort of system set by a certain age, you'll lack focus and your life will be out of balance. I placed the highest priority on the sort of life that lets me focus on writing... I felt that the indispensable relationship I should build in my life was not with a specific person, but with an unspecified number of readers. As long as I got my day-to-day life set so that each work was an improvement over the last, then many of my readers would welcome whatever life I chose for myself. Shouldn't this be my duty as a novelist, and my top priority? My opinion hasn't changed over the years.²

² HARUKI MURAKAMI 2008. THANKS TO KNOPF PUBLISHERS FOR UNDERSTANDING WEB 2.0 AND ALLOWING ME TO INCLUDE THIS LENGTHY PASSAGE. PLEASE NOTE THAT WHILE THIS REPORT IS LICENSED UNDER THE [CREATIVE COMMONS](#), ALL WORK BY MURAKAMI IS NOT.

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To be a successful artist of any kind, I think you have to relate to this principle somewhat. You may not apply it as militantly as Murakami has done, but if you're not comfortable spending time creating by yourself and thinking long and hard about the people who will consume what you create, you might want to do something else with your life.

#4) BE BIGGER THAN I REALLY AM

From the beginning, I set my goals and standards high. Even in the early days when less than 100 people were reading the site, I wrote as if there were an audience of thousands. When more people started reading, I assumed an audience of tens of thousands, and so on. When I interviewed other bloggers, I wrote to the biggest and most respected names. I looked up to them, treated them with respect, but also made it clear that I planned to be my own "authority blogger" as well.

In other words, I didn't think of myself as an up-and-coming writer; I thought of myself as one of the establishment. I decided, well, I haven't been doing this blogging thing very long, but I've been successful at a lot of other things in life. Most people haven't visited 100 countries or been self-employed their entire life, so surely I have something to bring to the conversation.

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Granted, this is an uphill battle in the beginning. When you have only five people following you on [Twitter](#), it's a hard sell to get the big names to pay attention. But if you stick with it, you'll gradually gain traction and your own branded space. More and more followers will come to you, and some will be converted to true fans.

(Important Note: Just because you write as if you already have a huge audience does not mean that you write *to* this huge audience. In fact, when I write my weekly articles, I try to think of only a few individual people and pretend I'm writing directly to them. But for the whole image, I'm thinking of something bigger.)

Site Reviews

After the site had been active for a while, I ordered site reviews from [Chris Garrett](#) and [Men with Pens](#). In addition to the invaluable advice, having a professional review done for you sends a signal that you are serious about your site. You *want* constructive feedback, you *want* to get better, and *want* to commit for the long-term. Chris and the Pen Men can help with that.

It's important to remember that an internet link is essentially an endorsement. I got a decent amount of traffic from the NYT link, but more importantly, I was able to say that the Times had effectively endorsed my site.

Media Coverage

One of the practical ways of applying the “Fake it ‘til you make it” strategy is through pursuing media coverage. I understand that the times are changing, and since this report is about building an online community, naturally I don't think traditional media coverage is *necessary* for your success.

However, just because something is not necessary does not mean you should ignore it. In my case, media coverage helped me a great deal. The first important coverage came from the *New York Times*, which mentioned my site on one of their career blogs two months after the launch. Needless to say, I was excited.

It's important to remember that an internet link is essentially an endorsement. I got a decent amount of traffic from the NYT link, but more importantly, I was able to say that the *Times* had effectively endorsed my site. For my book proposal, I mentioned it. When I wrote to other journalists, I mentioned it as background: “The site was featured in the NYT a while back...” and so on.

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In the past few months, the site has received coverage from MSNBC, *The Washington Times*, *La Presse*, *Conde Nast*, *Slate.com*, and a few other places. Each of these articles or citations has brought additional queries from other outlets, which was enough to convince me that building relationships with media representatives is still a worthwhile strategy.

[Note: if you are a journalist or freelancer and you think I can help with something, [please let me know](#). As explained above, I do not think your media venue is irrelevant.]

#5) BUILD LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

Before I started this project, I held the mistaken belief that online relationships were largely superficial — and I now believe completely the opposite. In fact, many of the new relationships I've forged over the past year are closer than ones I had previously forged in person. On an average day, I'll spend about two hours building relationships with people to sustain and build these relationships. I do this mostly through [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), site comments, 100+ emails a day, and occasional phone calls and in-person meetings.

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Prior to the launch in February 2008, I spent the summer and fall of 2007 actively reading a number of blogs that I identified with. My purpose in doing this was to get comfortable with the kinds of conversation taking place, and observe first-hand how people had successfully grown their blogs. I began with [Steve Pavlina](#) and several members of the [Life-Remix](#) network. I spent hours studying the archives, reading their flagship content, and seeing how bloggers dealt with different situations.

After I launched my site, I wrote individual messages to this small group of people who had helped me. The first people I wrote to were [Jonathan Fields](#), [Gretchen Rubin](#), and [J.D. Roth](#) — three people that I especially looked up to and thought, *I like what they are doing and I appreciate the communities they have carefully nourished.*

My message to them, and to other people I wrote later, was to simply say “Thank you for inspiring and teaching me through your writing.” I did not ask them to link to my site or otherwise do something for me.

Please understand this: asking someone to link to you without an established relationship or without answering the “reason why” will not work.

I'm probably the only blogger and former university student in the world who does not have a Facebook account. I don't have 5,000 close friends, and I send out about 20 Christmas cards each year.

With the people I looked up to, I knew I'd have good content coming along and some things that would help their readers at some point, but I didn't want to rush anything.

A few people in the blogosphere are especially good at welcoming newcomers and connecting people. This list includes [Chris Brogan](#), [Chris Garrett](#), [Liz Strauss](#), [Colleen Wainwright](#), and [Valeria Maltoni](#). If you're serious about your social media goals, they are great people to know.

Telling the Whole World

When you've got a good design for your site, have several months of content ready to go, and have already published at least five articles, that's when you head out and tell the world about your site.

This is important even if you are a fairly introverted person like me. I'm probably the only blogger and former university student in the world who does not have a Facebook account. I don't have 5,000 close friends, and I send out about 20 Christmas cards each year. Nevertheless, when I thought about it and started making lists, I realized that I knew a lot of people.

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Over the course of a few days, I told them all about it — every single one that I could think of. Many of them (about 25%, I think) went to the site and sent me some kind of feedback, which was really encouraging since not many people were reading at the time.

After the site grew in popularity and the World Domination manifesto took off, a number of people described it as “a viral marketing success.” I had to laugh about that, because for me, the viral marketing involved sending out hundreds of personal emails and asking everyone I knew to spread the word. True, after a while the manifesto seemed to take on a life of its own, but that was the precise goal in the beginning.

Strategic Guest Posting

In addition to the articles I wrote for my own site, I tried to write one excellent guest post for an A-list blog every month. To do this, of course, I had to establish a relationship with the blogger, create a compelling pitch, write the post, put it in HTML so they didn't have to do it (most people skip this step), and so on. It's a lot of work to do this, which is why I just did one a month.

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Later on I read that [Leo Babauta wrote one guest post each week](#), in addition to four or five posts on *Zen Habits*. I just shook my head when I read that — that guy must know something I don't. (I guess that's why his site is all about productivity!)

Because my time was limited, I decided to approach only A-list bloggers for these opportunities. I kept my pitch short, to the point, and heavy on “how this will help your readers.” After I started selling products, I did not include any commercial links in the post or author bio unless the blogger wanted to work with my affiliate program. In short, I tried to add value and deliver only excellent content that would create a true win-win relationship.

Answer Every Email from Readers

One of the things I've been surprised about is how approachable many of the “top-name” bloggers and social media experts are. My suspicion is that their success and the approachability are related.

On the other hand, I sometimes write to people and receive what I call the “get lost” autoresponder. This is the kind of message that makes me feel bad for writing. The implied message is, “Thanks for your note. I may

On the other hand, I sometimes write to people and receive what I call the “get lost” autoresponder. This is the kind of message that makes me feel bad for writing. The implied message is, “Thanks for your note. I may or may not get back to you, but if I do write back, it will be a while and you should consider yourself fortunate to receive the favor of my attention.”

or may not get back to you, but if I do write back, it will be a while and you should consider yourself fortunate to receive the favor of my attention.”

If you’re going on vacation, I understand that you may not get back to me. If you’re especially busy with a particular project, that makes sense too. But many of us manage 100-200 emails a day in addition to all of the other inputs that come through. I mean, if Seth Godin and Gary Vaynerchuk can consistently respond to their huge network of followers, surely the rest of us can too.

I get a lot of email now too, and I do my best to answer it all. I can’t be everyone’s email pal, and if someone makes a lot of assumptions when they obviously haven’t read my site, then I might let it go — but otherwise, everyone gets a real response sooner or later. By doing this and also sending a short personal message to everyone who joins my email list, I think I have connected with at least 50% of the site’s readership personally at some point. Sooner or later I know I’ll need to get some help with administration, but as much as possible I want to continue reading and responding to all of my own email.

WHAT WENT WRONG (MISTAKES AND SETBACKS)

Overall, the World Domination strategy worked out pretty well. After a couple of months, I had a stable group of about 3,000 readers, which doubled again another couple of months later. However, I also made a number of mistakes that limited the growth of my influence and caused some personal stress in the second half of the year. The list below is not complete, unfortunately, but here are a few of the big ones.

MOVED ON A COUPLE THINGS TOO QUICKLY.

I told my readers that a site redesign was coming far too early. In the end it took us more than three months to get moving on it, and two more months to launch. In retrospect, I should have waited until we were closer in. The lesson is that you should hype things and do a good pre-launch for major changes, but only when you really are ready to go.

OCCASIONALLY MADE MISTAKES WITH PACING.

I tend to go at things full-force, and I had to find a balance between keeping up the energy and promising too much. You definitely, absolutely need to continue to provide the “reason why” people should keep coming back to your site. But of course, if you’re going to be doing this

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for a while, you need to be careful not to promise too much, too soon. I'm glad the site has become so successful in one year, but I want to keep going. I now have goals for the project that will take at least 3-5 years to achieve, so I've had to learn to keep a moderate pace.

DERIVED TOO MUCH EMOTIONAL VALIDATION FROM DAILY UPS AND DOWNS.

I wrote about [Blogging and Insecurity](#) over at ProBlogger once, and I confess that I still feel much the same way as I did back then — I derive too much emotional validation from the daily state of my network. When lots of people are subscribing, the comments are up, and the links are rolling in, I feel great. When the numbers are down, I feel bad. I haven't found a way to solve this yet — if you've been there and moved past it, feel free to send me your magic solution.

EXPECTED A BOOK DEAL FROM THE INITIAL EXCITEMENT.

All bloggers get book deals, right? Well, if there was a blogger book bubble a couple of years ago, the bubble has definitely burst. This does not mean you can't write a book — it just means the book should be able to stand on its own.

I derive too much emotional validation from the daily state of my network. When lots of people are subscribing, the comments are up, and the links are rolling in, I feel great. When the numbers are down, I feel bad. I haven't found a way to solve this yet — if you've been there and moved past it, feel free to send me your magic solution.

For me, the process took much longer than initially expected. In fact, it took more than four months of writing proposal drafts (my final version was draft 11, I think) and struggling to connect with the right people. It is totally worth it in the end — one of the most important goals was to get established and receive a contract from a major publisher — but I underestimated how difficult a task this would prove to be.

[Fun update: After a great effort from [my great literary agent](#), I signed a contract with Perigee, a division of Penguin. Assuming I can get my act together and write it, the book will hit the shelves at Barnes and Noble (and the virtual shelves of Amazon.com) in September 2010. As long as you are still alive and online then, I'll do my best to make sure you hear about it. ☺]

P A R T

2

How to Get Paid for Meeting the Needs of Your Followers

THE COLD, HARD TRUTH ABOUT ADSENSE

THE ANSWER IS TO FIRE GOOGLE AND HIRE YOURSELF

UNDERSTANDING WHAT FOLLOWERS WANT

A FEW EXAMPLES

SCALING UP

A FEW TIPS ON LAUNCHING YOUR FIRST PRODUCT

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Still there? If so, I'll assume you're not afraid of hard work. I also know, however, that not everyone wants to get paid for sharing their ideas with the world. If you're not interested in monetization, I hope the first section was helpful, and you should also check out the third section on other things you can do to grow your influence.

For everyone else, let's say you get the site running. You stick with the schedule. You work hard, and you really want to make this happen. The followers start to arrive — when can you start thinking about getting paid for your great work without compromising the integrity that helped you create the following?

Your numbers may vary, but I think the approximate number to start thinking seriously about this is 1,000 followers or subscribers.³ I waited a bit longer, but finally decided to take the plunge and start thinking about some limited monetization. The only question was, what should I do?

³ THIS IS NOT THE SAME AS 1,000 TRUE FANS — THOSE ARE HYPER-COMMITTED FOLLOWERS, A FRACTION OF YOUR OVERALL BASE. BY ALL ACCOUNTS IT WILL TAKE MUCH LONGER TO ACHIEVE YOUR 1,000 TRUE FANS.

I'm sorry to break it to you. I know that some people will disagree, but here is the cold, hard truth: Ad-sense ads suck. They are unbelievable in the truest sense of the word.

Without question, the most common form of blog monetization is Google AdSense, the text ads provided by Google that you see displayed on many sites. I'm familiar with AdSense from my days as an entrepreneur, but I was uncomfortable with putting it on my portfolio site. Why? Well, let's see...

THE COLD, HARD TRUTH ABOUT ADSENSE

I'm sorry to break it to you. I know that some people will disagree, but here is the cold, hard truth: AdSense ads suck. They are unbelievable in the truest sense of the word.

UNBELIEVEABLE = NOT TO BE

BELIEVED; INCREDIBLE. [AND I

WOULD ADD: LITTLE OR NO VALUE.]

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To anyone who is in love with AdSense and believes it is the best way to monetize an online space, I offer this two-part challenge:

First, do you believe in and endorse the solutions that the companies advertising on your site are offering your customers? Second, do you *want* to send your hard-earned visitors away from your site?

If you can answer yes to the above questions while sleeping great at night, good for you. Proceed with your AdSense plans and pay no attention to me. If no, it's time to face the facts. Precisely, two of them:

Fact #1: Your visitors deserve better from you.

Fact #2: You can give your visitors something better on your own, and in the end you'll benefit more too.

You must understand that unless your site is highly sophisticated, many of the visitors who regularly visit are not as savvy as you are about The Google. They see links from you and think, "Oh, here's a link from Bob Blogger's site. I trust Bob, so this ad for overseas prescriptions must be legitimate."

If you're a publisher who uses AdSense, you're effectively encouraging your community to give their email addresses to strangers and therefore devalue their Inbox. Don't you want them to give priority to your newsletter and your RSS feed?

If you think this doesn't happen, it's probably because you are living in an insulated world with other high-tech people. When you follow the links from the ads on your site (very carefully, since you're not supposed to click on them yourself), you'll notice that many of them go to lead-generation sites of some kind. They do this because this is where the money is with Adwords and AdSense, and the only way the advertisers can afford to pay you *and* Google is to make sure they capture data from the people who click.

In other words, if you're a publisher who uses AdSense, you're effectively encouraging your community to give their email addresses to strangers and therefore devalue their Inbox. Don't you want them to give priority to *your* newsletter and *your* RSS feed? How will they do so if they're constantly being pushed along out of your network?

That's the bad news. Unless you can answer yes to the question of "Do you really think these ads are helping your visitors?" you now have to deal with the problem of cognitive dissonance. From my own experience screwing up my life at different times, I can confidently tell you that believing one thing and doing another does not result in an optimal feeling.

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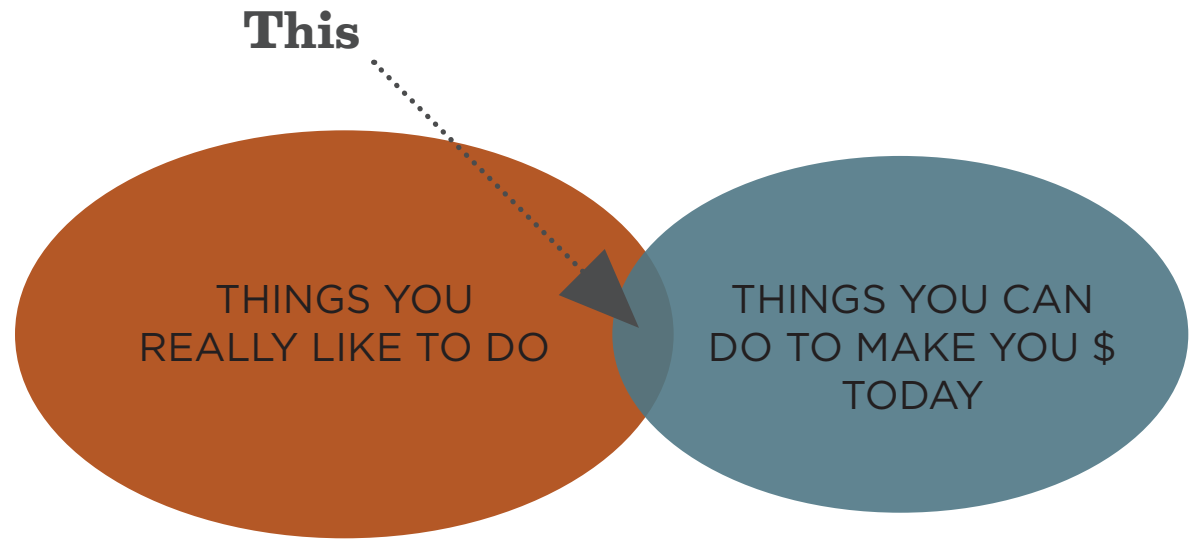
Please don't shoot the messenger.

Remember the good news: You can do a lot better than AdSense. You can give your visitors something better on your own, and in the end you'll benefit more too.

THE ANSWER IS TO FIRE GOOGLE AND HIRE YOURSELF

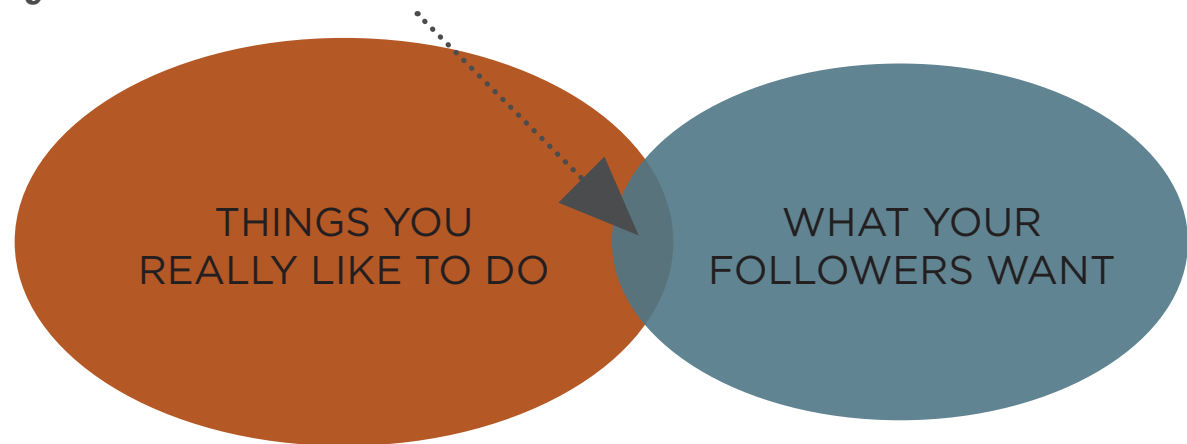
For the reasons outlined above, AdSense was out for me. The aesthetic sucks, the value is questionable, and in the end I knew that success would be dependent on the whims of Google.

The alternative for me (and many other people using this model) was to find a way to directly meet the needs of my followers by doing what I already love to do. Naturally, you can't get paid for everything you love, but there is usually a sweet spot of convergence between what you love and what people want to pay for. [Clay Collins](#) illustrates this concept well with the following diagram:



When it comes to beginning the process of monetizing your online space, Clay's model can be adapted as follows:

Things you like to do that help your followers



UNDERSTANDING WHAT FOLLOWERS WANT

Remember, people follow other people to be informed, entertained, and inspired. Generally, your content must clearly address at least at least one of these needs. Some of the best advice I heard about going from an average site to a remarkable one came from John Wesley over at [Pick the Brain](#). This is what he said:

“With our site there was definitely a turning point where it went from being about what I wanted to what the readers wanted. This attitude has been a big part of our success in growing the site.”

That advice was excellent. Since John first said that in a round-up interview I did, I’ve thought about it at least a couple of times a month when planning my new content.⁴

⁴ AT THE SAME TIME, YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL WHO YOU LISTEN TO. REMEMBER THAT IF YOU ARE DOING THINGS RIGHT, YOU ARE GOING TO GET ALL KINDS OF FEEDBACK AND REACTION TO YOUR PROJECT. IN THE END, YOU ARE THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DIRECTION YOU CHOOSE.

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As your influence grows, you'll likely pick up on a few trends that come through in the interaction between you and your readers. Admittedly, I was a bit slow with this in the beginning. I wrote about traveling the world without clearly explaining how I did it and what it cost. After I answered about 50 individual emails that all asked the same questions, I realized I should provide more comprehensive solutions.

I started by writing a short report on finding Discount Airfare. I was very careful in explaining to my readers what was going on — I'd be adding this ebook and a few other things as side products, while all of my regular writing would continue to be free to everyone. I also explained that no one should feel any obligation to purchase anything from me.

The first two days of the launch, I sold about \$1,200 in digital downloads of the report. As product launches go, \$1,200 isn't much to brag about. However, I was excited because a) it was the first commercial product on my non-commercial site, b) the marketing was deliberately low-key, c) the ebook was very low-cost (\$24.95), and d) the content was targeted mostly to U.S. and Canadian residents, while my overall site audience is worldwide.

When I sold \$5,000 in downloads the first day, I knew I had found a critical convergence point with my community.

The other pressing concern I heard from my readers was about getting started working online. Since I've always been self-employed through a variety of online marketing ventures, I had wrongly assumed that everyone knows how this works. Of course, this isn't the case, so I created an in-depth project called *The Unconventional Guide to Working for Yourself*. This product was far more successful, and when I sold \$5,000 in downloads the first day, I knew I had found a critical convergence point with my community.

LISTENING

When you consistently interact with your community over time, you'll likely pick up on the general topics they are interested in. To go deeper — or if you're not sure where to find the overlapping circle we looked at from Clay's diagram — I recommend you directly ask your readers what they want and how you can help them.

I do this with [Survey Monkey](#), which costs \$19.95 for the professional service. You can also use any number of free tools, or you could hack it out yourself with Google Docs, but I like the simplicity of Survey Monkey.

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To do this right, you want to allow for both open-ended answers and answers where your audience provides feedback about a couple of different ideas. If you've never done this before, I guarantee you'll learn a lot of interesting things about your readers. The two most important questions to ask in this kind of survey are:

- 1** In 1-2 sentences, why do you visit [name of site]?
- 2** What is the most important thing I can help people with?

If you've thought further along about some specific products or services, you can also ask about them:

"I'm thinking of creating the Complete Guide to Kangaroos. Based solely on the title, what do you think?"

Choose One:

- I love it and would buy it now*
- Sounds Interesting*
- Would Need to Hear More*
- Not Interested*

Again, there are an infinite number of ways you can optimize this process, and many serious internet marketers have become extremely successful by doing so. What I want to show you is that you can do it in a very basic way and still learn a great deal about how to meet your followers' needs. As for me, my goal is to build a community and focus mostly on my writing. I keep a number of other things simple to ensure I don't lose that focus.

A FEW EXAMPLES

I'm happy to offer my own experiences, but I'm far from the only ProBlogger using this model. In fact, many people are doing this much better and more efficiently than I am. Let's take a look around the blogosphere at a few different examples of unconventional success.

HAVI BROOKS (+ SELMA THE DUCK), THE FLUENT SELF

When I first saw [Havi's site](#), I felt like it was written in another language. I honestly had no idea what it was about, but something drew me in. I kept going back, and on my third visit I finally "got" it: Havi helps people rewrite their bad patterns and turn them into good ones. There's more

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**HAVI BROOKS & SELMA**

to it, of course, but once you realize how powerful this practice can be, you'll understand why Havi is on the road to becoming a worldwide superstar(Germany, Israel, Oregon, and beyond).

One of the principles I especially like about Havi's work is her identification of what she calls "right people." As mentioned earlier, there is no everyone. Some people will naturally be drawn to you — and Havi calls them your right people. It doesn't mean there is anything wrong with the other people, it just means that you and them are not the best match.

In addition to her products (some of them co-produced with Naomi Dunford from [ittybiz](#), another unconventional success story), Havi recently created a private community called At the Kitchen Table. She earns one-third of her income through Twitter - despite the fact that she does not actively promote products there. If you feel you "don't have time" for social networking, I'd suggest you [read more](#) about what Havi is doing.

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**DAVE NAVARRO****DAVE NAVARRO, ROCK YOUR DAY**

From a home base in North Carolina, Brooklyn native [Dave Navarro](#) helps people wake up early, be more productive, and create self-discipline that produces optimal results — all practices that he knows about from personal experience. For the past nine months, Dave has been getting up at 5:00 a.m. every day to work on his business before heading out to an office.

His “real job” is as a Senior Software QA Manager for a major defense contractor, but lunchtime and late evenings are also spent plugging away at the business. While Dave doesn’t want to speculate, I suspect a major change is coming up very soon. If and when that happens, I know it will be because of the great value he provides to his customers. In addition to the personal development products, Dave also does product launch coaching for small and mid-size businesses.

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SONIEI

SONIEI, SELF-REPRESENTED ARTIST

I've focused on blogging for much of this report because I'm a writer, but what if you want to make a living as a visual artist? If that's you, take a look at [Soniei](#), a painter from Halifax, Nova Scotia who sells directly to customers through eBay, Etsy, and her web site.

SonieI works full-time on her art and uses social media to build a broad network of followers, customers, and fellow artists. She also does some very cool things with video, including a series where you can watch her create a painting from start to finish. The downturn in the economy has had a negative impact on sales (she went from \$40,000 in 2006 to about \$2,000 a month now), but like me, Soniei values freedom more than anything else.

"I wake up everyday and I work on whatever it is I feel like working on that day," she told me. "I love working at home, drinking tea and watching my auctions. I just love it. Passion comes first."



Be yourself, because everyone else is already taken.

Havi, Dave, and Soniei are remarkably different from each other, yet they have all forged a new career for themselves through unique products and social media. One of the things that it is most interesting (and most compelling) about this business is that there is effectively no competition. I could not compete with Havi if I wanted to — she has her right people, and no one else can be Havi Brooks. Likewise, no one else can be you. In the words of Oscar Wilde, “Be yourself, because everyone else is already taken.”

I chose to feature success stories that are not (yet) widely known outside of their primary spheres of influence. This is because sometimes people think you have to become an internet rock star or sell marketing products to be able to support yourself. This is definitely not the case. If you’re looking for more examples, I highly recommend [Pamela Slim](#) (my superhero and book-writing mentor), [Dan Duhrkook](#), [Andrea Scher](#), and [Lea Woodward](#).

These people are extremely cool and worth following on their own merit (I am a big fan of each of them). However, I recommend you check out what they’re doing even if their specific market doesn’t interest you. You

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can learn a great deal simply by observing how they build momentum and sustain a community over time.

SCALING UP

By the way, if you get excited about building products or services for your community, here are a number of other topics you may want to research online:

- 🌐 Upsells
- 🌐 Crossells
- 🌐 Teleseminars
- 🌐 Webinars
- 🌐 Physical Products
- 🌐 Continuity Programs / Membership Sites
- 🌐 Camtasia
- 🌐 Outsourcing
- 🌐 Merchant Account
- 🌐 Affiliate Programs
- 🌐 Landing Pages
- 🌐 Adwords
- 🌐 Clickbank

It's not easy to gain someone's trust, and the trust your followers give you should be kept sacred above all.

But wait! Don't be overwhelmed with that list. If you don't know about those things, the sky will not fall down. All of them can help you grow the business side of your venture, but remember that it is far more important to keep building great (free) content and bringing people into your network.

You can let a lot of things go and still be successful, but you can't out-source the reason why people came to you in the first place. It's not easy to gain someone's trust, and the trust your followers give you should be kept sacred above all.

Also, it's better to JUST GET STARTED with something rather than getting lost in the details. A wise person once said, "The gap between ignorance and knowledge is much less than the gap between knowledge and action."

HOW TO DO THIS

By the way, the logistics behind making your first information product (typically an ebook) are extremely easy. You write 30 pages of helpful info and compile it into a PDF. Then you get a \$10/month account with [e-junkie](#) and link it to your [PayPal account](#). The e-junkie service will give

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you an order link you give to your followers. The people who want it will click the link, send you money, and instantly receive the product. There are innumerable ways to make this process more complex, but this way will work just fine.

A FEW TIPS ON LAUNCHING YOUR FIRST PRODUCT

- 🌐 Some people will say it's too expensive no matter how low the price is. Other people would gladly pay more, no matter how high the price.
- 🌐 When you first introduce something for sale, some people will complain that you are "selling out," no matter what you do. You have to expect and accept this. In fact, you can acknowledge the skepticism and use it to your advantage. (For examples, see how I did this [here](#) and [here](#).)
- 🌐 Set expectations and communicate clearly. Tell your readers exactly what's happening and what your long-term plan is for the site.

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- ④ **Product Launch 101:** don't just put up a link one day and say, hey, here's my product. Instead, build up to it. Tell people when you're working on it. Tell them when it's almost done. Tell them who it will help, how it will help them, why you decided to create the product, and so on. Make prospects and buyers feel special.
- ④ Begin creating a funnel. Your first product launch should set up the next, and so on. Some of the later products should be higher priced, provide more information, and be more exclusive. Not everyone who purchases the initial product will purchase the later ones, but many will. Again, this is something you can worry about after you get up and running — but it's good to keep it in mind.

P A R T

.....
3

Short Notes on Vampires, Rule-Break- ing, Email Lists, etc.

THE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

HARD WORK AND WORKING FOR FREE

LOGISTICS

WRAP-UP: GO AND BE AWESOME

Perhaps it's the anonymity of the internet, but there's nothing like a popular blog post to cause vampires to crawl out from their castles and start looking for blood.

THE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

In the World Domination manifesto, I wrote about the critics who derive their self-worth from bringing other people down. From time to time I return to this subject on the site, because it's important to educate the rest of us about the threat from these kinds of people.

Conversation Agent [Valeria Maltoni](#) calls these kind of people “energy-sucking vampires,” and I think that's an accurate description. Instead of contributing value, vampires attempt to take life away from others. Since I've become more active in online media over the past year, I've noticed that a significant number of these vampires also like to congregate online. Perhaps it's the anonymity of the internet, but there's nothing like a popular blog post to cause vampires to crawl out from their castles and start looking for blood.

Most input you'll receive from vampires is one-sided and abrasive, but some of it is also downright bizarre. I have received ten-paragraph emails with long rants about subjects I haven't even written about. I have a private gallery of shame for some of these messages, and a few favorites include:

The rest of his email was an 8-point outline complete with footnotes. At the end of the message he said, “I hope you will improve on these issues.” Seriously!

- ④ The guy who began the message with, “Nice try, Chris. Allow me to tell you the 8 things you are doing wrong.” No kidding — the rest of his email was an 8-point outline *complete with footnotes*. At the end of the message he said, “I hope you will improve on these issues.” Seriously!
- ④ The person who ended a long, profanity-filled rant with, “I have unsubscribed from your newsletter and will no longer visit your site.” (Two weeks later, I got another note from the same person: “Let me tell you how upset I am about your latest post...” Wait — I thought we had said goodbye!)
- ④ The one where someone asked for a refund because the ebook did not meet their expectations “even though I haven’t had time to read it yet.” (When I read that, I thought, “Product Use FAIL.”)

At first I thought it was just me, since I have the whole “unconventional living” theme going, but my friends have confirmed to me that pretty much anyone who develops an online following ends up with their share

of detractors. You can be writing about how to plant flowers for world peace, and once your site becomes popular, the vampires will find you.

It seems that the hyperbole of the internet takes over in full force with some vampires, who strangely enough don't usually provide links to their own blogs. It reminds me of [this article](#) in my favorite non-newspaper, *The Onion*. I'm telling you, it can be brutal out there... BUT DON'T GIVE IN TO THESE PEOPLE. Don't let them win. The rest of us want you to continue.

Remember, no statues are erected to critics. There may be a statue erected to a vampire somewhere, but after visiting 107 countries, I haven't seen one yet.

HARD WORK (AND WORKING FOR FREE)

Assuming you can get past the occasional vampire, you'll have to be willing to work hard and work for free. Steve Pavlina has said that [anyone can be a full-time blogger](#) — they just have to be willing to put in about five years to get there. I'm here to tell you that it can be done in less than a year, but it's still going to take some work and there are no guarantees.

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I work harder than most people I know, and the other unconventional success stories mentioned in this report do the same. Sometimes when I'm traveling in Asia, I set my alarm clock for 3:00 a.m. so I can get up, moderate site comments, and go back to sleep. In Mauritius a journalist wanted to interview me on a tight deadline. It was midnight and I had been up for 36 hours after flying in from the U.S. I was half-asleep and mosquitoes were crawling around the desk lamp in my small guesthouse, but I answered the questions in full and met the deadline.

From what I can tell, this behavior is not unusual. If you don't travel around the world like I do, hopefully you won't need to get up at 3:00 a.m. or worry about wifi access from country to country, but you'll have your own sacrifices to make.

In addition to working hard, you have to be willing to work for free for an unknown period of time. I did a round-up interview on "Insane Business Strategies" once, where I asked a number of entrepreneurs to send in their stories of insane things they had done when their business was in the startup stage.

Working for free may be insane in the outside world, but with most small businesses it is actually quite normal.

I got back some great stories, but I also noticed a disturbing trend in some of the other emails. Several people all said that they were insane to work for free when first starting their business. When I read those comments, I thought, “Am I missing something here? I thought everyone works for free when they are starting something new. That’s the whole point of risk and reward.”

Working for free may be insane in the outside world, but with most small businesses it is actually quite normal. A branded space in social media is effectively a small business, so think about that before you jump in. I don’t mean to deter you in any way. If anything, your chances of success will greatly increase as long as you understand what you’re getting into.

RULE-BREAKING

When establishing your online brand, you can break some of the conventional rules, but usually not all at the same time. Here are the ones I was able to break without too many negative consequences.

Decided to use my own name as the URL

In the beginning I chose to host my site on ChrisGuillebeau.com, even though the domains *ArtofNonconformity.com* and *.org* also redirect to the site. This was not an easy decision, and a couple of people have graciously pointed out that *Guillebeau* is not exactly an easy name to remember or spell. Yes, I'm aware of that — I go through life telling airline agents, restaurant staff, and anyone I meet, "It's OK, just call me Chris."

If your online space is called *Dooce* or *Happiness Project*, that's probably better than a name like mine. However, my theory was that in the end, the content, design, and marketing would make much more of a difference than the URL.

Wrote about several things instead of one niche topic

I chose to connect deep and wide on a number of related subjects. I tied them together in a theme (nonconformity, or "unconventional living") but admittedly, the theme is fairly loose. I wanted to write about my adventures traveling to every country in the world, but I also wanted to present my outlook on life.

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Rather than pigeonhole myself and choose one of these themes, I wanted to find a way to do it all. I knew it wouldn't attract everyone, but as previously mentioned, attracting everyone is not an effective strategy. Whether this is the best strategy for you or not depends. You should choose what's important to *you and your group of followers*.

It is probably easier to achieve success (remember, you define what this means, no one else) with a more specific niche. But in the long-run, I think I will attract more followers by doing what I know how to do best. For me, that is a mix of things — “Unconventional Strategies for Life, Work, and Travel” is what I call it — so that's what I've stuck with.

LINKS ARE THE CURRENCY OF THE INTERNET

I couldn't figure out who first said that, but it is absolutely true. No one will give you links without you earning them. To earn them, you'll need to do something remarkable. When you receive inbound links, it's like getting paid. This may be literal if you have ads or products, but even if not, you are being rewarded with new readers.

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As for your side, you'll want to actively post links that help other people look good (the people you link to) and help your readers find interesting material. Your personal goal may be to get noticed — this is not a bad thing — but you'll *accomplish* the goal by helping people and reaching out as much as possible without too many expectations.

EMAIL VS. RSS

If all you offer is RSS, you're missing out. Take the time to build the email list and give readers a reason to join. You can do this the easy way by simply including a [Feedburner email sign-up link](#). However, you can do much better by taking the time to set up a dedicated platform.

The better way is to provide content not otherwise available on the site. I do this through a "[6 Ways to Change the World](#)" email series. I also offer my email list product discounts and advance previews of reports like this one.

TRACK THE STATS, BUT NOT TOO OFTEN

After you've established a strong foundation, you may find it prudent to avoid checking your stats all the time. In the beginning, it's helpful to pay attention to what will hopefully be steady growth. (It's easy to grow

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when you start with 10 visitors a day.) After you've moved beyond the beginning stages, however, checking stats all the time can be emotionally unhealthy. I check my stats on the first of the month — that's it. I put the numbers in an Excel spreadsheet, and this is what I track:

- 🌐 Unique Visitors
- 🌐 Page Views
- 🌐 Page Views / Visitor
- 🌐 Inbound Links
- 🌐 Technorati Ranking

After I added products, I started including these metrics as well:

- 🌐 Products Sold
- 🌐 Net Income
- 🌐 # of Active Affiliates

Obviously you could track a lot more, but this basic information provides a good snapshot. I'm not a heavily quantitative person and I would rather spend my time on writing and marketing.

SITE COMMENTS ARE GOOD, BUT NOT ALWAYS REPRESENTATIVE

If you're writing a blog, some commentors are your true fans. They'll post on almost every entry, they'll cheer you on, and defend you when you're criticized. Don't take these people for granted. Send them a note thanking them for their support.

You should also be aware, however, that the readers who comment are not always representative of your broader readership. Most likely, the vast majority (98%+) of your readership does not even participate in the comments section. If you begin crafting your content strictly to meet the needs of your commentors, you may be missing the silent majority that faithfully reads along but never feels the need to respond through the comments.

Remember, different people choose to interact in different ways, and you want to make them all feel welcome. For example, some people regularly email me about the comments on the site even though they don't participate in them.

Also, this may cause some hardcore folks to shudder, but your web site is not a democracy and there is nothing wrong with closing comments

If comment management is killing you or you find yourself too emotionally attached to it, turn it off for 30 days to see what happens.

altogether. [Seth Godin](#) has done it, as has [Steve Pavlina](#). If you think that only “big-name” bloggers can get away with this, think again. Naomi at [ittyBiz did this a while back](#), and she still gets traffic, visitors, trackbacks, and so on. If comment management is killing you or you find yourself too emotionally attached to it, turn it off for 30 days to see what happens.

(Note: I *do* still have comments on my site, and I enjoy the conversation that takes place. I’m just saying that providing a forum for comments is not *necessary* for your success, nor should the number of comments be the metric of your success.)

THE WRAP-UP: HERE IS WHERE YOU GET SOLD

ON SOMETHING

If you’ve read reports like this before, you may be expecting a good sales pitch at the end. It usually goes like this:

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“I’M CREATING A MASTERMIND
GROUP, BUT I ONLY HAVE 7 SLOTS
LEFT. EACH SLOT COSTS ONLY
\$10,000 A YEAR...”

“I’VE MADE AN AWESOME \$499
PRODUCT THAT YOU NEED TO BUY
OR THE ROOF WILL CAVE IN
ON YOU...”

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That could be fun, but actually I have nothing to sell to you. Sorry. I do have a few products on my site, and [you can take a look if something suits you](#). I also have an anti-marketing policy, which means that you should keep your money unless you have a compelling reason to buy something from me.

Assuming you'd like to keep your money, you can help in two important, simple ways:

SPREAD THE NEWS OF THIS MANIFESTO.

Remember, links are the currency of the internet. Do you think I've earned your endorsement? If so, consider posting a link to it on your web site (use <http://chrisguillebeau.com/3x5/overnight-success>) or simply send it on to people you know who could benefit from it. You can also add value by telling your own story and helping others from a different perspective.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, GET OUT THERE AND BE AWESOME!

If you read this report out of curiosity, no problem. There is certainly more than one way to change the world. On the other hand, if you're in

If you have something to say, go and say it. Keep working. Be awesome.

the target audience of writers, bloggers, and online artists, I hope you keep going. The world needs more people like you. If you have something to say, go and say it. Keep working. Be awesome.

That's the most important thing you can do, because if you're in the process of creating a community, then what you say will be important to people. Give them what they need. Challenge them and help them, simultaneously.

If you'd like to make a career out of it, perseverance and authenticity are more important than being a genius. If I can do it, anyone can.

Let's conclude with an old Chinese proverb:

“THE PERSON WHO SAYS
SOMETHING IS IMPOSSIBLE
SHOULD NOT INTERRUPT THE
PERSON WHO IS DOING IT.”

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With that, the conversation is yours. Keep rocking the universe, and ignore anyone who tells you it's impossible.

Will you be the next overnight success?



POST YOUR FEEDBACK HERE:

<http://chrisguillebeau.com/3x5/overnight-success>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm grateful for everyone who took a chance on me, especially in the early days. J.D. Roth from [Get Rich Slowly](#) was one of the first A-list bloggers to help me out. He even put me up at the "Roth Hotel" when I got stuck in his city during inclement weather! What a cool guy.

Thanks to everyone who was kind enough to link to my content, follow me on [Twitter](#), post a site comment, or otherwise endorse my work. You guys are great! I am extremely honored.

Thanks to the people who I've met up with in my travels so far — in Seattle, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Cairo, Tunis, Amman, Damascus, Bangkok, Johannesburg, London, the guy at the Jason Mraz concert who asked, "Do you write the *Art of Nonconformity* blog?" and those who have sent invitations to visit from 30 countries and counting.

I'm really excited about meeting many more people over the next couple of years. I recently took a survey and asked readers why they come to my site, and one of them said:

“YOU HELP ME KNOW I’M NOT CRAZY
TO THINK THE WAY I DO.”

I loved that. Thanks, so much, to you and everyone else out there. You’re not crazy; the rest of the world is. Go and create your own overnight success, no matter how many days it takes you.

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RESOURCES

279-DAY OVERNIGHT SUCCESS PAGE

You can download a nice-looking version of the *Blog Action Plan* and get more info here:

<http://chrisguillebeau.com/279>

(The Overnight Success page also includes What Not to Do, Launching a Consulting Service, and several other sections not included here.)

“6 WAYS” NEWSLETTER

I’d love to have you in my small army of remarkable people. By joining my email newsletter, you’ll also get the free “6 Ways to Change the World” series that is not available on the site:

<http://chrisguillebeau.com/3x5/a-small-army-of-remarkable-people>

AMAZING DESIGN WORK

If you need help with high-end web or ebook design, please contact my designer, [Reese Spykerman](#). My success is directly related to the time, talent, and energy she gives to make me look bigger than I am.