QUICKSPROUT

QUICKSPROUT
TRAFFIC SYSTEM
GET MORE TRAFFIC TO YOUR WEBSITE

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BIG BRAND TRAFFIC SECRETS

Discover The Traffic, Sales, Leads, Profits And Most Importantly Income-Boosting Methods, Strategies And Techniques Of The 'Big Brands' Online...

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INTRODUCTION

QUICK SPROUT TRAFFIC SYSTEM

As the number of shoppers on the Internet has grown, so too has the number of web sites and companies competing for business. It's not a far stretch to say that most everyone you know has either bought something or searched for goods and services on the web. As most businesses have discovered having an online presence can grow your company exponentially and can arguably make the difference between a successful company and a failed one. On the other hand it can be difficult to get the attention of internet users. They are bombarded with thousands of advertisements and distractions each day, it's hard for a company to stand out.

As a business who is starting out on the web one of the most difficult jobs you'll have is figuring out what blend of offline and online marketing techniques to use to promote your web site. If you're a small business, that challenge is even greater on a limited budget. The right mix depends on many factors, including the type of business you are running, the products or services you are offering, the people you are trying to target and your marketing budget.

In this guide we'll go over a variety of different techniques and review various tools to maximize your online presence that will grow your site traffic such as;

- ▸ **ANALYTICS**

- ▸ **SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION**

- ▸ **SOCIAL MEDIA**

- ▸ **BLOGGING**

- ▸ **CONVERSIONS**

- ▸ **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

Marketing your website is not an easy task and requires a long term commitment if you want to see results. The aim of this guide is to simplify and provide you with proven methods of marketing success so that your site doesn't get lost amongst the competition.

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PART 1

GOOGLE ANALYTICS

BIG BRAND TRAFFIC SECRETS

GOOGLE ANALYTICS INSTALLATION

Although this guide on its own will teach you how to do many things related to marketing your business, I want to make sure you start off on the right foot and lay a good foundation so that you can measure the effectiveness of all your efforts.

Marketing involves a number of tasks that all have measurable results. These measurements are what justify your time, money and effort. If you're not measuring what you're doing you'll be wasting your time because you're bound to repeat your mistakes and miss opportunities to capitalize.

There are tons of analytic tools at your disposal: Some free, some paid. Some focus on website analytics while others focus on social. There are tools that focus on measuring one specific thing like funnels or A/B tests. Other tools even track eye movements or clicks using heat maps. The point is, there is no excuse to not measure everything you are doing. You might not exactly know how, or what to measure right now but that is what this guide is for, to teach you how to measure your marketing efforts and make sure you are getting a ROI (return on your investment).

Although I mentioned there are an unlimited number of tools at your fingertips to measure different things, my focus will be on Google Analytics. Google's free analytic tool is somewhat of an industry standard and for good reason: it's free, ubiquitous and powerful. With the proper tweaks and settings you can measure almost anything on your website.

Google Analytics

LET'S JUMP RIGHT INTO GOOGLE ANALYTICS (GA) AND START AT THE BEGINNING WITH INSTALLATION.

*If you already have GA installed on your website then move ahead to the next section.

The first thing you'll need to install is a Google Account. If you don't have one don't worry its free. Here's how to get your Google Account:

1 **Navigate to Google.com/analytics**

2 **Click "Sign up for a new Google Account"**

3 **Fill out the proper fields in the form**

Once your new account has been created you'll need to set up your new Google Anaytics account. This can be accomplished in a few easy steps

1 **Navigate to Google.com/analytics**

2 **Click "Sign up Now"**

3 **Log in using your new Google Accounts password and user name that you just created.**

4 **Click "Sign Up". Done!**

Once you're done signing up for GA you'll be prompted with this form

Google Analytics allows you to track multiple sites in one Google Account. You're about to setup your first website to track.

On this form you need to fill out the "Website's URL" with the exact URL for your website. Make sure it is the **exact** URL, and make sure you include the "www" if your website's URL has one. Don't include it if it doesn't. The "Account Name" will automatically fill itself in. You can also adjust the Time Zone and Country for which you reside in.

Once this form has been filled in, click "Continue". You will then be given a snippet of code that will be used to track your website. Follow the instructions that Google gives you on installing the snippet of code.

If you're having issues setting up your Google Analytics account check out Google's own tutorial on setting it up here,

http://www.Google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?answer=174090

TRAFFIC SOURCES

The "Traffic Sources" area of your analytics dashboard offers a treasure trove of insights into your website and your visitors. From it you can learn where your visitors are coming from, which websites are sending you the most traffic, which keywords are sending you the most traffic, and which source is sending you the most traffic.

To Access Your "Traffic Sources" Follow These Simple Instructions:

1. **Log into your Google Analytics account**
2. **Select your account from "Account Overview" and then select a profile (if you have multiple websites you are tracking under a single account)**
3. **Navigate to your "Dashboard"**
4. **Find and click the "Traffic Sources"**

You will be given two options: "Overview" and "Sources".

"Overview" will give you a very basic, top-level look at your traffic sources. A graph will be presented to you showing you the number of visits you received on any chosen date. Further down the page you get a more detailed breakdown of the amount of traffic each source (Direct, Referral, or Search) is sending to your website.

Although all of the information in the "Overview" is useful, the "Sources" section comprises the most vital information.

Under the "Sources" tab you are given the choice to choose from five options:

▸ ALL TRAFFIC
▸ DIRECT
▸ REFERRALS
▸ SEARCH
▸ CAMPAIGNS

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Each of these choices will display very detailed information regarding the amount of traffic each source has sent. Let's look at the type of traffic each "Source" Represents.

All Traffic

As the title suggests, this data represents all the traffic to your website (for whatever date range you have selected) from all sources. This is a good way to view your data when you are trying to get a basic, holistic view of where your data is coming from. You want to have a balanced traffic portfolio, without one source overly dominating the others.

Direct Traffic

Direct Traffic consists of traffic that directly accessed your site. There are a number of ways a user can directly access your site such as, typing the URL directly into the URL bar, clicking through a link in an email, or book marking your website. A direct visit is from someone who did not access your website from a referral site or via a search engine.

The problem with the way Google Analytics breaks down and displays Direct Traffic lies in the fact that it does not tell you which direct source the user used to get to your site. You are left in the dark as to whether the user used a link in an email, bookmark, or directly went to your site with a URL bar.

Later in the guide I will show you a way to get around this "blindness" by strategically using URLs to tag where your users originate.

Search Traffic

Search Traffic is all traffic that comes to your website via a search through a search engine. This means the user entered a keyword phrase query into a search bar belonging to Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc., found your website, and clicked-through. Google Analytics will break down your search traffic into which search engine was used to access your website and which keywords were used.

You can find more information about Search Traffic and Keyword Traffic in the Keyword Traffic section of this guide.

Referral Traffic

Referral Traffic is when a user is already on one website and clicks a link that takes them to your website. This link could be a text link, an image, a banner, etc.

For example, if the user is on Site A and clicks a link to your website from Site A then that will be reported as Referral Traffic, with the referring site being Site A. Google Analytics will display the name of the referring site (Site A) and any data recorded associated with that referring site (Site A) including total number of visits from that referring site, time on site, and bounce rate.

Remember, you can apply any Advanced Segments Google provides or any that you have created on your own to Advanced Segments. Go ahead and apply your Organic Unbranded Traffic filter and access your Search Traffic. Notice how there are no (or very minimal) branded keywords being displayed? These are all the keyword phrases that people are using to access your website via search engine that contain no branded terms!

Campaigns

Campaign traffic refers to traffic that comes via a campaign URL created using Google's Campaign URL Builder which can be found here .

Google's URL Builder is a great tool for creating campaign URL's because it doesn't require you to have any prior experience with parameters or URL structure. All you need to do is be able to effectively name your campaign so that you can recognize and differentiate it in your analytics.

Let's look at how the tool works and how you can create a Campaign URL by creating one yourself! Let's say I want to track how many people click on a link to my sale's page from a newsletter that I send out.

You might ask yourself, why can't you just track the URL without having to build a special URL? Well, if the link is in an email, then Google Analytics is going to report it as Direct Traffic. Just knowing that it came via Direct Traffic isn't really helpful to us since there are so many traffic sources lumped into Direct Traffic. We want to be able to measure exactly how many people clicked the link so that we can measure it's effectiveness, and optimize it further.

So, to recap, we are trying to track a link we have included to my sale's page in a newsletter.

Here's how to do it:

1 Navigate to http://www.Google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?answer=55578 This is where you will generate your URL.

2 Here you will find this

Step 1: Enter the URL of your website.

Website URL: *

(e.g. *http://www.urchin.com/download.html*)

Step 2: Fill in the fields below. **Campaign Source, Campaign Medium** and **Campaign Name** should always be used.

Campaign Source: *   (referrer: google, citysearch, newsletter4)

Campaign Medium: *   (marketing medium: cpc, banner, email)

Campaign Term: (identify the paid keywords)
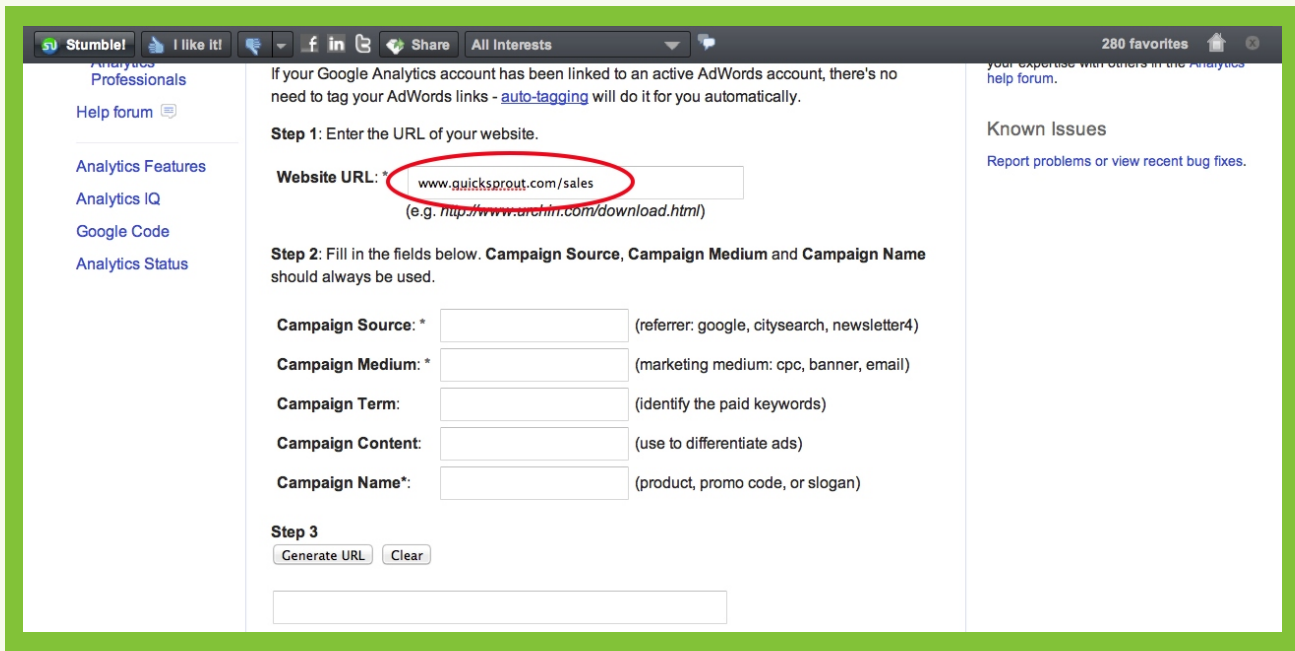
Campaign Content: (use to differentiate ads)

Campaign Name*:   (product, promo code, or slogan)

Step 3
Generate URL   Clear

3 Enter the URL you would like to track. This is the section where you would like to generate a custom URL so that you can track its traffic. For us, it is going to be,

www.quicksprout.com/sales

4 Next, we are going to have to start defining some parameters so that we can identify this traffic via our Google Analytics. To do this you should know what each parameter means.

Campaign Source

This is where the link is going to be placed. For example: Google, Twitter, or blog. We are going to fill in *newsletterfall* because the link is in our Fall Newsletter.

Campaign Medium

This is the medium by which the link is delivered. This could be CPC, banner ad, or in our case, email.

Campaign Term

This refers to a cost-per-click (CPC) campaign in which a keyword triggers a banner ad. This is not a required parameter to fill in, but if your Campaign Medium is CPC then you want to fill in whatever keyword correlates to that campaign. For our example, we'll leave it blank.

Campaign Content

Use this to differentiate between ads, if you are running multiple ads. This parameter is also optional; we'll exclude it in in our example.

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Campaign Name

This is the name you'll give your campaign. This name should be representative of your link and should specify the purpose of creating the link. These names can be whatever you choose, but for reporting and measuring purposes, they should be relevant to your goals. You might also want to consider that you might end up generating multiple Campaign URLs under the same Campaign Name in the future. For now we will use *fallsales*.

This is what our filled in parameters look like,

Step 1: Enter the URL of your website.

Website URL: *   www.quicksprout.com/sales

(e.g. *http://www.urchin.com/download.html*)

Step 2: Fill in the fields below. **Campaign Source**, **Campaign Medium** and **Campaign Name** should always be used.

Campaign Source: *	newsletterfall	(referrer: google, citysearch, newsletter4)
Campaign Medium: *	email	(marketing medium: cpc, banner, email)
Campaign Term:		(identify the paid keywords)
Campaign Content:		(use to differentiate ads)
Campaign Name*:	fallsales	(product, promo code, or slogan)
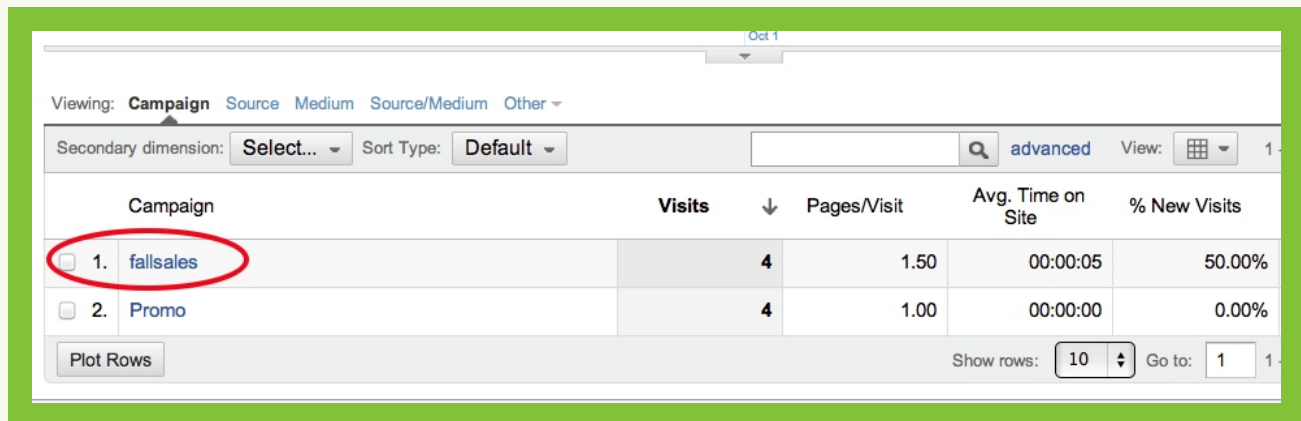
5 Finally, we are ready to generate our custom URL. All we need to do is hit "Generate URL" and it will populate the empty field right below it.

Here is our Campaign UR:

http://www.quicksprout.com/sales?utm_source=newsletterfall&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=fallsales

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So, we've generated our URL and we've inserted it into our newsletter and sent the newsletter out. Now we want to know how many people clicked the link to our sales page. Here is how to find that out::

1 Navigate to your Dashboard and access the analytics account associated with this "Campaign URL".

2 Hit "Traffic Sources" from your right-hand menu bar, then click "Sources" and finally Campaigns.

3 In your Campaign Dashboard you should find a familiar graph of traffic. Look at the campaign name...look familiar? You are now viewing the traffic stats related to your "Campaign URL".

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How to View Your Traffic

Keyword Traffic

The Keyword reporting in Google Analytics is a great way to get insight into what your users are searching for and what your website actually ranks for.

How to Find Which Keywords Are Being Used to Land on Your Site

The Keyword reporting in Google Analytics is a great way to get insight into what your users are searching for and what your website actually ranks for.

1 From your Google Analytics Dashboard, find the "Traffic" tab on the left hand navigation bar and click it

2 From the drop down menu that appears choose "Search"

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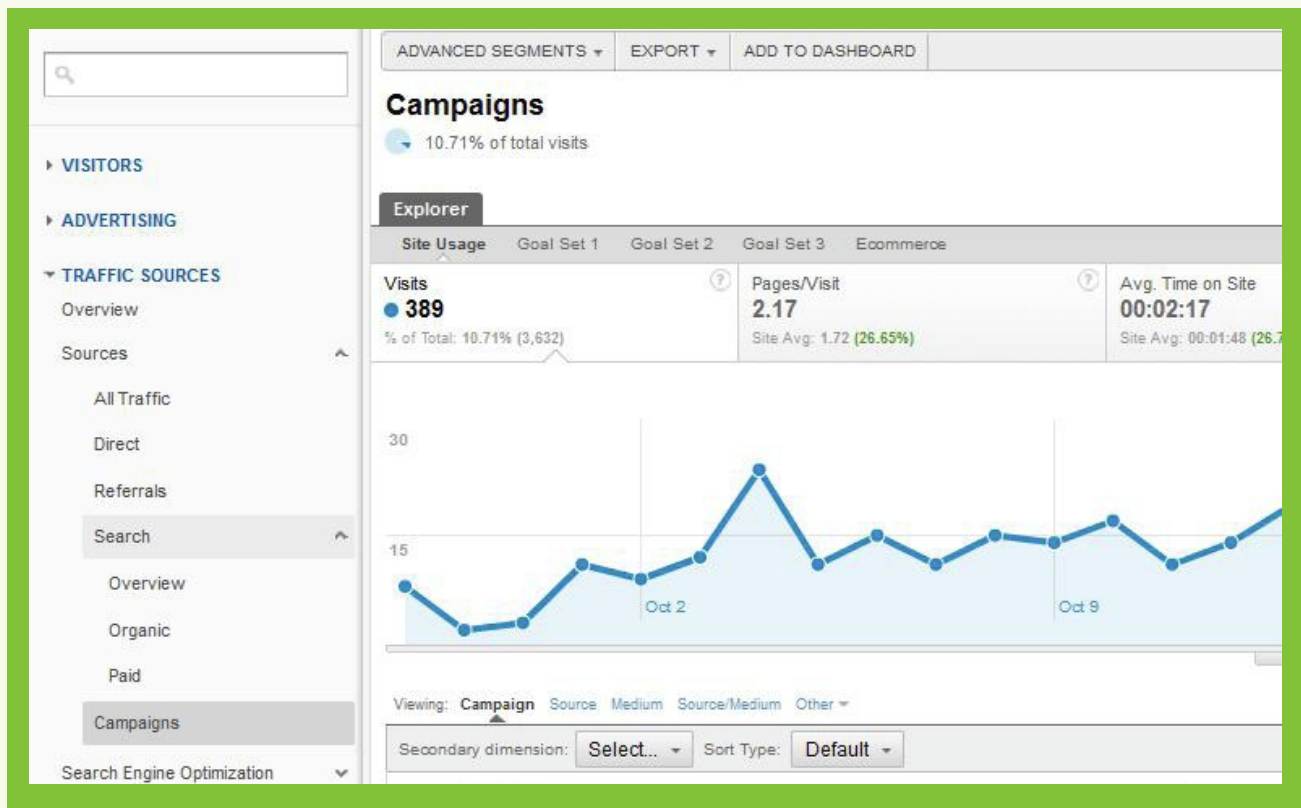
3 From that drop down menu choose "Organic".

4 Your "Organic Search Traffic" overview allows you to scroll down to find all the keywords that are sending traffic to your site.

Once you have access to your Keywords you can analyze which keywords are actually sending traffic to your website. You can search for specific keywords or exclude a specific phrase from your results. You can even apply your Advanced Segment for Unbranded Organic Traffic to see the keywords that contain no branded keyword phrases.

Now that you can find all the keywords that are sending traffic to your website, do you see anything that surprises you? Is there a strange or surprising keyword phrase that is sending traffic to your website? If there is, this is where you should capitalize on opportunities that you might not have known existed.

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Goallllllllllls!!!! and Events

"If it can't be measured, it can't be managed."

Measuring should be at the heart of your marketing efforts. If what you are doing can't be measured, it can't be managed; thus it can't be improved.

Luckily Google Analytics offers many ways to measure your different marketing efforts. Two great ways to measure involve utilizing Goals and Events.

Let's look at goals first.

Goals are ways you can measure conversions on your website. Google Analytics will track three basic types of goals:

▸ Time on site - A goal is completed once a user spends a specified amount of time on the website.

▸ URL Destination - A goal is completed once a user reaches a certain destination.

▸ Pages/Visits - A goal is completed once a user visits a certain number of pages.

There are lots of creative ways you can use these goals to measure conversions on your website; however, the best way is to utilize the URL destination style goal. It allows you to record a conversion when a user lands on a specific page. This page can vary depending on what you consider a conversion. Let's use an example to demonstrate how to set up and measure a URL Destination Goal.

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Setting Up a URL Destination Goal

1 First you need to pick a conversion point to measure. This can be a subscription to your blog, newsletter, etc. The only requirement to your goal is that it have a URL that is associated with the goals completion.

For example,

www.homepage.com ----> www.homepage.com/ email_sign_up ----> www.homepage.com/email_sign_up/thank_you_for_signing_up

"/thank_you_for_signing_up" is the goal completion page and will be your URL Destination when you're setting up your goal.

Once you've got your conversion and destination URL figured out you can move on to setting up the actual goal in Google Analytics.

2 Head over to your Account Home for Google Analytics and access your desired account.

3 Once you're in your account dashboard click the settings wheel symbol in the upper right hand corner.

4 In your settings select the Goals Tab from the Profiles Tab and hit "+Goal"

5 Now it's time to fill in the details of your Goal. First give your Goal a proper name so that you can recognize it. For our example I am going to name it "Email Sign Up" and designate whether you to have the Goal active as soon as you're done setting it up, or if you'd rather active it later.

6 Next we're going to select URL Destination for the Goal Type.

7 Now we need to enter the Goal URL. For our example the Goal URL is /thank_you_for_signing_up. You do not need to enter the root domain for the Goal URL only everything after the "/".

8 Next we're going to decide on a Match Type. For our purposes we are going to choose Exact Match.

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9   Leave "Case Sensitive" unchecked. When you set up your own Goals you will need to figure out if your URLs are case sensitive and adjust that setting accordingly.

10   We can now give a value to this Goal. A value can be anything you want, but it should be something that is meaningful to your conversion process. For example, if we know that the average worth of a user who completes an email sign up is $15 we can assign the value 15. This isn't a required step, so you can choose to skip it if you like.

11   Next you have the option to include a Funnel. They are very useful if you have multiple steps in your conversion process but for the purpose of this example we don't need to set up a Funnel.

12   Hit save, and you're set to go.

Google Analytics should now register a completed Goal anytime anyone hits the Thank You page, and if the only way to hit the Thank You page is to subscribe then your completed goals should reflect the number of people who subscribe.

As you can image there are many goal opportunities awaiting you. Now that you have a basic understanding of how to set up a goal let's discuss the types of goals you should be measuring.

What Goals Should I Set Up for my Business?

With so many options as to what you can track as a goal and a limited amount of allowed goals (you're allowed roughly 20 goals per account) you'll need to be careful to track key metrics that are important to your business.

Before we discuss what you should track, let me first say that every business is different and there are different micro goals that your business should focus on.

You should ask yourself some important questions when determining your goals like:

▸ What can I measure that is important to my business?

▸ What are my most important conversion points?

▸ Do I have multi-step conversions?

Completed Conversion Pages

Like our Destination URL Goal example above, you will want to track any page that signifies a successful conversion for your business. To do this you will need to make sure you have a "thank you" page or a "confirmation page" or some kind of page that users get after they complete a goal. This will take some preparation.

Here are some common conversions that can be set up as Goals in Google Analytics:

▸ Email Sign Ups

▸ Purchases

▸ Registrations

Event Tracking

While Goals are an amazing tool for tracking certain actions on your website, they have their limitations. This is where Event Tracking comes to save the day.

Like the name describes Event Tracking tracks certain actions on your website that you deem as events. Events can be a long list of things including, but not limited too:

▸ Outbound Clicks

▸ Downloads

▸ Video plays

This is just a small sample of things that can be tracked using Event Tracking. In theory, anything that can be clicked can be tracked, so use your imagination, but remember, only track things that are important. If you start to track things that have no effect on your business then you are just creating noise in your analytics and wasting time.

The process of implementing Event Tracking on your website is a little different than setting up Goals and requires you to do a bit of "tweaking" to your website, but don't worry, it's nothing you can't handle.

We're going to be using a computer programming language called *Javascript*. I won't get into what *Javascript* is or how it works in detail but you can learn more about it here. We are going to be modifying a snippet of code with some parameters and then insert the code into the html of your website.

Take a look at an example of the code you'll be dealing with

_trackEvent(category, action, opt_label, opt_value)

Here are the parameters you'll be dealing with and what they mean.

▸ **Category (required)**
The name you supply for the group of objects you want to track.

▸ **Action (required)**
A string that is uniquely paired with each category, and commonly used to define the type of user interaction for the web object.

▸ **Label (required)**
An optional string to provide additional dimensions to the event data.

▸ **Value (required)**
An integer that you can use to provide numerical data about the user event.

Let's look at how to tag something as an event and track it using Event Tracking.

Setting Up Event Tracking

First, you need to pick what you want to track as an event. In our case we're going track clicks to our Twitter page. The conversion would work this way from the user's end:

www.homepage.com - > user clicks "Check Out My Twitter" -> user is taken to my Twitter page

From the back end it will look like this:

**www.homepage.com ----> user clicks "Check Out My Twitter" ---->
the event is triggered and recorded in Google Analytics ----> User is taken to my Twitter page**

So, let's see how this is set up, step-by-step.

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1 We need to edit our tracking code to incorporate our parameters for tracking this event so I will need to include a **category** and **action** and optionally a **label** or **value.** For the **category** I am going to use 'Twitter', for the action I am going to use 'Went to Twitter Page', and for the **label** I will use 'Social'.

 So, my code looks like this,

<div align="center">

(['_trackEvent', 'Twitter', 'Went to Twitter Page', 'Social']);

</div>

2 Now that I've got Javascript code figured out I need to apply it to the event on my website. To do this I need to access the html of my website for the page where the event is located.

3 Once I find the right piece of code for my event in my html I will apply this Javascript snippet to it, like this,

<div align="center">

**<a href= "https://Twitter.com/neilpatel" target="_blank"
onclick="_gaq.push(['_trackEvent', 'Twitter', 'Went To Twitter Page',
'Social']);">Check Out My Twitter**

</div>

The black text is the original link and the red text is the added event track code.

You event is now being tracked using Event Tracking in Google Analytics. You can now apply this method to any clickable action on your website.

Advanced Segments

Advanced Segments are one of the best tools to utilize in Google Analytics for breaking down and focusing in on specific metrics that are key to your performance.

Advanced Segments allow you to segment certain types of visits to your website so that you can focus on what really matters in terms of measuring your performance. Google provides you with a number of predetermined Advanced Segments, which can be useful, but the true power of Advanced Segments is learning how they work and creating your own that are unique to your goals and needs.

How Do Advanced Segments Work?

Advanced Segments work through Google Analytics filtering out segmented data based on filters you put into place using the Advanced Segment tool. When you apply an Advanced Segment, Google will only display data that meets that criteria. For example, if you apply the "New Visits" Advanced Segment, Google will only display data based on visitors that Google records as new and exclude all data that doesn't fit the "New Visits" criteria.

Right out of the box Google provides you with a long list of ready to go Advanced Segments. You should access the following Advanced Segments that are provided for you:

- All Visits
- New Visits
- Returning Visits
- Paid Search Traffic
- Non-Paid Traffic
- Search Traffic

- Direct Traffic
- Referral Traffic
- Visits with Conversions
- Visits with Transactions
- Mobile Traffic
- Non-Bounce Traffic

What Kind of Data Should I Segment?

Since your options are virtually endless for the types of segments you can create I will give you one that you need to create right now before you move on and start creating your own. This Advanced Segment will isolate visits that have come to your website via organic search using keywords that contain no branded terms.

Why is this segment important? Great question. Well this powerful Advanced Segment is going to show us how many people are not specifically searching for your website or your brand but are finding your site using specific keyword phrases. This is a great way to see what kind of keywords people are searching for and which keywords your website ranks for.

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Setting Up the Organic Unbranded Advanced Segment

To create the Organic Unbranded Advanced Segment follow these simple steps:

1 Navigate to your GA Dashboard
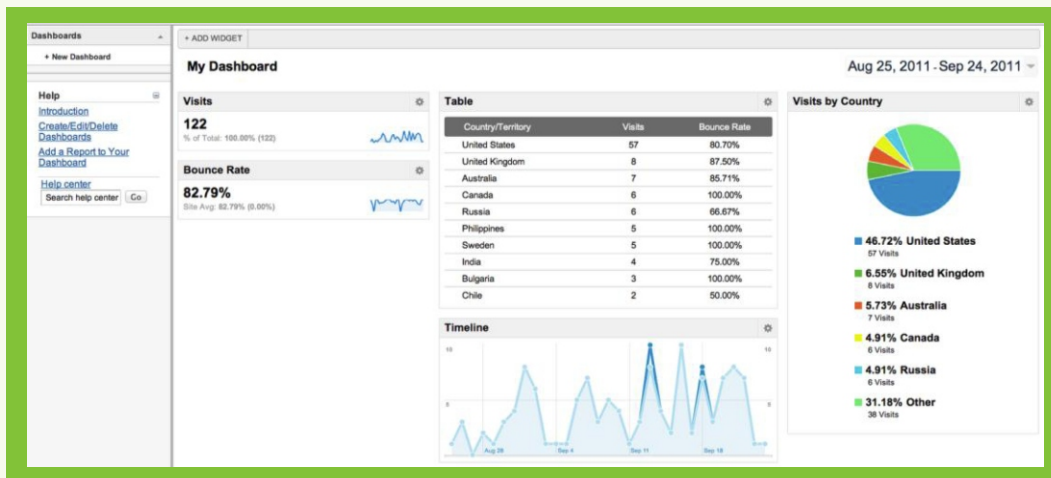
2 Click on the "Standard Reporting" tab at the top of the page.
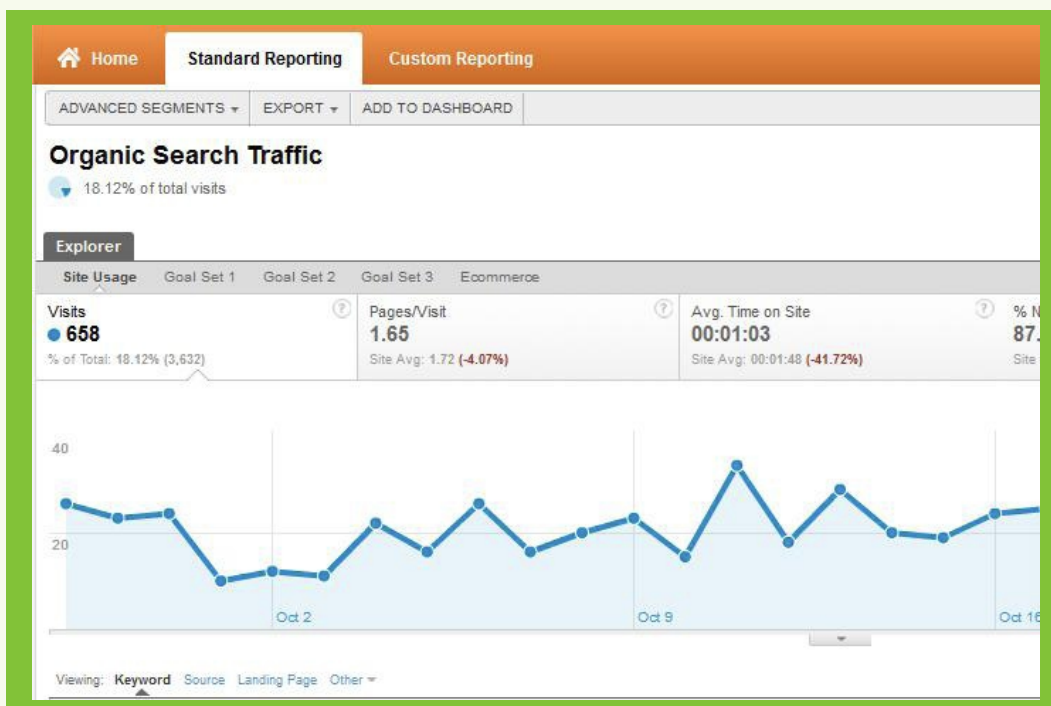
3 Click "Advanced Segments"
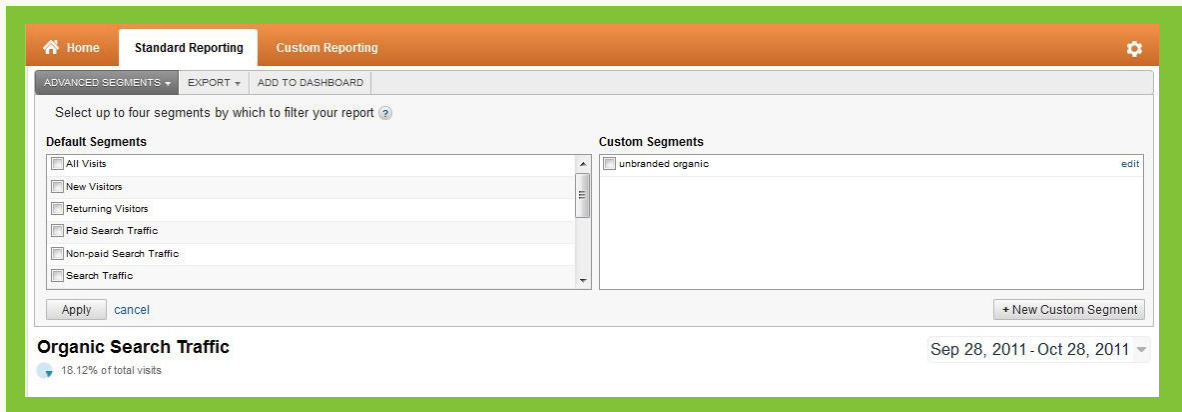
4 Here you will find the default-advanced segments plus any custom advanced segments that you will Setup.
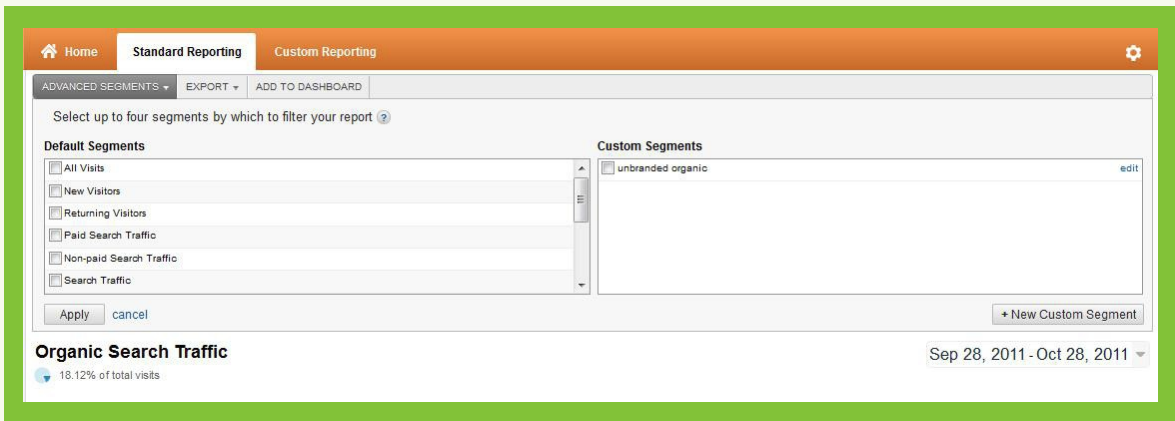
5 To start creating your advanced segment click "+New Custom Segment"

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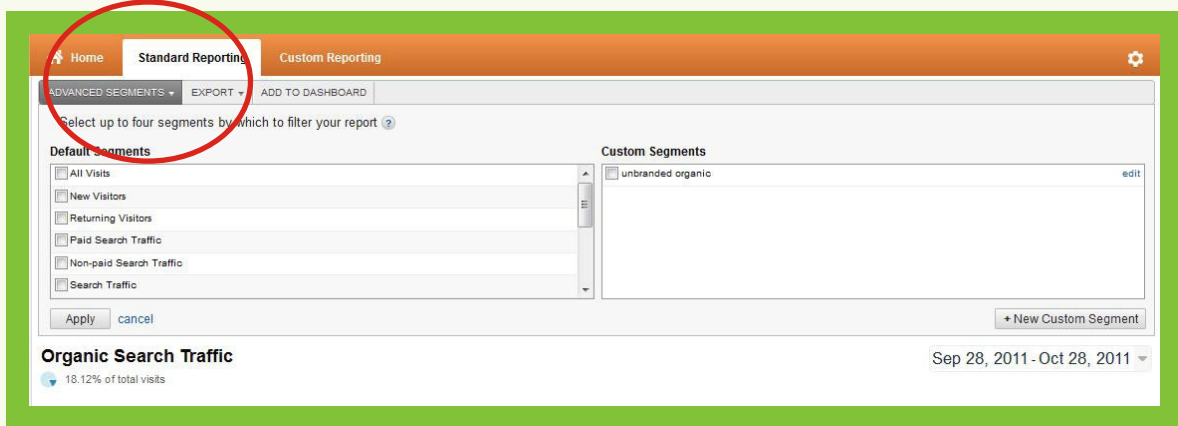
6 You will be taken to the screen where you will create your segment. First thing to do is name the segment "Organic Unbranded Traffic".
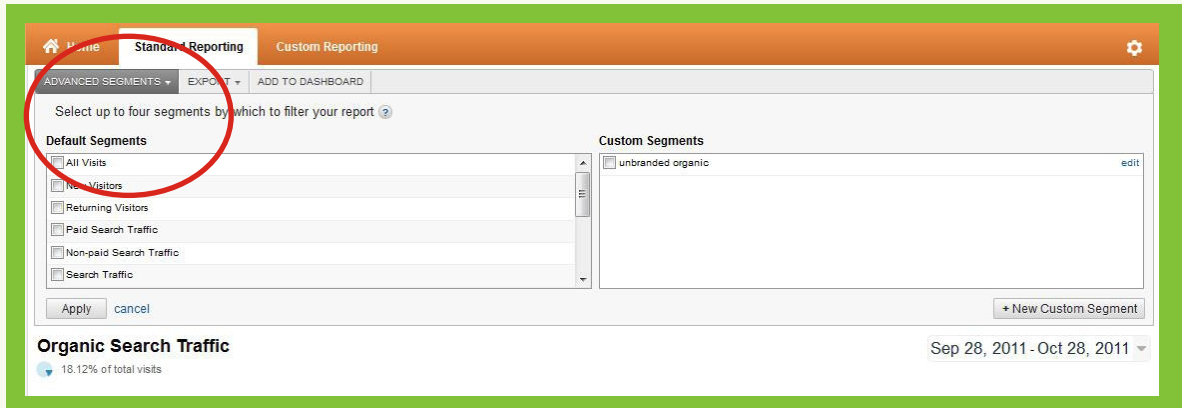
7 Next you'll need to fill in the following fields like they are in this image
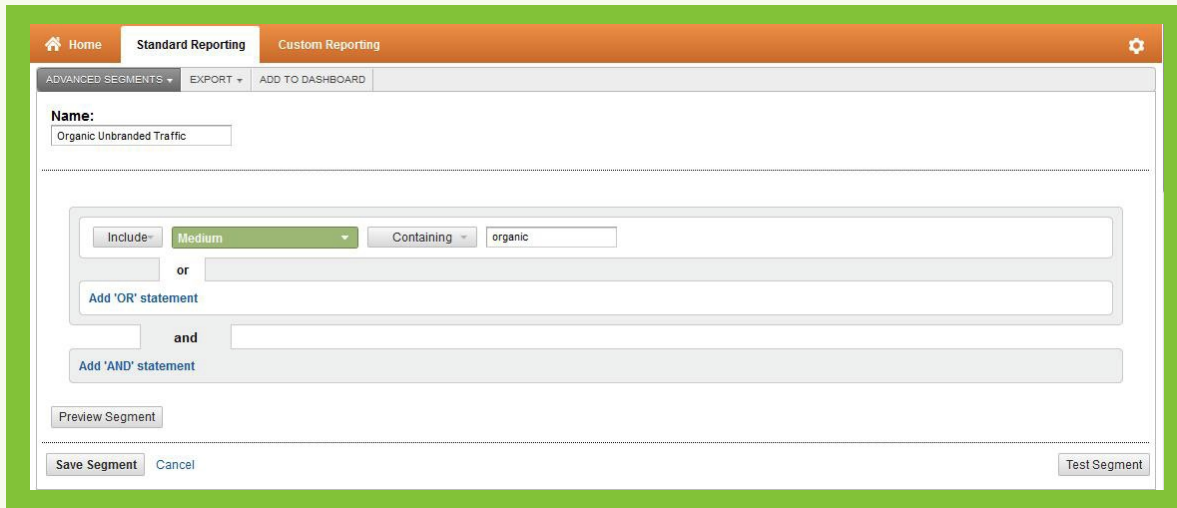
What you're doing here is telling Google to only include traffic that is Organic but to exclude traffic that is Organic AND using whichever branded terms you have entered. It is very important that you use the "AND"option and not the "OR" Option.

Include as many branded terms that you can think of that people would use to search for your company.

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8 Hit "Save Segment" to save the segment (don't worry, you can edit the segment any time you want)

9 You can now click "Preview" and get a view of the segmented traffic according to the variables that You put in.

Applying Your Advanced Segment

The hard work is over (for now). All that is left is to apply your Advanced Segment and watch your data change.

1 Navigate to your Dashboard

QUICKSPROUT
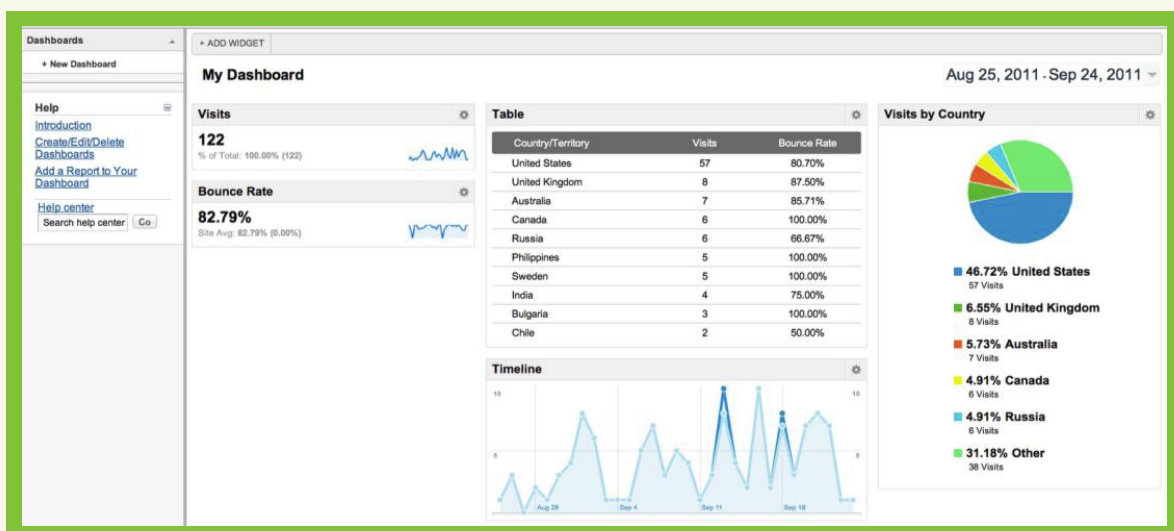
2 Click "Standard Reporting"

3 Click "Advanced Segments"

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4 You will now find all of your Custom Advanced Segments. Check mark "Organic Branded Traffic".
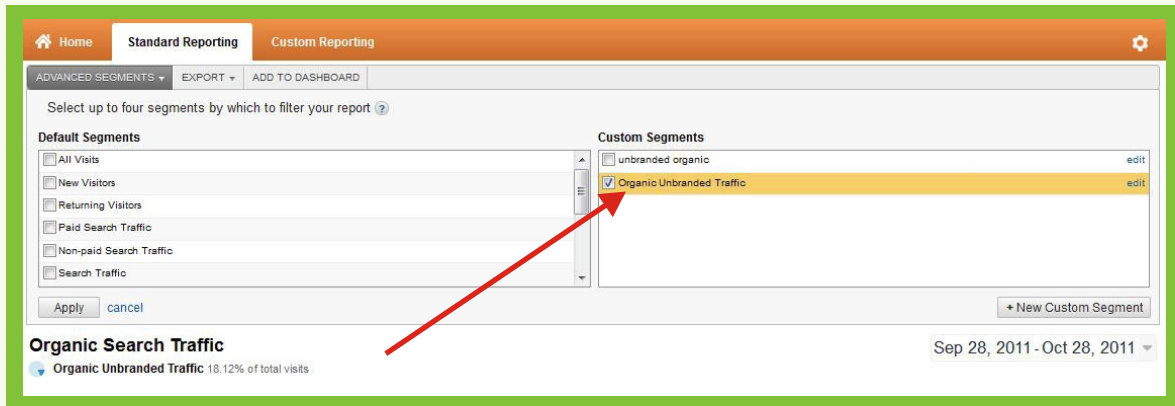
5 Click "Apply" and your data will be segmented by organic traffic.

QUICKSPROUT
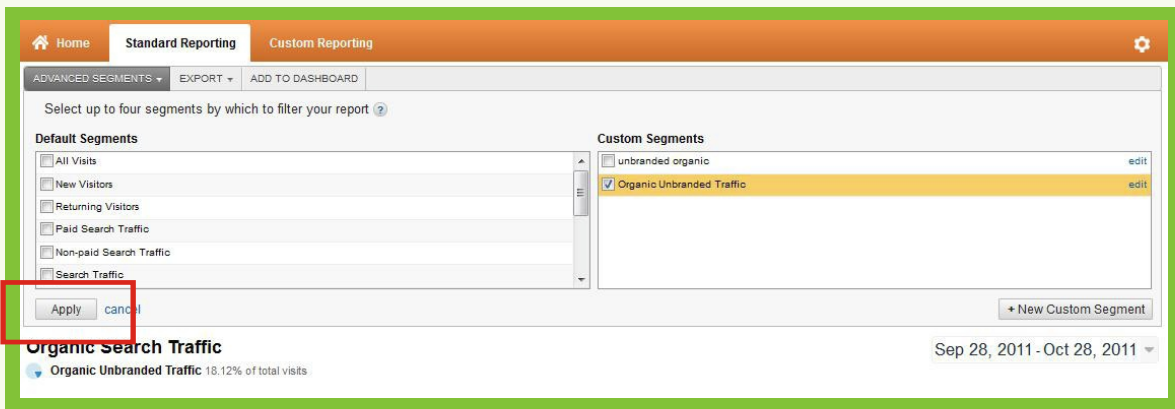
Other Advanced Segments That Are Useful To Your Business

There are literally unlimited options in terms of the types of Advanced Segments you can create for your analytics. The key to creating useful advanced segments is hypothesizing questions about your business and it's relationship to the traffic to your website and then creating Advanced Segments to help provide answers to your questions. The longer you work with your analytics to optimize your business, the more questions you will have, causing the depth and complexity of those questions to deepen.

At first you might merely be interested in knowing which search engine is sending the most branded or unbranded traffic to your website...now you can answer that. Eventually you will want to get answers to questions like, "How much traffic is coming to my site due to Twitter?" Notice how I said, "due to Twitter" and not "From Twitter". I posed the question this way because a large portion of Twitter users don't actually use Twitter.com to post on Twitter. They use third party clients like TweetDeck (now owned by Twitter), CoTweet, or HootSuite. All of these platforms might be sending Traffic to your website, but it's not always easy to track.

Let's look at an Advanced Segment for tracking traffic that is used by Twitter.

1 Access your Dashboard and navigate to your Advanced Segment screen
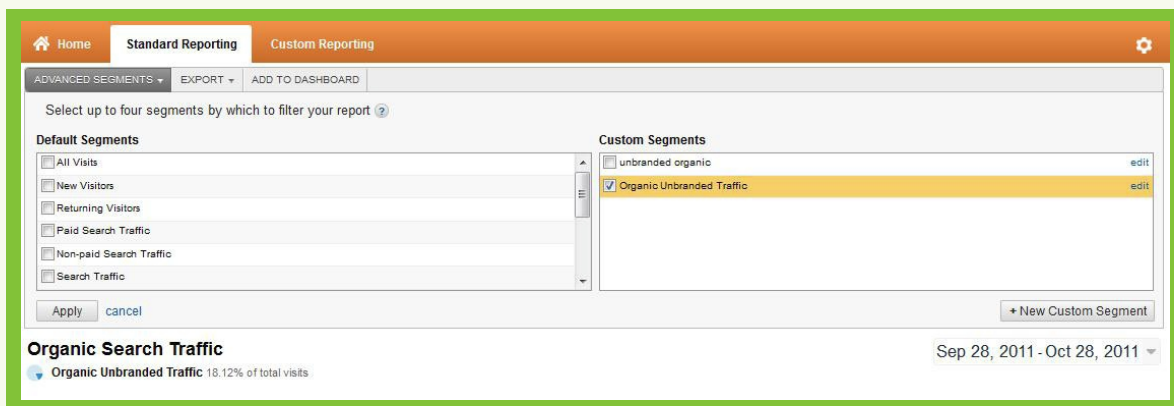
2 Click "+New Custom Segment"

QUICKSPROUT
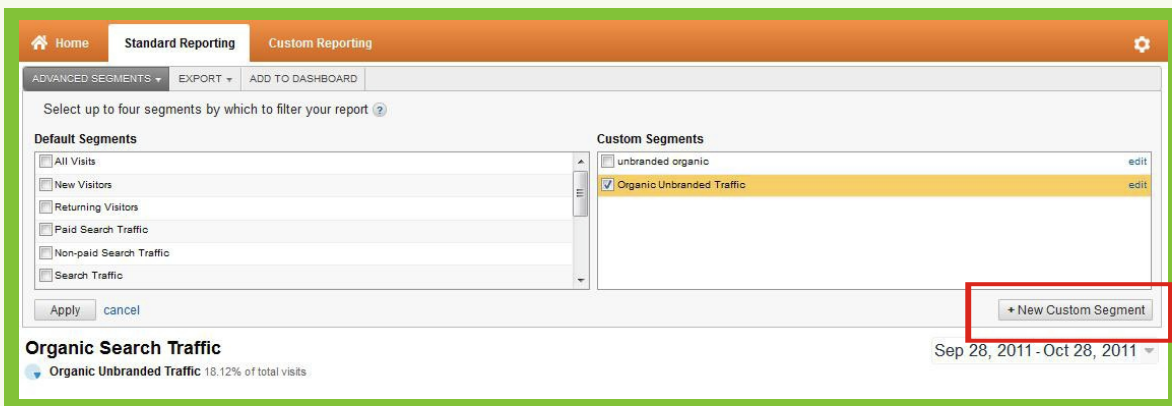
3 Name the segment "Twitter Traffic"

4 Enter the following selections

Include as many Twitter clients that you can think of as 'OR statements'. I included the ones that are currently being used, however, in the future a new client might arise and you will want to keep this advanced segment up to date to be as accurate as possible.

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Of course, we know that Twitter isn't the only Social Media monster out there that is sending traffic to your website. Let's create a new Advanced Segment to your account for other Social Media properties that are pushing visitors to your website.

1. Navigate to your Advanced Segment Dashboard

2. Select "+New Custom Segment"

3. Name this one "Social Media Traffic"

4. Fill in the variable like this
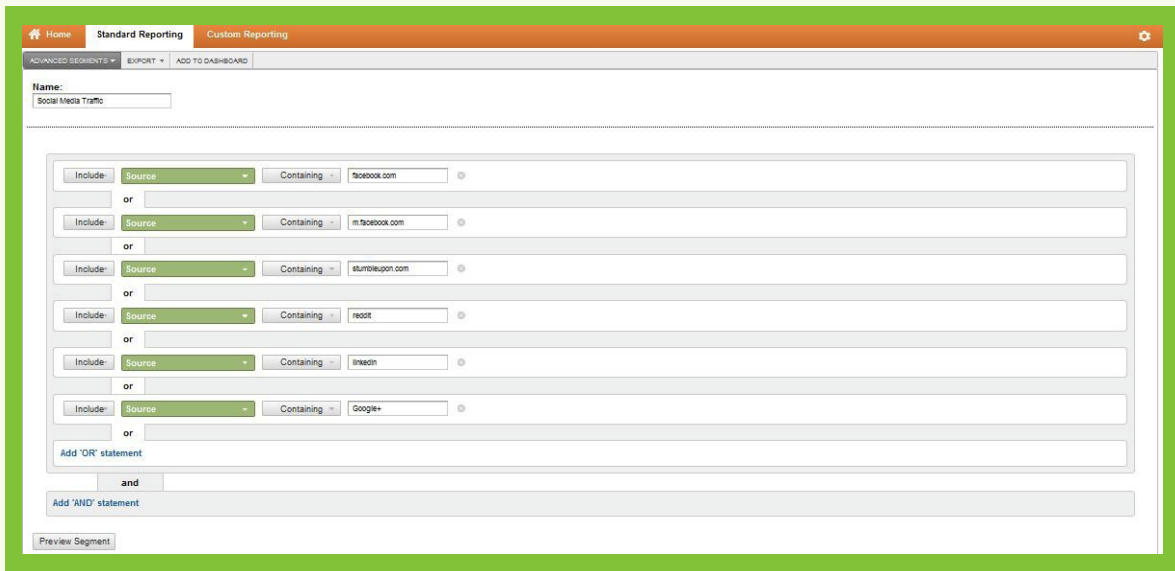
Some sites you will probably want to include are:

Facebook   **StumbleUpon**   **Reddit**   **LinkedIn**   **Google+**

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Let's take segmenting of social media sites one step further and create a segment to determine which websites within your own niche are sending traffic to your website. You might wonder why this would be important. Knowing which sites in your niche are continually sending traffic to your website is valuable information. Once you find out which sites are helping you by sending traffic, you can leverage this information by contacting that niche site and trying to cross promote, guest blog, sponsor, make link requests, etc.

To create this Advanced Segment all you need to do is follow the same instructions as the Social Media Traffic advanced Segment, but this time instead of entering social media sites as sources, enter the URL's for websites in your niche that are sending traffic to your website. If you are not sure which websites in your niche are sending traffic, I'll show you how to find that out.

To discover which websites in your niche are sending traffic to your website all you need to do is follow these few steps:

1 Click "Standard Reporting" tab at the top of your Google Analytics Dashboard.

2 Select "Traffic Sources" from your right hand tool bar

3 Click "Referrals"
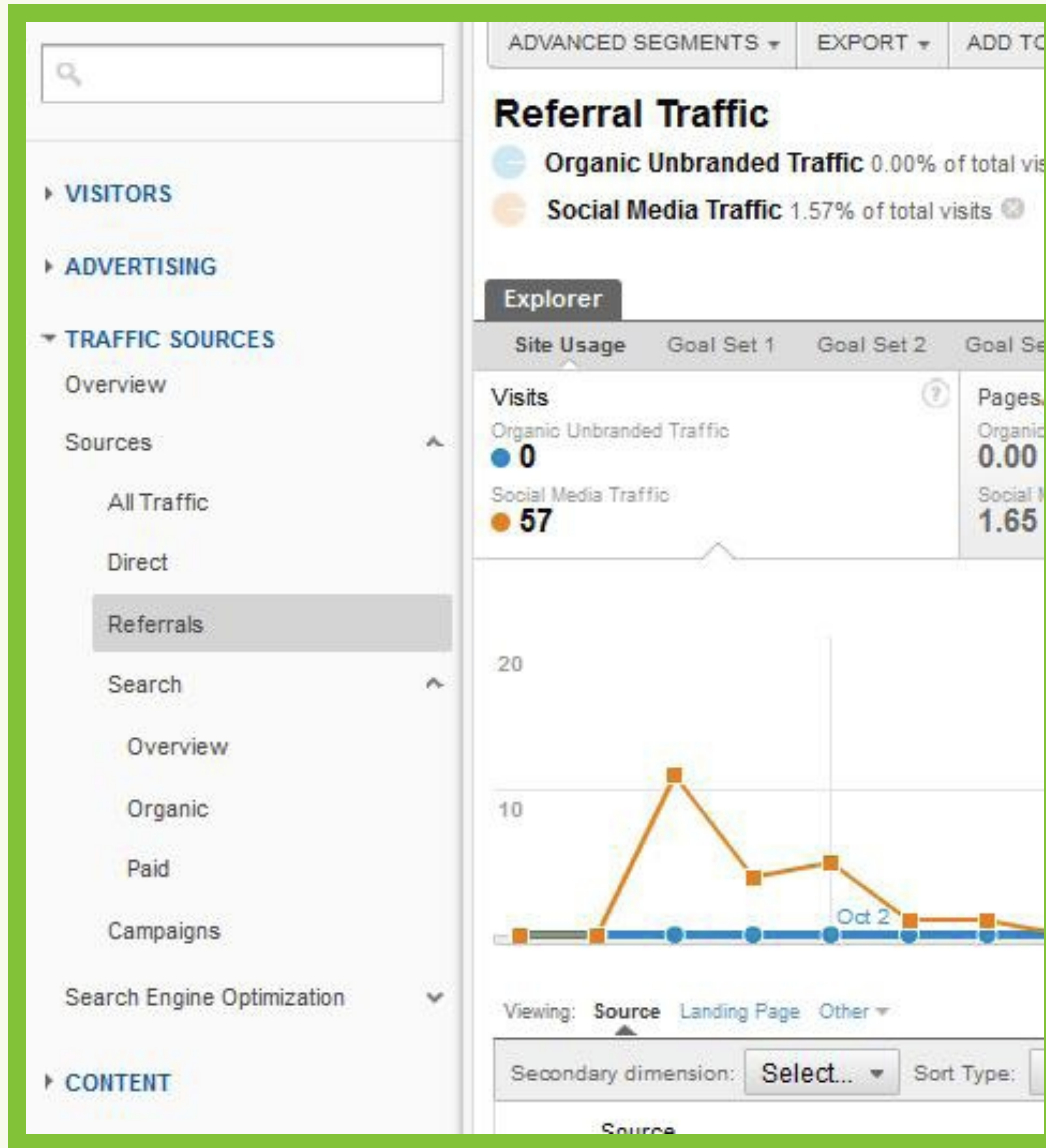
3 Scroll down to the breakdown of all the Referral Sources, or websites that are sending you traffic.

4 By default, Google Analytics will only show you 10 at a time but you can change this by increasing the number of rows show from the "Show Rows" drop down. Select 500.

5 You now have a list of all the websites that are sending traffic to your website. If you have a strong grasp of your niche community and which websites are in that niche you can browse through all your referrals and take note of which sites you want to include in your Niche Traffic advanced segment. Be sure to utilize the search option if you are looking for a specific site.

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Now that you can create your own Advanced Segments that will show you which niche websites, which social websites, and what unbranded organic traffic is coming to your website.

Let's explore using regular expressions in Advanced Segments.
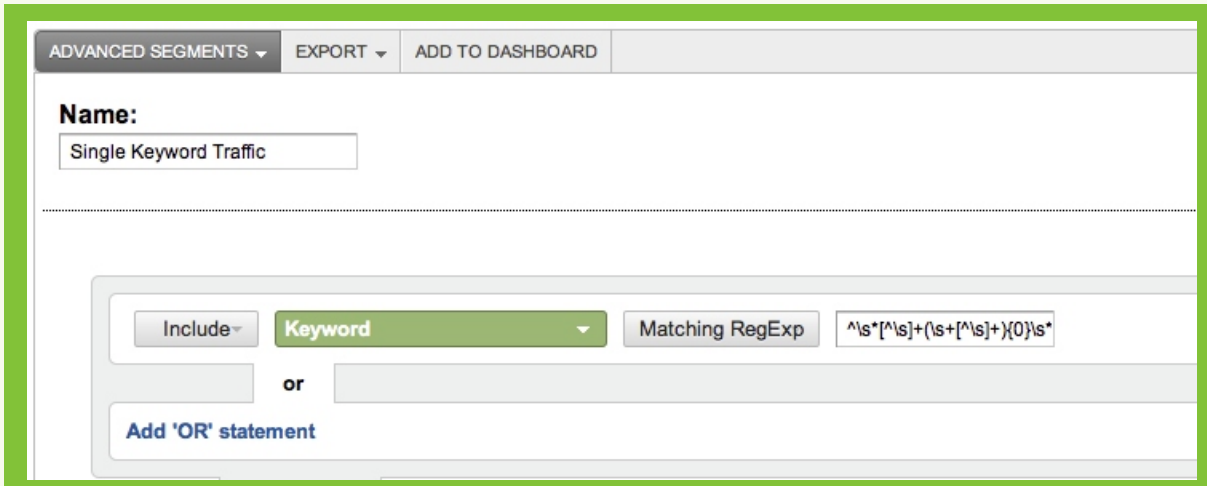
A regular expressions is defined as,

"In computing, **a regular expression** provides a concise and flexible means for "matching" (specifying and recognizing) strings of text, such as particular characters, words, or patterns of characters." - Wiki

For our purposes we are going to use regular expressions to further manipulate the data that Google Analytics is returning to us. The use of regular expressions can be explored to any depth you like, and can be utilized in very advanced ways. I want to give you a simple example of how to utilize a regular expression to get Google Analytics to segment only keyword phrases that sent traffic to your website that were a single word.

Setting Up a Advanced Segment to Segment 1 Word Keyword Phrase Traffic Using Regular Expressions

1. Navigate to your Dashboard

2. Navigate to your Advanced Segments dashboard

3. Click "+New Custom Segment"

4. Set your variables to look like this-

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The regular expression you are using here is:

^\s*[^\s]+(\s+[^\s]+){0}\s*$

This is telling Google Analytics to only segment off keywords that are 1 word. You can modify this regular expression by changing the {0}. You can set it to {1,2} to segment 2-3 phrases and so on.

Using regular expressions, or regex as you might find them called, can become a very advanced technique that can yield some very interesting data. There is a lot of information online regarding regex and how to utilize it and understand it, so explore further.

Yoast Google Analytics Plugin

One of the great things about utilizing Wordpress as your content management system (CMS) is that there are tons of awesome plugins at your disposal that can help you optimize your business website to fullest. Besides all the cool widgets and themes you can play with, you'll definitely want to take advantage of the Yoast Google Analytics Plug In.

This analytics plug in can do it all, and it's really simple to set up and use. The latest version release Yoast now boasts such features as:

▸ Custom Variables

▸ Asynchronous code

▸ Track by author

▸ Automatically tracks clicks and outbound links as events

▸ E-commerce integration

▸ API integration

How to Install Yoast Google Analytics Plug In

Since Yoast is a Wordpress Plug In, installing it should a piece of cake
.
Here's how to install it incase you don't know how to use Wordpress Plug Ins:

1. Navigate to your Wordpress Dashboard

2. Click "Plugins"

3. Click "Add New"

4. In the search field type "Yoast Google Analytics". This should bring up the plug in.

5. Once your find the right plugin click "Install" from the "Actions"

6. Next you need to authenticate the plugin, follow the on screen instructions that are given to you.

Yoast should successfully be installed now. You might need to give the plugin 24 hours to grab your stats and for it to start recording traffic.

If you are having further issues please check out Yoast's web site.

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ANALYTICS TOOLS OF THE TRADE

KISSmetrics

An app for measuring conversions utilizing custom funnels. It tracks people, not page views which will help you better target your customers and optimize your web site and conversion process.

CrazyEgg

An app for tracking clicks and scrolls using heatmapping technology. It's easy to implement and can provide valuable insights into how users are using your site.

SEOmoz

SEOmoz has a great suite of tools including campaign tracking resources that let you track rankings over time, keep an eye on competitors and find opportunities to capitalize.

Clicky

Clicky can be an alternative to Google Analytics because it provides all the useful data you would get from Google's free analytics program but Clicky offers data in real time. It isn't free though.

Google Analytics

Use this great, free analytics suite on your website to find stats such as traffic, visits, bounce rate, traffic sources, and more. Use it to track more complicated and sophisticated metrics such as events and goals. It's free to use and easy to install, so there is no reason you shouldn't be using it as either your main analysis platform or a back-up.

RankChecker

RankChecker is a great search engine rank checking tool that is offered through SEObook and is free to use. Once you have your list of keywords that you will be targeting with your on and off page seo campaigns, use this tool to periodically check the rankings of those keywords. All you have to do is import your list of keyword phrases, the url of the website you're checking and sit back and let the rankings information flow. Export the results to excel for sorting and analyzing.

Yoast Google Analytics Plugin

Free Wordpress plug in that gives you greater flexibility in measuring your websites data with Google Analytics. It can offer more custom variables, automatic set up events and more.

Piwik

Piwik is an open sourced analytics program that can provide you much of the same information that Google Analytics can but the advantage to using Piwik is that the app is installed on your server so that you have better access to all of your data, not only what Google Analytics chooses to show you.

Excel

Utilize Excel to sort and analyze your analytics and rankings data. Excel is also great for reporting results. Advanced functionality and functions can be used to really dig deep and get some great insights into your data, like using pivot tables to sort data.

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ANALYTICS PLAN OF ACTION

Now that you've completed this portion of the guide, let's run down all the steps that you should have implemented while working through it. If you missed a step or didn't implement something while you were reading the guide, go ahead and put the missed step into place now.

STEP 1 ▸ **Install Google Analytics**

Before you can start your analytics monitoring you need to install Google Analytics or whatever analytics tool you are going to be using. Once installed, take a couple of days to test to make sure it is accurately tracking data.

STEP 2 ▸ **Setup Goals & Events**

Setup goals and events to track important conversion on your website. Make sure you tag any conversion point of your website as a goal or event and monitor the data your collect closely. Continue to add new goals and events as your business and website grow.

STEP 3 ▸ **Setup Unbranded Organic Traffic and Any Other Advanced Segments You Want**

Use the steps outline above in this guide to set up your unbranded organic traffic advanced segment so that you can monitor your SEO efforts. Keep track of which keywords are sending traffic to your site, which are converting and which ones you should focus your efforts on.

STEP 4 ▸ **Monitor Your Traffic and Use It To Make Changes**

Regularly monitor your traffic, analyze the data and use it to make changes to your website and SEO campaigns. Monitor the most important metrics of your website and don't get distracted by vanity metrics.

Some items you will definitely want to keep track of are:

1. Overall Traffic

Make sure your traffic is constantly increasing and that there are no major dips in your traffic. If there are dips or slowdowns, figure out what caused them and fix it.

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2. Organic Unbranded Traffic

Keep track of the which keywords and the number of keywords that are sending traffic to your website. This information will be vital for your SEO efforts.

3. Goals/Events

Keep a close eye on the number of goals and events that are completed by your visitors. You want the number to constantly increase. If they aren't you will need to further optimize your website to increase goals and event completions.

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PART 2

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

BIG BRAND TRAFFIC SECRETS

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO for short) is the process of optimizing a web page or website through various techniques in an effort to improve the web page or website's ranking in search engines.

SEO is made up of many small parts and actions and a lot of research before you get started. These are all in an effort to get your website to rank #1 in a search engine for a valuable keyword phrase. SEO can basically be broken down into two main sections: On-Page Optimization and Off-Page Optimization. That is how this guide will be laid out-in to portions. The first portion will focus on On-Page Optimization followed by Off-Page Optimization.

On-Page Optimization

On-page optimization consists of creating your website and its content in accordance of what major search engines are looking for in terms of how each search engine ranks web pages in search results. On-page optimization has many facets from content creation, meta description optimization, to technical improvements that can be done to enhance your website like improving page load times. I will discuss the most important areas to optimize on your website, and how to do so, in this guide.

Basic SEO Elements of Your Website That Need Optimization

These are the most important elements of your website that have implications for SEO.

Title Tag
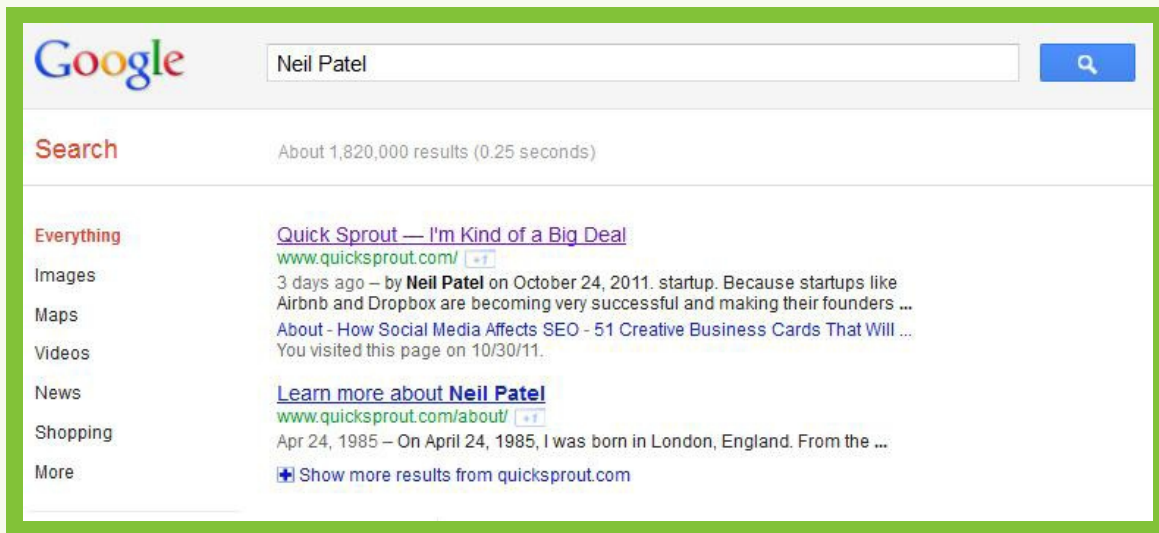
You may not know what a title tag is, but you have seen it. Every time you perform a Google search, websites with relevant title tags usually show up toward the top of the page. For example, I searched for the term "Neil" in the image above. Most of the results have the word "Neil" in the title tag. This means, if you want to rank for a specific term (like, Neil), that term should be in your title tag.

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Take a look at your blog's source code, the title tag will be close to the top and it will look something like this: *<title>Quick Sprout – I'm Kind of a Big Deal</title>*. Ideally, your title tags should be descriptive, short, unique, and somewhat keyword rich. With a blog, the title tag of each page is the title of your blog post, but this does not mean you can't optimize it.

How to Optimize Your Title Tags

Your title tag is very important to your website's performance in the search engine rankings pages (SERP). You need to be able to craft title tags that are appealing to users but also optimized for search engines. Here's how to do that.

Title Tags and SEO

Title tags might be the most important factor in your on-page SEO strategy. We can assume title tags are a major ranking factor for at least Google and have a big impact on how your website ranks and if users will click-through to your website once you do show up in the rankings. The title tag needs to be descriptive and utilize targeted keyword phrases that you want to rank for and that represent the page accurately.

Length of Title Tags

Your title tag should be no longer than 70 characters in length. Why? Because when title tag shows up in the search results, Google will only display 70 characters correctly. Anything after 150 characters will be cut off.

Check this out:

Notice how everything after "News" is cut off? Well this is the full Title Tag,

<title>NBA - National Basketball Association Teams, Scores, Stats, News, Standings, Rumors - ESPN</title>

Almost 27 characters are left out of the title when displayed in the SERPs, leaving the Title Tag looking incomplete and less appealing to users.

This is a much more optimized title tag as it displays correctly in the SERPs

Keywords

Your title tag needs to contain keywords that are relevant to the page's content. The keywords you use should be very specific and descriptive of what is on the page because the title tag is representative of the page's content. But don't go stuffing the tag with as many keywords as you can think of. Search engine spiders do not take kindly to keyword stuffers and your page will likely not rank for anything, or something unrelated. If you can't figure out what your webpage is about, how is a search engine going to?

Choose one to three keywords to target in each title tag and craft a tag that both spiders and users will be able to read and understand.

Let's look at a quick example of a well crafted title tag in the wild.

Notice how the title tag is descriptive and accurate in terms the content on the page? The title tag targets a few of keyword phrases like, "music subscription service", "premium music subscription", and so on. This title tag also fits within the allowed amount of 70 characters. It also features another important factor: a big brand.

Google loves big brands; it has made no qualms about that being known. So, while your website can still rank well despite not having a big brand attached to it, it is wise to include your brand, if possible.

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I suggest including your brand at the end of the title tag, so the emphasis is on your targeted keyword phrase rather than your branded keyword phrase, which shouldn't need any help to rank.

Uniqueness

Every single page on your website should have a unique title tag that is not used anywhere else on your website. This will give search engines a better chance at returning the right page for the search query. If you have two pages with the title tag "Great Flowers For Sale" but only one page is talking about *great flowers that are for sale*, how is the search engine to know which page to return? What if it returns the wrong page? Avoid this problem by crafting unique title tags for each page. If you have two pages about the same thing, condense the two pages into one page so you can create an effective title tag.

Things to Keep in Mind About Your Title Tags

- No more than 70 characters
- Focus on 1-3 keyword phrases in each Title Tag
- The more targeted the keywords you choose, the better
- Create a descriptive and accurate Title Tag to represent your page
- Include the most important keyword phrases at the front of the title tag
- Write your Title Tag for both users and search engines
- Include your Brand name in the Title Tag
- Every page needs to have a unique Title Tag

Meta Description
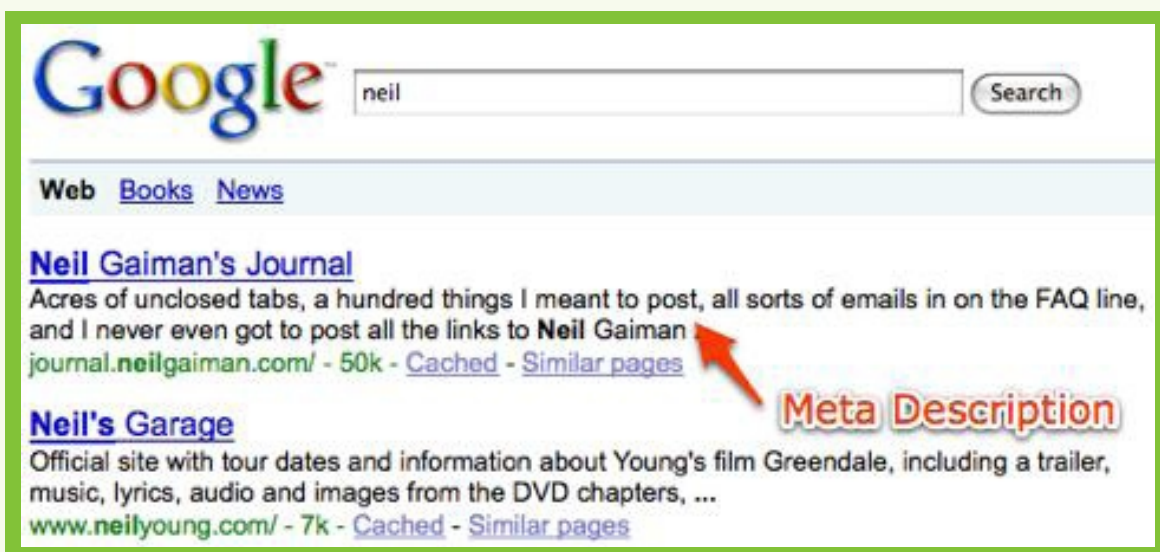
If you look at the image above, you will get a good understanding of what a meta description is. A meta description is a short sentence that describes what a web page is about. Each meta description tag on your blog should be unique, short, and descriptive.

Optimizing Meta Description Tags

Getting your website to rank well in the SERPs is only half the battle; you still need to convince users to click on your link.

Your description tag is your chance to show users that your website will have what they want. You have 150 characters to convince each user to click your link and go to your website.

Description Tags and SEO

While description tags are very important when you are optimizing your website for search, the contents of your tag do not have a direct effect on the algorithm Google uses when it evaluates and ranks your website. Description tags are there for the user, not the search engine.

Another thing to be aware of: even if you include a description tag, Google does not guarantee it will be used in the SERPs. You can consider a description tag more of a suggestion to Google, like, "Hey search spider, this is what this page is about, can you use this for the description tag?" Google will more often than not utilize the description tag you include, but do not be surprised if Google decides to grab another snippet of text from your page and use that instead. There isn't anything you can really do to prevent this from happening, so include the description tag to at least give Google something to use if they choose too.

What Makes a Great Description Tag?

A great description tag is made up of two parts. The first is a *unique value* proposition or a UVP. The UVP is what makes your site unique. It should demonstrate why your site is the best choice and what value it provides. The next part of the description tag is the *call to action* or CTA. This is your opportunity to tell the user what to do--Tell the user to click through or buy something from your site. If you gave your users a great UVP follow it up with a compelling CTA that urges them to perform an action and convert.

Disneyland California 3 Day Park Hopper Discount Admission ...
www.citypass.com/california/**disneyland** +1
Southern California CityPASS® includes a 3-Day **Disneyland**® Resort Park Hopper® & one Magic Morning early park entry. Save 32% with CityPASS®.

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Remember that your description tag should only be 150 characters in length to avoid Google cutting it short in the SERPs.

If you're going to edit your description tags manually using HTML here is what it will look like

<meta name="description" content="The official source for NFL news, video highlights, fantasy football, game-day coverage, schedules, stats, scores and more" />

Only edit the content with the quotes after **content**=

If you have Wordpress, you can manually edit your Description Tags or use a tool like All-in-One-SEO to easily edit your tags.

Things to remember about your Description Tags

- 150 characters max length
- Make it descriptive and convincing
- Should be equal to or less than 150 characters long
- Should contain a unique value proposition (UVP) and a call-to-action (CTA)
- Should encourage users to want to click-through to your webpage

XML Sitemap

The XML Sitemap is a way to let search engines know what URLs are on your website and are available to be crawled while including additional information how often the website is updated. Creating an XML Sitemap is easy, and there are many free tools online to generate one and submit it each search engine.

Here is a great list of tools from Google to create XML sitemaps.

HTML Sitemap

An HTML Sitemap is much like an XML Sitemap but it is created using HTML and does not allow you to provide additional information about your URLs.

301 Redirects

301 redirects are a way to tell spiders that one page has permanently been moved to another page. Have proper redirects in place is vital to avoiding users landing on broken or missing pages, which can kill your chances at converting.

Redirects are also important in terms of how users access your website. You'll need to be sure that your website is only accessible from either the non-www version or the www version. They might look like the same domain but you are running the risk of link juice being split between the two domains, having different versions of pages returned in the SERPs. You can make sure you have the right domain set by deploying redirects and choosing which version you want in Google Webmaster Tools.

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Alt Tags

```
</li><li><a title="Post to Google Buzz" class="google-buzz-button" href="http://www.google.com/buzz/post"
onclick="javascript:_gaq.push(['_trackEvent','outbound-article','http://www.google.com']);" data-button-style="small-count">
type="text/javascript" src="http://www.google.com/buzz/api/button.js"></script></li></ul><p><img src="http://www.quicksprout
alt="startup" title="startup" /></p>
```

Alt tags are used to give search engine spiders additional information about an element on your website. Alt tags can be applied to several types of elements on your website, like images and links. Image alt tags are vital because even though Google is improving its ability to analyze photos and classify them, providing the search engine with additional information via an alt tag is a great way to say, "Hey search engine, this image is of a green car that was made in America". If you do not include alt tags you're leaving it up to the search engine to figure it out.

Internal Linking Structure

Internal Linking Structure refers to how you link to other pages within your website. Developing a good internal linking structure is important for multiple reasons, including usability and accessibility for search engine spiders to effectively crawl your website and index your webpages.

Be sure you strategically place links on certain pages to increase click-throughs and conversions.

Page Load Speeds

Page Load Speeds are vital to your website's success on multiple fronts. Google does factor in the speed at which a page loads into their organic search algothrim. While it is unknown the exact weight it carries in the algothrim, it is assumed that the slower the page loads, the more penalty is put on your page. On the other side of that coin is the usability issue related to a slow loading page. Unfortunately, website visitors tend to care more about speed than all the bells and whistles we want to add to our websites.

According to surveys done by Akamai and Gomez.com, nearly half of web users expect a site to load in two seconds or less, and they tend to abandon a site that does not load within three seconds. Seventy-nine percent of web shoppers who have trouble with web site performance say they will not return to the site to buy again and around 44% of those web shoppers would tell a friend if they had a poor experience shopping online.

A great way to check your page load speeds is to use a free tool that Google provides. Page Speed Online is an awesome tool that will analyze your page load times and give them a rating and then give you tips on improving your pages.

The tool is really easy to use, here's how to utilize it.

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1 Go to https://developers.google.com/pagespeed/
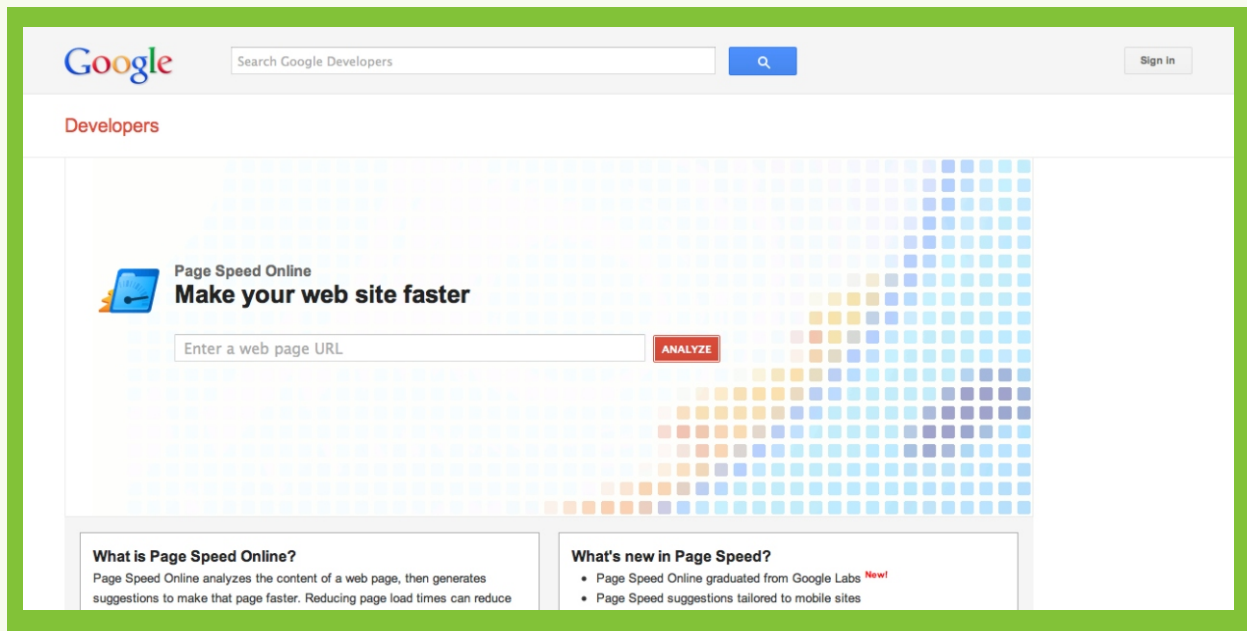
2 Enter the URL you'd like to check

QUICKSPROUT
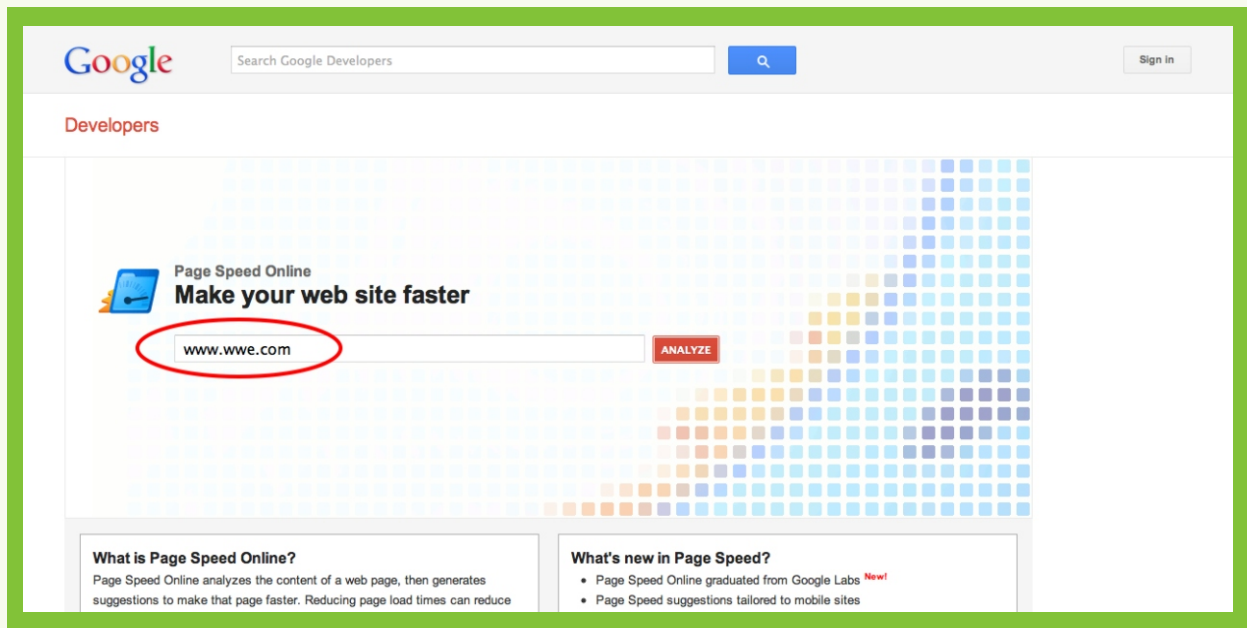
③ Google now gives your page a score out of 100 and gives you recommendations to fix issues that are causing your page to load slower than possible. You will get a priority of the problem, what the problem is and how to fix it.
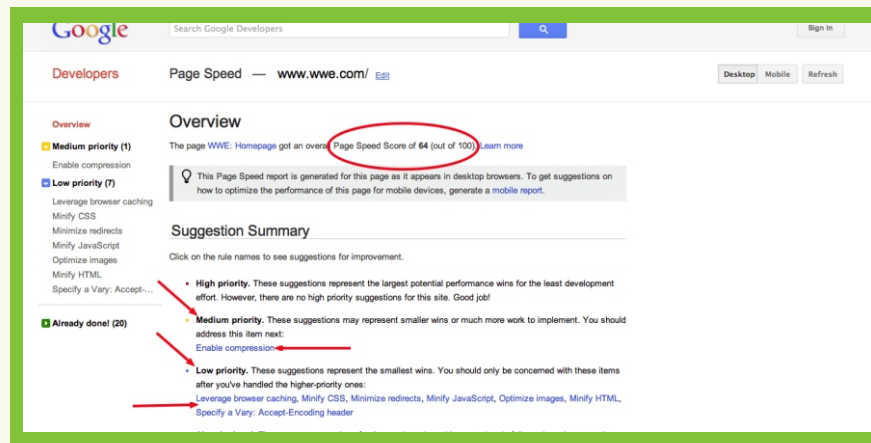
Now go fix those load times because they could be costing you serious money!

Content

You have probably heard that content is king by now and in many ways that is true, but that content cannot be crap or you'll be susceptible to volatile algothrim changes that could end up virtually killing your website. Your content needs to be optimized as well as being unique and of great quality.

Keyword Research

Keyword research is perhaps the most difficult and most important aspect of all of your SEO efforts. It is the basis on which you will make decisions on which keywords to target when you're crafting title tags and when deciding which keywords to target while creating content and link building. You can be more successful if your keyword research is done well, but you can lose a lot of time and progress if it is done incorrectly.

Let's look at how to kill it with your keyword research.

Understanding Your Customers and How They Think...and Search

Keywords are tricky things because you'll find yourself being pulled in many different directions when trying to figure out which terms to target. You have to make sure you're going after keyword terms that people are searching for, terms that represent your business well, and, most importantly, terms that are going to drive traffic to your website that will convert.

You know your business better than anyone and you're an expert in your field so you would think you already know every keyword phrase that relates to your business and the words people should be using to find your business. Unfortunately, all too often that is not the case. The keyword phrases you would think are great for your business might not be at all what your potential customers are actually using to search. Sometimes your customers do not know what they want, or don't know what words are related to your industry. This is why conducting keyword research prior to beginning your SEO campaign is vital. The more you understand about what keywords are being used to search for your type of business, the better.

How To Conduct Keyword Research

The first step to successful keyword research is to become familiar with the website for which you are building keyword research. If this is for your own website, then you should already be familiar with the site and if you're not, GO DO IT NOW.

1 Generate a list of all the keywords related to your industry and your website. You will want to use Excel, or similar program, to list your keywords so you can sort them later on.

2 Once you have a good, solid list of keywords start to break the large list down into smaller lists. Each list should be more focused on a certain term or concept. For example, if you were generating a keyword document about athletic shoes you would want to start by breaking down your master list into smaller lists that are centered around a certain sport. So, a "basketball shoe" list and, "football shoe" list, etc. This is going to allow you to have a better grasp of your keywords and save time when it is time to apply your research to the different pages on your website.

3 Once you've broken your master list down into smaller lists, go through your lists and start to build those lists out further. Take your core keyword for each list and start to add other relevant terms to it. In our athletic shoe example you would take your "basketball shoe" list and build it out so it includes terms like, "signature basketball shoe", "cheap basketball shoe", "basketball shoes", "green basketball shoes", etc. Don't censor your keywords at this point, just add them as you think of them. Do this for each list you have.

4 Now that you have large, robust individual lists, it's time to start throwing out the terms and phrases that don't have anything to do with your website. Since you weren't censoring what you were adding to your lists you might have put in a term that makes no sense to your website like, "green basketball shoes for girls". Well, let's assume you don't have any green basketball shoes for girls. Eliminate this phrase. Try to get your lists lean and targeted.

5 You now have many small lists of relevant, targeted keywords that relate to your website. It is time to check the search volumes of those keyword phrases. We are going to use the Google Adwords Tool for this.

6 Adwords only lets you check search volume for up to 100 keyword phrases at a time, so start to add your lists one list at a time.

Let's take a break and look at the Google Adwords Tool and I'll explain how it works and what the information it returns means.

The Keyword Tool returns a variety of data including, "Global Search Volume", "Local Search Volume", and "Competition". Global Search Volume refers to an estimated number of times that particular keyword phrase has been searched for globally in the past 12 months. Local Search Volume is the estimated number of times the phase was searched in the country and region you are searching from. Competition refers to AdWords and the competition in terms of how competitive the bidding for that particular keyword phrase is. While Competition isn't purely organic searching, it can still give you an idea of how competitive the keyword is in general.

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7 Once you Google returns search volumes for your phrases, you need to change the "Match Type" to "Phrase" because right now Google Adwords Tool is returning data for "Broad". We want to use "Phrase" or "Exact" because that means Google is returning results closely related to our initial queries versus results for terms that are broadly matched, and not that targeted.

8 Once you've changed your "Match Type" export the data to a .csv file for Excel.

9 Now, import your Adwords data into your smaller lists of keywords so the corresponding Competition, Global and Local search volumes line up with the appropriate keywords.

10 If some of the keyword phrases you initially put on your lists returned no search volumes then delete those keyword phrases from your lists. Then add in any new keyword phrases that you did not initially include but Google returned because they were related to your original list.

You now have a robust document that has targeted keywords that people are actually using in their searches. This isn't a static document though. It should be updated periodically to keep pace with your industry and its searching trends.

Analyzing Your Keyword Document

Now that your keyword document is complete, you should spend some time familiarizing yourself with it. Are there terms you're seeing that you are surprised to see? Remember when I said that potential customers might be using terms you wouldn't think are applicable to your industry? Do you see some terms that you are surprised by the amount, whether large or small, of people searching a particular term? Hopefully this document is providing you some insights into your customers' minds.

Your Keyword Document in Relation to Your SEO Strategy

These are the keywords you'll be using to develop your on-page SEO strategy. They will make up your Title Tags, be used to craft the content that occupies the pages of your website, used when link building, and when developing your brand. In other words, **THIS DOCUMENT IS IMPORTANT.** Do it right, spend time on it, and be thorough.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when applying your keyword research document to your SEO strategy:

High Volume vs. Relevancy

Just because a keyword has a high search volume doesn't mean it's a good keyword to target. A high search volume keyword might get a lot of traffic but that traffic might not be the right kind of traffic for your website. You want targeted traffic that is likely to convert. Be sure the keywords you choose have a high probability of converting, not just driving aimless traffic.

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A Fight You Can't Win

High volume keyword phrases might be too competitive for you to go after. Some keyword phrases are just out of reach, at least for now. Rather than trying to compete with a website that has thousands of links, a strong brand, and a tons of social signals, aim for "low hanging fruit" to start. Go after easier keywords that are valuable and that you can rank for quickly.

A great way check on the competiveness of a keyword phrase is plug it into Google and search it. Of the returned results, what kind of sites come up? Are the top results taken by mega-brands? If so, it's probably going to be hard to beat them. If the SERPs aren't dominated by well-known brands it doesn't mean there isn't high competition so you will want to analyze the top sites' Title Tags .

For example, let's say you have a website for your surfing lessons business in California. An obvious keyword phrase you would probably want to explore is "surfing lessons in California". So you use the Keyword Tool to see if there is any volume for it, and there is. Now let's see how competitive this keyword is.

Here are the top 5 results for "surfing lessons in California",

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By examining the Title Tags of the top 5 results, we can determine how difficult it will be to compete for "surfing lessons in California". Notice how only results #2 and #3 are targeting "surfing lessons California"? Results #1, #4 and #5 aren't even optimized for "surfing lessons in California" but they returned for it nonetheless. With a well optimized Title Tag, and some high quality links all using the phrase "surfing lessons in California", you should have a good shot at out ranking some of these sites.

The Long Tail Is Where the Conversion are Where the Money is
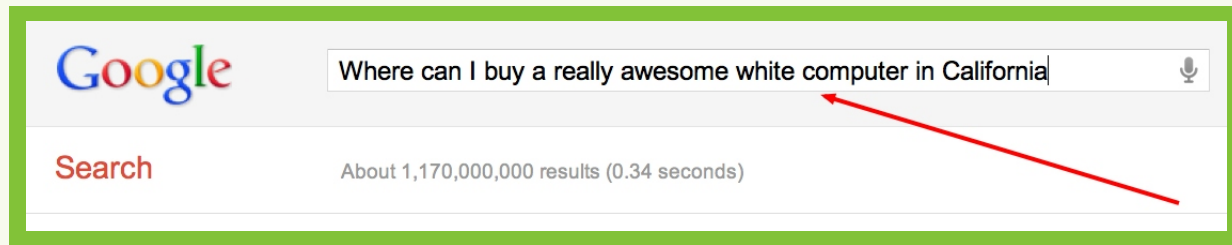
Be aware of the power of the long-tail keyword phrases. The longer and more descriptive a search query is, the more likely the searcher is farther along in the purchase or conversion process. A good example of this is someone searching for "computer" versus someone searching for "15 inch laptop with 4 gigs of ram". Who do you think is closer to actually buying a computer? Find descriptive keywords that have low competition but high search volumes.

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OFF-PAGE SEO

What is Off-Page SEO?

Off-page SEO is the practice of, well, optimizing your Search Engine Strategy off of your website. Confused? Well, don't worry it's actually quite simple in theory, but more difficult in practice.

Search engines use a number of signals when ranking websites. These signals include social signals like "Likes" and "Tweets", all of the on-page elements we previously discussed, and finally off-page signals like links back to your website. It is believed that links are the strongest signal that your website is an authority on a particular subject, thus deserving of a high rank. So, links are extremely important to the success of your website.

But how the heck do you get people to link to your website? That is the difficult part, and that is where the art of *link building* comes into play and you're about to become a master link builder.

3 Types of Link Building
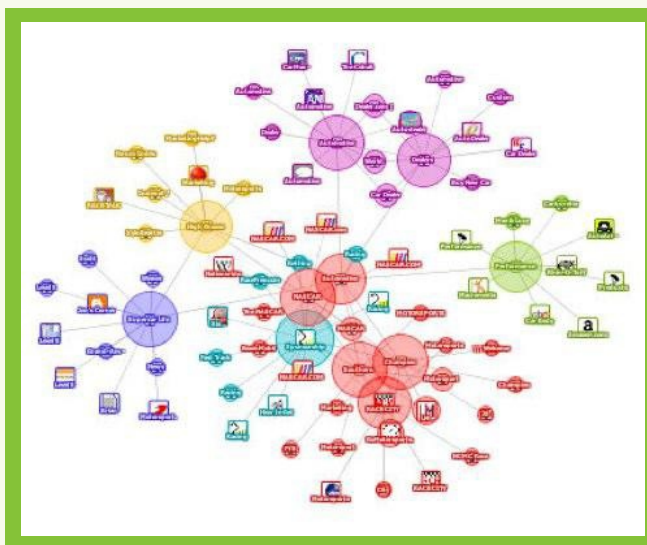
I like to categorize link building into three main types: manual, automated, and viral. The names are fairly self-explanatory but the methods to successfully execute each type are not. This guide focuses on manual and viral link building.

Manual Link Building

Manual link building can often be difficult because it takes a great amount of effort, creativity, and perseverance to succeed at it.

Some common manual link building tactics include:

▸ Email Link Requests   ▸ Guest Blogging

▸ Directory Submissions   ▸ Ethical Link Buying

▸ Blog Commenting

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All of these tactics can be great link building methods if done correctly. Here are some tips for making a killing with manual link building.

Send Out Emails

It is painful to send out emails asking for a links, but it's really effective. If someone is linking to your competition, they'll probably be willing to link to you. A great way to find out who is linking to your competitors is to do a competitive backlink analysis on all of your competitors. Use advanced search operators like **link:** "your competitors website url" to find all the links that Google has indexed for that website. Once you have a list of websites that are linking to you competitors you can contact them and see if they'll link to you.

All you have to do is send that website owner an email like this:

Hi John,

I know you don't know me, but name is Neil Patel and I.m with [KISSmetrics](). I noticed that you link to a few of my competitors such as Omniture, so I thought I would take a shot in the dark to see if you would be willing to link to us as well.

Don't worry, KISSmetrics isn't another me-too analytics solution, which is why your website readers will see value in us. Unlike some of the other solutions in the market place, KISSmetrics allows you to track, optimize, and improve your conversion funnels with a simple and easy to use report.

Thanks for taking the time to read this email.
Have a great day,
Neil

If you need help finding out who you should be emailing take to Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and LinkedIn. Use these services to search out your niche and industry and find the thought leaders and game changers in it. Make a list of all the people in your niche who you feel would be interested in what you have to say and can help you. Make sure your list is detailed with names, emails, companies, when you last contacted each person, and what their response was. This will help you track your success and failures and give you opportunities to capitalize.

Directory Submissions

Directory submissions have recently gotten a bad rap and might not have the same weight they used to when it comes to link juice they pass, but including directory submissions in your link profile is vital to have a well-balanced, naturally-appearing link profile.

For the best results and return on investment of your time with directory submissions, seek out high quality, relevant directories in your niche. Try to avoid submitting your website to "catch all" types of directories that will accept any link. These links don't offer much value and, if in large quantities, can harm your website.

To find relevant directories utilize advanced search operators and Google. For example, let's say you have a rock climbing website and need some directories that are in your niche, you could use this search query,

allintittle: sports directory
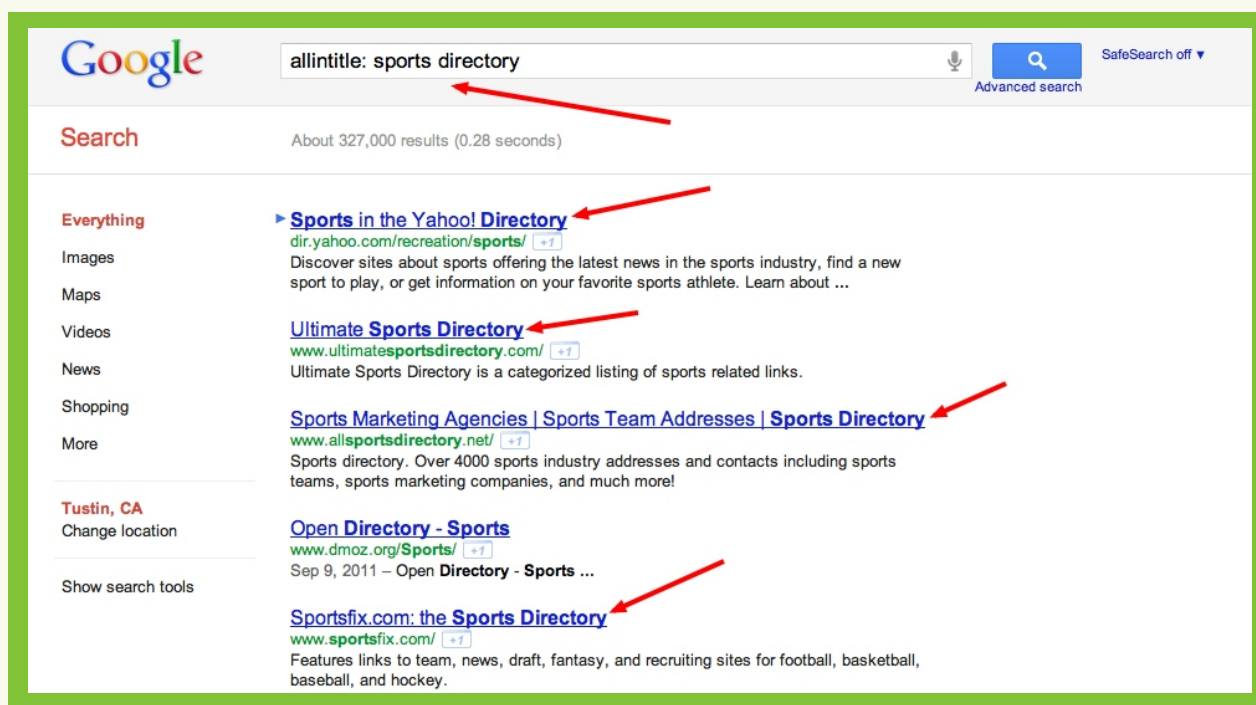
This is a great way to find relevant directories to whatever niche you're a part of, just swap out "sports" for a good keyword for industry and start searching results.

Ethical Link Purchasing

I know what you are going to say, buying links is frowned upon, right? And yes, you are right, you don't want to hit up a website and ask them if they will sell you a link.

But what you can do is spend money on content and then give that content away for free. The best example of this are infographics as you can create good ones for $500 and email popular bloggers to see if they want exclusive rights to it as long as they link back.

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Popular blogs like Guy Kawasaki and Mashable seem to be willing to post infographics created by other companies and if you happen to get a link from one of their sites you'll be getting a very authoritative link.

When using this strategy, you have to understand that you can't just create crap content and expect others to pick it up. If you create good information and just email popular bloggers, there is an extremely high chance that you can get a link from high Pagerank blog for $500.

Link Buying

You can also buy links from websites. This practice is somewhat risky in that Google does look down on and you can get penalized if you do get caught buying links, but you can do it intelligently and minimize the risks. When buying links you want to be very selective in which sites you purchase links from. Look for sites that sell links on homepages and blogs like Digital-Point Forums.Cost should not be more than $50 to $100 for a PR 4 or higher link.

When buying links, you should avoid:

- Sites that say they sell links (disclosures)
- sites that link out to too many other sites (ex: 50 plus percent of the links on their site are to outside sites - don't use this rule for directory sites)
- sites that link or discuss topics that aren't relevant to your site
- sites that utilize the default Wordpress themes
- sites that discuss spammy topics like gambling or adult related content

Make sure the sites you're purchasing links from look legitimate and aren't just using a default wordpress theme. Also be sure the content they have on the website is quality information and useful.

The easiest way to get caught buying links is to buy links from websites that are of poor quality and not run correctly.

Sponsored Reviews

Sponsored reviews are an excellent way to get credible, high quality links. Using a service like Sponsored Reviews will allow you to request that respectable bloggers use your product, service or website and then write an honest review on it. There are also built in tools that help you choose the best blogs for your money by using filters to sort through different filters like if the blog is cached, how much traffic the blog gets, etc.

Some advantages to using sponsored reviews are:

- Access to thousands of bloggers who are willing to write about your product
- High-quality, Do-Follow Link
- Exposure

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A sponsored review can cost you between $5 and $1000 per post, so there is an opportunity for every budget.

You should use sponsored reviews for any of the following reasons:

‣ Build quality traffic to your website

‣ Launch a new product or service

‣ Build high quality links to your website

Be sure that you are having the blogger using quality anchor text's for links back to your website. These anchor text's should be keywords that you are targeting for the respective pages that are being linked too. You should also suggest that the blogger link out to other high-authority sites in your niche to take advantage of link blending tactics. Ask the blogger to use relevant links to .edu or another website that is in the top 100 results in Google for your niche. This will help increase the quality of link juice and power that you get from the link back to your website in the sponsored review.

Blog Commenting
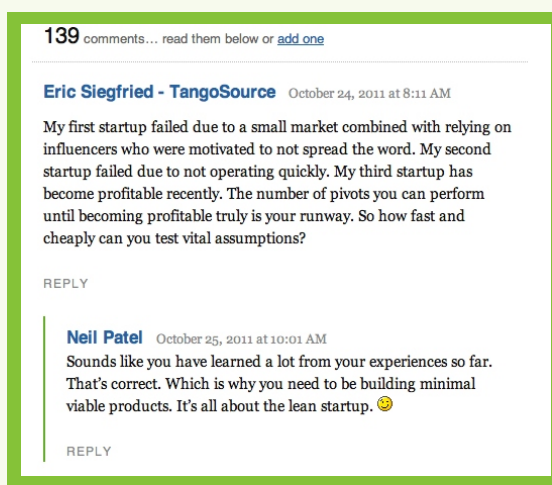
Blog commenting is extremely time consuming, yet can be worth your effort. The best strategy to utilize when blog commenting is to be genuine, helpful ,and consistent. If you're going to leave a comment on a blog post, genuinely read the post and put together a thoughtful comment. DO NOT SPAM blogs with comments that offer nothing of value, it's a quick way to build the reputation as a spammer. If you don't have anything helpful or valuable to add to the conversation then either think of something or don't comment. Also, be consistent with your responses across blogs. There is a good chance your niche is quite small when it comes to the blogging community surrounding it, so don't go bashing something on one blog and praising it on another. Blog commenting is more about you developing yourself as a helpful member of the community rather than scoring link juice from a comment.

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10 Simple Steps to Better Photoshop Performance

By Guest Author | August 13th, 2009 | Performance, Photoshop | 91 Comments

Guest blogging is a excellent way to build great links back to your website, develop yourself as an authority in your field, and build great relationships with other powerful figures in your industry. Remember, that landing great guest blogging opportunities is more about relationships than it is about SEO. You are dealing with another human being when it comes to guest blogging, not a bot or a directory. You will have to be genuine in your proposal to guest blog and really offer some value to the blogger who is hosting it. I've guest blogged on some of the biggest websites in tech and marketing and all of those opportunities happened because of relationships I've built over the years.

If you're just starting out, it's probably not feasible to cold email the biggest blogger in your arena and expect a response but you can grab some "low hanging fruit" and build from there.

MyBlogGuest Is a great website where bloggers and writers can meet up and discuss blogging opportunities. You can browse the website and view different blogs that need guest blogs in tons of different niches. Once you find a good opportunity, just shoot the blogger an email or private message and propose you write a blog for them.

A great pitch might sound something like,

"Hi Jeff,

My name is Neil Patel and I saw you were interested in some guest blog posts discussing social media. I'd love to contribute.

Would you be interested in a blog post discussing social media's impact on search engine optimization? The title could be,

'Social Media and Its Impact on SEO'

I am an experienced blogger with experience in social media and SEO so I can put something together for your blog.

Let me know if you're interested and I can put it together and get it over to you.

Thanks for your time."

See how genuine that was? I was honest, offered something of value to his site and let him know my experience and why I would be a great fit for the job. You can think of this like a cover letter for a job application.

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Once you get comfortable with some of the easier blogging opportunities and have some great published content online, start aiming for the more popular blogs an soon you'll be getting requests from blogs for you to write for them!

Using Advanced Search Operators for Link Building

Like mentioned in the directory submission section, using advanced search operators can be a great way to comb through Google's massive amounts of links and websites to find potential link sources. Here are some helpful search operators can save you time and find you great places for links

Inachor:"keyword"

What this command is doing is asking Google return all the websites with links pointing to them with that keyword as an anchor text. This is an excellent way to find websites with relevant topics that you can potentially reach out to for a link. Once your find a website that is relevant and you feel is valuable to you send an email like I described earlier in the manual link building section.

Intitle:"keyword"

This operator will return pages that have your keyword in the title tag which means this website is also a potential link opportunity. Send out a custom email to the blog owner or editor. Let them know about your website and how it might be beneficial to their website if they linked back to your website. Always be ready to provide a reason WHY another site would want to link to your site. Make mention of what that website has to gain by linking back to you.

Inurl:"keyword"

This operator is going to show you websites that contain your keyword in the url. This is an excellent way to find a "links" or "resources" page on a website.

Try, **Inurl:"links"** or **Inurl:"resources"** to find thousands of pages with whole sections of their site dedicated to links.

But the way to get the real value and gold out of our advanced search operators is to combine them to find very specific and targeted websites.

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For example, I am trying to find websites in Google that are linking to rocking climbing websites. First, I'll try to find rock climbing websites with "links" or "resources" pages.

I'll use this to search,

Inurl:"links" Intitle:"rock climbing"
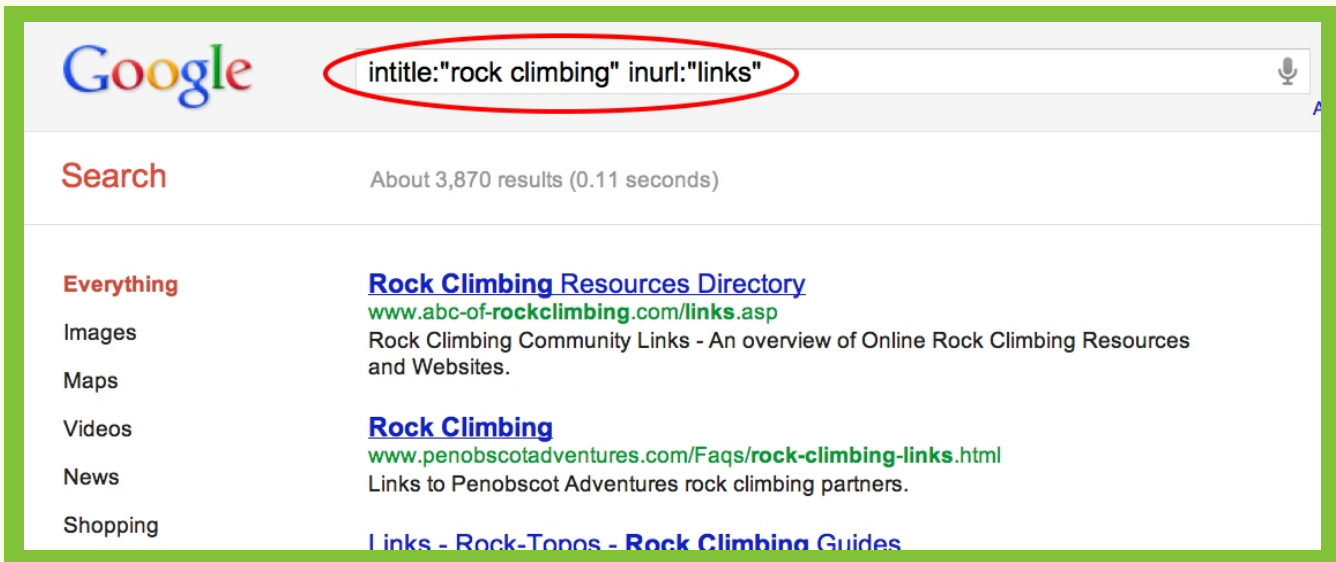
Now I'll have all the websites that have "rocking climbing" in their title and have pages that have "links" in their url.

QUICKSPROUT
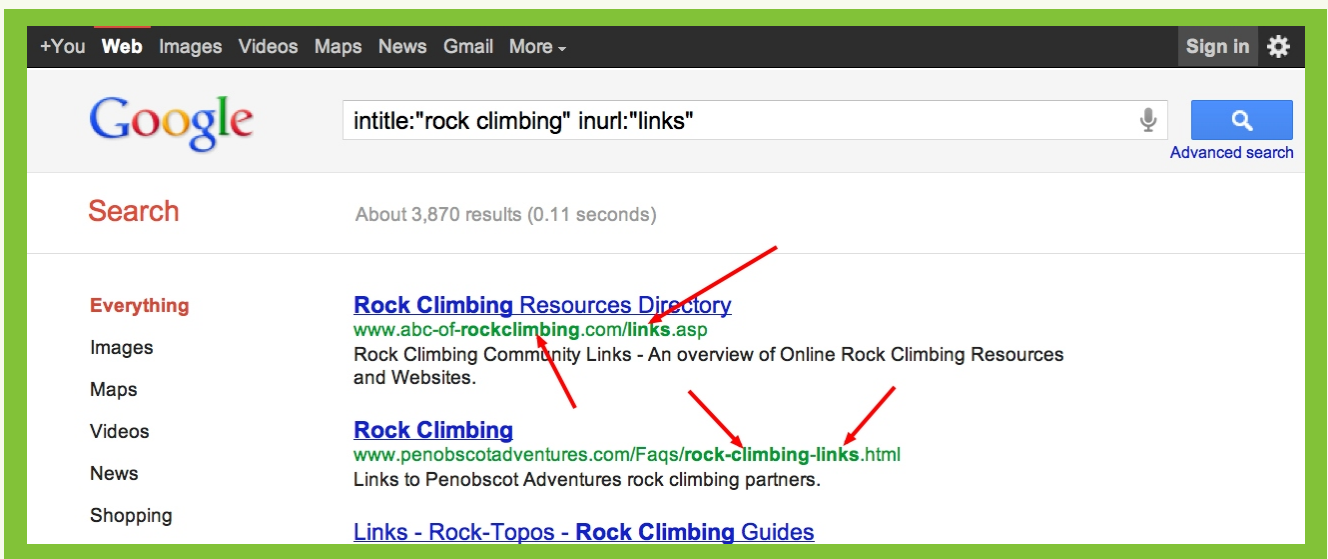
Within seconds I have thousands of linking possibilities. Now I'll send an email to each website that I feel can provide value to me, and might potentially link back to me. This does take a lot of time, to craft an email and personalize it, but I can pay off big time.

I can also hire an intern to do the work for. If I pay the intern $10 bucks an hour and get 10 or 15 links out of every 100 emails sent every 8 hours each link works out to about $6.77 to $10. It would be smart to keep track of which websites you email, which operator and keyword combination you used to find it and the websites response to your email. This way you can save time by not reaching out to the same website twice.

There are many search operators at your disposal, so explore combinations of operators and keywords to keep uncovering linking potential.

Viral Link Building

In comparison to manual link building where there isn't as much prep work to do, viral link building is all about preparation and creating amazing content without actually having a formal request to do it. Viral link building is creating a piece of "link bait" or content that people want to link to. In theory, you create great content and people will link to it and then others will see those links and link to you as well, thus the viral nature.

Creating this link bait or content that will go viral is not an easy task. It has to be interesting and captivating as well as funny, scary, shocking, or informative. It really has to have that wow factor.

A great type of link bait I have had success with is creating infographics to use with KISSmetrics. Our infographics have thousands of links, Tweets, and Likes. People love to share infographics because they take possibly boring information and make it digestible using colors, graphics, images, and style. Our infographics have turned normally boring things like page load times into a fun, shocking, and informative graphics that people can't get enough of.

QUICKSPROUT
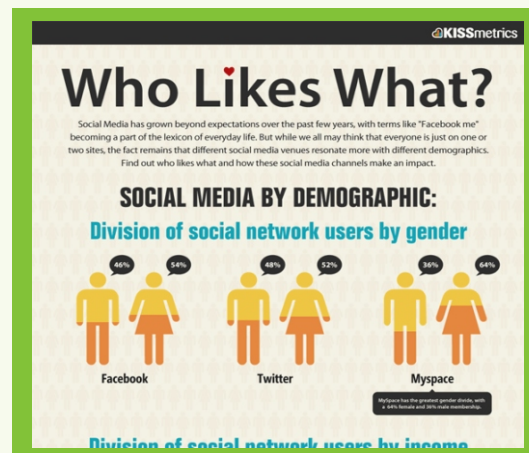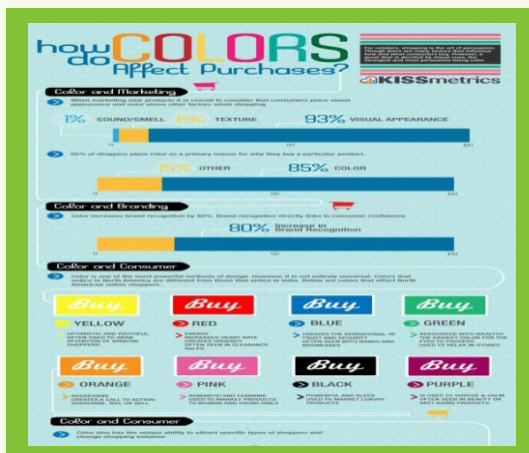
Some great types of other viral content that you should experiment are:

- Lists
- Funny or controversial pictures
- Videos
- Tools or widgets
- eBooks
- How to guides

All of these forms of content can spread like wildfire online if the content is great and you push it out to the right channels like Twitter, Facebook and other niche communities.

It is also important that you make this content easily shareable. If you create a killer infographic make sure you do the following to increase the odds of it being shared:

- Offer the graphic on your website in multiple sizes
- Include an embeddable html code that makes it easy for others to put on their websites.
- Include social sharing options like a Twitter, Like and Share button.
- Email all your friends, family and colleagues about the graphic and ask them to share it.
- Submit the graphic to various social sites like Hacker News and Reddit

Using Humor To Get Links

People love to laugh, and people love to share the laughter with their friends. This is why humor and funny content online can generate thousands of links and spread like wild fire. You find something funny while at work, share it with a coworker via email, he then shares it with his Twitter followers, who then share it with theirs, then it makes it's way to Facebook and eventually you've got more links then you could dream of! Of course, creating that kind of content isn't easy, but it can be done.

Take a look at The Oatmeal.

This one comic strip has over 5k Tweets, nearly 2k +1's and over 96,000 Facebooks likes.

If you can create a something that is funny, that is easy to share, and easily relatable to your audience, you can get some major backlinks. Experiment with videos, comics, pictures, editorials, Twitter accounts, or Facebook posts. Find something that works and run with it.

Avoid Anchor Text Perfection All the Time

QUICKSPROUT
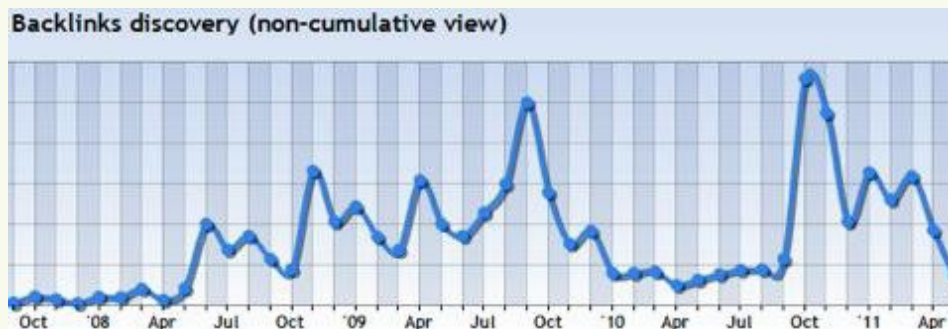
The best way to boost your rankings is to build rich anchor text links. For example, if my startup KISSmetrics wants to rank well for the term "web analytics" I need to get other websites to link to KISSmetrics.

When convincing these sites to link to me, I ideally want them to link with the phrase *web analytics* as the link text instead of my company name, KISSmetrics.
If more people link to you with the keyword you want to rank for as the anchor text of the link, your rankings will start sky rocketing for that keyword.

But what you may not know is that if you get too many links that are rich in anchor text, your rankings will drastically drop after a while. So, you have to rotate the anchor text up and ideally make it natural.

In essence, having rich anchor text is good, but it can't be too rich. I usually try to keep my anchor text rich for less than 10% of my links.

A great way to avoid having too perfect anchor text is take your main keyword you are link building for and to vary the phrase slightly when building different links so that you have a lot of links that appears more natural.

For example, say you are building links for the term "healthy hamburgers in San Francisco" for a fast food joint in San Francisco. You should build out a list of your keyword, but with variations. You can utilize a wide variety of anchor text over the course of your link building campaign like "healthy burgers in San Francisco", "San Francisco Healthy Hamburgers", "healthy hamburgers in the Bay Area", and so on. Once you have a good list of variations, start to build links for one keyword phrase, building them slowly.

Once you have a good amount of links for that particular keyword phrase move onto the next phrase. Cycle through all your phrases so that over a period of time you have a good amount of links built with a wide variety of anchor text. Make sure you are using your main keyword phrase, "healthy hamburgers in San Francisco" on the most valuable sites, while using your variations on less powerful sites.

Building Links to Important Pages

Your homepage is important, but having 100% of your links to your homepage is really unnatural.

I personally try to make sure that 80% of my links, if not more, are going to internal pages. And the best way to do this is to make sure your internal pages have really good content.

What you will notice when your internal pages start to get more links, the ranking of your homepage will also start going up. It is because search engines do not just try to evaluate where you should rank on a page-by-page basis, but they also look at your website as a whole. This is why sites like About.com and Wikipedia rank for millions of terms.

A great way to figure out what your most important internal pages are is to dig deep into your analytics. Here's how to do it:

1 Go to your Google Analytics page

2 Access "Content" dashboard

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3 Then hit "Site Content"

4 You can now view your site's content broken down into the amount of traffic each page gets.

5 You can either determine how important a page is by the amount of traffic it gets or how many conversions the page assists in.

Stay away from all page links. Although they can easily be bought, it's unnatural that someone would link to your website from every page unless you have a blog (for example, blogrolls).

I know doing the things I mentioned above may not get you to the same link count as your competition, but you will start increasing your rankings drastically. Don't fall into the trap of building links quickly.

Although your rankings will go up in the short run, it's hard to maintain your rankings once you get to the top. You'll start noticing way too many fluctuations compared to if you built relevant links slowly.

Spying on Your Competitors Links

What better way to find websites that are willing to link to websites in your niche then exploring the links your competitors have already gotten? A competitive link analysis can be a great way to score extra links, forge new relationships and get an idea of your competitor's strategy.

Here are a few advanced search operators that can help you do a competitive link analysis on your competitors.

Link: "competitor's website url"

This simple search operator will give you a great list of links that Google has indexed that point to your competitors website. Simply use this operator and start to analyze the types of links your competitors are earning.

Look for the type of sites they are getting links on, the keyword used in the anchor text and try to figure out how they got those links. Did they request them? Did produce a piece of content that was great enough that the website link to them on their own? Are the links in the body of the website or in the footer or sidebar?

Generate a list of all the links your competitors have gotten that you want to target as well, then set out to get links from the same places. If you find a website linking to your competitor, email the webmaster and ask them if they'd consider linking to your website because your website is such a great resource.

SEO TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Keyword Tools

Google Keyword Tool - This is a great free keyword tool that you can use for your keyword research. After you have created your keyword lists, use Google's keyword tool to find your keywords search volume and competition. Use this information to determine a keywords value and determine which you should go after.

Alexa.com - Alexa can provide some great information on which keywords are sending traffic to a website, and how much traffic each keyword is sending to that site. This is great for getting an insight into what is working for your competitors in terms of driving traffic through keyword phrases.

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Soovle.com - This is a great free keyword tool that will give you the autosuggested terms for multiple search engines including google, bing, wiki and more all on the same screen. Use this tool to generate keyword ideas early in your keyword research phase.
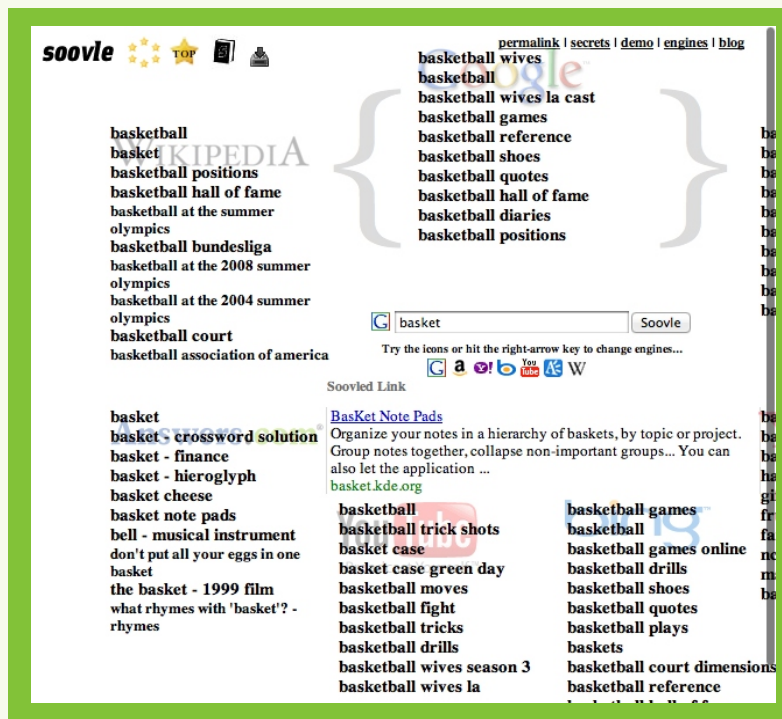
SEMRush - SEMRush offers a great tool that allows you to enter a domain and then find information on the top 10 keywords that the website ranks for. It will display their positions, traffic percentages, competition and more. This can be great for spying on your competition and finding out which keywords they are going after.

Research Tools

Google Trends and Insights - Use these two Google tools to determine what topics are hot and to follow popular trends. This can be valuable when writing or crafting blog content.

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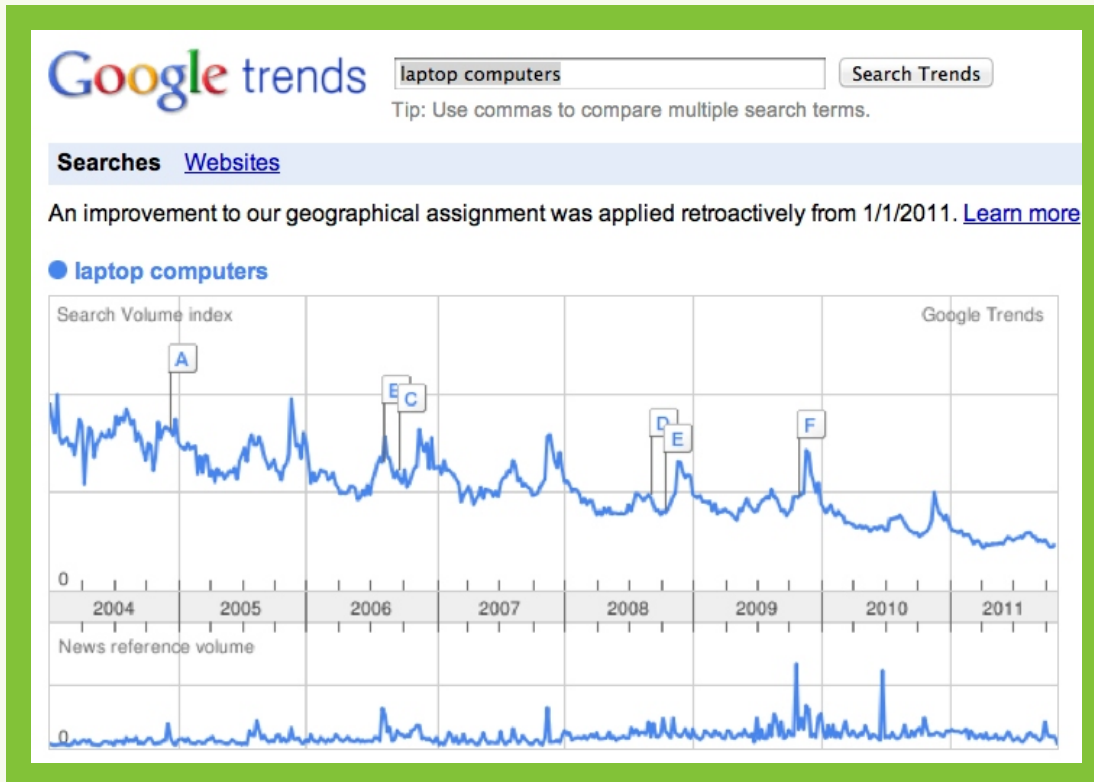
Link Building Tools

Zemanta - Zemanta is a service that helps you create blog posts and get those blog posts in front of other bloggers face who might link to you. You can use Zemanta in a number of ways, like a Wordpress plugin. Once you have the plugin installed and activated Zemanta will start to suggest tags, links, photos and related articles to help you craft your blog posts as you write. It's really great for saving you time when creating a blog post because all this is done through your Wordpress Dashboard. Another great advantage of Zemanta is that all the images are vetted for copyright and can be drag and dropped into your blog posts.

Once you have a great blog post put together Zemanta will help you link to your other blog posts to improve interlinking on your site. But the best part of Zemanta is when the tool starts to suggest your content to other bloggers and they end up linking to your blog posts. Even though this part of Zemanta isn't free, a lot of the tools and services they offer are. If you use Zemanta to build links the average link comes out to about $10 per link even though you are charged per impression, not per link.

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Open Site Explorer - Open Site Explorer is SEOmoz's index of the web. Open Site Explorer can offer you very indepth link metrics, link profiles and social metrics that can be invaluable to your link building campaigns.

SEOmoz offers a whole suite of tools including Open Site Explorer that can help you track SEO campaigns, link build, and optimize your website. It is definitely worth checking out.

SEOmoz   - SEOmoz has a great suite of seo tools including the great Open Site Expolorer which is a deep index of the entire web that can provide valuable link metrics that can lead to amazing linking possibilities. Use Open Site Explorer to figure out who is linking to your competitors, then put together a master list of those possible opportunities. Include information like domain authority, MOZrank and MOZtrust and sort them by which would be most valuable. Then go after those linking opportunities.

Google Search Operators   - Like I discussed previous in this guide, Search Operators are great for digging deep into Google's results and getting specific types of results. Use operators like **site:, inurl, link:** and **intitle** to narrow down results to make your linking acquiring easier and more efficient.

MyBlogGuest and Sponsored Reviews - Both these websites and services are great for getting valuable links and coverage in blogs. Use MyblogGuest to find opportunities to write guest blog posts for other blogs where you can include optimized anchor text links back to your website. Remember to try to write for blogs in a related niche to the website they will be linking back to for maximum linking benefits.

Use sponsored reviews to get other bloggers to write about your products which will include valuable links to your website. These aren't usually free, but can be really worth the time and money, just pick high quality blogs and make sure you work with the blogger to optimize the anchor text.

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Directories - Use Directories sparingly and focus on ones that will provide value. To determine if it will provide value, verify that is offers "do follow" back links, have a high PR, directories focusing on your niche and directories that tend to not just accept just any website. Here is small list of some good directories to explore:

dir.yahoo.com

botw.org

http://www.ipl.org/

http://www.stpt.com/directory/

https://secure.business.com/crm/signup/promo.do?promo=ADIFIF

http://www.americasbest.com/

http://www.joeant.com/

http://www.jayde.com/

http://www.mavicanet.com/

http://www.cannylink.com/

Check My Links - This plugin for Chrome will scan every link on any web page and tell you which links are broken. This can be used to identify broken links on web pages that you would like to have a link on. To make the most of the tool, find websites that you want a link on. Scan the web site with the tool and then email the web master letting him know that a specific link is broken and offer him a good alternative for the broken link by suggesting your website. This can be time consuming so you might want to consider outsourcing this task to an intern who can do this for a few hours to maximize your results.

Excel & Google Docs - Both Excel and Google Docs can be great tools for sorting data and pulling data from websites using scraping tools. Both require some knowledge with how Excel or Google Docs works but are easy enough to learn and provide some great results. You can explore Excel uses for SEOs here, and the same for Google Docs here.

SEO PLAN OF ACTION

You've now got all the SEO tools and skills you need to get going on your optimization campaign. Here is your plan of action to crushing the rankings!

STEP 1 ▸ **Audit**

Before you get to actively building links or optimizing your on page content you need to figure out where you page stands. Take note of your analytics traffic and which pages you'd like to see increased traffic, as well as which conversions you want to see increased.

STEP 2 ▸ **Research**

Research will be the basis of your campaigns so do it well. Research your keywords, your competitors, your niche market, trends and insights. Use tools like Google's keyword tool, Alexa and advanced search operators to decide on which keywords you should target for on page optimization and where your competitors are getting links, and how you can score the same links.

Build out robust keyword lists with multiple silos focusing on targeted terms that you feel you can rank well on and will provide value to your business

STEP 3 ▸ **On-Page Optimization**

Once you have a set of terms you're comfortable with start to optimize your on page content and meta information for your website. Concentrate first on title tags, meta descriptions and getting your pages load times under control. Remember to keep the keywords you use in your title tags targeted to the content on the page. Use unique value propositions and calls to actions with your meta descriptions. Keep your page load times as low as possible to keep users on your pages and to not get your site dinged in the search engines. Make sure every page has a unique title tag and meta description and has unique content.

Make sure you are creating valuable, high quality content for every page of your website. Web pages with great content are more likely to be linked to and will rank higher in the rankings.

STEP 4 ▸ **Off Page Optimization**

During your research phase of your SEO campaign you should have identified where your competitors are earning links and how they are acquiring them. Now that you have your website's optimization under control it is time to start building links to your web pages. Start to build links back to your website using the various methods outlined in this guide.

Build a variety of links using a wide variety of anchor texts to different pages on your website with various tools like SEOmoz, directories, guest blogging, viral content, etc. Keep track of where you are building links, which anchor texts you are using and the rankings of your pages as you continue to build links.

Remember not to build too many links to any one page of your site using the same anchor text to avoid building an unnatural looking link profile.

Once you've got your on and off page campaigns rolling be sure you are monitor your analytics. Monitor traffic to your website, sales, goals completed, keyword rankings, etc. Monitor and measure everything. SEO is not a .set it and forget it.. It evolves and needs constant tweaking to keep it on track, so be sure you are staying on top of your SEO efforts.

QUICKSPROUT

PART 3

SOCIAL MEDIA

SOCIAL MEDIA

SOCIAL MEDIA INTRODUCTION

Social media, you hear about its importance to a business' online presence and strategy everywhere you go. The concept seems simple enough; maintain a Facebook page, utilize Twitter and maybe even have a blog that you update a few times a month. Yet company after company still struggle with social media because they haven't made it a part of their company identity and don't understand that social media goes beyond updating their Facebook page and Twitter.

There is a reason social media is mentioned so frequently in business conversations and it's a subject that is the driving force in all of business. What is it? The almighty dollar of course. Businesses that struggle with integrating social media into their daily business practices translates into opportunities for other companies who can properly leverage social media and social media tools. Companies can invent themselves and establish their way of how they do business, convey their company culture, gather data and analytics, and engage current and potential clients with the proper use of social media and the endless resources of social media tools.

How Social Media Affects SEO

As search engines make deals with social sites like Twitter, it's obvious that social media affects SEO. But the question really isn't if social media affects SEO. It's more so on how it affects SEO, right?

The rise of Google's social search feature

Now, before you think that the increased relevance of social search recommendations is some sort of new craze resulting from the launch of the Google Plus social network, consider that Google launched the first version of its Google Social Search tool back in October 2009 and rolled the service out to all users in January 2010.

If you look at the screenshot above from the launch, Danny Sullivan made a few interesting observations about this new functionality.

The first is that Google's initial social search launch was rolled out as a separate tool, versus a full integration into a user's main results page. In order to use the service, you needed to be logged in to your Google profile and actively access the .Social. feature in the navigation bar.

Danny also noted that the specific connections Google was recognizing to populate its social results pages included blogs in your Google Reader, any contacts in your Gmail/Gchat accounts and any contacts you were connected to via profiles listed in your Google Profile. For example, if you were connected to a friend through Digg and had listed your Digg account within your Google Profile, that friend's content could appear in your social search results.

The implications of Google social search

Now, fast forward to 2011... not only are these social recommendations showing up on main search engine results pages, there's evidence that they're displacing results that would have displayed based on traditional SEO. And that an author's authority on social networking sites is influencing traditional SEO.

Just for a minute lets consider the idea that social recommendations might shake up traditional search engine results pages through personalized search. In a test by Rand Fishkin, he noticed that when he searched .cupcake madness. while logged in to his Google account the results were different.

Logged in:

Logged out:

Do you know why the results were different? In the first image, the result from the Everywhereist blog shows up only because of Rand's wife is the owner of the site. Once he logged out, the result is replaced by the site that earned the third place spot through traditional SEO.

The effects of this change are huge because if you only invested in traditional SEO you can be bumped from the search engine results in seconds. So should you even worry about conventional SEO anymore? Do things like backlinks, keyword-optimized content and on-page optimization still matter?

Although those questions are important, answering them doesn't take into account the full impact of the newly increased influence of social media on SEO. To do that, you need to look at how Google and the other search engines are quantifying social networking authority as a ranking factor within the traditional search engine results page as well.

Author authority: The latest ranking factor?

In December 1st, 2010 Danny Sullivan interviewed Bing and Google representatives on how Facebook and Twitter may impact search engine rankings. One of the questions he asked was the weighting of Twitter users and links shared in their tweets...

Bing responded with:

We do look at the social authority of a user. We look at how many people you follow, how many follow you, and this can add a little weight to a listing in regular search results.

And Google responded with:

Yes, we do use [tweeted links and RTs] as a signal. It is used as a signal in our organic and news rankings. We also use it to enhance our news universal by marking how many people shared an article.

And in response to the question, "Do you track links shared within Facebook, either through personal walls or fan pages?" the search engines had the following to say...

Bing said:

Yes. We look at links shared that are marked as "Everyone", and links shared from Facebook fan pages.

And Google said:

We treat links shared on Facebook fan pages the same as we treat tweeted links. We have no personal wall data from Facebook.

Based on their answers, you can assume that social media plays a role in influencing the search engine results by giving preference based on the authority of the author and the number of times a piece of content is shared on social networking sites.

In SEOMoz's 2011 Search Engine Factors Ranking report almost 132 SEO and social media experts predicted that social signals at the page level and domain level would have a greater impact on search engine rankings than traditional SEO factors.

Specific social media and search engine integrations

Of course, it's one thing to know that social factors are increasingly affecting search engine rankings, but it's another thing entirely to see what integrations are already in place and influencing results pages. By understanding exactly how the search engines use this data, you can come up with a marketing plan designed to rank in this new socially optimized world.

QUICKSPROUT

THE BIG THREE

Facebook

Although Facebook doesn't make information stored on its personal profiles available for indexing, content shared on fan pages is fair game. In fact, according to an analysis of the data generated by TampaSEO, Facebook shares are one of the social signals most closely correlated with high search engine rankings:
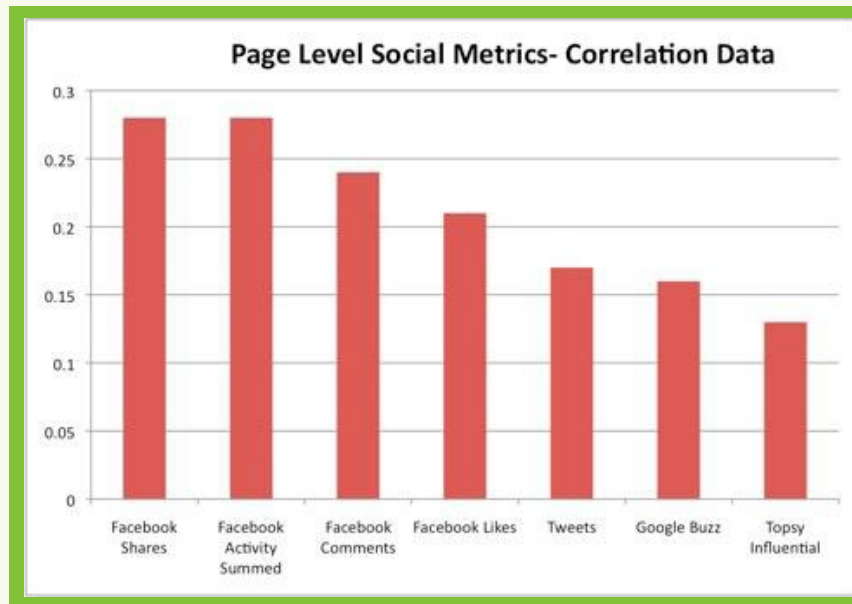
And while the correlation doesn't mean that Facebook shares by themselves lead to high rankings, it's worth noting that Google and the other search engines also give preference to content shared on Facebook via annotated social search.

In the current Google Social Search implementation, content shared by Facebook contacts receives preferential positions in the search engine results, as well as with a picture of the person who shared it. By increasing the social proof of these results, Google increases the chances that this content will receive clicks.

QUICKSPROUT
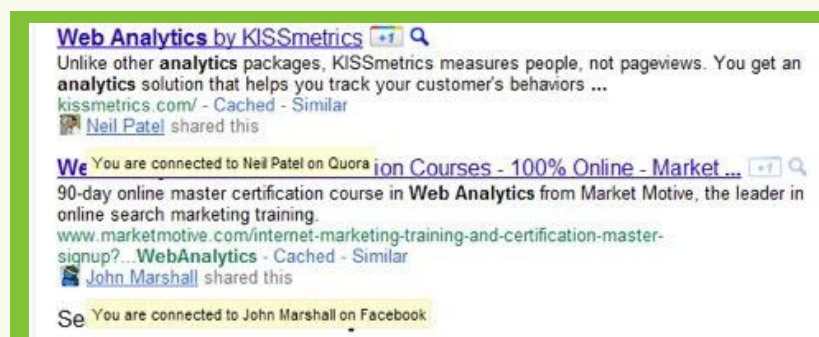
Twitter

One of the clearest integrations between social media and the search engines is the Twitter Search Engine on Bing. This tool enables you to search tweets in real-time from within the Bing search engine. And with the recent updates tweets are now in the Bing News feed, as well as a preferred treatment for content "liked" by a your Facebook and Twitter contacts.

And while the ability to search for tweets via Bing may not send much traffic to your social networking profile, there's evidence that tweets or retweets of links by legitimate users on Twitter can lead to a bump in traditional SEO rankings as well.

Jennifer Lopez did a case study showing that after a tweet introducing her Beginners' Guide to SEO was retweeted by Smashing Magazine, she noticed an immediate impact in terms of both traffic and rankings for a previously un-tracked keyword.

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Google Plus

As [Chris Brogan](#) said:

A social network made by Google impacts search?

It doesn't get much clearer than that. As a social networking service, as well as a search giant, Google has all the data necessary to implement changes to the search engine results based on social media. For example, they could hypothetically use the data generated by webmasters using Google Analytics, Webmaster tools, or their toolbar, plus the amount of traffic sent via social media sites by specific users. It's not a big leap to assume that data from these services could be used to tie your website to authority social networking profiles and then increase your rankings.

And although evidence is difficult to come by as [Google Plus](#) is still new, you can already see the integration between the Google Plus network and the Google search engine results pages via social search annotations and the "+1" button that appears next to search results when you are logged into Google.

Keys to Your Social Media Strategy

One of the goals in using social media sites is to increase the number of sites and people linking to your content. The more links you have to your web site, the higher you will rank on search engines like Google or Bing. High ranking sites receiving better positioning in search engine results, leading to more people visiting your site.

When it comes to building links to your site you have to first set some goals. Do you want to gain more leads, increase income or gain exposure. The purpose of SEO is to drive people to your website. The goal for the content you create for social media is to have a match for content people are trying to find for business, resources or entertainment, so it's important to have a few things in order both pertaining to your site and the content you create.

Social Media Optimization

As I discussed in Chapter 2 (Link) it's important that you have done your keyword research and have your site optimized to properly leverage your social media strategy. This way you can properly utilize whatever content you use and have the correct keywords linking back to your site to build your page-rank. It's also important that you have your site optimized for social media sharing, like installing a tool bar on your site that allows those who visit to share your sites content. Make it easy for them!

Finding Your Niche Sites

As a business the goal is to have customers speaking positively about the product or service to their group of friends, who in turn might mention it to their friends. Social media recommendations tend to have a stronger return on investment because, in general, people trust the recommendation of their friends over an advertisement. For this reason if you can find those niche sites that contain your target audience you can give your company maximum exposure to potential opportunities. Here is a good list of [social media websites](#). Once you find a social website that fits your liking become a part of the community. From there you can submit content as well as read other's that may be beneficial to your business.

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General Content Pointers

Titles- Create eye catching titles that raise the readers interest, but are not trying to trick them to click over. You only have one time to make a first impression. Annoying the reader is not the way to convert the person to a new customer or subscriber.

Keywords- Pick keywords that will help bring people to your site but are not obvious keywords that would end up in your articles anyway.

Links- Link to quality sites that compliment what you are publishing. This will encourage sites in the same niche to link to you as well.

Content- Try to publish unique and quality content. This prompts users to come to your site because they cannot easily find the content elsewhere.

Social- This is social media, so be social! Encourage people to share your content and share other's content that you find interesting as well. You'll find that this will make you a lot of friends quickly.

Crafting Your Business' Social Media Voice

Crafting your social media voice is an integral part of your marketing strategy. With a good amount of business done online these days, the way in which you craft your social media voice and company image is how your potential customers will perceive your company. With social media first impressions are everything. Here's a run through on how these social media outlets can help you find a voice for your company.

Facebook

Creating a Facebook Fan Page is an excellent outlet to reach out to potential customers and build a following with a few pretty neat built in tools.

Applications- There are many Facebook applications that allow you to gather valuable customer data that you can use in your other marketing campaigns, such as ads and new products. With Networked Blogs you can pull posts directly from your blog to keep fans updated on your latest news and allow them to quickly 'like' and share your posts with others. With the Facebook Questions app you can quickly add a poll to virtually any status update you make

Fan Pages- With more customization options than Groups, Facebook Fan Pages have become increasingly popular for businesses looking to promote their product or service.If you're looking to customize your fan page use applications such as Static FBML to tailor your landing page to both fans and non-fans with html, images and hotlinks to your other online destinations. You can also drive traffic to your Page and your website by including links and other multimedia on this page.

Multimedia- Give you customers sneak previews of new products, events and behind-the-scenes activities to put a more personal face on your company image. You can also utilize videos for product demonstrations, to answer customer emails and make your responses more personalized

Facebook Ads- Facebook has a huge network so you have the ability to reach out to millions of potential customers with Facebook ads. Different ads allow you to promote an your website, Facebook Application, Page or Event. You can also target your message to a specific audience using Statistics of your Facebook Page. You can get really precise with this.

QUICKSPROUT

Customizing Your Facebook Fan Pages

You can find plenty of companies on Facebook but how many of them will give you a compelling reason to find them? This question encouraged me to check out companies big and small to see who is using Facebook to its full potential. Check out enticing introduction pages, fun slideshows, cool videos, exclusive content, shopping, and even recipes. See if you can find some inspiration for your company's Facebook page by checking out what these companies have done.

ZAPPOS

The Zappos landing page makes it clear: pressing Like is first priority when a user lands on a company page. Often, that visitor will not come back but the news feed offers companies more chances to engage, as long as the user opts in with the Like button. This landing page works especially well because it offers exclusive content, and includes a catchy catch phrase (Let's be in a Like-Like relationship.)

Once users opt in, they can join the Zappos mailing list and interact with the other style-related features on the home screen. By uploading a photo, users can even get a chance to be featured as the Zappos fan of the week, as long as they are shown posing with their Zappos box. Having a dynamic profile picture also allows Zappos to continue peaking visitors' curiosity.

CHICK-FIL-A

Chick-fil-A steps beyond the fan page and encourages more fan interaction, like creating and using a profile picture branded with the Chick-fil-A logo. If users add something Chick-fil-A-generated to their own profile, it creates exposure to their friends, and will lead more curious people back to the Chick-fil-A page. The fan page is also useful, providing the menu and a store locator.
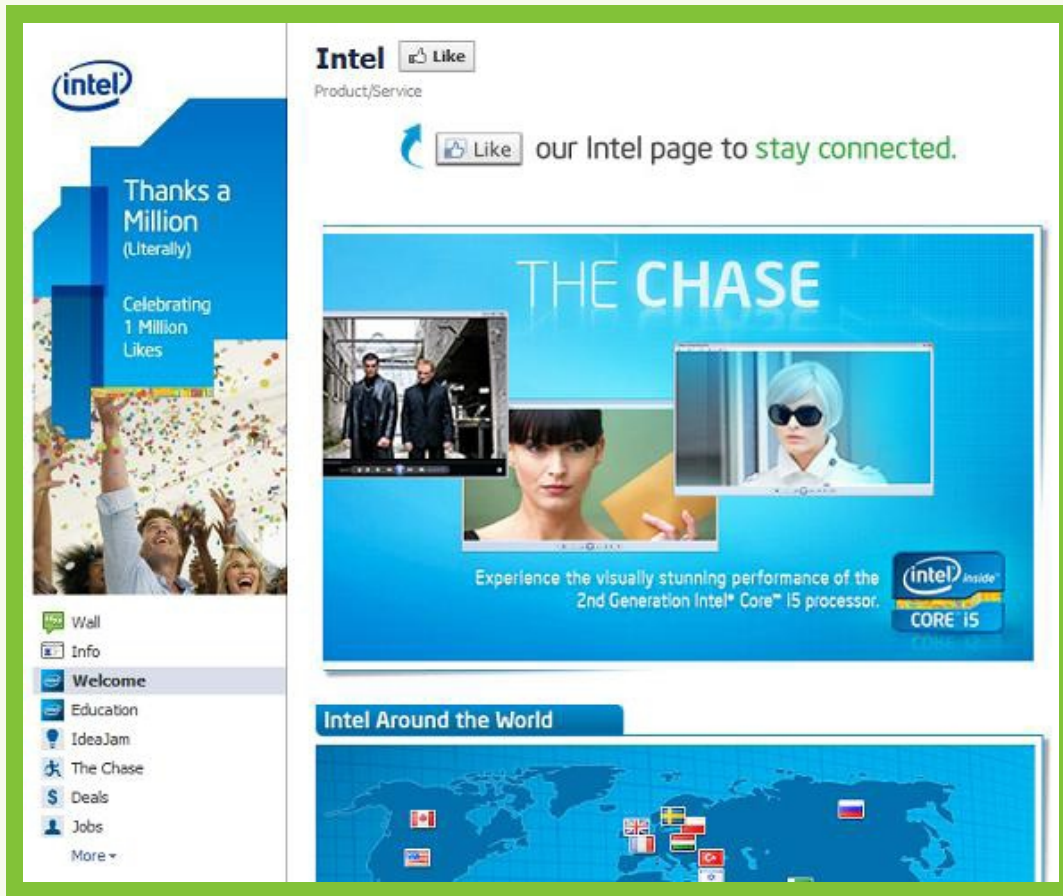
INTEL

Intel incorporates social proof into their fan page, celebrating 1 Million Likes in the profile picture. The landing page also provides a lot of bonus features to keep visitors interested, even before they have become a fan. The company's global emphasis is shown in the map displaying Intel locations and communities around the world. Clicking on the map connects users to location-specific Intel fan pages, like Intel Canada's page.

MAILCHIMP

The MailChimp profile shows off the company's fun-loving corporate culture, perhaps even more than the services the company provides. Both the Meet MailChimp tab and the Facebook Photos include a number of photos of individuals on the MailChimp team. The photo albums include the Ugly Sweater Holiday Portraits and Chimp-napped describes how the cardboard MailChimp has run away. The personality makes a software service company not quite so dry.

EMMY'S CLOSET

A number of Etsy shops grow their own communities, and Emmy's Closet is no exception. By talking to customers and other shops on Facebook, Emmy's Closet shows itself as a small and caring store.

Emmy's Closet also uses the My Etsy app, which allows users to browse actual products that are for sale in the Esty shop. Customers can either click through to purchase items, or share those items with their friends on Facebook, allowing fans to show their own friends their favorite items from Emmy's Closet.

QUICKSPROUT

OREO

Oreo is another company which chooses and features Fans of the Week. The company emphasizes its global appeal by showing the city each fan is in, as well as their name and photo (with Oreos, of course).

The page also provides a number of recipes for Oreo fans who don't want to eat their Oreos plain. With clear navigation and great photos, it's clear that Oreo is trying to make the customer experience great.

QUICKSPROUT

RITZ-CARLTON

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company uses its Facebook page to introduce users to the many locations of the Ritz-Carlton hotels, using a simple and elegant slideshow. The chain also dedicates a section to Ritz-Carlton's Community Footprints, incorporating a slideshow to celebrate the ways that its hotels have served their communities.

The page itself also .Likes. the location-specific Ritz-Carlton pages, like The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples, encouraging fans to dig deeper and see if there is a page for a location they have enjoyed in the past or are looking forward to visiting.

QUICKSPROUT

FIREHOUSE SUBS

Though Firehouse Subs is still a growing chain, its Facebook page looks as established as many other brands. Status updates help inform fans when the stores are having promotions or donating food to worthy causes. One fan even commented on the announcement of food donations and said "An act of kindness such as this will be rewarded!!! I tell everyone I know about you guys... & I have a BIG mouth!!"

The page also incorporates a store locator, which uses Google Maps to provide the contact information of the nearest Firehouse Subs location down to catering information and approximate distance from the user.

KOA KAMPGROUNDS

KOA Kampgrounds uses a long profile picture to introduce the company and its business: camping. In its YouTube section, the company includes a number of videos taking place on KOA Kampgrounds across America. This helps the company to profile its different locations and show its expertise in all things camping.

Twitter

Twitter is a micro blogging website where anyone can chat, track discussions, build relationships and stay on top of the latest news. With Twitter you can monitor what others are saying about your company and engage in conversations with opinion shapers.

What Does # mean?- The # symbol on Twitter allows you to identify, track, and organize discussions that can help fuel your online branding campaign. You can search for conversations related to your niche market, including daily and weekly chats. Using Twitter you can also target your tweets using SEO phrases and keywords that will attract people looking for what you sell. A great way to gain word of mouth advertising and followers is to create follower-only contests asking others to retweet (RT) your content to be entered.

It's Not All About You- The key to using all social media sites in your branding and marketing efforts is to remember that conversation goes both ways. Take time every day to answer questions that others may ask, either about you, your company or your market in general. Provide helpful tips or industry related news, even an inspirational quote! Go out of your way to share links and conversations that you find helpful or useful. Also, remember to always to say thank you!

Customizing Your Twitter Presence

After investigating which businesses made themselves worth following on Facebook, the same question was asked of companies on Twitter. The micro-blogging service is most commonly used for customer service and information broadcast, I uncovered companies integrating Twitter into restaurant wait lists, location-specific advice, and plenty of casual conversations to sustain relationships with followers and fans. Start reaching out to your fans on Twitter using some of these techniques, or your own original strategies.

SAN CHEZ BISTRO
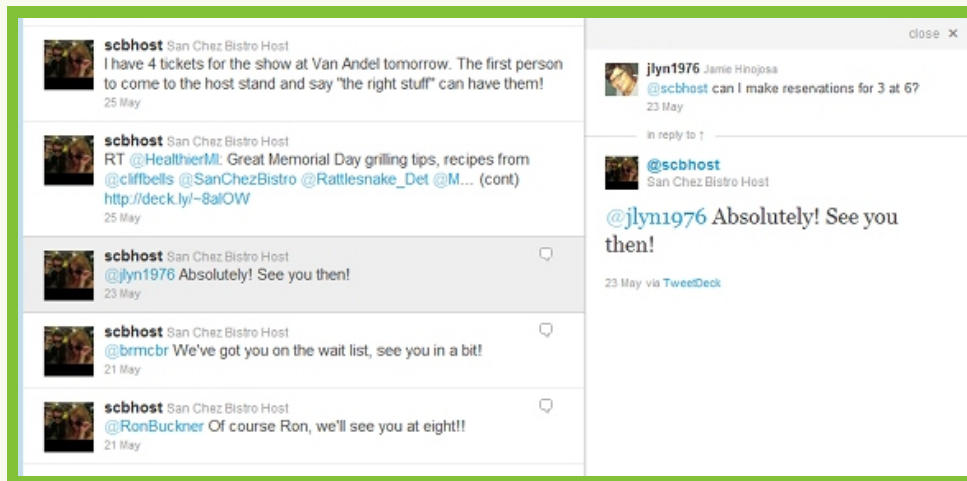
With two separate Twitter streams, San Chez Bistro of Grand Rapids, MI, makes sure that it's telling patrons exactly what they want to hear. The SanChezBistro account simply interacts with customers and responds to conversations about the restaurant. The scbhost account provides .Tweet-ahead seating. by allowing users to tweet the number of people coming and what time in order to be put on the wait list the account replies with a confirmation, telling users "see you then!" The account even occasionally tweets special deals, like a concert ticket giveaway.

BOSTON LOGAN AIRPORT
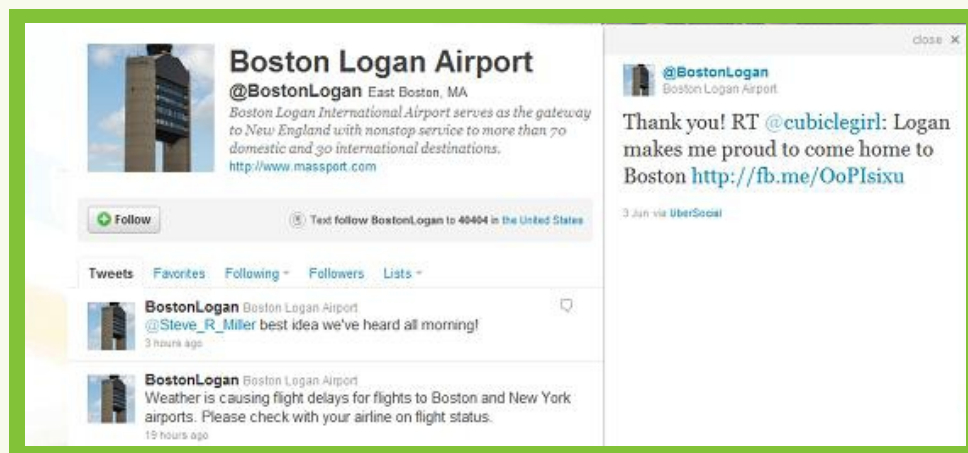
Twitter users often tweet even more while traveling. This means that a number of transportation providers use Twitter to communicate with passengers, but it is less often that a whole airport uses social media to communicate with the passengers who are just passing through. The twitter feed informs users of weather delays, responds to visitor complaints (down to broken power outlets), and brags about being a top Boston location on Facebook Places and Foursquare.

QUICKSPROUT

JET BLUE

Airlines are also calling their support staff into service wherever customers are talking about their experiences, and JetBlue is no different. The account responds personally to a huge number of complaints, even when weather delays cause the account to repeat itself over and over.

THINKGEEK

Though it's no surprise that a retail site catering toward geeks would have a huge following on Twitter, the company is doing everything right engaging its tweeting customers. It has split its Twitter persona into two halves: the thinkgeekspam account only tweets about new ThinkGeek products, which frees up the thinkgeek account to communicate with customers, solve disputes, crack jokes, and post irreverent news articles and off-the-wall comments.

SCHUH LTD
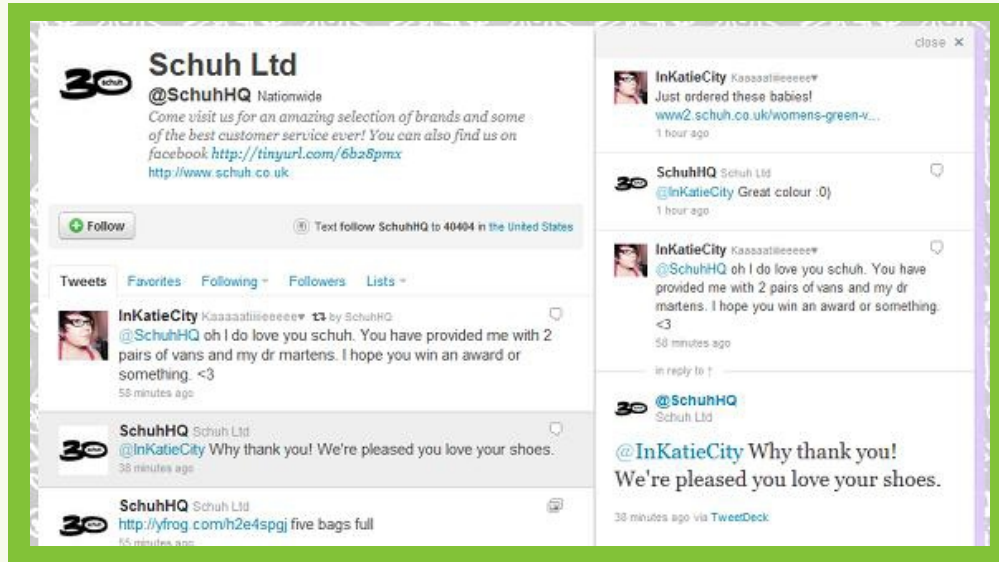
Over in the UK, retailers are using Twitter to keep the conversation going, too. Schuh is a British shoe company providing customer service and lots of fun commentary on customer's shoe choices. Some users will even tweet the Schuh account to see what the representative thinks of their shoe choices before making the purchase. Clearly, all the shoe conversations cater toward women, and the conversational tone of the account is casual and fun-loving to fit the customer demographics.

BEST BUY TWELP FORCE

If you need help with your Best Buy orders or just getting a recommendation of a new product, try tweeting the Best Buy Twelpforce. Their Twitter feed is a little different from most, because the tweets from users are aggregated into a forum-style website, which allows users to search for related questions before even asking their own. This setup also allows multiple Best Buy employees to answer questions, ensuring that the account is manned around the clock.

QUICKSPROUT

DAILY GRAPE

The place [Gary Vaynerchuk](#) got his start and made his mark on the social media industry. Unfazed by the fame, this account is still having wine-related conversations around the clock. Check out conversations about favorite wines, make recommendations, and chat with fans of the online TV show.

WACHOVIA

A bank might not be the first company customers would look for on Twitter, and financial information doesn't always work to share on Twitter. Wachovia has overcome these obstacles to answer customer concerns, share financial advice, and continue the conversation with customers. Wachovia makes it clear that multiple users maintain the Twitter stream by signing each Tweet with the initials of the employee tweeting. The account also does a great job of handling frustrated user complaints quickly and professionally.

POP CAP GAMES

Recently relocated from @popcap_games to @popcap, this Twitter account is eagerly jumping into conversations about the company's popular games, including Plants vs. Zombies. Constant clear communication is important for a company which is quickly rolling out different updates on different games on different platforms. The feed is also interspersed with product announcements, sales, and informative articles about video games and games in general.

Google +

Although Google + is essentially brand new, it's never too soon to start leaving your mark on a new social media outlet.

Circles- Instead of friends, groups or followers, on Google+ you use circles. Each circle is basically a way to organize people into different categories. Circles allows you to select which group of people you will share certain updates with. You can also create different messages that appeal to new or current customers.

Chats- Using Google+'s "Hangout" feature, you can chat directly with others, a surefire way to provide a personal touch to your marketing efforts and show your customers that you truly care about their opinions. You can chat with customers needing assistance and provide tutorials or sneak previews of new products. Another unique idea is to hold a 'town hall' meeting, where you gather insight and suggestions from customers or clients about services or improvements they would like to see.

+1- Posting links, photos or info is not enough. It has to be interesting and relevant and google+ makes it easy to target your posts to specific friend groups or 'circles'. You can create circles for your co-workers, friends, customers and people in your field, then post messages directly to them. ask people in your circles to +1 any post that they enjoy. Be sure to reciprocate by clicking +1 on articles that you enjoy so others will be more likely to share your interesting links.

LinkedIn

Linkedin is not just for professionals looking for a new job, it's also a great way to build business to business relationships.

Groups- Discussion topics are a popular area of LinkedIn. Here you can network with others in your field and discuss the topics that are pertinent to your business. You can also set up topics that are directly related to how you do business to showcase your expertise.
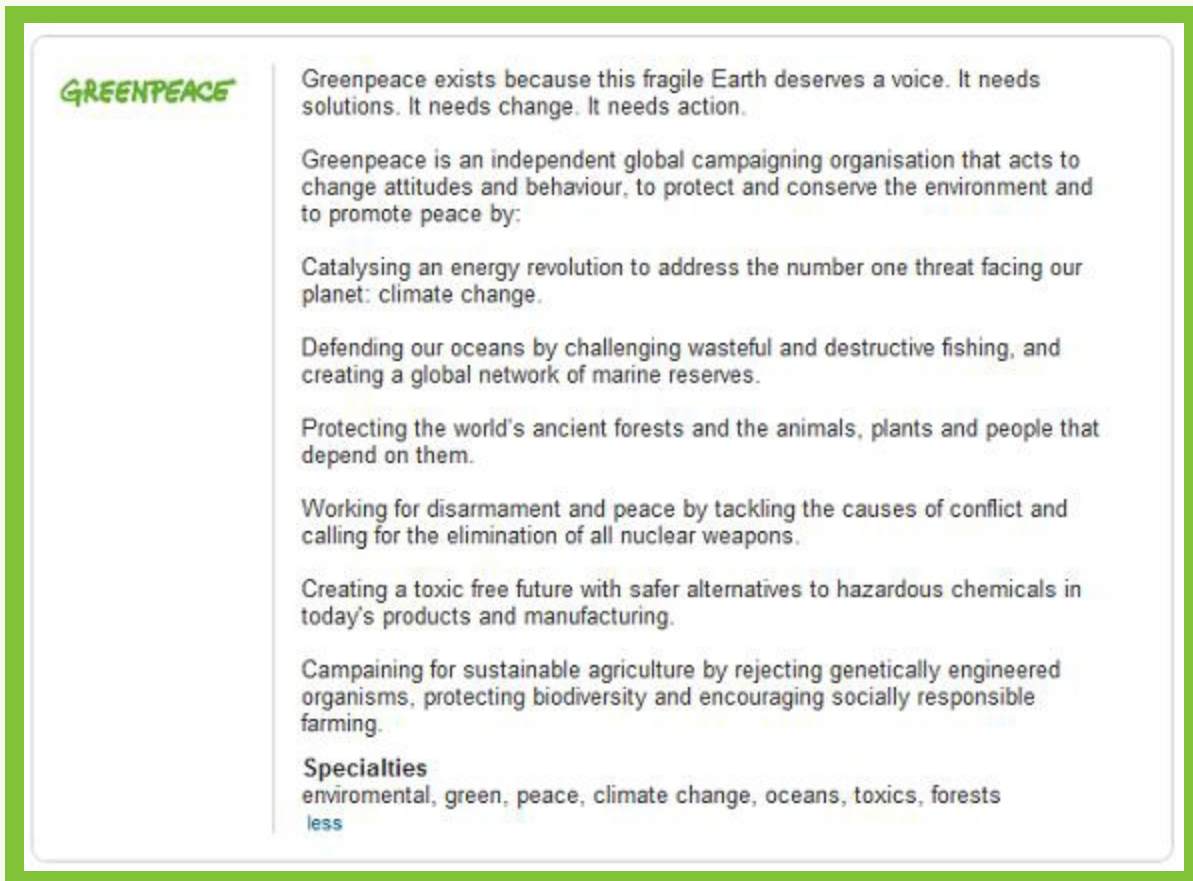
Connections- Take some time to view the lists of your friends and friends of friends for others in your field or people whose expertise you could either use or who you feel you could help. Connect with others on LinkedIn using the Invitation tool. You can send an InMail, LinkedIn's internal messaging service. Using Linkedin you can also try and get introduced through a connection by selecting someone you know who is already acquainted with the person you would like to contact to act as a middle-man to break the ice.

How Customize Your LinkedIn Profile

At first glance, there is not as much you can customize about your company page on LinkedIn as there is for Facebook fan pages or Twitter profiles. However, many companies are still gaining large followings on LinkedIn and connecting to their followers in a number of different ways. From construction companies to consulting firms, this group is proof that any company can make LinkedIn work for them.

Here are a few company profiles to inspire your company's LinkedIn presence.

QUICKSPROUT

GREENPEACE

GREENPEACE

Greenpeace exists because this fragile Earth deserves a voice. It needs solutions. It needs change. It needs action.

Greenpeace is an independent global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace by:

Catalysing an energy revolution to address the number one threat facing our planet: climate change.

Defending our oceans by challenging wasteful and destructive fishing, and creating a global network of marine reserves.

Protecting the world's ancient forests and the animals, plants and people that depend on them.

Working for disarmament and peace by tackling the causes of conflict and calling for the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Creating a toxic free future with safer alternatives to hazardous chemicals in today's products and manufacturing.

Campaining for sustainable agriculture by rejecting genetically engineered organisms, protecting biodiversity and encouraging socially responsible farming.

Specialties
enviromental, green, peace, climate change, oceans, toxics, forests
less

Anyone writing a company description can learn a lot from Greenpeace. Their short, action-packed snippets focus on concrete changes that the company makes, and the reasons behind those actions. With so much white space, the text is both more readable and more scannable. The writing is also approachable and jargon-free, allowing anyone to clearly understand what Greenpeace does. Even the specialties listed are clear and meaningful.

QUICKSPROUT

YMCA

Groups are a great way for users to connect on LinkedIn, and advertising your company group in your company profile information is an excellent way to increase adoption among your fans. The YMCA group currently has nearly 4,000 members, compared to only a few hundred in similar groups. As employees interact with fans within the group, the company becomes more personal and less corporate.

PROSTRUCTURE CONSUTLING
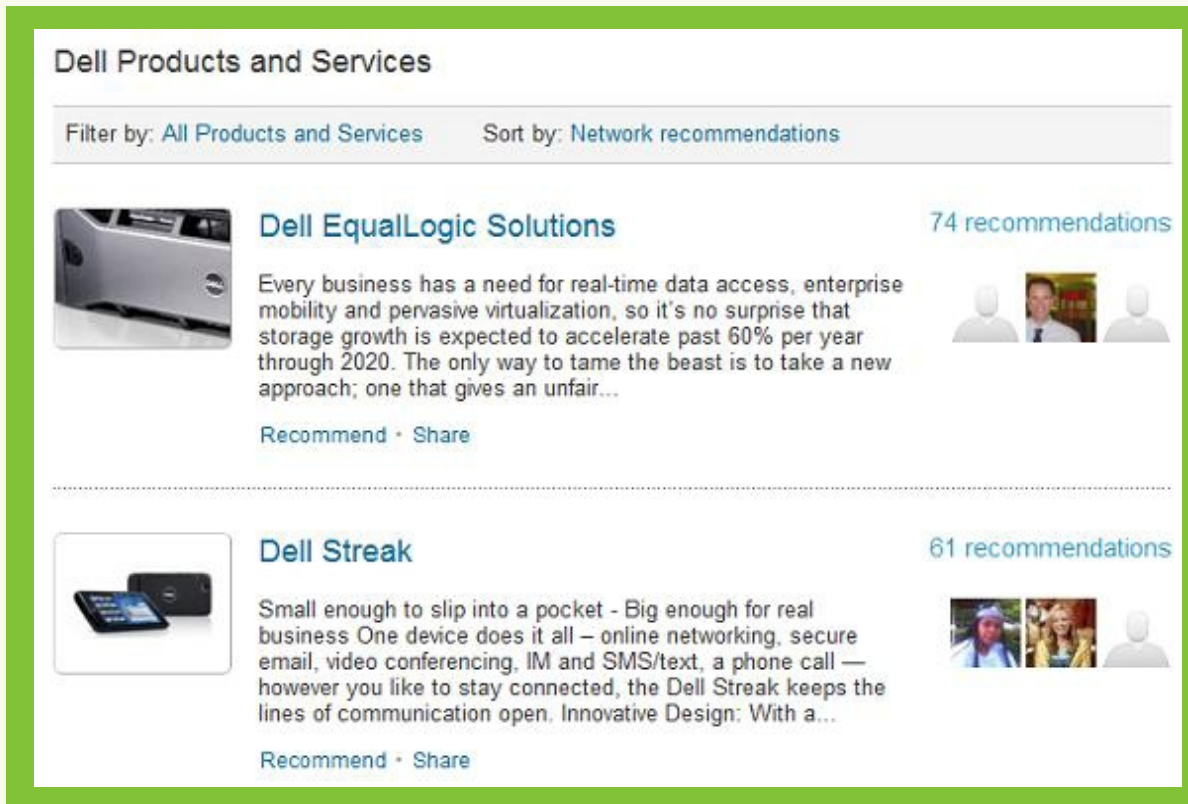
If your company is small, unifying your employees is a great way to send a common message to people viewing the company profile. ProStructure Consulting made its company profile stay consistent by with a unifying visual theme. Simple layout or background color choices can let employees keep their individuality while also showing their connections to each other and to the the business. Though this wouldn't be practical for a large company, it works well for a small one.

BECHTEL

Companies > Bechtel

Overview | **Careers**

Recently posted jobs at Bechtel

Field Engineer - Welding, Blue Grass (18607), Bechtel
Madison County, KY - Jun 13, 2011

Project Financial Analyst , Bechtel
Houston, TX - Jun 10, 2011

Project Field Engineer, Bechtel
Chile - Jun 7, 2011

Bechtel - Jubail, Saudi Arabia - Opportunities for Engineering, Procurement & Construction professionals,
Bechtel
Houston, Texas Area - May 25, 2011

As a number of people are continuing long job searches, posting job openings on LinkedIn is a great way for a company to increase its following, especially among the people who would want to work with the company. LinkedIn is not just a site for consultants anymore even construction workers can find jobs on LinkedIn with companies like Bechtel.

DELL

Dell Products and Services

Filter by: All Products and Services   Sort by: Network recommendations

Dell EqualLogic Solutions   74 recommendations

Every business has a need for real-time data access, enterprise mobility and pervasive virtualization, so it's no surprise that storage growth is expected to accelerate past 60% per year through 2020. The only way to tame the beast is to take a new approach; one that gives an unfair...

Recommend · Share

Dell Streak   61 recommendations

Small enough to slip into a pocket - Big enough for real business One device does it all – online networking, secure email, video conferencing, IM and SMS/text, a phone call — however you like to stay connected, the Dell Streak keeps the lines of communication open. Innovative Design: With a...

Recommend · Share

LinkedIn allows companies to post their products and services on their company profile, but many companies don't spend the time to update information about a significant number of products. However, some, like Dell, post a number of products, allowing users to recommend those products to their contacts. The social proof is clear, and could be even more beneficial for small companies offering a small number of products or services.

KRAFT FOODS

Kraft Foods mentioned in the News

Chicago Botanic Garden and Kraft Foods
Partner to Create Kraft Foods Garden
PRWeb, Jun 13, 2011

Research and Markets: The Cheese Market in
Singapore is Still Led by the Natural Cheese
Segment with a Share of 58.3 ...
Business Wire, Jun 13, 2011

Type
Public Company

Company Size
10,001+ employees

Website
http://www.kraftfoodscompany.com

Industry
Food Production

The right section of company profile pages show information including media mentions, helping to prove the legitimacy of a company. Though there is little doubt that Kraft Foods is a leading company in its industry, media mentions can make the difference for a small company, showing their involvement in their community or recent innovations.

GOOGLE

Also in the sidebar, you can display information like Fortune 100 recommendations and affiliated companies. YouTube and Google show their affiliations with each other, allowing users who are already interested in one to be shown a link to the other. Showing how companies are connected can help two separate companies have independent internet presences while still gaining exposure to the audiences of the other.

FACEBOOK
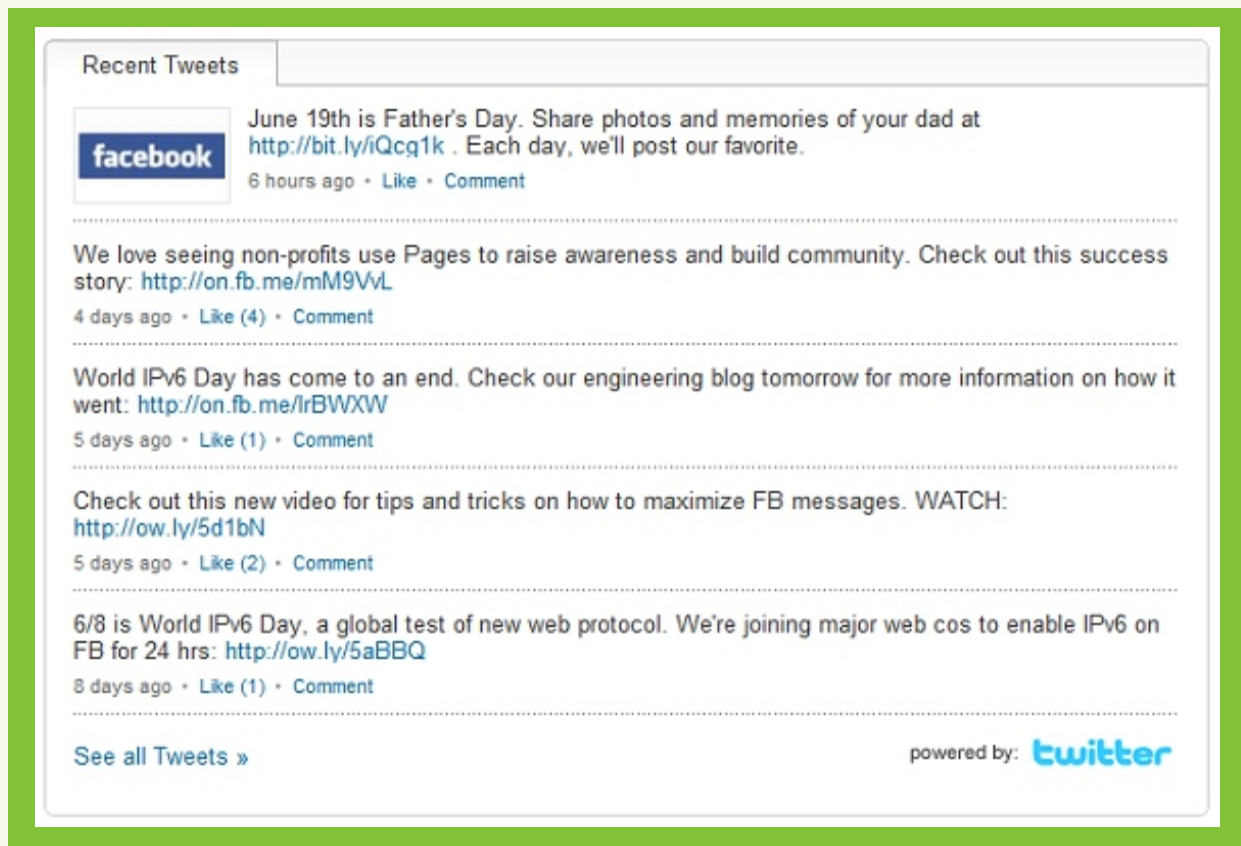
The ultimate in social media irony: Facebook's LinkedIn page syncing with its Twitter feed. By connecting Tweets to a LinkedIn profile, the tweets are also shown on the recent news section of its followers homepage. These short status updates can keep users in contact with a company without going back to the company profile. However, be regarding- if your company tweets more than 20 or 30 times each day, you might want to keep the stream off of L inkedIn.
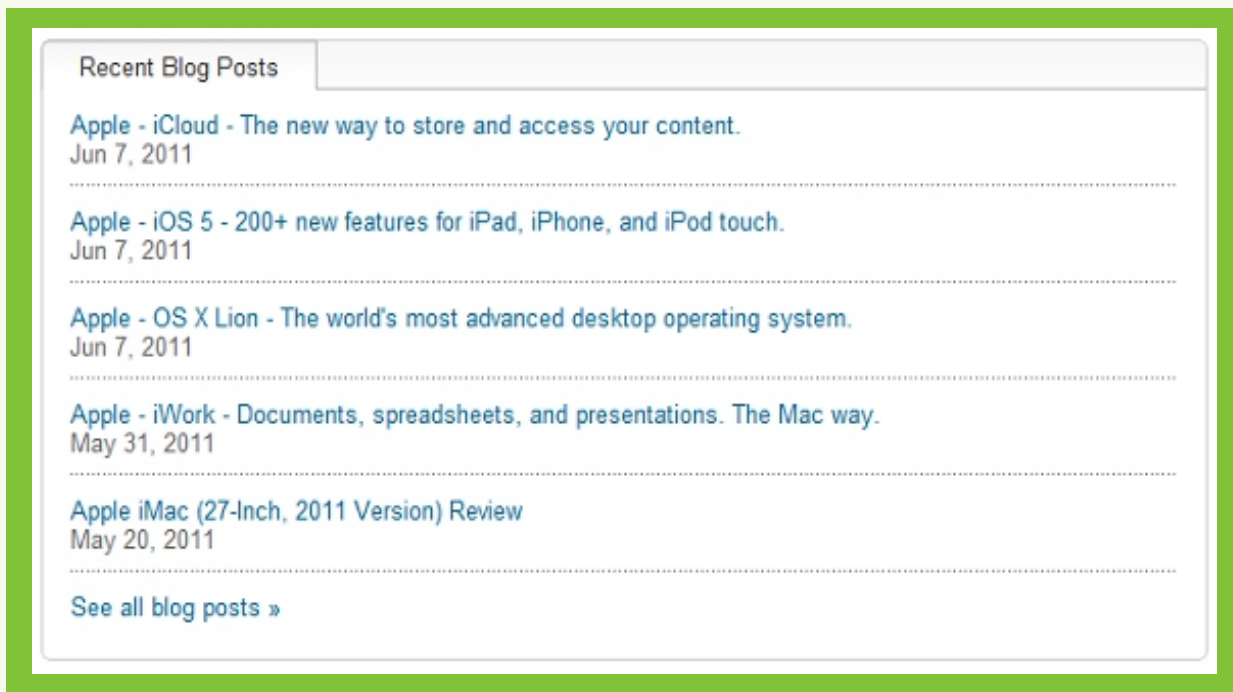
APPLE

Syncing blog posts also helps users connect with what is going on inside a company. Like tweets, blog posts and short previews show up on the recent activity feed for readers to interact with. Apple uses its blog posts to mostly announce new products and services. Making announcements through blog posts helps keep followers interested in new products, recent developments, or just office news. Blog posts can also be used to teach users useful skills and establish your company as an authority.

QUICKSPROUT

How To Track Your Social Media Success

Every business wants results and sometimes tracking social media results can be a bit hard to grasp. Before you start tracking the results of your social media efforts take a look at where you are currently at. Then ask yourself: how do I know if my social media campaigns are working. The following sections will help you gage your social media success.

Measuring Engagement

Count Clicks- You're already tracking how people get to your site now make sure you know which interactions were bringing them from social media sites. Your analytics should be able to do this, and you can help it along by using different shortened URLs for different tweets or shares, to better see which ones were effective with which audience, and how they spread.

Tally Retweets and Shares- Some of your clicks are going to come from people who aren't even following you on your chosen social media platform that's thanks to the fans who will retweet or share items they find interesting with their network. After starting a social media campaign, pay attention to what is shared to see which pieces resonate well with your audience, and build on them.

Track Interaction- Your fans will interact with you in a number of ways, so don't forget to notice when they do. You might see more responses to questions posed on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, or you might get more e-mails or phone calls. Find a way to keep track of whatever interactions you have with your customers, especially if social media is mentioned.

Size up the Numbers- Don't forget the easiest things you have to track: the number of fans, followers, or mentions you get. If you want some great motivation, these are good things to put on a chart or a bar graph, so you can see the numbers growing!

Tally the Active Fans- While it's great to watch the number of fans you have go up, not all of them are equal. Keep track of the number of fans who interact with your business whether they comment on your Facebook profile, suggest the company to their friends, retweet your tweets, or otherwise talk to or about your business. These advocates are significantly more important than fans who might not even see your business page more than once. Keep interacting back, and watch the percentage of active fans rise.

Determine Name Recognition- Many traditional advertising channels can only be seen or measured in terms of name recognition. Try measuring your social media activity the same way you measure your TV ads or billboards. Even though there are a lot of ways people can interact with you online, some might only see that their friends are fans and become more open-minded toward your company. Don't forget that that is success, too, even if it's less measurable.

Notice Exposure- As your company is mentioned on other websites, especially if they link to your Facebook or Twitter presence, take note of what is being said. Respond to questions, criticisms, or compliments in blog comments when possible, and be assured that your business is being exposed to new eyes.

Measure SEO- Your SEO efforts are a whole category in and of themselves, but even if you don't change your SEO tactics outside of your social media campaign, keep track of how your SEO changes as more users interact with your business.

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Check Retention- Find out how many of your fans are customers and track them as they become more engaged or become repeat customers. Social media is great for helping individuals remember what they enjoyed and come back to it, whether it's a restaurant or a pair of jeans. After all, it's often said that keeping a customer loyal is easier than attracting a new customer!

Count the Money- Yes, sometimes it does boil down to money. Though in some industries it is impossible to attribute particular sales to social media (especially if the product cannot be purchased online), you can keep track of leads define them how you will. Maybe someone asks about what services you provide after you supply helpful answers on LinkedIn or Twitter, or a fan expresses loyalty to a particular brand and says they plan to buy another as a gift.

Measuring ROI of Social Media

Now, measuring the ROI of social media is a little more complicated, as social media campaigns often deal with intangibles things like increased brand awareness, viral traffic opportunities and an increase in "followers," compared with hard dollars or sales. However, the basic principle remains the same whether you're investing money in working with a social media consultant or committing the time to do it yourself, you need to be sure that you see some sort of return from your campaign.

To help determine the ROI of your current or future planned social media campaigns, consider the following evaluation framework, designed by Katie Paine of the KDPaine &Partners Social Media Research Firm:

- Define the "R" - Define the expected results?

- Define the "I"- What's the investment?

- Understand your audiences and what motivates them

- Define the metrics (what you want to become)

- Determine what you are benchmarking against

- Pick a tool and undertake research

- Analyze results and glean insight, take action, measure again

Before launching any social media campaign, it's important to understand what you want to get out of it from the start. Simply saying, "I want to get more involved in social networking because some blog told me I should be," isn't going to cut it!

Instead, consider what specific changes you want to occur due to your campaign. Are you hoping to make more sales on your main website? If so, how many sales? Which product lines do you want to grow as a result of new media involvement? Or, are you engaging in social networking to increase brand awareness? If that's the case, how will you track whether you've been successful? Will a larger number of backlinks work, or would you consider a greater number of Twitter mentions a success?

Once have an idea of what you want to get out of a new media campaign, the next step in ensuring you get a good ROI for your involvement is to determine what you're willing to invest in the project. If you're paying a social media consultant to improve your company's online image, the specific amount of your investment is clear. But if you'll be doing the work yourself, you'll need to figure a price to account for time invested, missed opportunities and any other overhead expenses you'll accrue during the project.

Of course, while analyzing these two things, it's important to keep your audience in mind. For example, if your target visitors don't spend time on social networking sites, you likely won't achieve the same results as someone whose audience frequents these sites regularly. It's also important to manage expectations and be realistic at this point. If, as an example, you're selling a high-end or unique product, you're going to need much more than a few Tweets to increase sales.

Based on the answers you've come up with from these first three steps, your next task is to determine exactly what metrics you want to see a change in. Any of the following social media engagement metrics could be considered when planning a new media campaign:

- Overall number of website visitors

- Average time on site

- Website visitor conversions/sales

- Email newsletter signups

- Number of Facebook fans or Twitter followers

- Number of backlinks pointing to your site

Obviously, the metrics that matter to your business may be different from the data that are important to another company. If you've been active with web analytics and measurement before, you should have a good idea which metrics contribute the most to your website's success. If this is your first exposure to data-driven decision making, you'll likely need to spend some time determining which metrics it makes the most sense for you to track.

The last three steps of Paine's process will be pretty intuitive to anyone who's worked with data analysis before. Understand what your baseline results are (so that you have something to compare the results of your campaign to), implement tests and make use of tools that allow you to track measurable results, and then analyze what you've come up with. Be sure you run a long enough test to ensure that the results you're seeing are valid and not just an anomaly in a too-small sample.

If you don't like the results you're seeing, change course and another approach until you find the right combination of social media engagements to meet your goals. As each industry is different, it may take some time to find the best social networking sites to engage with and the right messages to send to your potential visitors. However, if you're willing to invest the time and money to conduct a good social media campaign, there's a good chance you'll see a solid ROI from your project.

How to Track Referring Sites

One of the easiest metrics to track when it comes to social media involvement is the traffic your site receives from referring sites, including Facebook, Twitter and other social networking platforms. To find this information, simply log in to your Google Analytics account (you do have one set up, right?) and navigate to the "Referring Sites" report in the "Traffic Sources" section.

Referring sites sent 1,283 visits via 58 sources
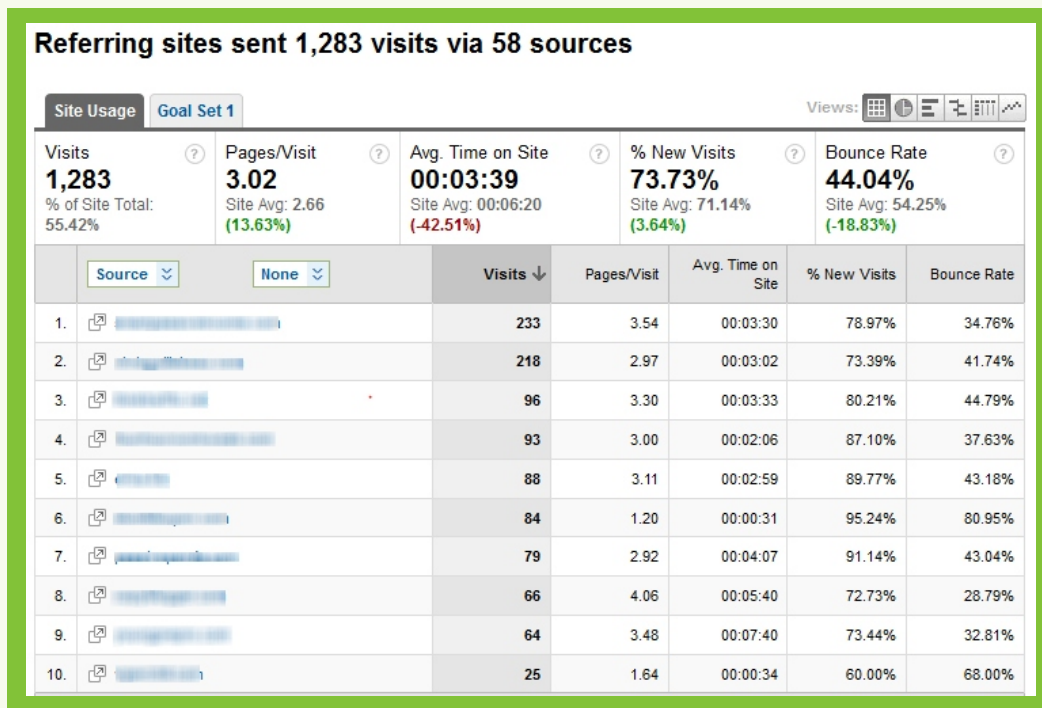
By looking at this chart, you'll be able to see which social networking sites are sending you the most visitors. For example, if you see that Facebook has sent you 300 visits, while Twitter has only sent a handful, it's logical to assume that your audience spends more time on Facebook. This means that you should increase your investment in this service over dedicating more time to Twitter.

Of course, this is something of a simplistic look at understanding the value of referring sites. In our previous example, it makes perfect sense to increase investment in Facebook based on the amount of traffic the site sends over. But what if visitors from Twitter are converting into buyers at a much higher rate than traffic from Facebook? Say 20% of your Twitter visitors wind up buying your products, while only .1% of Facebook readers do.

In this case, we need to consider the conversion value of social networking traffic as well...

How To Track Conversion Rates

The best way to determine what percentage of visitors from social networking sites are performing your desired action (whether that's buying a product, subscribing to an email list, contacting your for more information or so on) is to use the new Google Analytics Event Goals feature in combination with their advanced segment tools.

A complete, step-by-step guide on how to set up a system that tracks conversions by social media traffic can be found on Unbounce, but more advanced Google Analytics users can take the following steps to start tracking this data right away:

Step 1 - Set up an Event Goal for the specific type of conversion you want to track. You'll need to use the new version of Google Analytics to access this feature, and once there, you'll need to provide information about the specific action you want to measure as part of your conversion testing. For example, if you want to track product sales by visitors from social networking sites, you'll need to enter the URL of the landing page that a buyer reaches after completing a purchase.

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Step 2 - Create a custom segment to define visitors that arrive on your site from social networking sites. Within each custom segment you create, you'll be able to set up the segment based on the source of the traffic, so it's possible to set up a custom segment for visitors from all social networking sites or to create separate segments for each individual social networking site. If you're trying to determine which social networking site provides the best ROI for your time, set up a separate segment for each site you want to compare.

Step 3 - View conversions data within the Goals Overview screen. Navigate to Conversions -> Goals -> Overview, and then adjust your view settings to analyze only the conversions that can be attributed to the specific custom segments you defined in Step 2. This will allow you to quickly see which social networking site is providing the best ROI for your time.
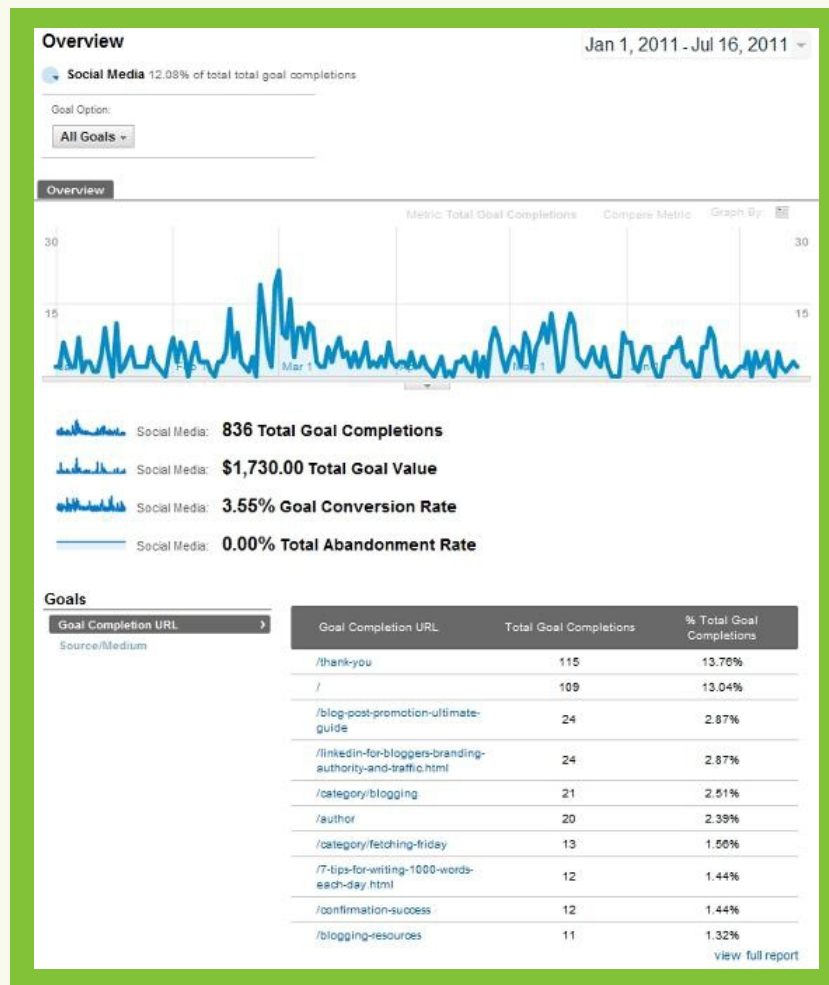
How to Gage Brand Recognition

Of course, you may not be using social networking sites to drive conversions, but instead to build your brand awareness by actively participating in conversations in your niche. This type of benefit is much more difficult to quantify - or, at least, it was until the introduction of the Klout system.

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Klout allows business owners to connect their social networking profiles together and assigns a score based on their spheres of influence. Scores fall on a range of 0-100 and, according to Klout:

"…measures influence based on your ability to drive action. Every time you create content or engage you influence others. The Klout Score uses data from social networks in order to measure:

▸ How many people you influence (True Reach)

▸ How much you influence them (Amplification)

▸ How influential they are (Network Score)"

Now, there are a couple of different ways this information can be used. For example, on a base level, if you were trying to determine if your investment in social networking is paying off in terms of brand awareness and influence, a quick glance at your Klout score would tell you if you are achieving this goal or if you aren't connecting with the right people in order to share your message.

However, if you find that your number isn't as high as you'd like, you can use Klout data in a different way. Because Klout also tracks the most effective influencers in any given niche, one of the fastest ways to expand the reach of your message would be to connect with the most influential people in your niche. According to Jason Keath, writing for Social Fresh:

"Browsing influencers by topic is one of the real untapped opportunities of Klout. Saying someone has a high potential for influence is nice and as Shankman said tells us they are passionate about something. But if we know who is the most passionate about snow skiing or cooking or New York City, we have much more relevance."

Obviously, in order to determine which social networking metrics are most important for you to track, you'll need to invest some time in understanding exactly what you hope to get out of these programs. Do you want your time spent on social media sites to pay off in terms of sales? If so, tracking specific referring sites and their relative conversion sites is essential to determine whether or not your campaign is paying off.

On the other hand, if you're simply involved in these sites in order to spread your brand's message, you may not need to devote time to implementing a detailed metrics tracking system. Instead, simply looking at measures of influence, like the Klout score, may be sufficient to determining if your investment in social networking is paying off.

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SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Linking Social Media Accounts

Sure, the internet marketing world has been abuzz with the launch of Google+, the web's most recent and most promising social networking site. But there are hundreds of other social networking sites out there. You aren't really expected to maintain a presence on all of them, are you?

Well, yes and no... In this section we're going to look at effective ways to balance your investment in all of these different social networking sites, including how to identify the sites that are a best fit for you, how you can double-up by posting to multiple networks at once and how to manage all of your different company's social networking campaigns without going crazy.

If you aren't actively engaging in social networking, you're missing out on this major potential benefit. But you're also limiting yourself in the ways you're able to connect with people. Social networking sites allow website owners to interact with their customers in real-time, which is an especially powerful way to build a brand when compared with regular posts on traditional websites.

Of course, knowing that you should be active in social media and actually doing so are two completely different things... If you've struggled to gain a foothold in the ever-growing social networking community, consider the following advice.

The first key to utilizing social networking effectively is to determine where your "community" hangs out, as that's where you'll want to focus your efforts. To get started, ask yourself the following questions:

Are my target visitors actively involved in social networking?- You might be surprised to find that, if your website is in a non-technical niche, your community doesn't participate in social networking at all! Of course, it would still be a smart move to at least set up accounts on the major social networks (Facebook, Twitter and Google+), although you might need to be more active in other online hangouts - like forums, message boards and chat groups - if that's where your audience is.

If your visitors are active in social networking, what sites are they most active with?- Again, this will vary widely from one niche to another. Some communities may be very active on Twitter, while others rely more on Digg, Reddit or LinkedIn. If you find that your target customers are most active on one or two sites, focus your social networking efforts there.

How do your target users interact with these sites?- Are they posting links or sharing text responses? Do they seem to be most active during the day or at night? If your community is active on Twitter, do they use any particular hashtags or participate in any regular chats? The more information you have about your users, the better you can tailor your social networking strategy to their preferences.

After doing your due diligence, you should have a rough model for how your community engages with social networking sites and you can use this as a guide to implement your own strategy.

For example, if you notice your target customers post on Twitter roughly every four hours, use that as a baseline for your own participation. If the people you'd like to engage with share pictures, text messages and video clips on Facebook, be sure you're sharing a range of media files as well.

The key is to be consistent with your efforts. It's far better to spend 10-20 minutes each day on your chosen social networks than to spend a few hours all at once each month. Social networking is about day-to-day interactions, so if you aren't present, you'll miss a major part of the benefit of this type of marketing.

However, that doesn't mean you have to drive yourself crazy by spending hours a day monitoring your newly-created social profiles. Instead, consider the following tips for managing social networking engagement in a sane and productive manner:

Use social networking plugins and add-ons to improve your productivity- For example, the AddtoAny plugin lets you make recommendations to your community on the fly by allowing you to quickly and easily share pages on your social profiles. Or consider the Buffer app, which allows you to schedule tweets and other social networking messages ahead of time.

Set time limits- Schedule time for social networking, just like you would any other important business task. When you're first starting out, aim for at least 10-20 minutes a day. If you find that your efforts pay off, increase the amount of time you spend connecting with your community in this way.

Double up and reduce your effort- One way to reduce the amount of time needed to maintain your social networking strategy is to use services that post your updates to multiple profiles simultaneously. For example, here's how to connect your Facebook and Twitter profiles so that updates posted to your Twitter feed are automatically piped through to your Facebook wall:

Social Timing - Knowing when and what to post can be crucial to your social media success. An info graphic put together by KISSmetrics details the science of social timing. http://blog.kissmetrics.com/science-of-social-timing-1/?wide=1

Once you've set up your Facebook and Twitter profiles separately, navigate to www.facebook.com/twitter/ and click on "Link a Page to Twitter". (Note- only pages can be connected to Twitter at this time, not personal profiles.)

On the next screen, ensure the page want to connect to a Twitter feed is the one that's selected, then click on "Link to Twitter".

QUICKSPROUT
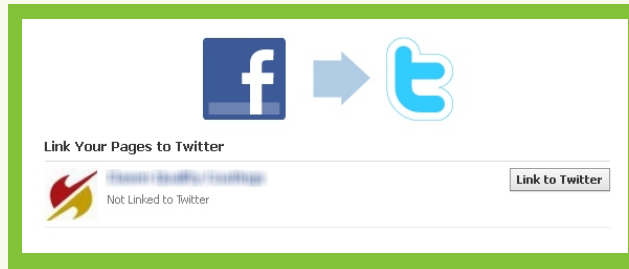
Clicking this button will take you to Twitter, where you'll be asked to authorize Facebook to use your account. Be sure that the correct Twitter profile is active in the upper right corner, then click on "Authorize app".

After this, you'll return to Facebook, where you'll be able to select the specific types of content that will be shared between the accounts. Once you've made your selections, click on "Save Changes".
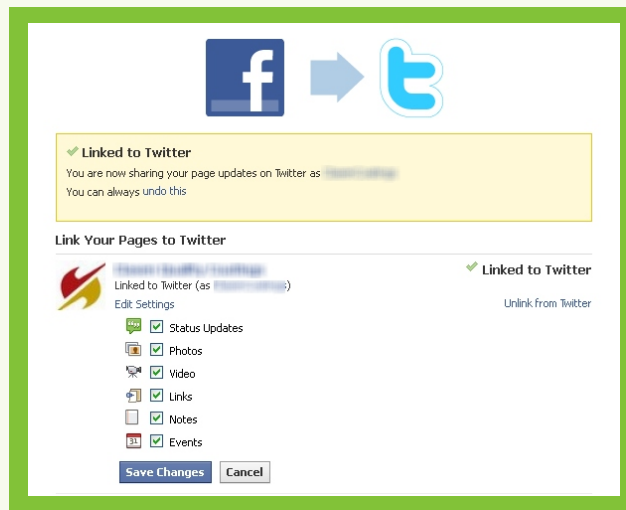
Congrats - you've now linked your Facebook and Twitter profiles together, effectively cutting the time needed to post to these two sites in half! For even more social networking automation, look into tools like Ping.fm or Sendible that will allow you to post to even more social networks at the same time. By spending a little time upfront to set up your social networking sites correctly, you'll save both your time and your sanity.

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Twitter App of Choice: Buffer
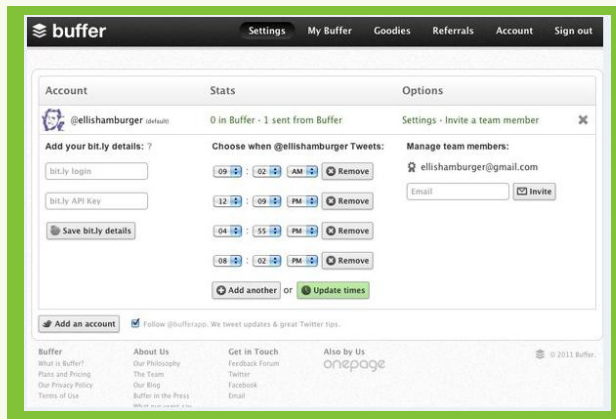
Being active is the best way to gain followers on twitter. However, you really need to pay attention to how often you are tweeting. You don't want to spam your followers Twitter feed. Buffer will help you manage and que your tweets, stay on top your analytics and it's really easy to use.

Buffer Helps you to queue your tweets- You might have familiar with tweet scheduling options in HootSuite or TweetDeck. Those tools will help you to schedule your tweets to send out at particular date and time. But filling in those details each time like titles and URLs can be time consuming. With Buffer you drop your links into your Buffer account and the tool queues them for future publishing. So if you find content that you like and want to share with others, you can save it for tweeting later.

Ease of use- Buffer app offers a couple of ways by which you can add tweets into your buffer. You can use their online website and add tweets into the buffer, or the easiest way is by installing their browser extensions. When you encounter a page worth tweeting just hit the buffer button.

Buffer Can Come Up With Tweets- Can't think of anything to tweet about? I like to include quotes or jokes occasionally in my tweets. Buffer makes the task easy with the "Suggest a tweet" feature. You just need to click the button and Buffer will suggest quotes or interesting tweets.

Integrated Analytics- Using the Buffer app you can track the full impact your tweets are making. Simply click on the "analytics" button in your Buffer account and you will get the number of retweets, number of clicks and the number of people your tweet reached. You can also see who retweeted your post. You can even add your Bit.ly account username and password to keep a track of your links and number of clicks. This is again a great feature to have a more detailed analysis of your tweets.

Buffer is FREE- In Buffer's free plan you can cue up to 10 tweets a day which is enough for an average tweeter. There are a couple other plans if you wish do tweet more frequently throughout the day.

How to Build Your Twitter Following Using Tweet Adder

Tweet Adder is an excellent tool to grow your Twitter following. It is supported on Windows and Mac. Once you click the login button you access the main Tweet Adder window. In this window you will see the relevant statistics of your Twitter account to the left. At the top you will see followers/following stats and a todo overview. The todo overview lets you know if there are users you have followed that have not followed you back within the time-frame specified and the number of new followers you should consider to follow back to maintain them as followers. The "Updates to post" is the pre-loaded Tweets that Tweet Adder will send for you over time to simulate that you're online. This can all be automated as you will see in a minute. Below basic stats you can see how your are doing over time, 1 day, 7 days, 30 days etc.
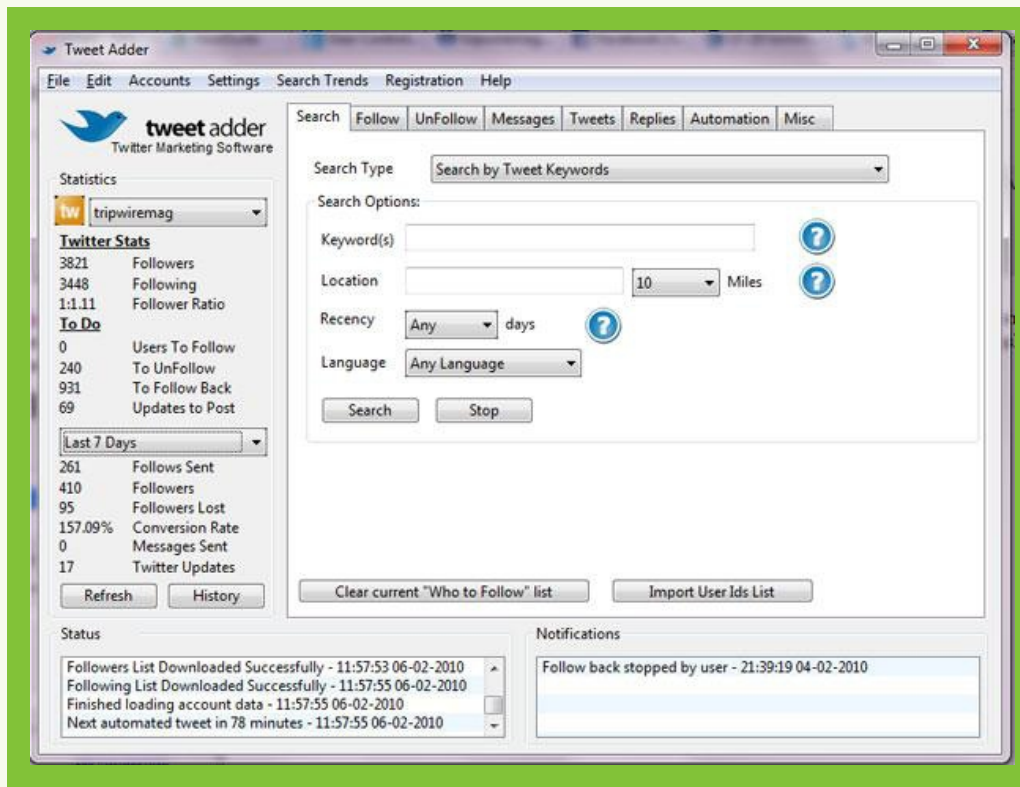
Use Tweet Adder to find targeted twitter users- One of the most important features of Tweet Adder that allows you to grow your Twitter following on a faster scale is targeting which users to follow. Searching is fast and you can easily sort the columns making it possible to find the right Twitter accounts to follow. There are five search types that all are useful but target different needs. My personal favorite is "Search by Profile Data". Why? What it does is to search users bio for a keyword match. This means that you can look up all users that have written fx. "SEO" in their bio. This is quite useful for following users that you know will be interested in your site/blog and tweets. This makes it much more likely that they will follow you back. You can add multiple keyword to narrow the search by adding a + before the keyword "+SEO +Social Media guru".

QUICKSPROUT
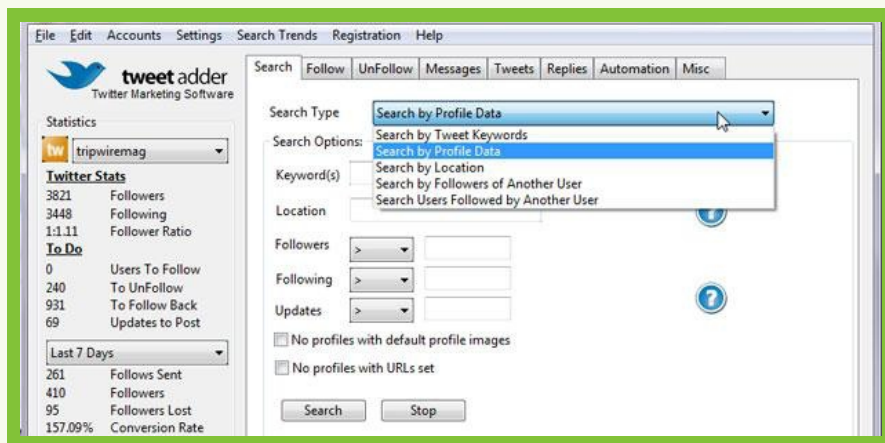
All of the search types will open a new window with all the information you need to analyze users. One really important feature is the ability to sort the columns. The following column is interesting because users that follow back thousands of other users are likely to follow you back automatically. So sorting as shown below makes it easy to find users that match this requirement. You can also see how many followers they have and how many updates they tweeted.

Once the users have been checked and the "Save Checked Rows" button have been clicked the users are saved and can be automatically followed using the follow tab. Tweet Adder will put a predefined delay between each follow. On the follow tab you can also follow back new followers simply be clicking a button. You will also be able to make this happen automatically by checking a few check boxes on the Automation tab.

The search capabilities in latest release of Tweet Adder has been significantly improved and now it can search automatically if it runs out of users to follow.

QUICKSPROUT

Tweet Adder automatic follow and unfollow functionality
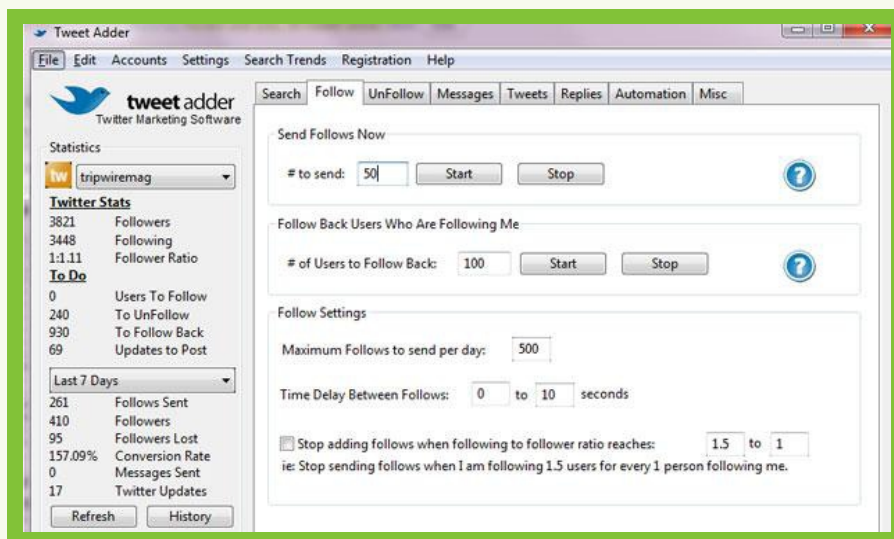
On the unfollow tab in Tweet Adder you can drop users that are not following you back. This is quite important to maintain a reasonable ratio between number of followers and number of users being followed. If someone is not following you back you need a specific reason and interest to keep following him/her because you want to get more twitter followers not to follow as many as possible. You will be able to configure what your unfollowing rules are.
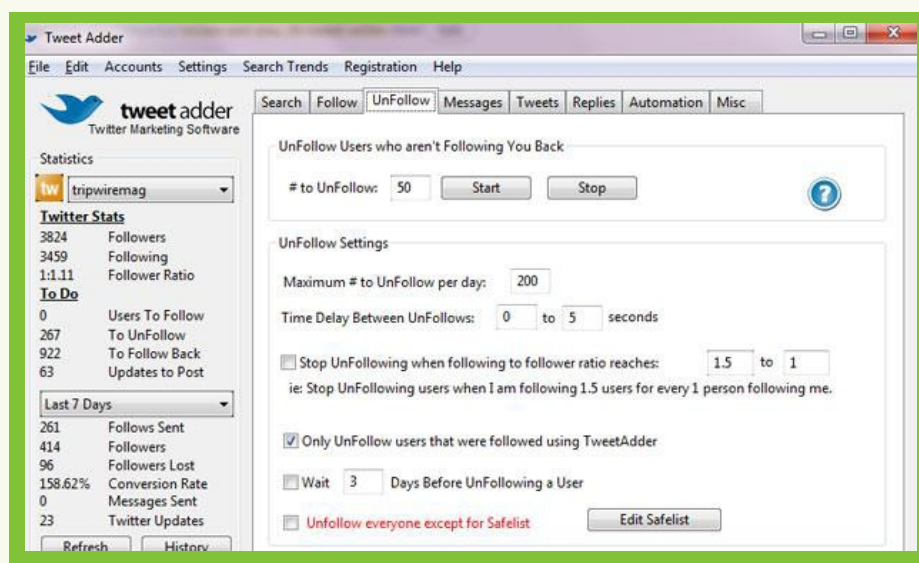
Buying Facebook Fans and Twitter Followers

If you want a quicker and easier way to increase your Facebook fans and Twitter followers you can buy them, although it will cost you some money. Buyrealfacebookfans.com and Buyrealtwitterfollowers.com allow you to literally purchase your social media following.

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These sites promise guaranteed results. I know of instances where they often over deliver on the amount you agree to buy. This is the easiest way to get fans or followers as everything is automated on the sites end, all you do is provide your info. You will be purchasing real fans and followers as well, so you're going to want to start engaging with them as soon as your following starts to go up. Give these a shot if time is an issue for you.

How to Convert Social Media Traffic Into Leads

Once you have all of your tools in place and you have a solid following that brings traffic to your site you're going to want to turn that traffic into some solid leads. This is the part where you start making some money! Here's how to do it.

Look at Your Surroundings

Often times people just post a status update or new blog post and don't take into account that there are other methods to drive people back to the site.

Every status update about a new blog post has three steps to drive lead generation: the status update, the blog post and the landing page. Each one of these has a different role in the process and offers a unique opportunity to optimize lead conversion.

You'll notice there's a critical component in the middle - the blog post. We spend a lot of time creating relevant content for our readers and promoting it through our social media channels. But many times, we forget to look around the content of the post to see if there is an east way for our visitors to become leads.

#1: Offer an email blog/company/product update subscription

Offering a subscription to new content on your site allows you to keep potential customers up to date, while also sending emails that facilitate your lead generation process. Once the user has opted-in to receive updates from your company, you have the ability to continue to market to them and nurture them though the buying process.

#2: Add a Welcome pop-up for new visitors to drive email subscribers

Once someone visits your site for the first time, have a pop out window that allows them to suscribe to your company updates or new product launches.

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#3: Include RELEVANT calls to action on your blog posts

Every blog post should include a call to action to what is relevant to what the blog post is about. For example, if you have a blog post about social media include a pop up about a social media webinar that you may be having.

#4: Keep it light and easy

Most of the calls to action we see on websites are all about buying a product or requesting to speak to a sales rep. You want to make sure that you build trust, especially with people visiting your site for the first time. You don't want to come off as desperate for business or force someone into subscribing. This will turn off potential clients. So make sure that you have "softer" calls to action.

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#5: Be your own advertiser

People often look to sell advertising space on there site. Instead of selling all of your space, use some of it for yourself. This is another excellent way to generate leads, especially if you have a deal going on at the time.

#6: Optimize your offers with landing pages

Once someone has clicked on one of your calls to action, make sure your landing page is optimized to convert a lead. Keep this page as simple as possible. Only ask a few questions if possible. Seeing a long list of questions will turn a prospective client off. It's also important to remember that people will fall off at every stage of the conversion process, so you don't want visual details holding you back.

ADDITIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS OF THE TRADE

SOCIALBAKERS

Get useful stats from Socialbakers. Socialbakers offers paid services to monitor your Facebook statistics, but it also provides useful free statistics for Facebook and LinkedIn.

KURRENTLY

Find out what's being shared on social media with Kurrently, a free, easy-to-use, real-time search engine for results from Twitter and Facebook.

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BLEKKO

Select the sites you want to search with Blekko. You can create "slashtags" for groups of URLs, friends, experts and communities and you can "slash in" what you want and "slash out" what you don't want to search.

SOCIAL MENTION

If social awareness is your main social media goal, then be sure to check out Social Mention, which allows you to set up social media alerts so you can measure awareness for specific

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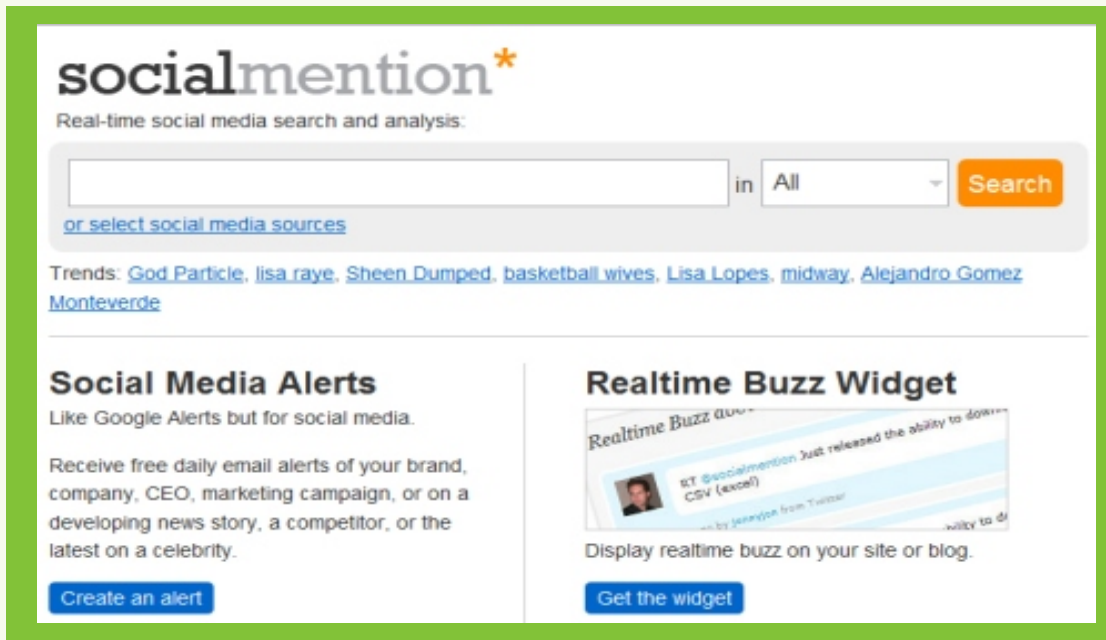
KLOUT

Klout is another tool you can use to measure awareness on Twitter and Facebook.

POSTRANK ANALYTICS

If customer loyalty is your main social media goal, you can use PostRank Analytics to measure results in improving loyalty.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN OF ACTION

Social media is impacting search engine results and if you want to get more traffic from search engines, you need to:

STEP 1

Build an active, engaged presence on social networking sites - this isn't exactly rocket science... if social media engagement is a new ranking factor, you simply can't benefit if you aren't there. If you haven't already, now is the time to build profiles on these sites and invest time in connecting with your followers.

- ▸ Set up a Facebook Fan-page and customize it to your liking

- ▸ Set up a Twitter account

- ▸ Link accounts if necessary

STEP 2

Utilize Social Media Tools to build your ROI and Social Engagement - There are a plethora of social media tools out there to help you reach your audience. Play around with some and try out the ones I mentioned in this section. These tools will be crucial to leveraging your social media campaigns.

- ▸ Set up analytics tools to track social media success

- ▸ Use Tweet Adder to start building Twitter following

- ▸ Buy Facebook fans using Buyrealfacebookfans.com

- ▸ Set up and use Buffer App to manage Twitter

- ▸ Utilize any other social media tools mentioned or those of your choosing

STEP 3

Optimize your sites for social media sharing if your sites are built on WordPress, installing a plugin like Sharebar to enable social sharing is something *you have to do*. Don't rely on your users reading good content on your website and then taking the time to navigate to social networks to share it on their own. Instead, you have to provide them with the tools necessary to get the job done in the easiest way.

a. Install necessary plugins to your site for social media sharing like Sharebar

b. Start brainstorming ideas on different types of content to share on your site

c. Adjust strategy according to amount of engagement

Encourage your readers to share your content smart marketers know that assuming people will take the action you want without you explicitly telling them to do so is a lost cause. You have to use strong calls to action in your posts, encouraging readers to share your content via social networks if they found it useful.

And most importantly, this doesn't mean you should give up on traditional SEO. In March 2010, The Register reported that only 20% of searches on Google were personalized , and although that number is growing, there's no way it will be 100% of all internet users.

There will always be people who hate social networking or refuse to build the Google Profile. These people will only ever see the traditional search engine results, so you still need to follow all of the regular SEO best practices.

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PART 4

BLOGGING

BLOGGING

BLOGGING INTRO

No matter what kind of business you have, or how small or large your business might be, having a blog for your business helps you stay in touch with your customers. A blog will draw your prospects closer because they can learn about your business and what you sell. Blogs help build customer loyalty, and they also help you create a personal relationship with your customers.

But that's where things get a little tricky. Because you're writing directly to your customers and letting them have a conversation with you but also doing so in a way that markets your business, you can't follow the same rules as people who have personal blogs.

You need to be careful about the advice you follow on "how to blog", because that information isn't always applicable to business blogging. Most of it is written by people and for people with personal blogs – they have much more leniency about what they post, and how they post it.

If you're here to do business, then you'll have to blog a little differently.

For example, many bloggers tell heartfelt, personal stories infused with emotion, but that's not going to work for you if you're looking to improve your bottom line. You can't write your opinion on controversial topics or vent in a rant on a matter that made you angry. You might end up hurting your sales if you did.

You also have to be careful about how much personality you pour into posts. Some bloggers curse like sailors or fling about sassy remarks, and that works for them because they're not running a mid-sized business or large corporation. Imagine if the CEO of Nike began swearing avidly on his website! Would that make you want buy some running shoes? Probably not.

The point is, when you own a business blog, you can't play by the same rules as other bloggers do. You have to be more careful about presenting your words in a way that leaves a good impression with customers and potential clients, and that helps you use your blog to market your business.

BLOGGING FOR BUSINESS

Never write about problematic clients

Writing about customers who skipped out on payment or who were rude to your staff with the intention of being 'helpful' to your readers actually sends a message to potential customers that you're not on their side or willing to do what it takes to create satisfied customers.

Plus, would you work with a company that may bad mouth you? Or even worse, your business? Businesses don't like negative PR, so don't make yourself look like a drama queen.

Always sound successful

I've seen some business owners blog about their quarterly losses and the economic crunch they feel. That just lets potential customers know that your business isn't doing so well and that they might be better off working with your competition.

And even if you were doing financially well, why in earth would you publish how much money you're making? It makes you look dumb because all you'll be asking for is more competitors. Because where there is money made, businesses will flock.

Be careful with controversial subjects

This isn't as easy as it sounds. Avoid sensitive topics like sex and religion, but also stay away from sharing opinions or personal stances on potentially inflammatory topics like recent laws or industry practices. The old saying stands: if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.

And if you happen to write about something controversial, make sure you have facts to back up your claims and try not to let your emotions get in the way.

Show values

Talking about the values your business supports or upholds is a good idea. If you believe business should be ethical, transparent and environmentally conscious, then certainly post about that - but in passing, and be careful with your thoughts. Downplay hard stances or strong opinions and never speak ill of the competition.

One of the best places you can show the values your company believes in is your about page. And don't do this in a boasting fashion, but instead do it by talking about the problems you can solve for your potential customers.

For example, if I were Southwest Airlines and had a blog, I would talk about how we believe in going the extra mile to help family members have a great experience by blogging about all the little things that make this possible, such as preferred seating for families. When you have a family, traveling isn't easy and because Southwest doesn't have assigned seating, a lot of families may decide to not book a flight with them, but that could change if people knew about the preferred seating for families.

Don't write for yourself

In business blogging, you're always writing for your customers first and your business second. Your personal needs have to come way down on your list of priorities. Remember that your goal is to get sales, draw in new clientele and boost business by informing readers, not sharing warm fuzzies.

As you start blogging, you'll notice that when you blog about things that help your customers you'll get more of them. And when you blog about how cool your company is, you won't get any new customers.

Put your blog in its' place

My first blog was a online marketing blog and I made the mistake of using it as a landing page. That meant visitors would land on the blog and think, "Oh, free tips on marketing, great!" I would have had them rather think, "Here's an online marketing consultant that I can hire."

A blog is an add-on feature, and you should treat it as such, marketing your blog and your business is just spreading yourself thin. You need one brand and not two separate brands as it will create confusion.

Remember your purpose

A business blog has one main goal: to get customers and sales. Blog about your products, your services, case studies, satisfied customer stories, specials, promotions, new releases... Your blog is a marketing tool for your business, so go ahead and promote in your posts.

Don't be boring

Having a business blog doesn't mean you need to be stiff. It's okay to connect with potential customers on a personal level. Just be sensible about sharing, maintain a good balance of business information and shy away from writing whole posts about your kids or your favorite sport.

Try not to give away the farm

Blogs make it easy for people to pour out tons of free information, but free doesn't make your business more money. Give away just enough information to demonstrate your knowledge and credibility to your readers, but reserve the actual techniques or how-tos for those who hire you, buy your product or sign up.

And if you decide that you want to give away some of your "secret sauce", do so by releasing that information in a free ebook or whitepaper. And before people can download it, make them give you their name, email address, company name, and phone number. This way one of your sales people can follow up with them and convert them into a customer.

Don't be afraid to ask

Feel comfortable telling people what you'd like them to do, because in many cases they won't think of contacting you or clicking the buy button or signing up for more blog updates until you put the idea in their head. Use call-to-action in every post, if you can. Just change the wording so that it looks new and different.

Quality over quantity

Don't market your blog to peers and colleagues as these people aren't your ideal customer. Having them as readers might help boost your RSS subscriber numbers, but that won't help you make sales. Find where your targeted posts hang out and invite them to your blog instead.

You can also participate in relevant forums and blogs by commenting. Every blog that you are commenting on will ask you for your website URL. So as long as you are adding value to the conversation, people will click on over to your website and hopefully start reading your blog. Or better yet, become a new customer.

How To Come Up With Great Content

As soon as you receive a link to a new piece of viral content, I know what goes through your head: "I could have thought of that." And it's true information goes viral when it more vividly depicts or proves something that many have suspected but never proven.

But how do you think up those perfect pieces of content before someone else comes up with the idea? Here are some techniques to get you started creating the next great blog post, infographic, or YouTube video.

Be useful or entertaining

People like finding and passing on information that is either useful, enlightening, or entertaining. Start thinking about what kind of content your audience would find useful: a free report or tool? How could you enlighten them about something they might have assumed or misunderstood without realizing it? What kinds of things would they see as being entertaining? Once you know who your audience is and what kind of response you are trying to elicit, you can start coming up with ideas for the content.

Write it down

The first step in brainstorming is always the storm. Start writing down anything you can think of that people are interested and that you could analyze further. Don't worry about how random your list might look, and don't take anything out. No criticism just writing!

Don't forget to let this process happen naturally, too. Carry a notebook with you, or create a text message draft when you have a great idea. Let yourself be inspired by anything you notice, or questions you want answered. After all, if you're wondering, chances are that someone else is, too.

Sort it out

Start noticing patterns in what you have written down. What might resonate with your audience? What would bring in the types of people you want to attract to your site? Keep in mind a specific type of reader to create an audience that will persist and grow, instead of a blog that is aimless and wandering.

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Pay attention to which of your ideas are trendy today but might disappear tomorrow. Keep the evergreen ideas somewhere to spark more ideas when you are running out, and use the trendy ideas before they go out of style. And if it's already too late, don't worry about letting some of your ideas go to waste it's better than wasting even more time trying to create something that will not go viral anyway.

Do your research

One of the things infographics are best at is putting things in perspective. Start comparing the number of virtual users to a physical quantity like the population of Iran. Show how much bigger $2 billion is than $20 million. Graphics help numbers retain their scale, even when the numbers are so huge our brains don't intuitively understand.

When you stumble on surprising statistics, collect them and come up with related statistics that you are curious about. Putting intriguing, related statistics together is a great foundation for a piece of linkbait content.

Work together

Bring others in when you're trying to generate ideas. You can do the original brainstorming session with a group, or you can ask for a second opinion when sorting through ideas. Let other people catch the enthusiasm, and add more ideas or recommendations to the original seed.

Know the formulas

Once you know what you are going to be giving information about, you need to decide what form it will take. Will you make:

- an infographic?
- a top ten post?
- a collection of photos?
- a youtube video?
- a podcast?
- a slideshare slideshow?
- an ebook?
- a tool?
- a quiz?
- something else completely?

You shouldn't just follow the crowd, but you should observe trends online, especially in your niche. Info graphics are fascinating and quick to be shared in some spheres, and overused in others.

Creating a Popular Blog

One question that I constantly get asked is: How do I make my blog popular?

The obvious answer is to write really good content. But good content isn't good enough. When I started blogging 5 years ago I had information to share, but I didn't have many readers.

Fast forward to today and after having started 3 blogs and working with other popular blogs like TechCrunch, Gizmodo, Mashable, and Boing Boing, I've learned the formula that'll make any blog (with good content) popular.

Here are the 7 things you need to do:

Pay for blog posts

Warning: Do not try to use this tactic to increase your search engine rankings as it can lead you to get banned from the search engines.

When I start a blog, the first thing I do is publish a minimum of 5 blog posts. After that, I pay other bloggers to blog about my blog. It takes a lot longer to build momentum if your blog has zero readers. So if someone already has readers, why not leverage their blog and get them over to mine?

Through services like Review Me and Pay Per Post you can find bloggers who are willing to talk about your blog to their readers. Keep in mind that these bloggers will have to mention to their readers that you paid them to write a blog post, but even with that said, it's still effective.

When I did this with Quick Sprout I was able to attract 1000 RSS subscribers within 24 hours with this tactic.

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Leverage the blogosphere

If you can't afford to pay other bloggers to write about you, don't worry. Another effective way to get more readers to your blog is to write guest posts.

For example, Mark Suster has a blog called Both Sides of the Table, in which he blogs about business and venture capital. One way he gets more readers to his blog is by regularly blogging on TechCrunch which has a similar audience to his.

And to prove that it has been an effective strategy for him, he even breaks down how guest posting drives more traffic to his blog than any other referrer.

Don't forget the basics

The way you setup your blog can make a huge impact on it's popularity. WordPress already comes out of the box with a lot of the stuff you need, but if you add a few extra plugins, it can make a huge difference.

▸ **Top commentors-** you want reward your readers for commenting on your blog. The easiest way to do this is to have a commentors leader board in your side bar as it will encourage people to come back and comment.

▸ **Threaded comments-** no one likes talking to themselves. With threaded comments you can reply to each of your commentors, which will help encourage more comments and cause your traffic to go up.

▸ **Subscribe to comments-** every time someone leaves a comment on your blog, you should give them an option to subscribe. This way, when a new person comes to your blog and leaves a comment, the previous commentors will get an email notification to come back to your blog and check out the new comment.

Tell your story

People connect with people! By writing a very detailed about page, your readers will feel like they actually know you. And once they make that personal connection with you, they will be more likely to not only comeback to your blog, but also comment and interact on your blog posts.

If you're not sure on how to write an about me page just follow these 4 steps:

▸ **Image -** I don't care if you are the ugliest person in the world, you need to place an image of yourself on your about page. That way your readers can connect with you and get to know you on a personal level.

▸ **About yourself -** The main point of the about page is to talk about yourself, but don't get caught up in just writing about your background and education, you should also discuss your life experiences.

- **Be unique -** People have probably seen hundreds or even thousands of about pages in their lifetime, which is why you need to have something memorable.

- **Contact -** Once you have made a strong impact your reader, the chances are they'll visit your blog again or even contact you. Because of this you need to make it easy for people to contact you through your about page.

And if you want to see what a finished product looks like, check out my about page.

Don't be shy

If you want to get readers to your blog, you can't by shy. Get out there and create a Twitter and a Facebook account. According to Alexa Facebook is the 2nd most popular site on the Internet and Twitter is the 11th. So why not leverage their traffic to get more people to your blog?

With Twitter not only should you be tweeting about topics related to your blog, but you should also follow other people who are interested in similar topics. You can find these people by doing a quick search on Twitter and then start following them. Naturally some of those people will follow you back, so when you tweet about your blog people will read it.

And with Facebook, start adding friends to your profile as there is a good chance they'll be interested in your blog when you share new posts.

Get Stumbled Upon

Do you know what the number 1 referrer to most blogs is? Google, right? But do you know what the 2nd most popular referrer is?

It isn't Digg, Facebook, Twitter or even direct traffic. Out of all the blogs I worked with, StumbleUpon seemed to be the 2nd most popular referrer.

If you want to start getting more StumbleUpon traffic to your blog, not only should you create a StumbleUpon account, but you should also participate in the community. You can do this by:

- **Stumbling-** start stumbling things that interest you and your blog readers.

- **Add friends-** befriend people who have similar interest on StumbleUpon. This way, when you start stumbling your friends will also see what you are promoting.

- **Engage-** stumbling every day isn't enough. You need to interact with other StumbleUpon users so that you'll increase the odds of them actually stumbling your stories. You can do this by sending them direct messages.

Optimize for search engines

As I mentioned above Google is the number 1 traffic referrer to most blogs. When you are first starting out, it won't be that way, but in the long run you'll notice that your Google traffic will continually go up.

Since a good chunk of your traffic will come from Google, it's important that you optimize your blog for search engines. The easiest way to do this is to use plugins like the all in one seo pack.

Use the Linkbait Generator

A piece of linkbait itself, this Linkbait Generator is nonetheless funny - and, who knows, it might even spark an idea!

Tell people it's viral

Your work needs to speak for itself, and encourage anyone who is reading to pass it on. Do you include social buttons, embed code, and an encouragement to pass it on? You don't need to be sleazy to let someone know that you are proud of your own work, and ask for their help if they enjoyed your work, too. And if people found it useful or entertaining, chances are they will be looking for a convenient way to share it anyway.

How to Come Up with Viral Content

A viral hit is the holy grail of internet marketing when your content is being shared eagerly across the internet, through social media and networks, email, chat, and even word of mouth. Shared content is far more powerful than any paid advertising method, because people tend to filter out ads. Bypassing these filters and having your message shared for free makes it the most cost-effective means of creating buzz for your business and driving traffic to your website. To succeed and benefit your business, viral content must pass four tests:

▸ It must have sufficient value, either informational or entertainment, to motivate people to share

▸ It must be timely and relevant, or present a new information on a timeless topic

▸ It must be related to your business, elevating the image of your brand

▸ It must be in an easily-sharable format, and give users a good variety of tools so that they can easily transmit the information to their friends

It is human nature to want to share information which reflects positively on the sharer. If you create content that enables people to elevate their own personal brand by being the one to discover it and show their friends, they will happily help you spread your message.

Tell people it's viral

One of the biggest viral video success stories is that of Blendtec Blenders . "Will It Blend" campaign. Blendtec had a good product, but the price point was much higher than the average blender one would find at a department store, even the high end models. In order to demonstrate the product's amazing ability to blend virtually anything, Blendtec created a series of fun videos in which they blended everything from golf balls to a Taser to an iPad 2.

Founder Tom Dickson has an affable and quirky on-camera persona, and the videos utilize an upbeat, retro-game-show inspired theme song. The unusual things he put into a blender and successfully blended into dust spread like wildfire through social media channels, and inspired an internet meme in which "But, will it blend" became a common comment reply in unrelated stories.

Tell people it's viral

By featuring their videos on YouTube, Blendtec leveraged the powerful sharing and embedding features to make their engaging and entertaining content accessible to a wide audience. Will It Blend videos now have a huge following of loyal fans, and according to Blendtec, its sales increased fivefold in the first year of the campaign and continue to grow steadily. At this writing, their YouTube videos have a total of 159,566,830 views, and their channel has 379,048 subscribers.

This is, of course, a best-case scenario of using viral video to reach your audience and grow your business, but if you have a product or service that lends itself to video presentation, even a modest video campaign can have great ROI.

The List: Easily Digested Content for Impatient Internet Users

List-making is one of the easiest ways to create valuable content which has the potential for widespread popularity, since it represents a streamlined source of information with a high degree of usefulness. Internet users are an impatient lot, and a well-compiled list is an easily-scanned and information-rich format. On any given day, social media sites feature many popular and well-thought-out lists and generate significant and relevant traffic to the list-makers. Being a curator of quality information takes less time and effort (and therefore less expense) than creating original content from scratch.

A good list also reflects positively on your brand by demonstrating knowledge and expertise, and is easily adapted to fit your audience and business model. A travel site can compile a list of budget vacation destinations, along with high-quality eye candy photography and informative links, creating a valuable and share-worthy resource for its clients and potential clients. As a bonus, sites that are linked to are likely to link back, and help spread the word, providing additional high-quality inbound links and additional viral potential.

A list doesn't have to be purely aimed at generating business; it can offer a pleasant or humorous diversion and in doing so give your business web presence a warm and human touch. A =Tips and Tricks' list can demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a subject and allow the list-maker to share personal insights and opinions. If you are able to create a regular list feature, this will encourage

The Infographic: Visualizing Difficult or Complex Information

Information graphics, or infographics, have been used for centuries to convey large amounts of information in an easily-understood format. They have the ability distill highly complex concepts into powerful and eloquent messages; Florence Nightingale used the diagram shown at the right to illustrate the need to change the protocols for treating wounded soldiers, and changed modern medicine as we know it.

Of course, your infographic doesn't have to change the world, but a well-researched and visually exciting illustration has a very high degree of viral potential; it requires a significant amount of effort and expertise (if you are not a graphic designer, it is a good idea to hire one who has specific experience in the medium), but the payoff can be well worth the investment. A high-quality infographic may be featured on many of the highest-trafficked sites on the internet, especially if the topic is particularly timely and relevant.

These are extremely valuable inbound links, and as long as the subject matter of the graphic is related to your business, the results can be dramatic.

Most infographics help visualize statistics and trends, which can be incredibly complex and hard to interpret when presented in text. A great infographic starts with solid research. Use the most reputable sources you can find, independent academic and government publications with well-documented methods and reliable statistical sampling, or other trustworthy sources of independent research. Always include your sources as a footnote in your graphic.

The first step is to compile the specific information that you will need to tell your story, along with the narrative you wish to accompany the charts and graphs. The hierarchy of information and visual language (color-coding, size comparisons, timelines) are determined by the type of data and the narrative; again, when in doubt, find a skilled designer who can help you craft your message.

Viral Controversy: The Third Rail of Viral Marketing

Some of the fastest-spreading and most share-worthy content contains an element of controversy. This can be dangerous territory, but if you proceed with caution and aremindful of the potential adverse effects, it can be extremely effective in driving traffic and creating buzz.

It starts with finding an already-popular opinion item, and posting an opposing or contradictory viewpoint. You should already have an established presence or be able to reach a wide enough audience, enough so that the popular individual you disagree with takes notice. While it is not strictly necessary for them to respond personally, you need to at least reach their audience in order to engage them and get them linking to you and talking about you.

The most important caveat is to be scrupulously careful not to damage your brand. Do not be mean-spirited or engage in personal attacks; make sure that your position is supportable and reasonable, and that you have the time to monitor the ensuing conversations and craft thoughtful responses.

High-Tech Viral Content: Apps and Widgets

A highly-specialized but fast-growing type of viral content is the gadget-friendly app or widget. Perhaps the simplest type is a customized content feed, which will place your logo and branding on the screen of their computer or mobile device. This approach works best for those who are already engaged in a variety of the viral marketing techniques outlined in this article, because this creates a rich source of content to be pushed out to your widget users, rewarding them for downloading your app.

Depending on your budget, you can go even further with this type of viral content, commissioning an app with custom interactive functionality. A great example is IDEO's Method Card app, which is a simple device-friendly presentation of their existing Method Cards, a printed deck intended to inspire and inform the design process. This app is available in a free version, with a more elaborate version available for purchase - indeed, one of the benefits of investing in app development is that useful apps are not only shared virally between users, they can also become a revenue stream of their own.

An alternative to the upfront cost of app development is to utilize established services to enhance your audience experience – for example, if you are promoting an upcoming event, offer a link that will automatically add it to the user's iCal, Outlook, or Google Calendar. Work with your web developer to discover new ways to add engaging features and widgets to your viral efforts.

Viral Contests: Competition Creates Buzz

Web start-up SnapSort needed people to write about their service, which offers the user detailed side-by-side comparisons of digital photography equipment. They had two goals: to grow their community and to get bloggers talking about them, so they created two contests: one for bloggers who wrote about the service, and another for users to join their forums and offer suggestions and feedback. This highly successful method asked the entrant to do more than just fill in a form or subscribe to a newsletter or feed, it required a level of engagement and got the participants really thinking about the service.

Over 1,000 entrants took the time to write a detailed blog post about the new site's services, or join the community and interact with the site and each other. This may not sound like a high number, but each entrant represents a newly-recruited ambassador who is now thoroughly engaged in spreading the brand's message.

To make a contest work for your business, define what goals you wish to accomplish (Twitter followers, Facebook fans, forum posts) and establish a method for keeping track of entries and for picking a winner – SnapSort used Random.org to insure that everything was done openly and above-board. Transparency and accountability are important whenever you are organizing a contest, to avoid any negative PR backlash from participants complaining of unfairness.

Be creative in defining the terms of your contest, and participants will want to share their experience.

Viral Instruction: The Expert Article or How-To Guide

If your product or service includes any sort of Do-It-Yourself aspect, it is a tremendous advantage to create detailed online help resources and guides. Not only will they save you time by allowing the customer to answer their own questions, but they also have great viral potential, if they are well-written and illustrated.

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To create a good how-to guide, start with an introduction that establishes the skill level and sets out any tools that will be required along the way. Break the process down into easy-to-complete steps and include diagrams and photography when necessary.

You don't have to be serious to write a viral how-to "Matthew Inman of [TheOatmeal](#) has created a whole series of highly viral comics on subjects ranging from "How to use a semicolon" to "How to pet a kitty". Occasionally, he brings his professional expertise into the mix, composing such guides as "How to not sell something to my generation" and "What I want from a restaurant website." His satirical and sharply humorous creations have achieved the pinnacle of viral success, wherein the viral items themselves become a marketable commodity, in T-shirts, mugs, and other goodies.

Viral Success: The Formula

The bad news is there is no formula, no fixed set of rules that you can apply and be guaranteed a huge hit with a hundred million YouTube views and a line of customized mouse pads and coffee cups. For that you need more than great content, you need to strike that mysterious nerve in the collective consciousness, and that's one of the least predictable things there is.

The good news is that you can achieve solid, reasonable viral marketing results on a regular basis if you follow the basic guidelines for viral content:

▸ **First and foremost, be generous.** The more you put into your viral content, the more you will get out of it. When you are creating your viral masterpiece, ask yourself, "who cares?" – put yourself in the place of your audience and consider why they should care about your message. This is the barrier you have to get over in order to get shared.

▸ **Make sharing effortless, and keep the content available** – don't skimp on the sharing options, and when possible, host high-bandwidth viral content on a reliable service like Flickr or YouTube so it will stay available under high traffic loads.

▸ **Be timely** – if current events affect your business or industry, and your content ties in with them, you have a much better chance of being shared.

▸ **Be original** – and don't be afraid to have some fun with it. Almost every viral success has a sense of fun and an element of surprise.

▸ **Be prepared** – if your content does go viral, be prepared to invest some time responding to comments and interacting with your audience. This is your real opportunity to shine, and to connect with new potential customers and clients.

The most important element in viral content is a connection with your audience. Know who you want to reach and what they find appealing – remember, marketing is as much about listening as it is about messaging.

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What To Do When You Have Nothing To Blog About

Check the Comments

We all have instances of writers block. Where you're sitting there looking at your computer screen and can't manage to pop out an idea for a blog post. A great place to start is looking at previous comments that your readers have left. Often times they will have left questions that you could answer with a blog post. Our perhaps, a comment reminded you of an interesting story or experience that you feel would be appropriate for your blog.

Check Out Other Blogs in Your Community

With millions of blogs on the web there is an infinite source of content available. Start with checking out blogs in your community. Check out what others are blogging about and see if you have something you can offer on the subject to be hosted on your blog. Make sure you give your own unique views or opinion of the subject so that others readers will be compelled to visit your blog.

Look In Your Archives

If your blog has been around for a while and you have many posts take a look at your archives. You may be able to bring back an older post and update it. Or if you're lazy just repost it. In most cases your readers will think it's a brand new post. I have hundreds of posts on my blog and it's very unlikely that most of my readers have read them all.

Check Your Email

While most readers will ask questions through blog comments, some will email you directly. Instead of answering the question through email break it down in a blog post. Often times your readers will have the same questions, so why not share the information with everyone!

Look At YouTube

When all else fails look for a funny or thought provoking video on Youtube. Make sure to add your comments or thoughts about the video.

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How To Increase Blog Post Rankings

When you're writing a blog post, you want to make sure that you get as many eyes to read your message as possible who would want to waste all that hard work? You want to make sure you're getting the search engine traffic, too. Here are 6 things to double-check before you hit . "Publish", in an effort to make sure your blog post's SEO is working for you, and not against you. Keep in mind that even though SEO only helps to improve traffic that comes from search engines, these tips improve the usability of your site too, and will therefore add benefit to all your readers.

Title tags

Titles need to be catchy - but they need to contain keywords too! Help people find what they are looking for by naming your blog post well.

The titles of your posts also need to be displayed as the titles of your pages (in the "title" tags, not just the "h1" tags). This sometimes requires a WordPress plugin or setting change. Find out what your title tags show now, so that you can change them for the future if necessary!

URL text

Your SEO improves when your URL contains specific search terms, instead of a jumble of characters or numbers. You can change your URL format in the settings of your blog. Also remember that the farther your post is from the root of your domain, the less SEO credit it is getting from its association with your homepage, so try to minimize the number of slashes in your URL.

Meta description

The meta description is for a description, not for keyword stuffing! Though search engines don't necessarily put more weight on the content in your description, it is often displayed as the site description in search results and you want that to be clear for your readers. Find a theme that will let you customize the meta description.

You should also pay attention to the description for social media reasons. When a link is shown in Facebook, the title, an image, and the meta description will be shown. Make sure yours encourages readers to click on the link!

Images and multimedia

Include images and multimedia not only does it engage users once they are on your page, it also helps your SEO. Name your images with applicable keywords so that they can count toward your page's ranking, as well as ranking in Google image search.

Description tags

Once you add multimedia, make sure you add descriptions! Alt tags are important for search engines to be able to understand the content of the image or video. Plus they create more opportunities for you to capitalize on your keywords without keyword stuffing and/or using redundant language. Alt tags also improve accessibility for people using screen readers, or if they have images disabled.

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Header tags

The title isn't the only header that's important. Subheadings are great for multiple reasons: they help users navigate your page, and they help search engines see what is important, too. So add h2 and h3 tags to split up your masses of text!

Internal links

Link to your other posts! It might sound a little strange, but the more internal links you have, the "higher" (closer to the homepage) those other articles appear, and the more credit they get with search engines. Imagine all of your pages in a web you want them all to be bunched up and related to each other, instead of being spread out without any connections.

When you are linking, both to your internal pages and to external sites, use specific words and phrases. Integrate the link into a sentence instead of saying "To find out, click here".

Link to other content

Speaking of linking, go ahead and do it! You want Google to treat you like an authority site, so act like one. Authority sites are not dead ends; think about how many outgoing links sites like Wikipedia have. Just be sure the links make sense in context and that they continue the conversation, instead of surprising the reader by jumping to different subjects.

Authors of blogs will often notice when they are linked to, which becomes an opportunity to grow a relationship. This leads to our next tip:

Get links

Both search engines and people, believe word-of-mouth recommendations far above self-promotion. Be sure to get your name out there yourself, but after that, see if you can get links from other sites. The least glamorous and most successful way to start doing this is to write high quality content! Make your article one that people will want to come back to and read again, or recommend to their friends and/or readers.

You can speed up the process by writing courteous, interested comments or e-mails, to bloggers you think might be interested in your site. But don't forget about content first- any quality site that links to you will want to make sure you have a quality site, too.

All of these changes can be put in place today, and only take an additional minute or two each time you write a blog post. Let your blog be the biggest SEO advantage it can be!

HOW TO GROW YOUR RSS SUBSCRIPTIONS

Quick Sprout has been around for 4.5 years and since that time I have built up a nice little audience of RSS subscribers. Considering that I have only published nearly 300 blog posts within that time, I am pretty proud of my accomplishment.

When I first started out my feed count was growing at a rapid pace, but what really started killing off my growth rate was my inability to publish new blog posts on a consistent basis. During my peak I was able to publish 2 blog posts a week, and during slow periods I was only publishing 1 blog post every 2 months.

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And after I got back into the groove of publishing a blog post every week, my subscription count still remained flat.

Here is how I increased my subscription growth by 243%:

Think outside of the box

I was at a conference in Indiana a while back and I ran into a gentleman by the name of [James Paden](#). He has been a reader of Quick Sprout for years and he specializes in conversion optimization.

To make a long story short, James invited me out to dinner, and we had a whole conversion on how we could grow Quick Sprout. Between the two of us we started brainstorming and we came up with ideas on how we could increase Quick Sprout's RSS feed count.

We came up with a ton of concepts, but here are the 4 we ended up testing out:

Idea #1: Hook your readers

The most logical way to get someone to subscribe to your blog, is to offer a subscription option below each blog post, *right?* Because if you are reading something you like, why wouldn't you want more of it?

The most logical way to get someone to subscribe to your blog, is to offer a subscription option below each blog post, right? Because if you are reading something you like, why wouldn't you want more of it?

Idea #2: Offer email options

A lot of people don't use RSS feed readers. Heck, even I don't use them, but what everyone uses is email. Within the sidebar, we added an email option.

If you notice, we still left the feed reader option, but we put an "enter your email" box within the sidebar.

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Idea #3: Offer a white paper

A good way to get someone to subscribe to your blog is to offer him or her an incentive. Blog content is great, but it isn't enough.

What we decided to offer was a free white paper on the business mistakes that I have made. To receive this white paper, you have no choice but to enter in your name and email address. Once we collect your name and email address, when then automatically add you to my RSS feed count through Aweber (this allows you to get Quick Sprout blog posts delivered to your inbox).

Idea #4: Friendly pop-up

I know what you are thinking, no one likes pop-ups anymore, but they still work. I already wrote a white paper, so why not create a nice looking popup that asked to see if you want to download it?

Whether you happened to put in your information or click on "no thanks" you would never see the popup again. And similar to idea number 3, we then passed in your information to Feedburner (they host my RSS feed) through Aweber.

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The results

Drum roll please...

Instead of having my RSS feed count grow at the usual pace of 3522 new subscribers each year, it is now growing at a pace of 1007 new subscribers a month or 12084 new subscribers each year. This accounts for a growth rate of 243%.

	Event Action ⌄	None ⌄	Total Events ↓
1.	Sidebar-Email		161
2.	Sidebar-Icon		98
3.	Below-Post-Email		63
4.	Below-Post-Icon		14

But what's really interesting is the RSS subscription method that you prefer. See, I would have thought that the most popular way that you would have liked to subscribe is the call to action that fades right in at the bottom of each post. But according to the image above:

1 63 of you entered in your email from the call to action below each blog post. (idea #1)

2 14 of you clicked on the RSS subscription icon from the call to action below each blog post. (idea

3 161 of you subscribed by entering in your email in the sidebar. (idea #2)

4 98 of you clicked on the RSS subscription icon in the sidebar. (idea #2)
I don't have a full 30 days of history with idea #3 and #4, but ever since James implemented them you can see how my RSS count really started to skyrocket.

On October 28th, idea number 3 was implemented and my new daily RSS subscription growth went from roughly 9 new subscribers a day to 53. Within the next day or two it died down to 20, but that isn't bad considering it was Halloween weekend.

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On November 1st, idea number 4 was implemented and my new daily RSS subscription growth went from 21 to 110. And of course, it slowed down over the next few days, but it still shows that pop-ups are effective.

Here are the stats for ideas number 3 and 4:

1. 186 of you put in your name and email into the sidebar white paper call to action. (idea #3)

2. 467 of you put in your name and email into the pop-up. (idea #4)

Emails cause higher engagement

The best piece of information that I found out through this test is that email subscribers engage a lot more than RSS subscribers.

If you look at the screenshot above, you'll notice that there is well over a 60% engagement level through emails collected through Aweber. And if you compare that with the image below, you'll notice that only 30% of the RSS subscribers who use feed readers engage.

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If you really want to sky rocket your RSS subscription growth, create a free ebook or a white paper and give it away to your readers. Just make sure that you are using Aweber to give it away as it won't just help you collect more emails, but it causes higher engagement levels.

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HANDY WORDPRESS PLUGINS FOR YOUR BLOG

There isn't a shortage of WordPress plugins, including free ones - but what about the free ones that really work and make a difference? Those can be hard to weed through, especially if you want to make sure they work with the newest version of WordPress (3.1.1, currently) and if you want to see other users' reviews. We've checked out all the reviews for you, and while they're not perfect (of course), here are 12 great plugins that might become your next favorite!

Usability

W3 Total Cache

Everyone wants a fast site, right? Especially one that doesn't crash when that perfect post of yours finally goes viral. Caching your pages allows your server to serve them much faster. With a huge number of ratings and an outstanding score, this plugin has a history of providing great speed and stability.

WP Super Cache

This plugin also caches your site and allows for a faster load time. Still coming highly recommended, this plugin requires very little customization.

Yet Another Related Posts Plugin

Display related posts from your blog below each post. Considers titles, content, tags, and categories, and displays more or fewer matches depending on how many match the post well.

Management

WP-PageNavi

It's simple: this handy plug-in creates improved page navigation that lets users jump around between pages instead of just showing "last page" and "next page" arrows.

CMS Tree Page View

If you are frustrated by attempts to create page hierarchies in WordPress, use this plugin to drag and drop your pages and add new ones. Creates a simple-looking view so you can know where all your pages are at a glance.

Editorial Calendar

Schedule future posts with drag-and-drop ease, and get a quick overview of what is going to be posted when. A great resource for multi-author blogs, or individual blogs with a backlog of posts.

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SEO

All in One SEO Pack

It's the most popular SEO plugin because it works. You have so many options to customize, and yet it works out-of-the-box, too. Set default meta tags and customize titles and descriptions. There's no excuse not to fine-tune each page now!

SEO Ultimate

Another way to customize your meta tags, titles, and much more. It even extends the canonical features of WordPress, making sure that you never have a problem with duplicate content. It isn't as widely used as the All in One SEO Pack, but SEO Ultimate can use your All in One SEO Pack settings, if you want to switch.

Google XML Sitemap

With a huge following, this plugin has plenty of support for older and newer versions of WordPress. It creates sitemaps readable by all the major search engines, and automatically resubmits your site if it detects a major change.

Social

Digg Digg

Adds several social media sharing buttons wherever you want them: at the beginning of a post, floating in a sidebar, in small or large sizes. Make it easy for others to share your work!

CommentLuv

When a user leaves a comment, this plugin shows a selection of latest blog post titles to display under the comment. A quick way to see what your community is blogging about, and help them engage each other!

AWeber Integration

Your RSS subscriber count represents the amount of readers you have. The problem with RSS is that not everyone uses a RSS reader.

The cool thing about the AWeber Integration plugin is that it allows your visitors to subscribe to your blog by email instead of a RSS reader. And when they do, those subscribers get automatically pulled into your Feedburner account so that you can have an accurate subscriber count.

With this plugin you can encourage visitors to become subscribers by offering them extra content for free. One idea could be to offer email subscribers a free eBook.

HOW TO MAKE MONEY ON YOUR BLOG

If you think it would be good fit for you to monetize your blog there are several tactics that you can utilize to make some dough. Depending on your blog you can make money directly from your blog or indirectly.

Direct Income Earning Methods - these methods are where a blogger earns an income directly FROM their blog.

Indirect Income Earning Methods - these methods are where a blogger earns an income BECAUSE of their blog.

Most blogs tend to fall into one or the other of these methods - although there is nothing to stop bloggers experimenting with elements of both .

DIRECT INCOME EARNING METHODS FOR BLOGGERS

① Advertising

There are many ways of selling advertising space on a blog but some of the different advertising options that I see bloggers experimenting with include:

- **Contextual Advertising** - Programs like AdSense and YPN (beta) are very popular with bloggers and are probably the most common income stream being used by them today. These programs basically scan the content of your blogs and display relevant ads. They are generally simple to use and involve pasting some code into your blog's templates. Payment is on a "per click" basis (referred to as CPC or" "cost per click" ads). Contextual ads suit blogs that have a particular niche topic, especially if it has some sort of commercial angle.

- **Impression Based Ads** - Impression based ads pay a small amount for every person who views the advertisement. The amount that they pays varies from program to program (and ad to ad) and is generally a fraction of a cent. There are a variety of ad systems around like this including Fastclick and Tribal Fusion. Impression based ads won't earn you much if you don't have a lot of traffic but can be great if you do.

- **Blog Ads** - BlogAds These ads put the control of what ads show and how much they earn into the hands of the blogger. The downside is that if you price them too high you could never have any ads showing at all.

- **Text Ads** - Another increasingly popular way to sell ads on your blog is to look into text links. The great thing about these ads is you can accept or reject which ads you want to run and they don't take up much room. AdBrite is one such system that gives you control in a similar way to BlogAds in that you set your own prices and approve all ads. Text Link Ads is another text link seller which already has it's own pool of advertisers so you don't have to look for them on your own. Bidvertiser and Adzaar are other systems that are popular with some bloggers.

- **RSS Ads** - An increasingly popular way for people to read blogs is via RSS. As a result publishers and ad providers have been keen to find ways to place ads in feeds. Feedburner gives publishers three options (1. AdSense if you've been approved by them, 2. Amazon affiliate program and 3. if you have a lot of subscribers (over 500) they have an Ad Network). Pheedo is another system that would be worth trying.

- **Other Ads Systems** - In addition to the above systems are many others that you should try out. AdGenta, CrispAds, Clicksor, Intelli Txt, Peak Click, Double Click, Industry Brains, AdHearUs, Kanoodle, AVN, Pheedo, Adknowledge, YesAdvertising, RevenuePilotTextAds, SearchFeed, Target Point, OneMonkey, and TextAds.

② Sponsorship

Another form of making money off your blog is finding sponsorship.The advantage to the above systems is that they at least assist you in getting advertisers. The big blog networks have people dedicated to the task of finding advertisers, but smaller bloggers might find this worthwhile also. The key if you're going to take this approach is to target advertisers in your niche that have products that closely relate to what you're writing about. There are a variety of ads that you can offer them including banner ads, buttons, text links, mentions in newsletters and even individual post sponsorships. I would highly recommend that you always make it clear to readers that your post is a sponsored one when you're writing a sponsored post.

③ Affiliate Programs

Affiliate programs are where you take a commission for referring a reader who purchases a product or service to a company. Probably the most common of these for bloggers is Amazon which has tens of thousands of products that you can link to. Other affiliate programs that represent many different companies and products include Linkshare, Commission Junction and Clickbank. Affiliate programs take some work if you want to get the most out of them but can be lucrative if you match the right program with the right blog/topic.

④ Donations and Tip Jars

You can always ask your readers for donations to your blog. Though it probably won't garner you much money unless you have a large and loyal following.

⑤ Merchandise

Another way to make money is to sell t-shirts, stickers, mugs or any merchandise in general. Again, you'll probably have to have nearly a cult like following to make a dent in profits.

⑥ Selling Subscriptions

Another way to make money is to sell t-shirts, stickers, mugs or any merchandise in general. Again, you'll probably have to have nearly a cult like following to make a dent in profits.

⑦ Blog Networks

Another emerging income source for bloggers are blog networks. There are two ways to make money here. Firstly you can start a network and contract bloggers to write for you or secondly you might like to join a blog network as a writer. There are many networks out there and all have their own strengths and weaknesses.

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INDIRECT INCOME EARNING METHODS FOR BLOGGERS

We now turn our attention to ways of making money from blogging that are more more "indirect" in nature - or how to earn money because of your blog rather than from it.

Many of the ways in which indirect methods are successful are because of the perceived success or knowledge of the blogger. Building a reputation as a blogger takes time and starting a blog with these strategies in mind should be seen as a long term - goal.

- **Consulting** - when you are perceived as an expert on a topic you will find that people naturally come to you for advice, some of them willing to pay for it. As you develop your reputation as a consultant/blogger you can increase your asking price or hourly rate so to speak.

- **Employment Opportunities** - Bloggers are increasingly being targeted by companies because of their demonstrated abilities in their field of expertise.

- **Business Blogging** - Similarly there are some businesses who employ people to blog for them either as their main role or part of their role.

- **Book Deals** - You can expect this is you become a rockstar expert in your field. Publishers are more receptive to signing book deals with leaders of industry. This is becoming more and more frequent.

- **Offline Writing Gigs** - These types of opportunities can be in the form of newspapers, magazines, trade publications etc.

- **Online Writing Gigs** - Similarly some bloggers also land jobs writing for other forms of websites as a result of being discovered from their blogs.

- **Selling e-resources** - Some bloggers are leveraging the expertise they have in an area by putting together their own "e-products" such as e-books, tele-seminars, courses etc and selling them to their readers.

- **Business Partnerships** - One of the benefits of blogging about a niche topic that interests you is that you will begin to connect with others who have similar interests and expertise. As you interact with them it's amazing to see the opportunities for working together that arise.

- **Speaking Opportunities** - Once again this is dependent upon the topic you're writing about but some lucky bloggers end up with all kinds of opportunities to speak at conferences, workshops and seminars on their topic of choice. Sometimes they are freebies, other times the conference will cover costs and on other occasions there are speakers fees.

Remember, if you want to use indirect tactics it will take a while to build your reputation as a blogger. It's important to craft a unique profile of yourself and to offer unique content and perspectives that your readers can use in their business dealings or everyday life.

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BLOGGING TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Repost.Us

Your content can be instantly syndicated to another publisher, blogger or website with a few clicks with Repost.Us and have no prior business relationship - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Onlywire

With the click of one button Onlywire will submit your content to 26 social media sites. Includes analytics. Pro plan starts at $10 a month for 1,000 submissions.

Bit.ly

Share your blog content across social networks with Bit.ly a free web-based app. Bit.ly shortens, shares and tracks your links. Chrome extension available.

NewsTex

Another syndication service that allows you to share your blog or online video content. Contact NewsTex for pricing information.

Feedburner

Feedburner is an online tool that manages your blog feeds. Control syndication, delivery options, and publication terms over multiple blogs. Then analyze the results to optimize your feed content. Best of all it's free.

Dlvr.it

Dlvr.it automatically feeds your blog content (or any RSS feed you create/curate) to Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social networks. Includes analytics.

BLOGGING PLAN OF ACTION

Social media is impacting search engine results and if you want to get more traffic from search engines, you need to:

▸ **Craft a unique blog presence that represents your company** - Start out by figuring out what platform works for you, from there customize it in a way that reflects the ideals and values of your company.
> a) Recommend setting up a WordPress account and Blog
> b) Customize the design to your liking

▸ **Optimize your blog for social media sharing** - There are many plugins that will help you optimize your blog so that you're able to get your content out there. Start with the ones' I've suggested in this section and you'll be off to a great start.
> a) Wordpress has many plugins to take advantage of
> b) Set up analytics plugins to track blog traffic/shares

▸ **Come up with ideas for unique and relatable content** - Remember you want to come up with content that is appealing to others and will make them want to come back read/participate more. Don't make it all about you. Be creative!
> a) Brainstorm different types of blog topics or content to share on your blog
> b) Get feedback from your readers

▸ **Encourage your readers to share and provide feedback on your content** - Your blog is a great place to interact with your client base. Ask them to share with others and don't be afraid to ask for feedback about where you can improve your business.

When blogging for business, your ultimate goal is to convert readers to buyers, so make sure that you put effort into helping achieve that conversion. Link to your sales pages within blog posts, talk about what you can do for people and play up that you're a business with something to offer.

Remember that your blog shouldn't be the main attraction. It's just a gateway to help readers discover your business and get them excited about the bigger and better things you sell.

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PART 5

CONVERSION OPTIMIZATION

CONVERSION OPTIMIZATION

Conversion optimization is the practice of optimization your conversion process and rate. A conversion is when a designated goal has been reached, or a specific action has been accomplished. As we have learned, a conversion can be many things including:

- A blog subscription
- Email subscriptions
- Purchases
- Follow you on Twitter
- Liking something on Facebook

Optimizing your conversions is an extremely important part of your business. Optimizing your conversion rate will allow you to earn more money, increase your following and help your business succeed.

How to Break Optimization into a 5 Step Process

Conversion optimization can be broken down into a 5 step process:

1. Baseline your macro conversion
2. Identify optimization opportunities
3. Gather qualitiatative data
4. Create and implement A/B tests
5. Measure against your baseline, rinse & repeat

Baseline Macro Conversions

Setting a baseline for your conversions is the starting block of your optimization efforts. Creating a baseline which you can compare future tests and results too will be vital to you measuring your successfulness.

Identify Optimization Opportunities

Identify elements on your website and your sales funnel that have optimization potential. These will be the elements you want to test in the future.

Gathering Qualitative Data

Gather peoples thoughts, opinions, feelings and reactions is a great way to identify conversion barriers. Utilize online surveying tools like KISSinsights to ask your users questions about your website, such as. "Did you find this page useful?". Be sure the answer options you give them will report useful and actionable information to you.

Using A/B Tests

Utilizing A/B tests will give you quantitative data as to which option resonates with users better and leads to more conversions. You will be able to test different elements of you website against other to find the most effective options.

Measure and Repeat

Once you've tested something, attempt to test something else. Conversion optimization shouldn't be a one time project. You can continually test various elements of your website and always find ways to improve something. Just make sure you are spending your time testing valuable elements in your conversion process and not wasting your time with un-actionable items.

What is A/B Testing?

A/B testing is the process of testing one change against another, thus, A versus B. In the content of your website or marketing efforts, this might be headline A versus headline B.

What is Multivariate Testing?

A/B testing is the process of testing one change against another, thus, A versus B. In the content of your website or marketing efforts, this might be headline A versus headline B.

Why A/B Testing?

While there are many methods of optimizing your conversion rates, A/B testing is a fantastic way to test many different types of elements and conversion points on your website.

Well-planned A/B testing can make massive differences in the effectiveness of your marketing efforts and your ability to convert users. Narrowing down the most effective elements of a promotion, and then combining them, can obviously make your marketing efforts much more profitable and successful.

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How to Plan a Successful A/B Test

When planning a A/B test the first thing to do is to figure out what you want to test. Like we said, you can test a number of different things, both, on your site and off. If you're running an on-site test, you'll want to think of all the sales-related pieces of your website, and then figure out which elements you want to test. Think of elements that are vital to your conversion process.

With off-site tests, you might be testing a banner ad, a PPC ad, a sales or welcome email. Most off-site A/B testing will most likely include testing of ad copy. Writing effective ad copy can make or break a campaign so making sure you're focusing on the right tone, verbiage and message is important to your success and bottom line.

Remember when planning your A/B test to make sure you include enough time to potentially run multiple A/B tests. Don't always rely on the results of one test, make sure you test all options with in a reasonable limit. Also be sure you know what kind of results you're looking for. Don't get caught up in vanity metrics, focus on what matters. If sales email A garnered more click through than sales email B but sales email B earned more conversions, then you need to be able to decide which is the better performing email.

Lastly, plan to run your tests at the same time, you can't A/B test two elements at different times and expect relevant results.

How To Know What Things to Test and Where to Test Them

While there are an endless amount of elements you can test, remember to focus on what matters. Don't waste precious time testing things that don't matter in your conversion process. You'll find different elements to test on different mediums like your website, email, PCC, banner ads etc.

Here are some things you can test on your website:

- Headlines
- Color of Calls to Actions
- Copy of Calls to Actions
- Placement of Calls to Actions
- Shape of Calls to Actions (square vs rectangle vs circle vs rounded corners etc.)
- Images that are part of your sales process (Do images with real people in the
- convert better than images of objects?)
- Sales Copy
- Product Descriptions
- Product Images
- Layout of your website
- Layout of your shopping cart
- # of steps in your checkout process
- Contact forms

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Here are some things you can test in an email campaign:

- Subject line

- Times emails are sent

- Copy

- Call to Action

- Images in the email

- Time between emails sent

- Types of deals you offer in your emails

Here are some things you can test in an ad campaign:

- Ad copy

- Headline

- Call to Action

- Should you include a phone number or not?

- Which websites you set your ads to run on

- Which demographics you chose to show your ads to

- When your ads get displayed

Testing More Than One Thing at a Time

Testing one element at a time is the least complicated way to run a standard A/B test. You are able to focus on one thing, test it and measure the results without having to factor in other variables. There are ways to do multivariate testing, but they are more complicated. Both A/B testing and multivariate testing can both be accomplished using a number of helpful tools such as Google's Website Optimizer or apps like Unbounce which will help you set up multiple landing pages and A/B test them against one another.

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How to Put Together a Successful A/B Test

Here is a great way to conduct your A/B test.

1. Pick which page you want to test

2. Select one element from your sales process on that page

3. Once you select the element you'd like to test make sure you have an idea of the type of results you'd like to see

4. Create two copies of that page, but change the one element you chose to test to something different, possibly a new color or new copy.

5. Now choose your method for serving up both pages randomly to your visitors, like Google Website Optimizer.

6. Select a length of time you want to run the test for. Make sure it is enough time to gather adequate results.

7. Run the test

8. Gather your results and analyze them.

9. Determine if your results are valid.

Once you've successfully run your test you have a couple of choices. If you are happy with the results then you can go ahead and implement a change based on your results. If you don't think your results are valid, or just want to try running the test again with a different control and variable then run the test again. You can run the tests as many times as you like, just keep time isn't always your friend. So eventually you'll need to make a choice and be content with it. You can always revisit your test in the future.

How to Use Google's Website Optimizer to Run An A/B Test

Google Website Optimizer is a fantastic free tool for creating experiments to optimize your conversion rate.

Here is how to utilize Website Optimizer:

1. Select an element you want to test on a certain page of your website

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2 Create different versions of this page with the varying element. For example, you want to A/B test a .purchase. button on your home page. Create two versions of your home page and make the colors of the "purchase" button different for each version of the page, say green and red.

3 Now you've got two copies of your homepage, one with a green .purchase. button and one with a red "purchase" button. You need to upload your newly created page with the varying "purchase" button color to your website so that it has a live URL.

4 Next you'll need to setup your experiment so head over to the Website Optimizer website.

5 First, click "Create a new experiment".
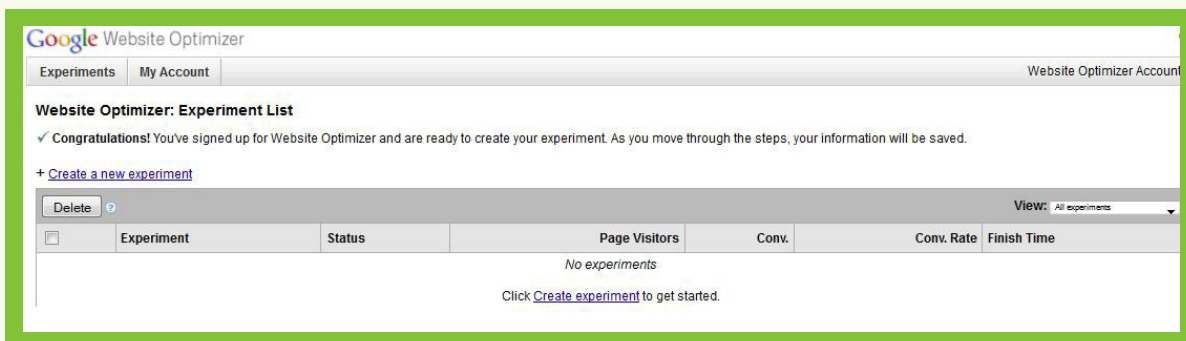
6 Select, "A/B Experiment The simplest way to start testing fast".

QUICKSPROUT
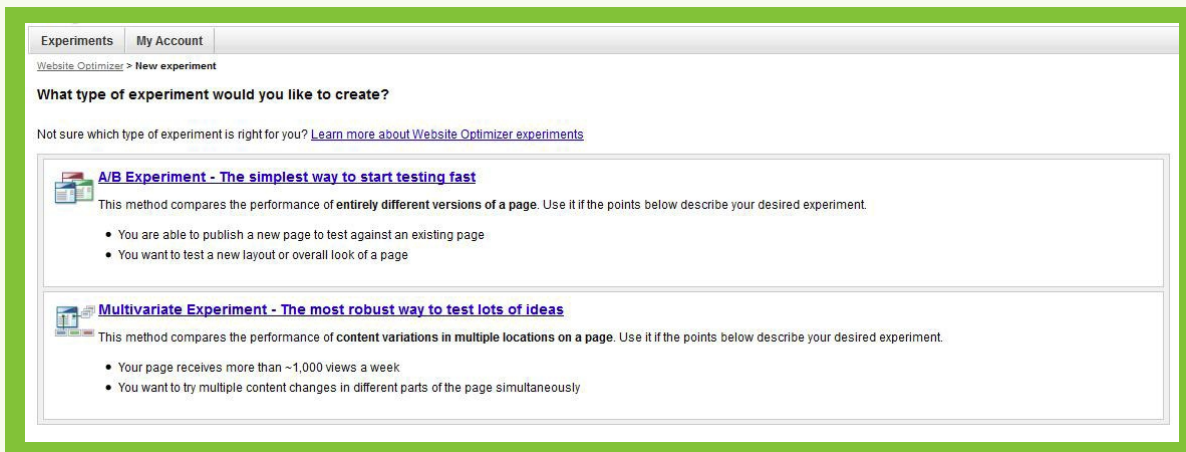
7 Select the checkbox indicating that you have completed the steps on the screen and click Create.

8 Next, name your experiment.

9 Next, enter the URL of the original page you used to create the variation off of and the variation page's URL in the field below titled, "Page variation URL". Google is going to verify that both URLs are live. *note: the urls in the images are just for this demonstration, neither page is a sales page.*

10 Now you need to enter the URL of the page that would signify that a conversion has been made. This might be a "thank you" page. For this demonstration we'll use my "About Page".

11 Hit "Continue" and you will be posed with two options of installing JavaScript tags that help track the conversions. Choose which method you are most comfortable with. I am going to go with installing it myself because it's really easy to do.

12 In this case, Google is going to give you three tracking scripts that you will need to place on each page (the two pages with the varying element you are testing and the conversion page). Each script should be placed on their respective pages immediately after the opening <head> tag of your source code.

QUICKSPROUT

13 Once the scripts are installed on all your pages, hit "Validate pages".

4. Publish and validate your pages

After you add your tags, **publish your updated test, variation, and conversion pages on the web.**

We will check your pages to make sure that the scripts are correctly placed.

Validate pages

💡 **Pages not accessible?** Click "Validate pages" anyway. If we can't access something, we'll ask you to manually upload your pages for validation.

14 Once each page validates and everything checks out all you need to do is launch your experiment. Just hit "launch experiment" and Google will start to serve the two pages randomly and start reporting data back to you within 24 hours.

How to Create Successful Landing Pages

We can't talk about conversion optimization without discussing a landing page and optimizing your landing page.

Here are some tips for nailing your landing page and optimizing the landing page portion of your conversion process:

1 Make sure you have the same design theme, color layout and overall tone of your main website on your landing page. This will keep the branding consistent and familiar.

2 Don't offer multiple call to actions. Keep the landing page focused on one call to action as to not distract the user, or confuse them.

3 Don't hide your call to action. The whole point of the landing page is for the user to respond to that call to action so keep it visible and keep it prominent.

4 Create a call to action that is strong and leaves the user knowing exactly what they need to do next.

5 Build trust with your landing page by displaying any third-party badges or certificates that show you are reputable and trustworthy.

6 Reduce users need to leave your landing page for more information. Include everything they'll need to be informed and make a conversion. On the flipside of this, make sure you only include relevant information as to not confuse or bore the user.

7 Implement good user experience and design practices within the landing page.

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8. If possible, include testimonials and client logos from reputable and well known clients who endorse your services.

9. If possible, keep your landing page's length to "screen length". to avoid the user having to scroll down. Any opportunity to reduce the chances that a user will bail from your landing page should be taken.

10. Always be testing for further optimization. Run A/B tests, change copy, images, colors and calls to actions to see which users respond more too.

Make Conversions the Path of Least Resistance

Odds are you're going to have a hard enough time getting a user to convert even if you have the perfect sales funnel, so don't sabotage your efforts by putting up road blocks in your conversion process. The goal when you're optimizing your conversions should be to make it as easy as possible for people to convert.

Copy

There are many elements of your sales funnel that you can screw up quite easily if you're not careful, starting with the copy. Your sales copy needs to be great. It needs to be authoritative and persuasive if you have any chance of selling your product. Remember that your readers have a short attention span so be sure to only include messages that are driving your customers in the right direction. Avoid confusing, or misleading passages that serve no purposes. Make every line and word mean something. If it's not helping you sell your product then drop it.

Also, be sure you are writing your copy so that it is geared to convince the buyer that your product will help **them.** The buyer doesn't care to read about how the product helps anyone but them, so write all your copy in that tone.

Fonts

Fonts can be fun and extremely creative, but unfortunately also a major hiccup in your conversion process. What's the point of your brilliant copy if your reader gets a headache trying to read it or can't read it at all!?

Avoid copy that is way too small for someone to comfortably read. Try to keep the font at size 16 to avoid too much eye strain. Also, stay clear of offensive background/font colors. Your best bet is to stick with a dark font on a light background.

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Highlight the Important Stuff

Since your users' attention is short, and you have a small window to grab their attention and sell them your product you need to make sure all your most important points are highlighted and stand out. Use headers strategically so that your reader can glance at your page and understand what your product does on a basic level from just reading your headers. Also deploy bullet pointed lists to highlight important features or product details. This way your users can easily reference the best aspects of your product.

"You" Rule

The best way to reach your customer and grab their attention is talk to them, and talk about their problems. Avoid talking about yourself, your customers aren't interested. They want to know how you or your product will help them with their problems. If you can communicate this point clearly and persuasively, you are on your way to making a conversion.

Eyepaths

Keep in mind the concept that people generally read left to right and from top to bottom. With this in mind, design your sites layout and content to adhere to it. Remember that users tend to view websites using an F-shaped pattern, meaning then start in the center of the page and briefly view the image or headline, then move to the upper left hand corner where they read that line then move down the left hand column and continue for there.
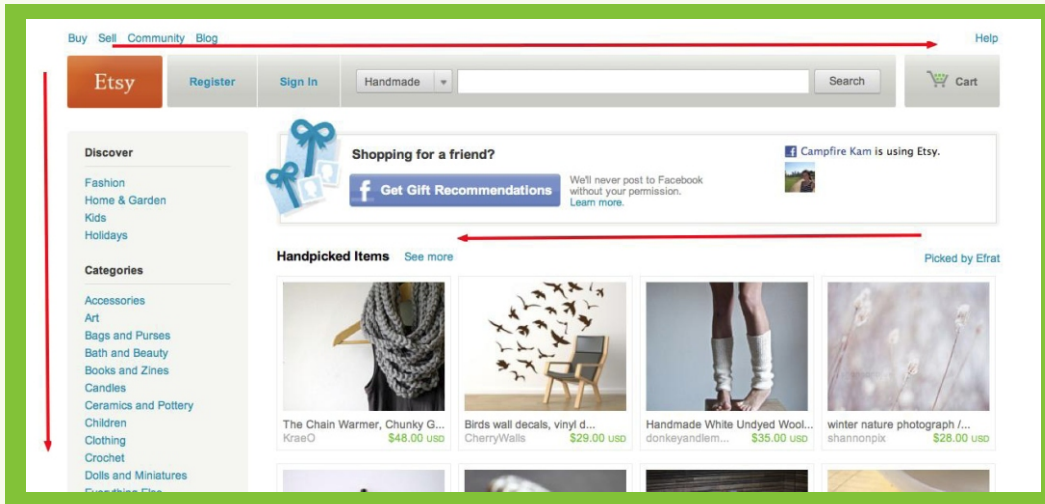
Since you have an idea of where users are looking on your page, be sure to avoid placing elements that can distract users from your call to action. Items that might distract some are:

- ▶ Twitter feeds

- ▶ Facebook status update widgets

- ▶ Images

- ▶ Ads

Carefully evaluate every element on your page and make sure that none is distracting users from your main goal of converting.

Minimize Reading, Maximize Message

QUICKSPROUT
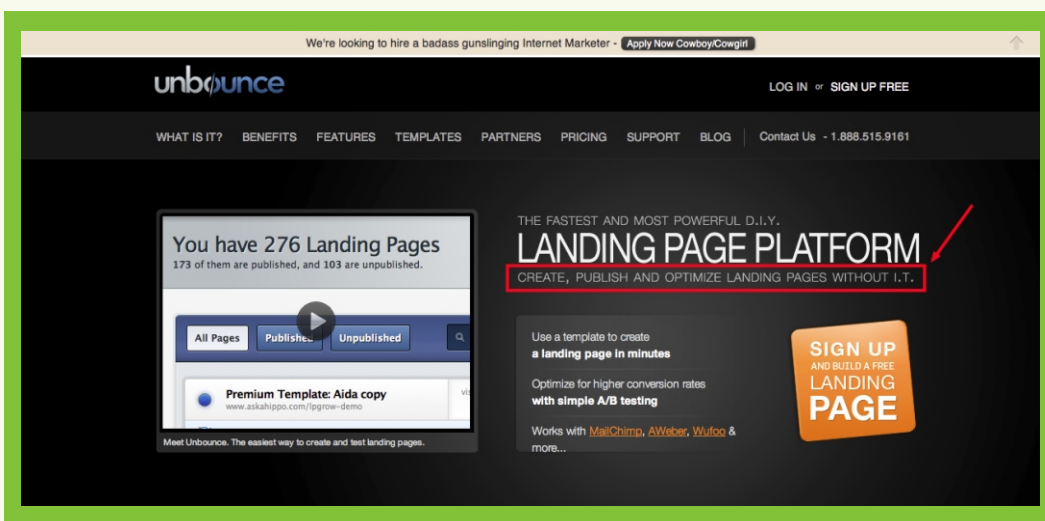
Use carefully crafted subheadings to highlight your main points. Users have short attention spans and tend to scan pages rather then read them in their entirety. This means you need to make sure they notice the most important messages on your pages.

The user should be able to understand what your page is all about just from reading your headings and subheadings.

Bullets

Bullet points are an excellent way to make points stand out visually so that users can scan a page and find the most important facts quickly. Use bullets to highlight key product features and benefits.

ASKING THE EXPERTS HOW THEY INCREASE CONVERSIONS

"The first simple change is usually "Uncovering the Lead." This involved finding the real value proposition, the "what's in it for me" that is usually buries in the copy or in the site, and making it the headline or offer. This applies to all kinds of pages: landing pages, home pages, product pages and category pages. The pain for my clients is that the WIIFM (What.s in it for me?) is usually more specific than they like. Visitors love specifics. This means that you will be letting some visitors leave disinterested. The goal is to create a net win for the business."

- Brian Massey, Conversion Sciences

Creating city specific landing pages instead of using on catch-all landing page that targets the one big city in the metro area we.re advertising in. People like seeing their city name on the landing page. The conversions have been significantly higher on these city specific landing pages compared to the one for the big city.

- Adam Kreitman, Words That Click

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"One of the simplest things I did to increase conversions with my eBook on blog post promotion was to take the sidebar off of the page. It isn.t as good as having it on its own separate sales page off-site, but it has made a difference as people only have one call to action to focus upon instead of my subscription boxes, advertisers, and other sidebar items."

- Kristi Hines, Kikolani

I added an email opt-in form at the bottom of every blog post (in addition to the form at the top of the page). I got 40 new subscribers overnight. This has continued to be a great way to generate new readers and followers.

- Jeff Goins, Writer

USING SURVEYS TO COLLECT VALUABLE INFORMATION

You probably don't know why your site visitors leave without signing up or giving you a try. It's a tough question, because visitors don't tell you and if you don't know why they aren't signing up it's hard to pinpoint which elements to optimize for. The vast majority of them simply don't have the time or inclination to find a contact form or feedback tab and write up a message explaining themselves. They may not even consciously realize why they're leaving your site.

You have to ask, and there are some tricks for how to ask to maximize the quality and quantity of answers:

Timing: Interrupting people before they've had some time to orient themselves and skim your site is perceived as rude. Asking questions after someone has left your site yields very low response rate and people may not remember the specific questions or concerns they had.

Placement: You want input from people who have demonstrated interest in your site not just "drive-bys". For that reason, the homepage is often not the best place to ask your question. Pricing/plans pages are often better; fewer people see them but they're the people who are your most likely customers.

Wording: Ask a yes-no question, and you'll get a "yes" or "no" answer - not very helpful. I've also found that asking "why" (as in "Why aren't you signing up?") is perceived as accusatory. I'll provide some suggested wordings below, but I strongly recommend iterating on your question text to see what subtle variations lead to more useful responses.

How to do it:

Sign up. If you haven't already, sign up for KISSinsights and put the Javascript snippet on every page of your site. (Once the code is on your site, you won't have to edit your site again. This is what makes it easy to experiment with timing, placement, and wording.) Signup is free, but you'll need a paid subscription for most of the customizations/variations described below.

Write your question. The default question KISSinsights provides is? Is there anything preventing you from signing up at this point?. Other variations you may wish to try are:

> ▸ Is there anything preventing you from signing up for [Product Name] at this point?

> ▸ What else can we tell you about [Product Name]?

> ▸ Adding a second question, .Include your email address if you'd like a reply. with a text field.

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Choose where (and when) to ask your question.

My default recommendation is to ask the question on the page where a customer would actually click a sign up button or submit an inline signup form - this is probably either an explicit "signup" page or your homepage.

- ▸ The default delay is 20 seconds. If your signup page is fairly information-dense, it may be better to try a 30- or 40-second delay instead.

- ▸ Pricing pages are another good place to ask this question. You're more likely to get a greater percentage of responses asking (or complaining) about price, but that might be what you need.

- ▸ If you're not sure which page is best, you can set the survey to appear on any page after your visitor has already visited 2 pages on your site. This is a good all-purpose way to catch visitors who are interested enough to do some due diligence into your product but haven't accessed the signup page yet.

Do a spot check. After you've gotten the first 5-10 responses, read them to make sure that your question is being answered the way you expected. Because each customer will only see the survey once, there's no downside to tweaking it. A subtle rewording or configuration change may get you dramatically more useful responses.

For example, we initially asked "Is there anything else we can tell you about KISSinsights?". and our first ten responses included seven one-word "no" answers. We then reworded the question to "What else can we tell you". A more open-ended phrasing and started getting more substantial replies.

How many responses is enough? You'll know when you start seeing the same responses repeat over and over. In my experience, 30-50 responses is usually a good indication to go ahead and make changes based on those responses.

A/B Testing Email Campaigns

Utilizing email campaigns can be a great way to remind users of your product, inform them of new products or offer discounts on an existing product. Email campaigns are even targeting users that are already somewhat interested in your product because they opted into your mailing list. But just because they signed up for your emails doesn't mean it won't still be a challenge to get them to turn into paying customers.

Even with your strong email subscriber list you're still going to be in a position where optimization is going to be necessary to improve your conversions rates. A/B testing is a great method for testing your email campaigns. Like we mentioned earlier in this document, you can test a number of different elements in your A/B experiments like:

- Subject lines

- Layout

- Call to action

- Times the emails are sent

- Offers

Once you select which element you want to A/B test, create multiple versions of your email with only that one element modified. Next select the size of your experiment group, or the number of subscribers you're going to include in your test. The larger your testing group is, the better results you can expect. Keep in mind that if you're trying something extremely radical in your tests you might want to choose a smaller sample size so only a limited number of users see it, you know, in case it is a major failure!

Once you've got your testing group size figured out, next you need to put the experiment in motion and get those emails out there to our two sample groups. There are lots of email tools that can help you with this like MailChimp which has an A/B feature built in. If you don't have a web tool that can do the A/B testing for you, all you need to do is split your sample groups into two different email lists and send each of the variations to their respective group.

Once you start collecting data from your email campaign you'll need to keep track of various metrics depending on what type of conversions you're measuring. Some conversions you might be measuring could be:

- Open rate

- Click-throughs on links in the emails (hint on track these, use a Campaign URL like I showed you in the Analytics section of this guide so you can track various links you include in your email campaigns)

- Of those that click-through to your website, how many converted

You'll probably want to test all three of these metrics to get an overall view of the successfulness of each email variation.

Once you have isolated an element that converts better than it's variation you can move onto testing a new element in a different email campaign. Eventually you should have a lean, mean, converting email machine. Of course, you'll always want to keep testing to a certain degree.

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HOW TO CRAFT A KILLER CALL TO ACTION

Developing the perfect call to action is some what of an art and varies from product to product and page to page so there are no iron set rules on how to create your call to action but there are some things you should keep in mind when putting them together to get the best results.

Limit The Number of CTA's

One of the most important things you can do on your landing pages is to keep them focused and not give the users too many options of things to do. You want to limit the number of call to actions on any given page as much as possible. One is ideal because it clearly guides your user onto the next step of the process, and there are less chances of distractions or confusions.

Give People a Reason To Click

Even though your entire landing page should be focusing on reasons why a user should use your product or service, you should put extra emphasis near your call to action as to what the user will get when they decide to click your CTA.

Mint brings all your financial accounts together online or on your mobile device, automatically categorizes your transactions, lets you set budgets and helps you achieve your savings goals.

Take Mint.com for example, they've clearly told you what Mint does and what you will get by clicking their CTA. I know I will get all my financial accounts all in one place, for free. This is a great method to remind your users what they are getting when they sign up or purchase.

Create a Sense of Urgency

Remember the last time you watched a infomercial and they yelled at you that you only had 10 minutes to call to get their steak knives set, plus a second knives set and that if you called in the next 5 minutes you got a pet dragon too? Well, you still would have gotten all that stuff even if you didn't call in the 10 minute window, but they sure made you feel like you had to do it now or you would lose out on a great deal. That is what you want to do (of course, not as cheesy). Create a sense of urgency, or time sensitivity so that your users are more likely to act now rather than bookmark and come back.
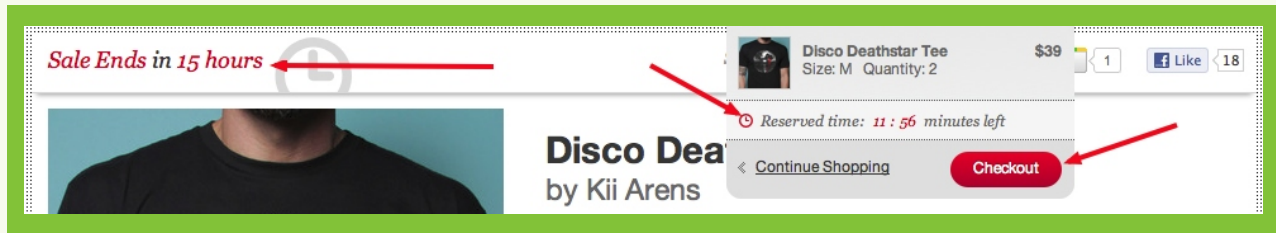
It's pretty easy to create a sense of urgency without there actually being any urgency at all. Simply say,

Buy now for a limited time before this deal disappears!

Even though, the deal might be a never ending deal, you've still urged the user to act now because the deal is only active for a limited time and will eventually disappear.

Here are some more phrases that can cause urgency for your call to actions

- For a limited time
- Time sensitive
- Limited registration
- Limited number in stock
- Deal ends soon
- Ready to ship
- Limited quantities

As with all the other elements of your landing pages, the phrases you use to create a sense of urgency should be A/B tested. Simply, create two or three versions of the same page with a different urgency phrase and see which converts better!

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Make Your CTA the Peacock of the Page

Do you know how the male peacock attracts it's mate? It is the most colorful, out of place, distinct peacock on the block. Well, your CTA is really no different than a male peacock looking for some love. Make your CTA stand out by giving it a different color than anything else on the page (but still keep good design/color choices in mind). If other buttons on your page are orange, make your CTA yellow so it stands out from the rest and is highly visible.

Along with color, give your CTA some space to shine. Give it optimal placement on your page, in a high visibility location. This way the CTA will be the focus. There are some great tools out there for finding the visibility location on your pages. You can use eye tracking tools that track where users are looking on a page, or you can use a tool like CrazyEgg which track clicks and scrolls utilizing heatmap technology to optimize your CTA locations. You can literally get a page setup with a heatmap in 30 seconds!

Oh, and make your CTA bigger than any other button on your page. You want it to be the giant purple elephant in the room that no one can ignore.

Remember to A/B test all your changes. Measure against your baseline, rinse & repeat.

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10 Easy Ways to Boost Your Conversions

1 **Offer Secure Payment Options** - People will feel safer giving you precious financial information if you offer secure payment methods. Don't let the security of your site interfere with your conversions.

2 **Demonstrate Your Skills Through Certifications** - If you have certifications that you have earned by completing courses, classes or tests that demonstrate your skills in a field then fly that certification like a proud badge of honor.

3 **Highlight Your Policies** - Make your policies accessible and known. Have access to your privacy policy easily accessible so that users can view it before they continue using your website. Also, if you have a policy like "Money Back Guaranteed" or "100% Satisfaction Guaranteed" then highlight it throughout your website. It can end up being a major converting factor.

4 **Put a Face on your Business** - Using your own photo on your blog or photos of your staff on your product websites can help to make your company seem human. It can also show that you are proud and confident enough in your business to put your own face on it.

5 **Case Studies** - One of the best ways to prove that your product works the way you say it does is to provide a case study that shows hard proof that it does! Creating a case study will take some time, preparation and analytic skill. Consider working with a current client or an actual customer who is using your product. Ask them if they'd like to participate in your case study and go from there. Once you have your case study you can use it on your product pages, and also use it as great link bait for your website.

6 **Testimonials** - Like case studies, testimonials are good for have your claims validated by real, paying customers.

QUICKSPROUT

7 **Highlight The Best Option** - While you may have a number of different pricing models, options or plans, you should always highlight which is the best plan for, both, you and the customer. This way you are reducing some of the conflict a customer might encounter when trying to figure out which is the best plan for themselves.

PRO	PLUS	STANDARD	BASIC
$99/month	$49/month	$19/month	$9/month
250,000 visits / month	100,000 visits / month	25,000 visits / month	10,000 visits / month
100 active pages	50 active pages	20 active pages	10 active pages
Hourly reporting	Hourly reporting	Daily reporting	Daily reporting
✓ Heatmap Report ✓ Scrollmap Report ✓ Confetti Report ✓ Overlay Report ✓ List Report ✓ Multiple Domains tracking	✓ Heatmap Report ✓ Scrollmap Report ✓ Confetti Report ✓ Overlay Report ✓ List Report ✓ Multiple Domains tracking	✓ Heatmap Report ✓ Scrollmap Report ✓ Confetti Report ✓ Overlay Report ✓ List Report ✓ Multiple Domains tracking	✓ Heatmap Report ✓ Scrollmap Report ✓ Confetti Report ✓ Overlay Report ✓ List Report ✓ Multiple Domains tracking
Sign Up	Sign Up	Sign Up	Sign Up
30 day money back guarantee	30 day money back guarantee	30 day money back guarantee	30 day money back guarantee

8 **Features, Side by Side** - If you have multiple versions, plans or tiers for your product or service, give a side by side breakdown of which features come with each version of the product. This way your users can find all the relevant information they need to make their final decision all in one place, laid out clearly.

9 **Hold There Hand Through the Process** - Don't leave your customers worrying or being concerned with how the process of setting up or using your product will play out. Give them a step by step walk through of the set up and use. It will eliminate there fear of the unknown which will make the sale that much easier.

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10 **Make Yourself Available for Questions** - Who can answers questions about your product better than you or your team? No one, so make yourself and your team available for questions from customers. List a phone number, email and have an easy to use and access contact form on your web page. When you get a question or concern, address it quickly so potential customers know you're available to help them should they become customers.

SIGNUP FORMS

Don't Ask Too Many Questions

Gathering information for anything website can be a challenge due to many factors like limited attention span, laziness and fear of privacy. It is because of these many road blocks in your way to gathering important information that you need to aware of what you absolutely need to know, and only ask that.

Ever land on a web form that asks you to fill it in completely and there are 15 fields? Pain in the ass, right? Why do they need to know my phone number in order for me to use this product? Are they going to call me and sell me something else, or worse, sell my information to someone else? Well, most companies worth their salt won't do any of these sleazy things but people are still fearful of giving out too much personal information. So, if you don't need to know your customers phone number, don't ask for it. You've now eliminated one field the user needs to fill in and they won't be concerned with you calling them. You're not conducting a marketing survey, you're selling a product.

There is a direct correlation between the number of fields you're requiring users to fill in and rate of drop off in your forms. Basically, the more fields = bigger drop offs.

Go through all your forms and try to reduce the number of questions you're asking, and the number of fields that are being required to be filled in. Only ask what you absolutely have to ask to complete the conversion process. If you want to still try to gather information, make some fields not required to be filled in, or give the user the option to give more information after the conversion process is finished. This way, you've got your sale or sign up and you might still collect some additional data.

QUICKSPROUT

SIGNUP FORM DESIGN OPTIMIZATION

Signup forms come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are great and some of them are awful. Here are some tips for making your sign up forms great:

1. Length
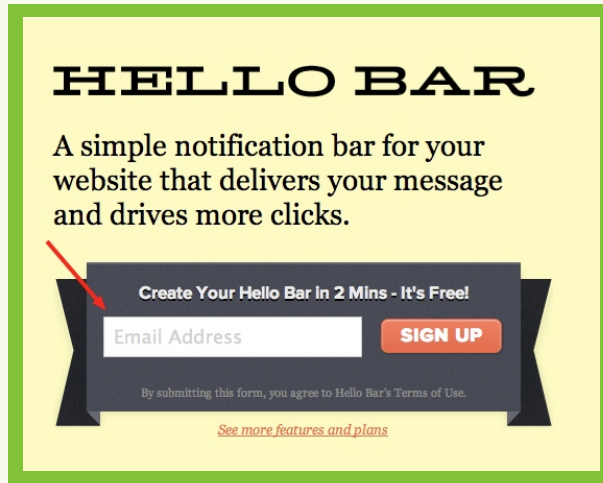
This signup form is short and to the point. They only ask for the bare minimum information they need to reduce drop off. Remember, the more information you ask is directly related to the bigger number of drop offs you will incur, so keep it short.

2. Minimize Eye Movement
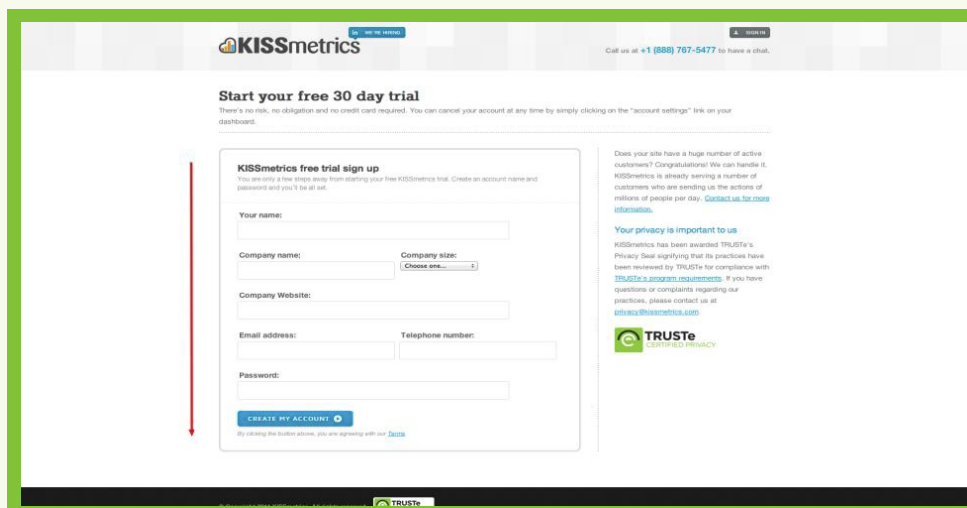
Keeping your signup form input fields in a vertical fashion will minimize the eye movement for users and keep them focused on moving through your form. Try to avoid having your users bouncing all around the page to reduce distraction.

QUICKSPROUT

3. Errors as they happen

If your forms will have fields that are required to be filled in, give users helpful error messages if they have skipped a required step as soon as they skip the step.

4. Progress

Let your users know how long the process will take to encourage them to continue. Users might be weary of long forms, or in-depth signup process but if you tell them it will only take 2 minutes to complete, they will be encouraged by the short time commitments.

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5. Trust

Trust is a huge factor in online businesses. The more trust your business has the better. Offering a money back guarantee is a great way to show that you stand by your product and are so confident that the user will be happy with their purchase that you will give them their money back if they aren't. There is nothing to lose her for the user, encouraging them to sign up.

Shopping Cart Optimization

You might assume that because you've got the user to land on your website and successfully add an item to their shopping cart that the battle is over and that you've won. Well you're wrong, you've still got one hurdle left and that is getting users to successfully checkout.

There are a number of reasons a user who has added something to their cart might abandon their purchase all together. These reasons include:

▸ The forget they've added something and leave the site

▸ They get distracted by another call to action or another website all together

▸ They have second thoughts

▸ They decide to come back another time to buy the item

▸ They want to price check against a competitor and find a better price

▸ Your shopping cart is broken

▸ Your shopping cart is confusing

▸ Your shopping cart isn't trustworthy

These are just a few of the reasons why your shopping cart can kill your conversion, but all of these roadblocks are avoidable.

Here is how to prevent some common shopping cart killers.

Forgotten Items
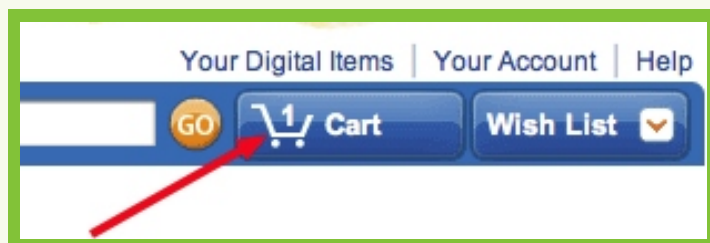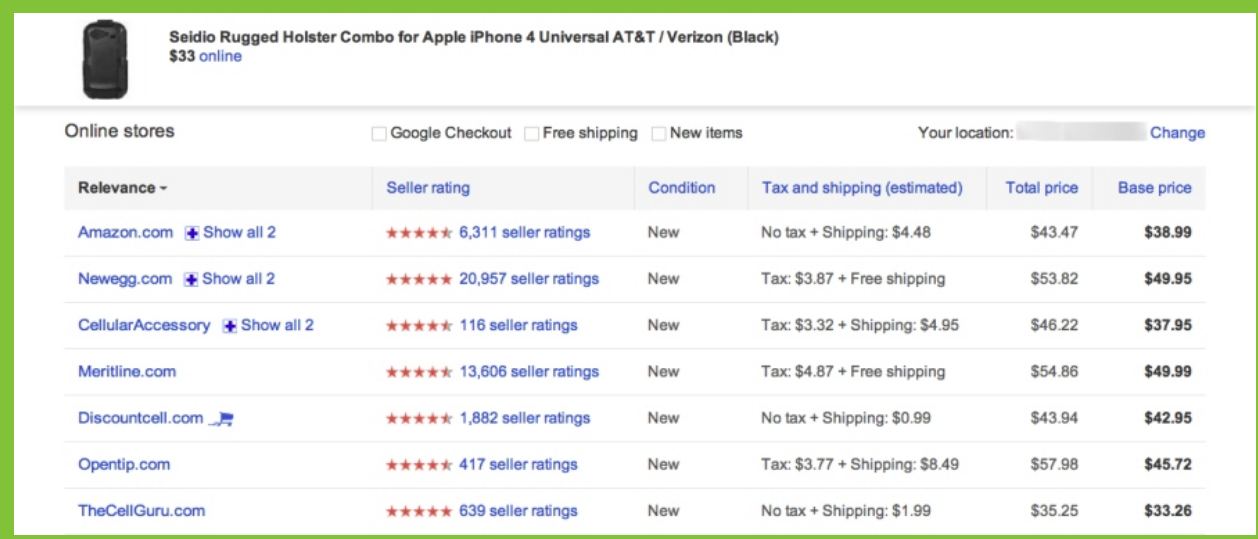
Depending on how large your site is or how many products you offer, your users might find themselves browsing your site for hours, which can be a great thing...or a bad thing. This is a bad thing when a user adds an item to their shopping cart at some point during their shopping experience and then forget they've added it and leave the site, abandoning their shopping cart. How can you avoid this? Make your shopping cart remind users that they have added items and that they can checkout whenever they are ready.

Too Many Calls To Actions

Your website might be cannibalizing it's own conversions by offering too many calls to action. Don't prompt users with too many options, choices or varying offers through the conversion process and shopping cart. Once you get the user to the shopping cart, focus on getting them to check out. All aspects of your shopping cart should be forward moving.

Price Checking

Wanting to get the lowest price on what your buying is a natural thought in most shoppers mind. This thinking might cause your shoppers to delay buying something on your website, even after they've already added it to their shopping cart, so that they can browse the same item on another website and compare prices. There isn't much you can do to alleviate their concern on getting the lowest price, unless you can gauarntee the lowest price. Even if you do, you might want to consider offering a price comparison feature on your product pages so that users can compare prices without bailing on your website. Be warned, if you don't have the lowest price you will need to be able to offer something in exchange for not having the lowest price, like free shipping.

Broken Shopping Cart

Nothing will kill your sale faster than a broken shopping cart. A shopping cart that doesn't work send a number of signals to users like "this website is broken", "this website isn't legit if I can't even buy anything", "the site has been hacked", etc. While none of these things might be true, your broken cart isn't doing you any good. The best way to avoid a broken cart is to test your cart relentlessly. Be confident that your cart works and concentrate on other aspects of your business.

QUICKSPROUT

Confusing Shopping Carts

Your shopping cart experience should be dead simple. Avoid anything that will confuse a user. The best way to avoid confusing a user is to keep your checkout process simple. Only ask for the most basic information you need to make the sale, and keep the checkout process streamlined and lean. Keep the checkout cart free from useless widgets or Twitter update tools or unneeded distractions. If you are not sure if your shopping cart is confusing use a tool like CrazyEgg to track where users are clicking and scrolling. This can give you an insight into how users are interacting with your cart experience. Use CrazyEgg in conjunction with KISSmetrics to keep track of your funnels and to figure out where users are dropping out of your sales funnel.

Untrustworthy Shopping Cart

Don't let the legitimacy of your website concern users. Display various trust badges and certificates that your site uses so that users can feel confident when they are handing over their credit card information. Proudly display any trust signals you can, as well as the logos of the credit cards that you accept. This is a great place to remind users of any money back guarantees you have, or other policies that might make the users feel more comfortable.

QUICKSPROUT

CONVERSION OPTIMIZATION TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Google Website Optimize

Creates easy to use and free A/B or multivariate experiments to tests various elements on your webpages to optimize for conversions. This is one of the easiest ways to determine which pages, calls to actions, buttons, images, etc convert better. Use it whenever you want to test a new element.

CrazyEgg

CrazyEgg enables you to view where your users are clicking on your website through the use of a number of features including:

▸ Heatmaps

▸ Overlays

▸ Scroll Tracking

▸ Confetti overlays

It's extremely easy to use and can really help you see interactions with your website that you never would have been able to access. Use it to test new pages that you are unsure how users will interact with, as well as testing old pages that aren't performing as well as they should. You might discover a huge opportunity that you can capitalize on!

KISSinsights

Easy to use survey software. Ask important questions from your users and get vital answers about your business. All you have to do is install a small snippet of code, enter your survey questions and site back and let the answers roll in.

Ask questions like:

▸ What feature are you most excited about?

▸ Do you find this feature useful?

▸ What would you like to tweet this?

Soon enough you'll be sitting on a pile of valuable data that you can act on!

QUICKSPROUT

Unbounce

A great web tool for easily creating and A/B testing landing pages with little to no IT experience needed. This is a great tool to create landing pages quickly and A/B test them. This is a great tool that encompasses the A/B testing-like features of Google's Website Optimizer and a full featured landing page builder.

Optimizely

Optimizely is another great A/B testing tool that offers a .What you see is what you get. style land page builder. It isn't a free tool, but if you really want to take you testing to the next level Unbounce or Optimizely are great choices.

QUICKSPROUT

CONVERSION OPTIMIZATION PLAN OF ACTION

Now that you have a solid understanding of how to optimize your conversions and the benefits that can be reaped by doing so you need to set a plan of action and get the ball rolling.

STEP 1 ▶ **What to Optimize**

We have already gone over which elements of your website and business you can optimize. Remember, any elements of your conversion process can be optimized. Elements that you should consider optimizing are:

- Colors of Call to Action Buttons
- Placement of Call to Action buttons
- Sales Copy
- Copy of Call to Actions
- Number of Fields on a Form
- Headlines

You should generate a list of all the elements that you like to test and keep it up to date by recording which elements you have tested and what the results were. This will keep you from testing elements you have already done.

STEP 2 ▶ **Prioritize Your Optimizing Efforts**

With so many elements to test, and somewhat limited time you will have to prioritize which elements get tested first. It's a good idea to test things that are the most vital to your conversion process, moving on to less important things later on. Remember to not focus on things that don't matter to your conversions. You should also always reevaluate your priorities if things aren't working for you.

STEP 3 ▶ **Choose Your Method of Testing**

We've discussed A/B testing to great extent and multivariate testing to a lesser extent but whichever method you choose, make sure you keep your testing procedures uniform across all of your tests so that you can yield accurate results. To get the best results I would suggest sticking with A/B testing for most of your optimization efforts. It is easier to track results while minimizing errors.

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Test

Now that you have chosen your element based on it's importance and which method you'd like to use to test it, you now need to choose a tool to test it with. Use Google Website Optimizer to setup easy A/B tests and track your results closely. Give the test a good amount of time to collect data so that you have a good sample to make your judgement from.

STEP 5 **Analyze**

You now have a set of data that you collected from your A/B test. Now is the time to analyze the data and decide if the data is valid. If you find it to be valid, then it's time to analyze it and determine what changes need to be made.

STEP 6 **Implement Changes**

With your data analyzed, you now need to implement a change based on what you found. Whether it was a green call to action button that out performed an orange one, go ahead and make a change.

STEP 7 **Test Again**

Test a new element and analyze and implement changes based on what you've found. Continue doing this continually on your website with new elements and pages.

Keep in mind that you need to give your tests adequate time to run, so that you can collect accurate data. Also be aware that you need to be able to set a cap on how many times, or how long you let a test run. You might be tempted to continue testing the same element over and over, but this can cause you to waste time and dilute your results. Test something, make a change and be content with it but keep monitoring it's progress. If at some point the performance of that element changes, then you can go ahead and test it again.

PART 6

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

BIG BRAND TRAFFIC SECRETS

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

When you think of building relationships and networking you probably imagine yourself going up to new people and striking up a conversation with them. This usually takes place at local meetups, conferences, or even through the web. But the thing is, networking doesn't stop there. Some of the best connections that you will make in life are through introductions.

Think about when you walk up to someone that you are interested in meeting. In most cases, you guys will strike up a conversation and learn a few things about each other but the relationship usually stops there. Occasionally you may follow-up with each other, but most likely the relationship will not be strong enough where you could count on them for a favor or much else.

Now think about when one of your friends introduces you to someone. Right away, both parties have a bit of respect for each other because someone that they both trust put them together. Plus, the relationship grows at a rapid pace where you can potentially count on each other without having to see each other repeatedly at conferences/meetings for a long time. An introduction is valuable because it creates a meaningful relationship compared to networking with random individuals.

Now that you know the value of introductions, the trick is to get people to start introducing you to others. The easy way is to just ask others for introductions, but this will probably put you in an awkward position with your friends. On the other hand, if you start introducing your friends to others where there is a mutual benefit, they will naturally be appreciative of you. Furthermore, if they think of anyone that should meet you, they will start returning the favor by introducing you to others.

There is also another side to relationship building when it comes to building your brand as well. There is the typical face to face relationship building and then there is online relationship building. Your online relationship building will help build your rankings for your website or blog; this is known as link building. In this chapter I'll cover the in's and outs of networking at events, conferences and meetings as well as building relationships online.

MAKING A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION

When you meet someone new for the first time, you only have a few minutes if not a few seconds to grab their attention and make a good impression. Oftentimes this is done with charm or a decent introduction however sometimes people ask you right away what it is you do. The best way to answer this question is to have a one-liner that explains what you do and how you could be valuable to the individual you are talking to. But before I got into creating that "one-liner" here are some things to keep in mind:

- Don't come off as an arrogant prick, even if you are one.

- Let the other individual talk a bit before you start bring up the one-liner. This way you can tailor everything around them.

- Be honest and don't just tell people what they want to hear, even if you think lying will brand you as a rock star.

- Keep a consistent message no matter who you are talking to. You can tell people different one-liners, but if you are a marketer at the end of the day your one-liner should be related to marketing.

So now that you have all those things in mind you can now create a tailored one liner that will brand yourself depending on the situations you are in. For example here are some one-liners I have used:

Situation:

I was at a web 2.0 conference where individuals, who were part of startups, came up to me asking me what I do.

One-Liner:

I am online marketer that has helped startups like XYZ increase their traffic.

Situation:

Meet a few VCs at a local meetup who asked me what I do.

One-Liner:

I am an online marketer who has helped VCs such as XYZ increase the network worth of their portfolio companies.

The overall purpose of using one-liners is so that you people can get a better understanding of what you are an expert in as well as how you can provide value to them right away. If anything, this gets the conversation going along a relevant path.

One-liners are also great for branding because they help people remember you (if done right). So, stop wasting time and come up with some that will help further your personal brand.

HOW TO ROCK IT AT CONFERENCES

During the last two days I was at a conference I noticed that most of the attendees weren't getting their money's worth. It doesn't matter if you got in for free or paid because the 2 days of your time spent at the event, is worth money to someone.

QUICKSPROUT

So if you want to get your money's worth out of attending a conference, here are a few things you have to do:

HAVE BUSINESS CARDS

It's not cool to not have business cards. Over the past few years it has become a trend to not carry business cards, which is a big mistake. If you don't make it easy for people to contact you, no one will.

If you plan on attending any event, make sure you bring plenty of business cards with you.

If you don't have any business cards, create some. But don't just create any type of card because it needs to stand out when thrown into a stack of hundred of other cards and more importantly it has to say something about you.

COME UP WITH AN ELEVATOR PITCH

Although you have business cards, you aren't quite ready to attend a conference. Before you can start mingling, you have to come up with an elevator pitch.

This elevator pitch should consist of a few things:

▸ Your name

▸ What you do

▸ Why you are here

In addition to those 3 elements, keep your pitch shorter than 30 seconds and make sure it is relevant to the conference.

For example, TechCrunch 50 is a conference about startups in the web 2.0 arena. So during the event, I had the option of using a few elevator pitches.

Hi, my name is Neil Patel. I am an Internet marketer that has helped companies like TechCrunch double their search engine traffic through SEO. I am here to find startups that need help with their Internet marketing efforts.

Hi, my name is Neil Patel. I co-founded a company called KISSmetrics that is a web analytics solution for startups. I am looking to help startups solve their problems that revolve around metrics.

Hi, my name is Neil Patel. I co-founded a company called KISSmetrics that provides web analytics for small and medium businesses. I am here to meet investors.

I know these three examples sound weird, but they work. All you have to do is say them in a conversation so they don't sound too cheesy.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

I know the "cool" people don't attend too many sessions, but you should. Sessions can provide a lot of knowledge and insight, so take the time to attend at least a few sessions.

What I recommend doing is that you look at the conference agenda ahead of time and circle all of the sessions that you want to sit in on. For these sessions you should try and sit in the front so that:

▸ You can clearly see the presenter and their PowerPoint Presentation (if there is one).

▸ You can hear what the presenter is saying (the audio system may not be working).

▸ You'll have a better shot at getting to ask the speaker a question.

DON'T BE A NETWORKING WHORE

No likes a networking whore, so don't be one. Plus what's the value in meeting 1000 people over a two-day period? There is no way you can truly get to know every person at a large event.

Don't waste your time getting to know a large group of people, concentrate on meeting high quality individuals that will hopefully turn into a relationship.

1 **Speakers** - meet every speaker you listen in on. Don't spend too much time chatting to them because they are getting hounded by hundreds of other people. Be considerate and give them some space.

2 **Conference organizers** - meeting the conference organizer is a wise thing to do. No one really gives them the time of the day, when they should. Organizers can get you into future conferences for free and they know where the cool private after parties are.

3 **Competition** - your competitors don't have to be your enemy. If you build a relationship with them you can be their friend and potentially even get business from them.

The only group of people that I didn't mention above is the regular conference attendee. You should get to know other attendees but this should naturally happen as long as you aren't sitting on the sidelines.

DON'T EAT LUNCH WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Most conferences provide lunch. The lunch food usually isn't that great, so when lunchtime rolls around you are going to have the urge to eat out. Don't do it!

Not only should you be eating lunch at the conference, but you should also sit down at a table filled with people that you *don't know*. And when you sit down introduce yourself and get involved in the conversation.

You'll be amazed by who you'll meet over a 30-minute meal.

WALK THE FLOOR

Most conferences have an exhibition floor filled with sponsors and companies who are showcasing their services or products.

Take at least an hour to walk through the exhibition floor and see if there are any companies that you maybe interested in. Even if you don't want to buy anything, you can get a lot from exhibitors.

Other than swag you can get free products and services that will help your business grow. It just may take a bit of schmoozing to get these things for free.

TAKE SOMEONE OUT TO DINNER

If you want someone to open up to you, you have to talk to them on a one on one setting. It's going to be hard to do this at a conference because you can easily get interrupted. But typically most conferences give you a few hours for dinner before any after parties.

Find someone that you want to get to know on a personal level and ask them to dinner. If they say no, move onto your next target.

During your dinner meeting don't just talk about business. Find out how they are doing and chat about whatever is interesting to them.

There is nothing wrong with doing business over dinner, but it shouldn't be the focus. The focus should be on build a relationship.

Once the dinner is over and the bill comes around, make sure you pay for it. Now, when the other party wants to return the favor, they usually will try to take you out for dinner and try to pick up the tab. But if you don't let them pick up the tab, they will start to think of creative ways to return the favor. In many cases this could be introducing you to other people that are interested in paying you for your expertise, or they may just throw you a few business deals. Whatever they do to return the favor, your return-on-investment (ROI) will be much higher than your cost of picking up the tab.

ATTEND THE AFTER PARTIES

The biggest value of a conference is the after parties. This is where you'll get all the good information and learn the most. When people are loose (have a bit of alcohol in them) they'll end up talking and sharing almost anything.

Here are a few unwritten rules when attending after hour parties:

▸ What happens at the party stays at the party. Don't go and blab everything you hear.

▸ Don't push people for information...even if they are drunk. Get to know people and if they naturally want to share information with you, great.

▸ Don't leave early, even if you are tired. The longer you stay, the more value you'll get out of the party.

▸ Stay away from the dance floor and any loud speakers. It is difficult to have conversations in these areas.

▸ There is typically another party after the party is over, so try and go to it.

DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW UP

At this point the conference is over, right? Technically it is, but for you it isn't. You have to follow up with **EVERY** person you met at the event.

If you don't, you'll never end up building any real relationships. Meeting someone is great, but if you don't get to know him or her you'll never end up gaining value from the conference.

And for some reason if a portion of the people you email or call don't follow up with you, you can try following up again in a few weeks, but I recommend letting it go. You don't want to be that pestering person that people hate.

IMPROVING YOUR BRAND AT CONFERENCES

If you work in the corporate world, you probably end up going to at least one conference or industry event per year. The great thing about these conferences is that they are usually industry specific so people that you need to be brand yourself with will be there. Whether you are a speaker, press, or just a regular attendee there are always things you can do brand yourself at a conference.

Speakers

If you are a speaker you are one step ahead of the game because you are already branding yourself as an expert. This is your time to shine so here is what you should do:

- Keep it short and sweet - Don't you hate those boring presentations that are long and put you to sleep? Well, don't do that then.

- Entertain people and make them laugh - Some of the best speakers I have ever heard entertain the audience. More importantly, the great speakers that most people seem to remember have put forth a performance of sorts, rather than just a presentation.

- Educate - If you can't provide any value to the audience, then what's the point of speaking?

- Answer their question - Usually, at the end of your speech there will be time for question and answers. The area that most speakers fail at is that they don't answer the questions that the audience asked. Answering questions that no one asked is useless, so don't do it. One trick is to re-iterate the question to the person asking it to make sure you understand what they are asking. Nothing irritates people more than if you don't answer their question.

- Give away your presentation - People are more likely to remember you if you have a conversation with them. A great way to do this is to tell everyone at the end of your speech that you will email them your presentation if they give you their business card. This is great because you are building contacts as well as talking to more people.

PRESS

Whether you are actually press or you lied so that you can get a press pass you should use it to your advantage. When people see press badges they will either be afraid to talk to you or they will want to talk to you. For those individuals that want to talk to you, here is what you should do:

1. Learn who they are and not just about their company. Don't just do this because you have to due to your press pass, but do it because you actually want to learn who they are.

2. Next, let them know who you are and what you do so that they can relate the conversation to you.

3. Once you get to know them and they get to know you start discussing their product or service and find out how you can help them.

4. Lastly you should trade business cards so that you can keep the conversation going and more importantly build a relationship.

ATTENDEE

If you are not a speaker or part of the press, you can still brand yourself through conferences. Here are some effective ways I have seen attendees brand themselves:

1. **Quality over quantity** - It would be great to know everyone at a conference but that is usually unrealistic. Instead of trying to network just to obtain business cards, try and build special relationships with a few people that you really connect with.

2. **Don't puss out** - The biggest mistake attendees make is that they don't hang out after hours with others. The best time to brand yourself is when everyone is having fun after hours. Whether that is at the bar or parties make sure you are hanging out with the A, B, C and even D listers.

3. **Get involved** - When you are attending sessions you should interact with the people sitting next to you. When people ask the speakers questions that they don't answer correctly, you should speak up in a polite way and answer the question.

4. **Run the floor** - Most conferences have trade floors where companies exhibit. I know you don't want to hear sales pitches but you should still visit the booths because those companies should know about you. There is nothing wrong with being head hunted by other companies if they can pay you more money.

I have only been going to conferences for a few years so there are probably tons of other things you can do to brand yourself at these events. Feel free to leave a comment if you have any tips to share.

QUICKSPROUT

THE ART OF NETWORKING

Attending conferences and going to local meet-ups is a great way to meet new people, but it isn't a good way to get to know someone. If you really want to be successful at networking you have to follow these steps:

Put your feelers out there

Every time you attend an event, you'll notice that there are a few networking whores in the room who hand out business cards to every single person they see. They usually get to know thousands of people, but when it is time to call in a favor or ask for help, no one steps up to the plate because they haven't built any personal relationships.

The goal with networking is to build personal relationships and you don't do this by being a whore. The next time you attend an event and are looking to network, here are a few things you can do:

▸ Look for the most popular groups in the room. These groups are popular because they are made up of the "it" crowd. These are the type of people you want to be associated with for obvious reasons.

▸ Once you have found the popular groups, look to see what individuals make up those groups. You don't want to cut into a group and try to join the conversation because it will create an awkward moment. Instead you want to wait till one of those individuals leaves the group for a moment (to get food, get a drink, go to the bathroom) and start to get to know them.

▸ After you start getting to know a few people in the "it" crowd, you can then join the group they are in. This way, there won't be an awkward moment because you'll know a few people in the group.

▸ When the conversation starts dying down, you want to get people's contact information. You can either do this in a casual fashion by trading phone numbers or by trading business cards.

Start following up

Within 24 hours of meeting someone in person, you want to follow up with them. If you don't, they might forget who you are. The easiest way you can do this is by sending an email like this:

Hey John,

It was great meeting you at the Seattle 2.0 Awards. We should meet-up for lunch or drinks next week. Let me know when you are free.

By the way, I noticed that your company provides design services for small online businesses; I know a few people that could be interested in your services. Let me know if you would like an introduction.

Thanks

Neil

If you read the email above, you'll notice that I did was two things:

The first was to give a few options on meeting up

And the second was to offer to help them out

By doing both of those things your chances of getting a person to follow up with you will be higher. If you just invite someone for lunch or drinks, they may not respond. But if you do something for them, they'll feel obligated to respond.

Setup a meeting

Once you get someone agree to meet-up with you there are a few etiquette rules that you have to follow:

- Pick a meeting location that is convenient for the other party, and not just you. If you are the one who wants the meeting, why should they have to come to you? You should be the one driving to them.

- Don't be late to the meeting! I don't care if there is traffic or if you have some family issues, always be on time for a meeting you setup. And if you tend to be late to meetings, it is better to be extra early than late. If the person you are meeting happens to be late, that's fine, you just can't be late.

- When it comes time to pay the bill, you have to be the one paying. Don't wait too long before you throw your credit card down, and if the other persons offers to pay, tell them that they can pay next time. The worst things you can do in this situation is split the bill in half or take time to throw your credit card down because it makes it seem like you don't want to pay.

Build a personal relationship

Meetings don't have to about work. Talking about money or business all the time gets boring. If you want to successful at networking you have to build personal relationships and not just business relationships. You can do this by talking about general topics such as sports, family, or anything you think may interest the other person.

When chit chatting, pay close attention to their body language. If you are feel the other person is getting bored, change the topic. You want to talk about stuff that you both find interesting.

Once you finish your first meeting you'll notice that you are building a friendship and not just a business relationship. This is the secret with networking because if a friend asks you for something, you are more likely to do something for them compared to if a business colleague asked you for something.

And lastly, you'll want to have many more meetings with the same person. You never build great friendships over one meeting you build friendships over years. So don't expect your networking to pay off within a few weeks or months, it can take years before you see a ROI.

HOW TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH INFLUENTIAL FIGURES

When people hit you up, it isn't too hard to build a relationship with them because they did the hard part. But if you want to build relationships with influential people, the chances are, they will not be hitting you up.

One way to approach these individuals is send off a quick email of how you admire them or want to get to know them. Usually when you do this there is a high probability that they will not respond to you because you have just put yourself in a position in which you are beneath them. (not considered an equal)

Another way to build relationships with influential people, and this is the method I use, is to hit them where it hurts. If you do this, you will probably be seen as an equal and you'll have a high chance of actually getting to know the them on a personal level. All you have to do is:

▸ **Research the individual** - study all of the things he or she is doing wrong. Don't nitpick the small things, but look at the big things that are affecting their business in a negative way or hindering their success.

▸ **Draft an email** - if they are influential, you should be able to find their email address on the web. Once you have their email, draft up a detailed email that starts off with why you are emailing them and what they are doing wrong. For example when I first contacted Guy Kawasaki, I started off telling him that as a fellow marketer, I was disappointed with his blog because there were many mistakes that were hindering his growth. And within that email, I listed out all of the things that were causing this.

▸ **Sit back and wait** - usually if you write a productive email, the other party responds. If they don't, then move onto your next target. And if they do respond, they usually come back disagreeing with what you said. When they do this make sure you prove your points and use facts to back it up.

▸ **Follow up** - lastly you want to follow up. Whether they disagree or agree with your email, you want to try and help them out. Ask them if they would like your help in fixing the things you pointed out. In most cases they will accept as long as you aren't trying to charge them. And by doing this, they usually won't forget you and you'll build a great relationship. Just make sure you follow up with them once in a while so that your relationship becomes personal.

Hopefully my method of building influential relationships works well for you. The most successful people I got to know were all done by talking shit.

LEVERAGE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS INTO TESTIMONIALS

Testimonials. They can do wonders for your business as long as they are used the right way.

The main reason for using them is that they help establish credibility and they give you the opportunity to prove claims about your product or service. The end result is that they can help you convert more of your visitors into customers if they are used correctly.

But before we get into the correct way of using them, you need to first understand what not to do.

Don't create fake testimonials!

The biggest mistake you can make is creating fake testimonials. Why? It's not just because they aren't believable, but if you get caught it will ruin your credibility.

You are better off not having any testimonials than creating fake ones. And if you truly have a great product or service, sooner or later your customers will start giving you real testimonials.
Alright, so here is how you can effectively use testimonials:

Know your customers

When I was trying to sell informational marketing products to small businesses I decided to get a few testimonials from some big names:

Neil has advised TechCrunch for more than two years and been an important part of the growth of the TechCrunch Network by helping us implement SEO best practices. Search engines have grown to be responsible for 1/3 of all TechCrunch traffic, so Neil's ongoing support is critical to our business.

-Michael Arrington, founder of TechCrunch

Neil's expertise was instrumental in helping the Cheezburger network to grow from a odd little cat blog to the largest humor network on the web-serving more than 190 million page-views a month.

- Ben Huh, owner of I Can Has Cheezburger

Neil is a real SEO guru. His knowledge is stellar and he's truly a standout in an industry cluttered with self-proclaimed experts.

-Alex Algard, founder of White Pages

Do you see anything wrong with them? The people who were buying my informational marketing material weren't able to relate to the larger companies listed above. Yes it is good to use testimonials from big names, but you also want testimonials from average Joes.

QUICKSPROUT

Go web 2.0

This is the new aged web. Your testimonials don't just have to be text based anymore. Consider asking your customers for video or audio testimonials. The advantage of using different types of media is that they also allow you to leverage channels like YouTube to gain customers, while text based ones won't.

Don't forget the basics

What's the problem with most testimonials? They don't include the person's full name, their company, location or age. Now granted it may not be relevant to put all that information in the signature of a testimonial, but it's a lot more realistic than saying that "J. Smith" wrote that testimonial.

In addition to that, consider adding a picture of your customer next to the testimonial. Nothing beats having a picture of a smiling customer.

Don't be vague

A good testimonial says something nice about you or your company, but a great one explains the benefits or your product or service. So instead of just trying to get short testimonials that don't contain much substance, try to get ones that contain facts and hard data.

If they start becoming too long you can do two things:

▸ **Italicize and bold the important parts** - not everyone enjoys reading. Italicizing and bolding will allow skimmers to get the main points without having to read every single word.

▸ **Make them a case study** - you can always link a short testimonial to a case study. This way if people are skeptical and want to read more, they can.

Testimonials can be meaningful

The best way to use testimonials is in a meaningful way. You can post small snippets where they will support your company's claim.

For example, if you have a paragraph that talks about how the Maytag washer you are selling is durable, put a testimonial supporting that fact nearby. When Mary says, *"my Maytag washer is still running strong after 10 years... which is pretty darn good considering that my husband accidentally crashed into it with his car"*, it gives a lot of credibility to the washer you are selling.

Location, location, location

Having great testimonials isn't enough. Depending on where you place them, it can drastically affect your conversions.

The chances are, you'll just end up placing testimonials on your homepage or your sales page. But if you place them in multiple locations, you may see an increase in conversions.

For example, with my old Quick Sprout membership program, the check out page that included a testimonial in the sidebar converted 6.38% better than the check out page that didn't include a testimonial.

Try placing your testimonials in different positions and pages. And when doing so, make sure you split test them so that you can figure out if it impacted your bottom line.

Testimonials can convert window shoppers into buyers as long as you use them the right way. Don't just copy what your competition is doing or base your decisions off of what I am telling you. Try things out for yourself!

LINK BUILDING VS. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In the short but eventful history of search engine marketing, link-building has been touted as the key to the holy grail of high page rank; subsequently it has become one of the most abused and ineffective strategies in all of SEM. Black-hat tactics abound, with automated "bots" being used to create bogus online identities and flood forums and comment system with links. Unscrupulous SEM services offer get-popular-quick schemes which may temporarily boost search rank, but violate the terms of most search engines and put you at risk of being banned entirely. In addition, this type of behavior it reflects badly on your brand, and is ultimately ineffective in building a real audience or customer base. The key to that kind of success is relevant, meaningful inbound links that bring not only high page rank scores, but interested new readers or prospects. And the key to that is relationship-building.

It starts with the Pitch

Jeff Pulver wrote a brilliant piece about how to [pitch a blogger](#), which reads in part:

I enjoy hearing from my friends about new products and services that excite them. This is one of the ways I discover new things. But solicitations from PR professionals who are total strangers to me generally come across like spam.

Now, Jeff's article goes on to detail a very long and involved process for connecting with him, which can be looked upon as the gold standard of reaching out to an influential individual.

Jeff goes on to say:

"Get to know your target (me)"

Read my Bio. Get a feeling of what I.m about.

Read my Blog posts. Try to get to know me.

Join in the conversations on my blog.

Follow me on twitter Follow me on Friend Feed. Comment and establish yourself.

Friend me on Facebook and say something.

Email me and introduce yourself. Ask questions.

By engaging in the above, you are sending me a meta message. That you care enough about what you are doing to make the effort to get to know Me. That to you, I am not just a name on a call sheet but someone who you want to build a relationship with. And this in turn will result in the establishment of a new node in our social networks.

Now, the problem with this advice is that when it applies to someone who is already extremely popular is that you have to fight through a fairly massive crowd for a chance at establishing that relationship Mr. Pulver has close to 400,000 followers on Twitter, and he follows over 36,000 back. This is still good, sound advice, of course, and you should definitely keep this in mind as you seek to establish beneficial relationships. The main problem with this approach is that it requires a large up-front investment of time, and may not be practical in terms of ROI.

Taking a Wider Approach

Fortunately, there are ways to conduct a more cost-effective outreach campaign, based on creating and sharing useful "linkbait" with like-minded sites, and going from there. This approach offers both the short-term benefits of quickly accumulating some relevant inbound links, and an opportunity to make more lasting connections in the course of reaching out.

1. Have something to offer: put yourself in the position of most professional (or seriously influential hobbyist) bloggers out there. Chances are they spend at least a portion of each day staring down an empty text box, or clicking through their RSS feed, searching for an idea for a post. What do they want? Content! Blog fodder! When do they want it? Well, pretty much always. If you have something to share with them that will help them fill that text box, you've opened the door to the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

2. Don't just copy and paste your pitch it's OK to use a basic template that encapsulates what you have to say, but do take a few moments to have a look around their site. Pay particular attention to how they offer their contact information, and whether their "about me" page contains any rants about how much they hate getting random email pitches, or sets out certain rules of

3. In your email signature, give your contact information, including a phone number. In all likelihood no one will call you, but it does give your request a little more legitimacy; it shows you are not just a human spam bot with a throw-away email, but rather a serious potential alliance.

4. Depending on the type of site, they may not respond to your email directly but a site that has a contact link for "tips" may just use or link to your content, so do follow up after a day or so to check. If you've been linked to, drop a friendly comment, bookmark this site in your RSS feed reader, and make a point to visit again.

The goal here is to establish a regular pattern of interaction and a friendly exchange of links. As with any relationship, this takes some effort on your maintenance on your part.

Taking it to the Next Level

Once you have made these initial connections, it's time to get organized. Consistency is the key to solid, long-term link relationships, and a good RSS reader is an important part of this. You should, of course, follow, friend, and/or become a fan on social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, but at the core of a mutually beneficial link relationship is keeping up with what your connections are posting on their blogs. Set aside some time every day, say a half an hour in the morning and evening, to check the feeds. You are looking for opportunities to contribute comments, share your friends' posts socially, and perhaps create a blog response linking to them. Moderation is important here, excessive linking can damage search engine ranking.

If you see that sites you reached out to have linked to you, be sure to respond. You want to be very pro-active about reciprocating and thanking them, reinforcing and encouraging further interactions. This may sound very deliberate and even calculated, but when done properly it should feel a little warm and fuzzy; though these relationships are being conducted primarily through electronic channels, they are ultimately very human connections.

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In the early stages of a mutually beneficial linking relationship, you should explore extending the connections to other social platforms, which offer additional opportunities to be supportive and cross-promote. A good multi-platform app like TweetDeck can help you stay on top of activity on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other services. You can also create specific lists in Tweet Deck, or even filter posts using keywords to prioritize notifications, so you stay current on your most important connections without being inundated by constant chatter.

You can also customize your notifications, which can be very distracting - I recommend either turning the audible notifications and popups off, or setting an interval of 15 minutes or longer between them. You want to be responsive, but avoid being completely overwhelmed. Alternatively, you can schedule several "social hours" during the day, and devote that time to catching up with everyone, or even use social time to reward yourself when tasks are completed.

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Social Graces

There is sometimes a tendency to become overly comfortable in a relationship, and let your manners slip. Comfort is good, but in professional online social situations, it's a good idea to always be mindful of proper etiquette. Vadim Lavrusik has an excellent article on Twitter Etiquette, outlining important rules that can be applied across most social platforms.

It's amazing how many words are devoted to describing the behavior of users on a site that limits their posts to 140 characters. In his article, Vadim lists 10 commandments and his readers submitted an additional 12 that he deemed worthy of inclusion, a clear sign that there is a need for all of us, no matter what level of experience, stop and take a look at our online social behavior. It's not necessary, or even possible, to avoid triggering everyone's pet peeves, but it is important to make a conscious effort to minimize these annoyances.

It's worth noting that 4 of the 12 additional contributions to the list involved the use of automated services. A few years ago, I found myself abusing these auto-posting services, and noticed that I was overloading my various social streams, so I created a chart to track what was auto-updating where:

Shortly after that, I concluded that I needed to turn off almost all the auto-updates in the interest of being less noisy (and more considerate). One of the biggest challenges facing any social networker is sifting through the noise to get to the important stuff the last thing any of us needs to do is create so much noise that we drown out (or dilute) our own important content. And in order to build and maintain valuable relationships with fellow online content providers and networkers, we need to be on our very best behavior.

Networking Relationships: It's Complicated

The advent of online social networking added several new layers of complexity to the already challenging landscape of human interaction. Establishing and nurturing mutually beneficial linking relationships takes a lot of effort, but the difference in results compared with the outdated concept of high-volume link-building is significant and very worthwhile. There are still SEO/SEM practitioners who advocate or use quick and easy tricks to "get your links on thousands of sites" but that strategy is not only ineffective, it can be downright dangerous. Google's guidelines are very clear on this subject:

Your site's ranking in Google search results is partly based on analysis of those sites that link to you. The quantity, quality, and relevance of links count towards your rating. The sites that link to you can provide context about the subject matter of your site, and can indicate its quality and popularity. However, some webmasters engage in link exchange schemes and build partner pages exclusively for the sake of cross-linking, disregarding the quality of the links, the sources, and the long-term impact it will have on their sites. This is in violation of Google's Webmaster Guidelines and can negatively impact your site's ranking in search results. Examples of link schemes can include:

1. Links intended to manipulate PageRank

2. Links to web spammers or bad neighborhoods on the web

3. Excessive reciprocal links or excessive link exchanging ("Link to me and I'll link to you.")

The best protection you have against being found in violation of these rules is to cultivate genuine relationships which elevate not only your page rank, but your whole brand's perceived value.

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ONLINE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: LINK BUILDING

Link-building is arguably one of the most important aspects of your SEO strategy for your website, blog, business, or brand. Links are the currency of the internet, payable by Google. Below are are some great ways to build your relationships online through these various link building tactics.

Social Media

▶ Create profiles on social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or any of your other favorites. (here are a lot more sites to choose from)

▶ Use those profiles to spread additional links to your own content, tastefully interspersed with other informative articles and interaction (not spam).

▶ Invest in a social coupon deal. Even if subscribers don't purchase the actual deal, they are still exposed to your brand.

▶ Create multimedia presentations and post them on any of the following viewing sites: SlideShare (presentations/slidedecks), Youtube(videos), or iTunes (podcasts).

▶ Become a member and interact with social bookmarking sites starting with digg, StumbleUpon, and Delicious.

▶ Answer questions and establish your "authority" on sites like LinkedIn and Quora.

▶ Interact with forums in your market. Be useful and human.

▶ Comment on blogs and join conversations to help strengthen your online network.

Viral Content

▸ Write tutorials and complete how-to's.

▸ Create beatiful, useful infographics.

▸ Show off photos and artwork.

▸ Create an informative ebook or whitepaper.

▸ Present a case study...

▸ Or take it a step farther and **be** a case study! Put your analytics to good use and show off your business strategies. Explain what has helped your site or business grow, complete with steps so others can follow your lead.

▸ Host free tools.

▸ Give free advice.

▸ Create free design templates for WordPress or Blogger (complete with credit to your URL at the bottom).

▸ Make a free app (for multiple platforms).

▸ Make a free browser extension (for multiple browsers).

▸ Just give stuff away for free; The more it's worth to them, the more it's worth for you.

▸ Create lists. Especially huge, exhaustive, comprehensive lists. Or create lists that will provoke a reaction, like lists of iconic people.

▸ Write about other people. Be mindful about what you say and remember that whatever you post on the internet is permanent. This is the case whether you want to be a ranting, angry critic or a raving, boastful fan.

Guest Posts

1. Write authoritative guest posts within your niche. Make sure your particular angle is showcased through the article, so it doesn't just blend in with the regularly scheduled posts.

2. Write broad, interesting guest posts outside your niche. Tie your specialty to their niche markets in unexpected ways. For instance, "keep fit while freelancing" or "be zen while doing SEO."

3. Accept guest posts from other authors on your blog. Some guest posters tell their audiences when they have written a guest post.

4. Let your articles be published in ezines or newsletters of other organizations with attribution.

News

▸ Make your business newsworthy; Have a successful marketing campaign, fundraise for a charity, or tell your own personal success story, from day one until now. Of course, you could also go bankrupt or get involved in court all in the name of "news"... but those strategies don't come highly recommended.

▸ Create a high-quality press release.

▸ Contact national news, local news, and industry news with your story. Don't forget about newspapers, radio, TV, and internet news outlets.

▸ Volunteer to be an "on call" expert in your field. Be known as the one who can define industry jargon so that anyone can make sense of it.

Interviews

▸ Get interviewed on other sites.

▸ Interview others on your site.

▸ An interview on the news is great, too!

Competitions and Community

1. Ask questions in blog posts or social media outlets. Listen to the answers. Keep people engaged.

2. Survey your followers. Know who is listening to you.

3. Create banners or badges for fans to include on their blogs or sites (with a hyperlink back to your site).

4. Create a give-away or drawing that encourages blog comments, retweets, and sharing.

5. Run a competition for the best multimedia created for the contest, linking back to your site videos, blog posts, infographics.

6. Create badges for winners of "best blog" or "best site" contests.

7. Sponsor a charity, conference, or sports team. Thinking bigger? Get an event named after you.

Reviews

1. Solicit reviews of your products and services.

2. Create an affiliate program to encourage others to promote you.

3. Give testimonials for others (contractors, consultants, providers). Give permission for the testimonial to be posted on their website with a link back to you.

4. Solicit testimonials from others, and cross-post them on your site and theirs.

Link Requests

▶ Routinely link to other helpful pages.

▶ Find lists of niche or local sites, and ask to be listed.

▶ If you have a blog, look for blog directories to be listed in.

▶ If your site has beautiful CSS, submit it to a CSS style directory.

▶ If your site is standards compliant, submit it to a standards compliance directory you get the picture!

▶ Ask for links from employees and friends with websites, especially if they are looking for a way to help your business grow.

Local Links

▶ Trade reciprocal links with neighboring restaurants and businesses.

▶ Join the local business bureau or chamber of commerce.

▶ Look at the city website (or help create one). Request to be listed as a local business.

▶ Find out if your local library has a directory of local websites or businesses.

▶ Complete your business profile on DexKnows, YellowPages, and other business directories.

▶ Complete your business profileon Google Hotpot, Yelp, and other review sites.

▶ Encourage and respond to reviews (both positive and negative).

▶ Notify your alumni association, or other schools or colleges you are associated with, about your business. It's possible to be listed in an alumni directory, a newsletter, or other online materials with a link back to your site.

Face-to-Face

- Attend conferences.

- Have business cards, carry them, and use them.

- Write about the conferences and events on blogs and social media.

- Take pictures. Let people know they will be posted online - with this you'll be giving them disclosure and a reason to visit your site.

- Follow up with contacts (wherever they are made).

- Arrange times to meet local professionals in your field.

- Join a networking group or organize your own networking event.

- Be helpful. If you give the up-and-coming a helping hand, it's not just a one-way street.

By the way, now that you know how to start building links, don't forget to be smart about it. Associate your links with important keywords (but not always the same keywords). Make sure your site is ready to "grab" new visitors you only have a few seconds! Brush up your design, create a landing page, and suggest a category or an article to get them introduced to what your site is about.

Measure the results of your link-building. Run analytics, and annotate important events. This will help you discover which audiences converted well, and let you focus your later efforts more productively. Go forth and build links!

THE IMPACT OF GUEST BLOGGING

With guest blogging you can control exactly who links to you, what the link text is, and what information your site address is affiliated with.

A guest post is exactly what it sounds like: a blog post written by a guest anyone who doesn't own the blog. The guest is credited at either the beginning or end of the article, often with an introduction paragraph by the primary blog author. In the guest's byline, he or she generally can place a couple appropriate links.

Why?

The main reasons to guest post are to contact a new audience, to build a relationship with other bloggers, and to create quality links back to your blog or website. Who doesn't want a little more exposure to new potential clients?

Attract customers

With so many people wrapped up in SEO, it can be easy to forget that every link is a new road for potential clients to find your website. You can drastically increase both the number and quality of the people following the links by guest posting for blogs that your customers will read. Remember, it's not just the pageviews that matter, it's the sales or engagement that those individuals contribute.

And by building a relationship with another blogger expands your network. They might be able to direct interest or sales toward you, especially if you work on supporting them, too.

Improve search rankings

One part of the magic Google formula is the number and quality of links to your blog. By guest posting, you are creating quality links from one respected website to another, a good move in Google's eyes. Even writing your byline is important: make sure that your link text says something relevant to your market instead of simply "click here".

What to say?

It is important that you have a message to share with the blog's audience beyond advertising. Generally, posts that are too self-promotional backfire, leaving potential clients with a bad taste in their mouths.

Be sure that you have read a variety of the other blog posts, including other guest posts. Some bloggers will appreciate it if you mimic their writing style and length, but others will let you represent yourself however you see fit.

Introduce yourself, and make it obvious why you think your message is important for the community on this particular blog.

Submissions

Many blogs have differing requirements for how to submit a guest post request or proposal. Some sites only accept full articles, others request ideas be submitted before the articles are written. Still other sites have specific e-mail addresses or contact forms you should use, and many simply do not accept guest posts at all. If you want to write a guest post for a blog, follow their lead and submit your proposal the way they want it. After all, it's still their blog!

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Work, but Worth It

Yes, it takes a significant amount of time to write a good guest post, especially at first. Many of your posts and ideas will even be rejected. However, spending quality times on these posts will help you become a better writer for all of your posts in the future, both guest posts and posts on your blog or website.

WHERE TO START WITH GUEST BLOGGING

So you've been invited to be a guest blogger on someone else's blog? Congratulations! Guest Blogging can be a great way to gain exposure, sell yourself, network, and could get you invitations to be a guest blogger on even more blogs. Heck, some writers out there live off of guest blogging alone. To be a successful guest blogger, there are a few things that you need to bring to the table every time, and the tips listed below will give you a great head start. So before you attempt to write your first guest blogging article, check out the advice below to see if all of your bases are covered.

Demographics and Research

Before you attempt to write for someone else, you need to find out as much about their blog as you possibly can. It's very important to know who you're writing for, and what range of topics you can write about. The last thing you want to do as a guest blogger is write something totally irrelevant to the blogs readership and turn people away. Go through their last fifty or so posts, and see which ones were the most popular and widely read. Be unique and write in your own voice, but don't try and reinvent the wheel. The last thing that the blog owner wants to do is apologize to readers for off topic posts that were written in his or her absence. A good couple of hours of research should do just fine.

Stick to your Commitment

If you were hired or invited to guest blog while the author of the blog is away for a few days or more, and he/she wants you to write at least three posts per day, then you'd better do it! Put yourself in their shoes. If you were going away and had someone lined up to post three times per day and they didn't follow the schedule, then you would have a giant mess to clean up when you came back. If you don't think you can commit to something like this, then you need to politely tell them up front so that they can alter their strategy before they leave. When you guest blog for someone, you are selling your reputation and the blog owners reputation at the same time, so you need to bring your A-game in every post, and follow the rules to a "T". Commitment and reliability is half the battle.

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Readers come first!

Sure, guest blogging can be a great way to expose yourself to a brand new audience, but you have to remember that the blogs readers come first in every situation! Don't plug your latest invention/project/marketing scheme just write good, helpful content that pertains to the audience at hand. Again, the last thing you want to do is make even one of their loyal readers mad enough to unsubscribe. Being a good guest blogger can bring many benefits to you, the blog owner, and the readers, so when you're done guest blogging, try to make sure that when you're done blogging that the blog is in better shape then when you found it. Make a good impression, and you'll surely be invited to do it again, and possibly for other blogs that see your professionalism.

Don't forget your own blog!

While you're putting all of the monumental effort into creating great guest posts, it behooves you to make an even bigger effort to maintain your own blog. You see, while you are on a guest blogging assignment, you will naturally attract new readers to your own blog from the blog owners reader pool. So when those new readers are curious enough to check out your home blog, you want to make sure that it's up-to-date and ready to read. Since part of the guest blogging experience is selling yourself, the last thing you want to do is turn away any new readers/subscribers that you might gain over the course of your guest blogging experience. Put out some grade A content on your own blog while you're guest blogging, and that way you'll keep the new readers Interested and coming back. Remember, be creative but be yourself. Don't try to be someone your not, because new and old readers will see right through it, every time.

Guest blogging can be a great experience for everyone involved. Following the above tips and advice will ensure that you don't blow it! Remember, first impressions are everything, and if you bring all of your skills and talent to the table while you guest blog, then you'll reap the rewards for a long time to come.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Rapportive

A tool that shows you everything about your contacts right inside your inbox. Rapportive combines what you know, what your organization knows and what the web knows. Great for keeping track of your contacts.

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Aweber

An email marketing software, Aweber includes email signup forms and auto responder services that make it easy for you to build your email list and stay in touch with potential clients or contacts. Sign up for $1.

SurveyMonkey

An online tool that allows you to create and publish a survey within minutes. SurveyMonkey allows you to view results and in real time. A basic plan is free.

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS PLAN OF ACTION

▸ **Research upcoming conferences in your field** - Start out by figuring out what conferences you would find interesting our useful to your business. Look for one's that have influential speakers or companies. This will create a great networking opportunity.

▸ **Prepare your business cards and elevator pitch** - You never know when these might come in handy. It's always wise to be prepared to talk about yourself our company as you could run into someone anywhere who could help you business.

▸ **Reach out to your current contacts** - People you already know may be able to introduce you to others who can help our your business. Don't be shy!

▸ **Start building relationships** - Send out introductory emails, set up meetings, have a meal or converse over drinks with someone you'd like to get to know.

▸ **Come up with a link building strategy** - Pick out the tactics that would work best for your business and start guest blogging. Remember you can always use your current friends and contacts to help you with this.

Building Relationships is an essential part of growing your business and your overall marketing strategy. The more useful contacts you have the more opportunity your business has of being successful. So get out there and start meeting people!

YOU ARE READY TO GO

This guide covers a lot of aspects related to your website and business, ranging from implementing SEO strategy to networking to optimizing your conversions. You now have the tools needed to take your website and business to the next level. All that is left is for you to take them and put them into motion.

These strategies are solid practices that can help you increase traffic to your website, increase conversions, aid in networking and more. They are designed to help you reach your goals, and the best part is, anyone can utilize them. You don't need to be a SEO expert to increase traffic to your website through search engines, or a master blogger to create content that people love and link to. These strategies are accessible to anyone who has the desire and drive to make them work. The most important thing to do is set goals, and use these strategies to achieve them.

Goals like increasing traffic, increasing conversions, developing blog content, etc. take time, patience and practice to reach their full potential. You will need to strike the right balance between all the strategies mentioned here to reap their full benefits. Take your time, experiment and most of all, have fun. Every website and business behaves differently and is its own unique creature, so use the tools provided in this guide to make your website the best it can be.

Find the strategies and tactics that work best for you and maximize them to their fullest potential. If you find SEO is working really well for your business then dedicate more resources to it, but don't put all your eggs in one basket. Just because SEO is working well for you right now, it might not always be that way and it would be awful to be left without any other strategies to fall back on if that happens. As with most things in life like you diet, relationships and finances, balance and moderation are the keys to success. Develop a well-balanced marketing strategy that helps your website and business, and nurture it.

Developing your marketing strategy needs to be a priority for these tactics to work. As I have said before, they take effort and time, and cannot be done once and forgotten about and still provide results. While everything I have laid out here for you is easily accomplishable on your own, if you find yourself not being able to dedicate enough time their success, find someone who can help you, it's that important.

I hope this guide has given you the foundation you need to be successful in your own efforts and truly hope your business reaches its full potential.

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at Neil@neilpatel.com

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TRAFFIC SYSTEM

GET MORE TRAFFIC TO YOUR WEBSITE