

# Essential Strategies for Earning with Affiliate Links

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## Introduction to Affiliate Earnings

**Affiliate earnings are viewed by some as the pot of gold! Stick someone else's ad on your page, and you get paid every time someone uses that link to go to the merchant site and make a purchase.**

**Affiliate programs are good for merchants – people come to their site, and they make purchases (usually). The merchant only pays for 100% effective marketing. Not a bad deal for them.**

**You are not their employee. You are an independent business owner.**

### **Wait a minute! Did I say “business owner”?**

Yup. It does not matter if you did not want to own a business. It does not matter that you just wanted a little income on the side. **Uncle Sam says, if you earn money “on the side”, then it is self-employment income.** You have to report it, and you have to pay taxes on it, including self-employment taxes. The merchant companies that you receive commissions from WILL report your earnings to the government. You are in business! Treat it like a business, and you actually have a good chance of succeeding!

**I've joined hundreds of affiliate programs. I've received checks from exactly five.** Those five were good ones, and I earned from them because I worked at earning from them. Some of the ones that worked took 6 months before they got a single sale. The amount of money was fair for the amount of work I put in. I learned the hard way to earn from affiliate links.

### **The way it works, is this:**

The merchant sets up an affiliate tracking system – they may use their own, they may have one built-into their shopping cart, or they may contract it to another company. If they contract it, your commissions may be lower. They may also use Clickbank, which is a combination affiliate manager and payment processor.

The affiliate software puts a tracking code into the link. They give you a custom link – no one else has one like it. Some are short. Some are very long.

When someone uses the software, they usually get a cookie (bit of code) dropped onto their computer by the affiliate software. Their purchases are tracked back to your referral by use of that cookie – when they go to check out, the cart checks the cookie to see who they were referred by.

The amount of the order is then passed to the affiliate manager, and your account is credited. Of course, if the payment is not valid, or of a refund is issued, the commission that you earned will also be reversed.

Most affiliate programs pay per sale – you only get paid if the shop owner gets paid. A few rare ones pay per click or per lead, but they are almost impossible to find.

**It all sounds like a great way to earn. You don't have to carry any product, you don't have to fill orders, you just have to market someone else's stuff.**

**And you really can earn from it. But it is not easy. It is work, just like any other business. Affiliate earnings come from treating it like a business.**

In actual practice, probably 90% of affiliates never earn a single penny. Because they don't understand how to do it right – there are plenty of people telling them that it is easy, when it isn't, or that all they have to do is buy the system, which doesn't work, or that they just need to do this one simple thing to make it work, which DOESN'T work! **Lots of people have motives for telling you that things will work when they don't. That is because they are telling you what they want you to do, not what you NEED to do. They are instructing you for THEIR benefit, not yours!**

There are strategies that can help you earn more successfully. **They take knowledge (you can get it if you don't have it), patience, intelligent analysis, and diligent application.** But they have the potential to return an income that justifies the effort. Whether they do, or not, depends a lot on what you do, and how you do it, and how long you stick it out.

I can't promise you'll make a fortune. I can promise that I'll be honest with you, and tell you what I know about improving your chances of earning well with carefully selected affiliate links. That is the most anyone can honestly promise you.

## A Little History

In the early days of affiliate programs (which came along just after the internet matured enough to allow tracking cookies!), they were hot news. **Hey, take a site you put up for fun, stick an affiliate link on it, and BAM! Instant income!**

Even in those days it wasn't quite that easy, but it was admittedly easier than it is now! Amazon.com was one of the original big players, and they still are. People used to actually make money with Amazon links (now only sites with HUGE traffic can).

**Well, shortly after affiliate programs became a possibility, the vultures started circling.** They began a second enterprise – one of profiting not from the affiliate links, but from telling other people how to profit from affiliate links. **Problem is, most of the books out there are just plain bunk. Someone wrote it who only knew how to profit dishonestly, or who really didn't know as much as they were pretending to know!**

Unfortunately, most of the affiliates knew even less than the scammers – leaving them targets for bad advice. Their inexperience did not help them to know that there was an alternative. Sites proliferated everywhere – you've seen them, I'm sure – nothing but pages of affiliate links. A whole page, with banner after banner. Nothing interesting there. Nobody clicks, they want to run away as fast as possible! Don't you?

**Theories abounded. Most of them wrong. Because most theories left out the principle of work. And it does take work. A few instructional manuals did mention the work that had to be done, but since there were so many promising an easy way, they were largely ignored.**

Back then, merchants rushed to install affiliate software – but only a few did a good job of setting up a quality program. They gave their affiliates bad ads, bad landing pages, and did a poor job of selling the product once the customer landed. They did not help their affiliates learn how to do it right either. Small wonder they got few clicks, and no sales.

During the last several years, it has evolved. Management options are now more affordable than ever, and more functional than ever. There is no reason for a merchant to not provide a quality program (but it takes work on their part too!). Unfortunately, many startup affiliate programs are still bad, but there are a lot more good ones out there. It is now the responsibility of the affiliates to FIND the quality programs, and then to do their part to make it profitable.

**The upshot is that while misinformation is more common, and more affiliate programs exist to confuse the issue, the potentials are actually BETTER, if you learn how to use them right, and if you learn how to choose good ones to start with.**

## The Stuff that NEVER Works!

**I don't care how many people tell you that certain things will work, they will not. Statistics will bear me out on this, with each point that I make below.**

**There are specific tactics that do not work.** Many of them are still promoted by ignorant or unscrupulous people, who have a motive for trying to persuade you that they do, but they don't. Not if you are honest, and rarely even if you are dishonest!

**Here are some of the things we see over and over that do not work:**

1. **Sticking it there and leaving it.** That means, putting up a page on whatever topic, and throwing affiliate links or banners into it and walking away. This kind does not earn.
2. **Affiliate programs that are hugely popular and which only pay for new customers** (great for the merchant, horrid for the affiliates, especially the small ones). If the program is hugely popular, and they only pay for new customers, then you can have 100s of people click through your links and make purchases, and you won't get credit for them – some companies do not credit you for repeat visits, only for new customer purchases. Someone else will have beaten you to it.
3. **Non-targeted affiliate links.** Affiliate links that are just thrown onto a page, regardless of relevancy, won't earn. They look like spammy ads, and people do not click those.
4. **Affiliate programs with 0 cookie life, or poor tracking methods.** I have personally referred someone to an affiliate program, and waited while they clicked through and made the purchase, and then was not credited for the purchase – more than once with one program. Some programs are like that. You do the work, they never pay. These are rare, and it is more often tracking failure than human intent. But it still stinks.
5. **Huge pages of nothing but affiliate links.** The internet equivalent to the back alleyway plastered with disreputable ads. No one wants to go there.
6. **Review pages with nothing but positive reviews and an affiliate link on every review.** Come on! How transparent can you be? Affiliate links that work do so because of trust and sincerity, not blatant pushiness.
7. **Spamming. It is illegal, rude, obnoxious, and ineffective.** Spamming includes sending email to anyone who did not ask for that SPECIFICALLY, or who did not give you permission to send ads to them.
8. **Quick Opt-In List strategies, one page websites, and other internet scam tactics.** They don't work. They don't work for other businesses, and they don't work for affiliate links.
9. **PayPerClick if you are unskilled at optimizing ads and keywords.** PayPerClick is a skill. One that takes training, trial and error, and patience – plus money. It isn't the equivalent to the money faucet. A lot more runs down the drain than what comes out of the faucet, unless you have experience and training.
10. **Bad Marketing Tactics.** There are a ton of them. We'll list some in the back of the book. If you don't market your business, or if you use ineffective or harmful tactics, you won't ever earn anything.

**I repeat... just in case you didn't quite understand that I really mean it. This stuff never works. It will waste your time. Whatever you do, it has to be different than the stuff that always fails.**

Fortunately, there are many choices that DO work. They all start with some education and understanding of the things that make good affiliate programs work for both sides of the partnership.

## Partnerships and Reputations

The first key thing to understand if you are going to be a profitable affiliate (that means you earn for you, and for them), is that your relationship with the affiliate company is one of a partner. **Partners cooperate together for mutual benefit. They aren't doing you any favors, and you don't slave for nothing. You work together.**

**Your ability to profit hangs on two things: Your ability to successfully market the product, and their ability to follow through. Some is dependent upon your reputation, some upon theirs.**

If you market in dishonorable ways, you tarnish your reputation. But at the same time, since you are using their company name, you can also damage their reputation. This is why most good affiliate programs have use terms which prohibit you from using certain types of advertising. They wisely take the minimum efforts to protect their reputation.

**The way in which you market has the most profound influence on your own reputation.** And as with all businesses, your reputation builds into a powerful tool to increase your marketing power long term, or it grows to be the biggest marketing hindrance that any business can face. **Remember, you are a business now, not just an invisible person. The most effective affiliates know this, treat it like a business, and use marketing methods that help a good reputation work for them over time.**

It is wise to do so, because a reputation is the number one factor in building momentum from marketing over time. When you start a business, nobody knows you, nobody gives a rip whether you succeed or not. Do it right, and people come to trust you. They come back, and they bring their friends. Other people like what you do, they pick you up as a resource – not just a business they like, but an asset that they can recommend to other people, which makes THEM look more helpful and increases THEIR credibility too. When you give other businesses the ability to look good by referring you, your marketing takes on a life of its own, and your marketing efforts and dollars go much further.

**This all happens slowly, over time – 6 months to even see that it might someday happen. 1 year to know that it probably will with your business, and to see some evidences of it beginning to build. 2 years to really start to have an appreciable effect on your business.**

You are in this for the long haul. **You don't earn from affiliate links if you are going to play with business.** You have to develop a business plan for revenue generation, and to promote your business. Then you have to stick it out. If you do, and if you work your business honorably, your reputation will grow along with your efforts, and will eventually help you reach a point where you get more back than what you put in.

**Businesses pay their dues. Everyone has to. The payoff is incredible though. And if you do it smart, affiliate links can be a means of earning all by themselves, or they can provide supplementary income so that what you really want to do is more profitable, sooner.**

Protect your reputation, and protect the reputation of the companies that you partner with, by being honorable and smart about how you market. We'll explain just how to do that in the next chapters.

## Types of Affiliate Programs

**There are basically three types of affiliate programs. We are talking about management of them here, not how they actually work from company to company.**

**The first is third-party managed.** A lot of affiliate management companies have come and gone, but only one has really stuck around through it all, and that is Commission Junction. Performics is now another biggie, but hasn't been around as long as CJ.

These companies provide all of the integration, support and management software, and even pay the affiliates. They are fairly expensive to get into, so typically only larger companies use them. Many of the companies that use them offer low commissions, and you'll see pages of mid-range brand names.

**The second type is a variation on third-party managed, and that is essentially ClickBank.** They are a combination payment processor and affiliate manager. Commissions tend to be a high percentage with CB, it is not terribly costly to get into, but it is widely used by many marginal writers and producers. It is so popular within the scammy internet marketing world, that entire programs are developed around using CB to earn. Unfortunately, they do not work, for reasons we'll cover later. The only way you can really make money with CB affiliate links is to either not care about WHAT you sell, and push it on anybody, or to carefully select just a product or two to promote, making sure they are relevant to your site content.

I am not a fan of ClickBank, for many reasons, even though I have received paychecks from them (though that is much harder than it sounds). If you choose to use ClickBank affiliate links, read their terms of use very carefully, and do some research on how they pay, and when, and how many orders you have to get under what circumstances in order to get a paycheck.

**The third type is where most of the real gems are found, and that is through independently managed affiliate programs.** This category consists of a wide range of built-in or hosted affiliate management solutions. The difference between them and the first category is that all of them have checks issued by the merchant directly. You get varying degrees of support, terms will vary widely, some will be well prepared and some will not. The management software will have different kinds of interfaces, and you won't have the convenience of a central login for multiple merchants.

**The degree to which these vary in quality is huge. So you really have to do your homework and check out the company. BUT, your chances of finding a unique product that you can really feel good about (and that not just anybody recommends), and your chance of offering something valuable to your own visitors and clientele is much greater.**

This last type is the hardest to find (we'll cover that next). They are my personal favorite though.

Which type of affiliate programs you work with should not depend on what kind they are, it should depend on what they offer that you feel good about selling.

**Start with the product.**

## Selecting Good Affiliate Programs

**Before you choose a program, you have to FIND one! Actually, it is easy to find affiliate programs, but less simple to find good ones.**

As I said, smaller, independent ones are my personal preference because I can match the products more closely to the venues and topics in which I have a high degree of experience, or which compliment pages or services I already have. They also tend to be the ones with the items that are harder to find, so you can offer someone a real treasure.

**Finding small, independent affiliate program is not easy. You don't do it by going looking for affiliate programs.** Rather, you start with companies that DO what you need, and see which of the companies you trust have an affiliate program. This is the best strategy both short term and long term, because it puts you in the position of getting affiliate programs because of who they are, not because you just want something to pay.

If you have a page on Exercise in the Winter, then you might be interested in warm jogging shoes, lightly insulated exercise clothing, treadmills, exercise videos, etc. Instead of doing a Google search for "winter exercise affiliate program", you'd simply search for "exercise video", "winter jogging shoes", or other topics directly. Go in a few pages deep on the search, and look for companies that are not in the top tier – you don't want Wal-Mart. You want a lesser known company that makes a unique product that you cannot get just anywhere. When you find it, then see if they have an affiliate program.

**I also strongly recommend to new business owners, or those that are going into a new arena, to start with their own strengths and interests.** Promote things you love, things you know enough about to promote intelligently. If you are creating a page or selling a service that would naturally be complemented by something that pops into your mind, then go see if there is an affiliate program for it.

**Affiliate programs which are operated by established businesses will generally be more stable than brand new businesses with a new affiliate program. The age of the business is generally of more importance than the age of the affiliate program.**

If there is any question of the integrity of the affiliate program, do a net search for "(program name) scam", and see if there are widespread complaints. I've only ever had problems with two affiliate programs – one because of their weird payment terms, another because their system did not credit purchases correctly.

**Don't join a program unless you know how and where you can promote it. Remember, slapping ads on a page does not work – programs that match your content and which work well with your themes and interests will be simple to promote, and you can do so more successfully.**

## Overview of Promotional Methods

I've mentioned a number of methods that do NOT work to make money from affiliate programs. The following is an overview of types of promotion that DO work for affiliate programs.

### Affiliate Income to Enhance Existing Assets

Many people already have a website, or an existing business. Sometimes a website put up for non-commercial reasons can get enough traffic to start an owner wondering whether there is any income potential in it. There are a range of successful ways to add affiliate links or referrals into existing business lines.

1. **By adding links to content-relevant pages.** This is pretty much a no-brainer. To work well though, the ads must be well chosen, and well placed.
2. **By creating new pages to promote the links.** Do this if you want to give a personal recommendation for an item, or if you want to send search engine traffic directly to it.
3. **By recommending to customers a service or product that compliments what you do,** and for which you earn a commission. It is generally polite to tell them that you'll receive a commission for it. I've found that if you treat your customers well and they feel that you are always trying to help them, they are happy to use your link, and pleased to have a way to "pay you back" a bit if they need the item you recommend. This is NOT the same as pushing products on your customers that they did not ask for – what I mean is, I am a webmaster. It is natural for me to recommend reliable hosting to my clients, and I have an affiliate link for that. I might also recommend specific software for specific needs – the point is that the customer ASKED, and that what you recommend IS perfect for their needs. Most of the time I email an affiliate link in answer to their request. Personal recommendations in this manner are the most time consuming affiliate earnings, but they are also the most successful, with generally an 80 to 90% purchase rate.
4. **By adding the links to eBooks, newsletters, and other channels that you already have operating.** Response rates are often low, but in these channels, volume can often make it worth the effort anyway. A lot will depend on how you do it – if you publish a pushy ad, then you'll be unlikely to get a response at all. If you make it more like a personal recommendation, then the response rate will be better – but remember, you are still making a recommendation to someone who did not ask you specifically for this, so you are sending on the chance that some of the readers need it at the time you send it.

### Starting Cold

If you are starting from scratch, then you are going to need to think about an entire business structure, not just getting a link and emailing it. You'll have to consider how to build a website – affiliate links are pretty much worthless as an income generator if you do not own a good website – and you'll have to think about themes, and a channel to promote through.

### Here are four basic choices:

1. **An infosite.** You create an informational site, with information on a specific topic or theme. The rule is the same as for affiliate program choices – pick what you know! You can write the articles yourself, create a community site where the members submit articles, add a forum, or use reprintable articles. Quality is essential – if your site is not high quality, nobody will want to use your ads.
2. **A review site.** These are fairly successful IF you do it correctly. You have to be objective, review things honestly and you cannot put in an affiliate link for anything that is not truly good. If you review a specific type of item in one section of the site, then only link to the things that have a good rating. With a review site, you must be careful not to make any claims about any other business or person that are not provable – if you damage their reputation, and you cannot prove the truth of what you say, you can end up in legal trouble.
3. **A newsletter.** You can establish a mailing list, and mail items of interest to your subscribers. In order for affiliate links to work, you have to have emailable ones, AND you have to actually provide information of interest to your readers. Otherwise they'll junk the newsletter and never even read the ads let alone click

them. This is the email equivalent to either an infosite or a review site – you can use the same kind of content.

4. **eBooks, and other viral items.** Instructional manuals are a great way to promote affiliate links – but you need to develop a reputation in order for your instructions to be taken seriously. Other types of eBooks can also be used to promote affiliate links. Certain types cannot be used in an eBook – Javascript coded ads won't work, neither will Flash ads. Most other ad types will though. Text links which can be linked within the words of the book are the most successful type of affiliate link for an eBook.

There are other creative ways to promote beyond that, but those methods will generally involve variations on the ones listed. Rarely, a company will have a simple enough URL that you can promote it offline. If they do not have a simple URL, you can still promote it offline through business cards and other literature, by creating your own page or website to send them to with the affiliate link there.

## Selecting Appropriate Ad Types

**Affiliate links come in a variety of forms – many are so similar that you'll never notice a difference unless you need to do something special with it like use it in an eBook, others are fairly easily distinguished.**

**The two basic categories are:**

**Text** – Phrases, descriptions, and slogans that are in plain text, not in an image.

**Image** – This includes plain images, animations, Javascript coded ads, and Flash ads.

Within those categories, there are some rules and peculiarities.

**There are actually a wide range of text ad types** – some are coded in HTML, and you cannot change the code (the terms of use may forbid it). If that is the case, then you'll have a hard time doing anything other than using it as an ad.

If they do allow you to change the text, then you can do “context links”. That means, you can embed the affiliate link into a keyword or two in the middle of your descriptions and paragraphs. You can also write your own ads that appeal more to your target market, as long as the ads are accurate. Some affiliate programs will not allow this though, and you **MUST** know the terms of use.

In general, text links can be easily incorporated into websites, email, newsletters, or any other form of marketing. Many affiliate programs will provide a simplified URL that you can use in emails. The advantage is that it is quick to paste in, and will usually automatically hyperlink (become clickable). The disadvantage is that it **LOOKS** like an affiliate link – you decide whether that is a disadvantage or not. This same link though, can also be embedded in keywords to use as a context link.

**Text links are the most versatile** – they can be used ANYWHERE, and will usually fit almost anywhere. A text link can change shape to fit in various spots. It can go in the middle of an article and look like it fits. It can go in the sidebar and look like part of your content. You can put it in a colored box to draw attention, or you can leave it plain to blend in. You may also color the text – if you color it the same as your regular color on the site for emphasis text, it will look like it belongs. Click rates on text ads are higher, and trust perceptions are higher. They simply work better than graphic ads.

**Image ads are used by most affiliates** – they like the look of them. And for some sites, they are good, because you can put them into an ad rotator, and they'll flip by right along with other ads and not look different.

Image ads go well at the top of the page, bottom of the page, and in the sidebar. They work less well in the middle of an article (where they are just an annoyance). They come in a variety of sizes, so make sure you get the right size for the spot you want to use it in.

**Flash ads and animations should be used carefully!** Some people seem to think that the purpose of an animation is to keep people from thinking about anything other than the obnoxious flashing thing they have created. Ads that flash too fast should be avoided! **You should be able to COMFORTABLY grasp the message, and then you should be able to move on to something else on the page without being distracted by it. The rule is, NO MORE than ONE animated ad visible on the page at any one time.**

Flash ads cannot be used in eBooks, and their use in anything other than a web page is either unpredictable, or simply won't work. They also can be somewhat unpredictable on a web page, since they require a plugin to work.

**Remember, people do predictable things at certain points on a web page** – they look for things in certain places too. After they read an article, they are in a good mindset to be distracted and they are often at that moment of “what next?”, and if you provide them with something, they'll often go. This makes ads at the bottom

of an article a no-brainer – even though it seems like it would not be as good as at the top. People also expect to find ads in the right sidebar – whether or not they look at them will depend on how much they trust your site to give them valuable information.

**Think about where you want to use the ad, before you choose them.** Choose ads that will work well within your site style – colors should compliment when possible, and the ad should not clash radically with your site message.

## Reviews and Recommendations

**Of the possible methods of promoting affiliate links on a website, reviews and recommendations are possibly the most effective ones. Both methods involve choosing your affiliate program, and your focal page, very carefully.**

Recommendations are most effective for someone with an established business and a stable customer base. **If you have a good reputation, your customers will listen to your recommendations, especially if they are given with the needs of the customer in mind.** They work best for things that your customers are likely to need, and that you know they are likely to need BECAUSE they purchase what you sell. Some examples:

- If you sell camo gear, then your target market may be interested in hunting equipment, military style goods, paintballing supplies, etc.
- If you sell sports team hats, then your customers may also be interested in sports team jackets.
- If you sell special needs clothing, your customers may be interested in adaptive equipment.

**Some bad matches might be:**

- If you sell large size clothing, do NOT advertise weight loss resources! This would make your target market feel bad about buying your products, and make them feel like you are insensitive.
- Affiliate links for shops that are directly competitive. Direct sales income has a higher potential than affiliate income, so it is never a good idea to directly compete with yourself!
- Items that are simply not related to what you are selling.

**With recommendations, you are taking an established reputation, and leveraging its power to sell other items.** It almost never works if you are pushy – you have to be sincere and honestly want to help your customers to get another good deal.

**Reviews are a way of creating an environment in which you can develop a reputation without having to establish a sales or service business first.** Your reputation can be made by wise reviews instead of by sales. Your reputation is still the key to being effective, so it will be important to build a reputation for honesty and accuracy.

**When you write reviews, it is important that you review good and bad things both.** Never link to an item if it is not a good recommendation. If something has an affiliate program that sounds good, but the product is not good, then it can help to state in the review that you passed over the affiliate program because you did not feel good about recommending it to others.

**The first goal of the site always has to be presented as giving good information. If that comes first, then affiliate earnings naturally follow. If the earnings become the focus, then you lose credibility.**

There are two effective ways to set up a review site:

1. **A general review site.** You can review anything, the site may have multiple categories. If you do this, it is important that you strive long term to have more than one thing in each category – the categories and reviews will be more meaningful if you do. Each item gets its own review page – one item, one page. This is more effective for people, and for search engines. If you have multiple items in a category, you can present another page for the category with a comparison chart, but this should be in addition to the individual pages.
2. **A themed review site.** The theme might be a single topic with reviews of a range of options in that topic area (such as wide shoes, with reviews of the various manufacturers or outlets), or it might be a more

general theme that ties several product types together, such as a home repair tools site. A themed site is the mid-ground between a single topic and a general site, in that everything relates, but you will still need categories and may want comparison charts.

Affiliate links can be done from comparison charts, and from the individual review pages.

A review site can be run with community software also – by writing reviews, or just an overview of the product, and then letting members submit their own supplementary comments and review opinions. You have to really monitor this kind of site, and make sure that comments are credible, and that you are not spammed. But it can take some of the pressure off you to produce everything. In this kind of site, you'd only provide affiliate links to the ones that maintained a rating of a certain level or higher.

**Guard your reputation, and NEVER EVER recommend something, either in a review site, or as a peripheral recommendation, which does not meet high quality standards. If they buy it based on your recommendation, then it will hurt your reputation if it is not all you say it is.**

## Content Links

**Links within content are referred to as “context links” because they link right where they are referred to in context.** They are alluded to as highly powerful by many marketers, but like all forms of promotion, it really depends on how you use them, and who your target market is.

**There are a number of ways to use them, and if there is a “trick” to it, it is just using them where it feels natural to use them. Put them where people will be likely to want to know more, or where you feel they fit.**

Context links can be a keyword or phrase within a sentence, they can be a sentence in a paragraph, or they can be a paragraph by themselves which has a linked word or two – more like a low key ad in the middle of the rest of the information.

**What makes them powerful is that they ARE part of the actual information, not an ad.** So if you use them in an informational setting, they are perceived to be valuable as part of the information. Get pushy though, and they become nothing more than another ad on a page which has trouble justifying its existence.

**In order to use content links, you must know the terms of use of the affiliate program. Not all allow it. Some require that you use ONLY their words in the links. Many will allow you to write your own words though, as long as they are accurate.**

It is simplest to use the Email URL – typically they'll provide you with a simple web address, that does not have HTML code with it, which you can use in context links as well. Just write your page, and then look for logical places to put the link – highlight the words that you want to link into, and use the link tool in your HTML program to insert the affiliate URL.

Make them natural, and logical, and they can be very successful.

## Personal Referrals

**Personal referrals are like a recommendation, only you do them one-on-one. These are, bar none, the most effective type of marketing for affiliate products.** You are, again, trading on a reputation, and if your reputation is good, your customers or clients will usually follow your recommendation for something that they know you are experienced with.

When I tell new clients that the best place to register their domain is with GoDaddy, they register their domain with GoDaddy. When I tell them that I like this company, or that company, for hosting, they use them. They do that because they know I understand their needs, and that I won't give them a referral just for profit.

**Personal referrals are also the most time consuming type of referrals, so they really don't work except in two circumstances:**

1. **When the item has enough value to make it worth it.** If a program pays a significant amount per sale, then it is worth it to refer it personally, because the time is worth the money made.
2. **When you have a need to make that kind of referral anyway.** If my clients keep asking me about a domain registrar, even if I make only a few pennies telling them to use an affiliate program, it is worth it because I have to give them that referral anyway. I might as well earn from it.

**The key to personal referrals is that they are closely related to what you are already doing, AND, they are very personal. I have several options for my clients in one category of services. I can talk to the client, get an overview of their needs, and then I can give them a referral for the option that will really work best for them. They know I actually thought about what was best for them, and that I did not just recommend it because I could earn from it. It is an extra measure of taking care of them rather than a means of making more money from them.**

When I give an affiliate link to a client, I ALWAYS tell them that it is an affiliate link – I inform them that they can use it or not, but if they do, it is one of the things that I use to keep costs lower for my clients. They appreciate that I tell them that, and virtually always say, “I'd love to use your link, you've done so much to help me!”.

**Thoughtful, personal referrals have the highest conversion rate of any other kind of affiliate referrals. They take time, and thought, but they are worth it.**

## Tracking Results

**Tracking is used as a means of determining which of your affiliate programs are profitable, and which ads and placements are profitable. You can make it as simple, or as complex as you want – I am warning you now, because if you start reading up on this, it is likely to just bury you and make you feel hopeless at first. Simple is good. Simple leads to complex as you learn, and then complex becomes simple with practice.**

The simplest tracking consists merely of writing down, over the months, which programs earn, and which ones do not. Your goal is to do two things, long term:

- 1. Weed out the programs that do not work.**
- 2. Improve the returns on those that do.**

Web real estate has value – your pages cannot be devoted to things that do not earn, so getting rid of those that don't earn long term will make way for doing more of the things that DO earn.

If you are starting a business cold, then it will take a year or more just to determine which work, and which do not.

If you are adding affiliate links to an existing business, you should have a good idea within 6 months – but remember, it can take up to 6 months to see results even from a successful one. In general, if you can get one sale, you can get another.

If, after six months with an existing business, or 1 year with a new one, an affiliate program has done nothing, you can choose to either remove it, or change something. If it earns well fairly soon, then you know you are onto a winner.

If you make two or more adjustments, and the program still fails to earn, then remove it and move on to something else.

Many programs provide tracking of some sort – you can place different ads in different locations, and track that way (if they provide that kind of tracking). Some allow you to add special code to the link so you can track where it came from. If they do not, and you want to track more carefully which pages are getting clicks and which are not, you can use a URL redirect service, which may provide better control. Don't bother though unless you really want the data, and will use it.

I've had clients who have come to me to ask about improving their site earnings. They had affiliate links through their sites which had never earned a thing. It did not occur to them to remove them and put in something that did earn. Another client had an affiliate program that never earned, and upon checking, the merchant had removed the purchasing links from the product pages, so there was no way for the customers to purchase the goods!

**There are many reasons why affiliate programs do not earn.** Sometimes you can spot why, sometimes you cannot. If you adjust a couple of times though, and still cannot get it to earn anything at all, that is a strong indicator that you are wasting your time with that particular program. It does not mean it is bad for everyone, just that it is not going to work for you, through your available methods.

**Before you throw in the towel, actually look at earnings in the affiliate program login – don't assume they've never earned just because you have never received a paycheck.** Always check your affiliate programs also if you get a check in the mail – we've found that a surprising number of affiliate programs issue checks from a company other than the one you think they are. For affiliate management programs like Commission Junction, which handle a large number of companies, you'll want to make sure that you track the individual merchants, not just CJ generally.

Earnings are tied to website traffic – so if you have a program that works, you can increase site traffic, and the affiliate program will produce better and better. If you cannot get the affiliate program to produce, then additional traffic will make no difference.

## Multiple Types of Revenue Generation

**A single website can be home to a wide range of different earning types. It can contain sales, ad revenue, affiliate income, service promotion, subscriptions, memberships, and other types of income generation.** They can live comfortably on the same site, and they can even share space on the same page, but you have to observe a few rules if you want it to work successfully.

The first rule is:

**One Primary income generation type per page.** This means you have to decide the most important revenue generation for that page, and make it the purpose of the page.

The second rule is:

**No more than one Secondary income source per page,** and if the page is a product or service sales page, do not use AdSense or other similar types of advertising on the page – they will directly compete with your product or service (affiliate links will not if you choose them carefully).

Page focus means that each page addresses a single topic, and that topic exists for the purpose of highlighting and promoting one source of income. If you have a review page, then that review page will focus on a single item to review, and then it will have an affiliate link which will be your primary revenue generation. You may choose AdSense or other peripheral links for a secondary income source – be aware though, that if you choose AdSense, some of the ads on the page may be for the thing you are either promoting, or reviewing against. You must decide if this is a problem or not.

In general, products and services make more than affiliate links or ads. Ads will often make more than affiliate links (depending on the type of ad, and the type of affiliate link, and the type of site). Sometimes though, an affiliate link will far outperform ads (affiliate links get higher payments, but fewer of them – ads earn from every click, but each click pays low).

Figure out what is the most profitable item for the page, and make that your primary revenue focus for the page.

## Quickie Overview of Online Marketing

**Good marketing is not just about getting traffic to a website. It is about increasing revenue. Fail in that, and you wasted time and money.**

Good marketing is ALWAYS either expensive, or time consuming – low cost marketing falls in the middle between costly and free marketing. This is an absolute rule you can depend on, and use as a yardstick to measure tactics by. If someone promises you fast and cheap marketing, they are lying to you.

**So what makes marketing good?**

**Good marketing puts an effective message in front of people who are interested in what you are selling.**

There are two parts to that:

1. **An effective marketing message.** This filters through your entire website, and through each ad that you write. They all have to have a unified message, or you'll attract a different kind of person than you really want, and that won't help you.
2. **It reaches people who are interested in it.** That means you are advertising in places where there is likely to be a high number of people who meet your target market profile.

Advertising can be said to have two approaches:

- **The Shotgun approach:** You blast ads out there hoping that one of them hits someone who is actually interested. It is usually very cheap to do this, but it is also not very effective. If you market to mothers with small babies, and you are blasting ads to all and sundry, then only about 1% or less of the people who hear your ad will be within your target market. Sometimes this is the only way to reach a specific market (like radio ads for a local market), but with marketing online, there is almost always a way to target it.
- **The Sharpshooter approach:** You find places where a high number of your prospects hang out, and you get your ad in there. This has two advantages – it reaches the people who are most likely to be interested, and it gives you a little bit of a recommendation from the place where they are hanging out. For example, if you are targeting moms with small babies, and you advertise in a “new moms” site, then you are advertising to people who fit your customer profile, plus visitors who like the site will associate you with that site (because they saw your ad there), which helps them be more willing to trust you. This approach generally costs many times more than untargeted advertising (or takes more time), but the ads are far higher quality, and more likely to turn into purchases.

**Now, a bit about “internet marketing”. Internet marketing is a term that is used to describe ONE internet arena only:**

**How to sell information products to people, and to encourage them to make impulse buys.**

**It is not good for ANYTHING else! It does not work for anything else. People who sell “Internet Marketing” materials through “one page websites” do not tell you that they have NO CLUE how to sell shipped products, or services, or how to promote quality information.** They do one thing, which relies on dishonesty to work, and they do NOT know HOW to market if they have to be strictly honest! Their tactics attract only a single target market, and result in discouraged and disillusioned customers over the long term. Avoid their “secret” marketing tactics, and learn the real stuff instead.

**Things they recommend that do not work for startups:**

1. **Traffic Exchanges.** You click on other people's ads and they click on yours, and everybody gets more traffic. Only the problem is, nobody is interested in purchasing (you certainly aren't, why would anyone else be?), they are only interested in inflating their traffic. This is a waste of time, because it does not increase income.
2. **List building.** They present it as the instant answer. It takes time to build, and only happens if you promote your LIST instead of promoting your SITE. Every business does NOT need an email list, it is an optional thing, and a list is ONLY good if it helps you to develop good relationships with your customers.
3. **Freebies.** Freebies usually attract freebie seekers – these people are cheap, and do not make good customers. Further, if you want a freebie to work, you have to advertise IT instead of advertising your SITE. Samples and promos do work well for some businesses, but only if it is a carefully chosen item, and ONLY if it helps to increase your sales, not just your traffic.
4. **Safelists, Announcement Lists, Ad Lists.** Everybody is there to SELL, not to buy. Nobody is reading your ad, and you are wasting your time.
5. **List Builder Programs.** Again, everyone is there to sell, not to buy. These programs waste your time.

6. **Free Classified or Free for All Link sites.** These are bad news. Your ad does not stay there long enough to be read before it scrolls off, and these sites are banned from search engines. Also, people visit these sites to SELL, not to buy, so nobody is interested in your ad.
7. **Automated Search Engine Submissions.** You do NOT need to submit your site more than once (unless you have neglected it for a LONG time and just did major changes, or unless you rebuilt it with new page names). Automated submissions do not even submit to the best search engines (which require manual submissions). Try [www.selfpromotion.com](http://www.selfpromotion.com) if you want to know how to do it right, this site helps you through the submit process in an effective way (and you can use it free).
8. **Autosubmits to blogs, forums, etc.** This is a spam tactic, and will get you in big trouble, besides being TOTALLY ineffective.
9. **Overuse of Autoresponders.** This will kill your business, because it is impersonal and people know it. Use autoresponders only as an enhancement to personal contact, or to deliver repetitive information, with a clear invitation for personal contact if needed.
10. **Advertising on forums.** If you use a forum, you need to be a real person, and participate. Do not just send ads, it is ineffective.
11. **Joint Ventures.** This is an "internet marketing" recommendation that you see in most IM books. These do NOT work for startups, or for any business that does not have a substantial customer base. They do not want your great idea, they want your customer list. See Collaborations below for more on using cooperation in a good way.

**Now, a quick listing of stuff that DOES work, and how to find more info on it: Directory Listings** – Find good quality directories to list for free. Directory listings are reviewed by a person, which makes them different than Free Classifieds.

1. **Search Engines** – Submit your home page, ONCE, to the top search engines (MSN, Yahoo, and Google).
2. **Article Marketing** – Write good quality information, and submit it to article directories. Do NOT write ads! Put a signature line at the bottom, with a link to your site. More on online article marketing can be found here: <http://www.articlemarketingmagic.com/>. You can also try traditional print article publications. Harder to GET published, but big kudos if you do!
3. **Signature Lines** – Use signature lines in emails, forum posts, and other communications.
4. **Paid Ads** – Do the math before you commit, and choose paid ads that increase your site revenue.
5. **Link Exchanges** – Do NOT use Link Exchange programs. Just participate in forums and when you see someone with a site that has relevant content that you feel you can respect, politely suggest a link trade – your link on their site, for their link on your site. Not worth spending a lot of time on, but worth getting when you can get a good one. You can swap links, or full ads.
6. **Viral Marketing** – Viral marketing works best when you can gather a group of people to create a viral product – a freely distributable item that has genuine value, which has your business info in it. Not a magic bullet, and not very helpful for startups, but useful sometimes.
7. **Forum Participation** – That means PARTICIPATION, not ADVERTISING. Post a comment, encourage someone, ask a question, be a real person. Participate in Industry forums for information about your business, participate in other forums to find large numbers of your target market. Drop a signature line with each post. If you are friendly and helpful, people will click the link and you'll get business from it. This is slow, but POWERFUL.
8. **Blogging** – Only works if you can keep up a steady flow of information or comment that people WANT. You must post at least once a week, and you need to figure out how to use it to gently market without being pushy.
9. **Events** – Online and offline events can really help you get your face and business out there. Prepare well, and consider carefully what you want to offer then and there. A great place to distribute promos, viral marketing products, brochures and business cards, or to offer a freebie that leads to further customer contact (the only kind of freebie worth offering). The rule is, make sure you have something with your contact info on it to send home with everyone you contact, or who visits your display.
10. **Business Cards** – Use business cards to keep people reminded of who you are and what you do. Create a good one, then hand them out to anyone who might be interested.
11. **Networking** – Get to know people, and get your name out there. Build relationships. Business comes as a natural result of familiarity and friendliness.
12. **Trade Associations** – Good networking, but some also offer good marketing benefits. Make sure the marketing benefits actually reach your market – if you sell soap, and promote in a magazine for soap makers, it is not going to help you since all the readers are ALSO selling soap. Make sure marketing benefits reach your CUSTOMERS, not your competitors.
13. **Press Releases** – Only useful if you have genuine NEWS. If you do, and if you write it well, these can be powerful.
14. **Guest Appearances** – When you get the chance to present a seminar, radio show, teleconference, etc, go for it. These get your name out there, and most are recorded, so even if no one hears them at the time, they can benefit you long term.
15. **Collaborations (JV)** – Cooperate with other business owners for mutual benefit. Organize an event together, produce a viral book together, swap services or goods, etc.
16. **Volunteering** – Give something first. Volunteering, sponsoring, and making your presence known can help establish a reputation for professionalism, and it can get you seen.
17. **Market to Customers** – Don't be pushy about this! Just let them know when you are having a sale (tactfully), send them a planner with discount coupons in it, put a flyer or catalog in the box with their order, send them a greeting

card, etc. Make sure you only send them something they will appreciate.

18. **Local Media** – Choose wisely, because different media works for different businesses, but often local newspaper ads or radio ads are not extremely costly.

**Don't let marketing overwhelm you. Pick two things you can do, and do them consistently.** Once you get a routine for those, then add in another, perhaps two or three months down the road. Choose the things you can do most easily, and choose the things that will be most effective for YOUR business.

**Marketing is a necessary facet of a successful business. Choose the right stuff, and it gets a whole lot easier, and a whole lot more rewarding.**



## About the Author

This book was entirely written by Laura Wheeler, owner of Firelight Web Studio. She is a busy Mom of Eight children, four of whom are still at home.

Way back in 1982, she took a two week course in computer usage. She failed it utterly, and could not understand the command line interface used at the time. About 14 years later, the family was gifted a Mac Classic. After a little tentative exploration of the use of it, she found that she could actually understand how to use it quite well. She bought a copy of Macs for Dummies, and within 6 months had reformatted the hard drive just to see if she could. Her business was started a few years later.

At first it was just printing, word processing, and data entry. Not many people had home computers in the small town they lived in, so she got a bit of work doing that. She kept learning more about computers, and built her first computer system shortly after. She learned graphics processing, page layout, and copy writing in this time period also.

Laura saw her first website in 1999. Five months later she was awarded a contract with the Town of Medicine Bow to redesign and maintain the town website. She began building websites for herself and others, picking up contracts with the Wyoming Dental Association, and the Historic Virginian Hotel, and several others.

When Laura began business, she had no money to spare. Her business was build around the ownership of a computer, printer, scanner, and later an internet connection. She bought software when she could afford it, and learned to use free software when she could not afford it. She knew that if she did things the "recommended way", she'd be heavily in debt, and might never crawl out from under it. There had to be a way to start with nothing but work and determination, and that is what she did. Since she was in a small town, her business evolved into several lines of work in order to fill local need. Her website services encompassed everything a client needed, because her clients could not afford to hire a team. This need gave her a broad base of skills in all areas of website design, layout, and administration.

In 2003, her youngest son was diagnosed with cancer. While life was unpredictable, she turned to building AdSense websites. Since his recovery, she has gradually phased those out in favor of more intensive web design work.

Laura specialized in very small businesses because she knows how they work - because she has done it. Not once, but twice, and with multiple business lines. She knows how long it takes to get orders or traffic. She knows the inexpensive ways to get that traffic, and she understands what makes a customer or visitor feel comfortable on a site so that they will purchase or come back. She is also skilled at teaching other people what she has learned, and knows how to explain it in terms that they can understand if they have no experience with it.

Her experience and expertise are unique. She knows the backroads that nobody else travels, which can save time and money. She understands which of the "experts" are telling the truth, and which ones are just trying to get you to buy their product. She knows that there is one truth for large corporations with healthy advertising budgets, and another nearly hidden truth for small startups and microbusinesses that don't have money to waste. She understands how hard it is in these times for the little guy to get a foot in the door and make a place for himself in a world that is dominated by the mega-corporations. And she understands which back doors will actually get you inside, and which ones will get you mugged.

When she started specializing, her niche is one that almost nobody else wants to occupy. The expertise required in this area is difficult to acquire, and it shuts the door on many of the perceived "cash cows" in the web business world - but she recognized the potential in helping other small web developers learn the success strategies she had developed. From that realization sprang the MicroWebmasters Alliance. The only organization in the world of its kind – an organization dedicated to teaching MicroWebmasters to succeed while giving their clients extraordinary value.

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Creating Personal Touch in a High Tech World