

How To Get Started With Affiliate Marketing

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Introduction

Affiliate marketing is a great way to earn an income online. It has several advantages over many other methods:

- You don't have to handle product inventory or delivery
- There's little or no customer support required
- You don't have to deal with returns
- You can promote multiple products from different vendors, choosing the best of the best

Many marketers approach affiliate marketing the wrong way, however, and as a result they are not very successful with it.

In this report, we're going to look at how to set up a **profitable affiliate business** starting from scratch. If you follow the tips and strategies outlined in this report, you'll be building your business on a strong foundation, one that will support much more growth.

Planning

The first step in building your affiliate business is one that many marketers do superficially, or sometimes not at all - planning. If you don't plan your business properly, you can spend a lot of time, money or both setting up websites, writing content, generating traffic and all the other things that go into affiliate marketing with little or no return for your efforts.

The absolute first step is to decide on an overall business model.

Do you want to create affiliate review websites that review various products in your market? Or would you prefer to set up affiliate blogs that have a wider range of content? Maybe you want to create a "hybrid" affiliate business that lets you use multiple monetization methods such as your own products, Adsense and other things, with affiliate offers being just one component.

Affiliate marketing can take many different forms, so it's important to consider this up front. That doesn't mean you can't add or change the exact process you use over time (you most certainly will) but you also don't want to limit yourself needlessly either.

Example: If you are planning on reviewing affiliate offers and driving sales from those reviews, you might consider a domain along the lines of ProductXYZReviews.com. A domain like that is great if all you're going to do is write reviews, but it's not the best choice for a site that also provides other types of content, such as articles, how-to information and so on.

If visitors land on that site looking for those other things, it's quite likely they would think it isn't suitable for them.

It's important to give yourself room for growth in your business, so **don't limit your options right from the beginning.**

I'll repeat this again because it's so important:

The plans you start with today are most likely going to evolve and change over time, so if you choose a domain or anything else that could limit you in some way, make sure you do it with the knowledge of how it could affect you down the road.

The second step in planning your affiliate business is choosing what market or markets to tackle. If you're thinking of building sites in several niches at the same time, I would recommend thinking twice about doing so. There is a lot of work that goes into getting a new site up and running, and generating traffic, so **working on several at once usually results in none of them being particularly successful.**

It's much more effective to work on one until it is running smoothly, generating visitors and income, and then moving on to the next one.

But if you decide to tackle several at once in spite of the warning, it's best if they can all be related to the same broad market. This gives you more opportunities for cross-promotion between your sites, and it will also help to improve your results with the affiliate programs in that market. This can sometimes lead to better commissions or other perks.

There are various theories about choosing a market, for example:

- Pick highly targeted niches (the "Long Tail") so you have less competition and can get your sites ranked and generating traffic quicker

- Pick broader markets so you have a wider selection of affiliate offers and topics you can cover
- Target markets that have a lot of items that people need to buy whether they like it or not
- Choose markets that have a lot of desperate and/or impulsive buyers

All these theories have some merit and the reality is you can cover them all if you pick your market correctly.

The first, picking highly targeted niches, is a good choice for getting faster results, since there will be less competition in many cases. But it also limits your growth potential because it's so targeted. There are only so many things you can write about, and probably only so many affiliate offers you can promote.

Markets with a lot of necessities that people have to buy no matter what can be effective, but generally a desperate or impulsive market (sometimes called a *rabid* market) is going to be more profitable.

And targeting a broader market means you're going to have a lot more competition - therefore it will take more time and effort to get things moving - but you're also going to have a lot more growth opportunity because there is so much more you can cover.

Here's what I recommend when choosing a market...

Start with a targeted niche - a sub-topic of a broader market. That will make it easier to get some momentum going. But start with future growth in mind. Build your website (or network of sites) in such a way that you can add more sub-topics to it as you grow. Then once you have one niche up and running, add another one. Get it going successfully then add another, and so on.

This lets you "back into" a broad market by biting off smaller pieces one at a time. You'll gradually build a presence in the overall market, and start to grab more and more of the people looking for answers.

Finding Affiliate Offers

Once you have your plan in place - and to some degree this is still part of the planning process - you'll need to find some effective affiliate offers that you can promote.

There are a couple of options here. You can sign up with one or more of the big affiliate networks, like [Commission Junction](#), [Shareasale](#) or [Clickbank](#), which have many products and vendors in various markets. Or you can find independent affiliate programs, both from big companies like [Amazon](#) and [eBay](#) or smaller vendors who run their own programs in-house.

Both options have advantages and disadvantages. The big networks tend to have more "red tape" when you want to sign up for an affiliate program. Some vendors on these networks will approve anyone but others look for specific things, like websites you already have in that market or good conversion stats on your account.

If you're just starting out in a new niche, or you haven't been a member on the network for long, **these types of criteria can sometimes disqualify you** and certain vendors will decline your application.

You can run into the same problems with some of the larger independent affiliate programs like Amazon and eBay (eBay is notoriously hard to get accepted by) but smaller independent programs will usually accept all affiliate applications.

The disadvantage of smaller affiliate programs is there's no guarantee that you will get paid on time, or at all in some cases. The big affiliate networks handle all the commission payments so you can be pretty confident that you're going to receive what's owed to you.

But if a smaller affiliate program isn't run very well, commission payments can be inconsistent. And in some cases, these vendors have just disappeared without paying what's owed to their affiliates. (Don't worry, this isn't widespread, but it is something to keep in mind.)

If you're looking at these types of independent affiliate programs, it's a good idea to do a little research before doing a lot of promotion, particularly if you're paying for traffic through Pay Per Click or some other form of advertising.

You can simple search for some reviews of the program in Google, or you can use a site like AssociatePrograms.com to see if any other affiliate have posted reviews, good or bad.

Networking With Affiliate Managers

One tip that can sometimes improve your success rate with the larger networks is to get in touch with the affiliate manager for the vendor you're interested in and let them know who you are and what your plans are for working with them.

Sometimes these affiliate managers will decline an application based on some criteria that they use when evaluating potential affiliates. If you don't appear to meet that criteria, you may get declined automatically when you do in fact meet it - or could if you knew what it was.

Example: If you're located outside the United States, some affiliate managers will decline your application because they only work with affiliates sending US traffic to their offers. But the fact is, most of your traffic is probably still US-based so if you send the affiliate manager an email explaining this, it will sometimes convince them to change their decision and approve you after all.

Plus, most affiliates never take the time to introduce themselves to their affiliate managers. If you make that effort to reach out to them and just let them know who you are and what sort of plans you have, you might be surprised at how far it can get you.

If you need help with something in the future, they're probably going to recognize your name and get back to you faster. If they have special offers that they want to test, you'll be more likely to spring to mind as someone to offer it to. You might even get better commissions if you develop a good working relationship with them, and show that you can deliver results.

Building Your Websites

When it comes to building your affiliate websites, there are quite a few options. You can use software like Kompozer or Dreamweaver to build static HTML sites. Or you can use Wordpress to build affiliate "blogs" - although they don't necessarily

have to have anything in common with true blogs. Wordpress is also a great content management system (CMS). You can even build your sites on free hosting sites like Squidoo.com or Wordpress.com.

The third option - using free hosting - isn't recommended. It can be a way to get started for absolutely no cost, and if you're literally starting with nothing you might want to consider it.

But the big disadvantage to using those types of hosts is that you don't control your own site.

You can add your own content, post links and do various other things. But if the host ever decides that your site doesn't meet their requirements for some reason, they can remove your site without any warning. If you build a successful affiliate website on one of these hosts, you could lose all the time and effort (*not to mention revenue*) overnight.

If you can't afford to spend a few dollars to get started, this can be a good way to earn enough to move to your own hosting, but you should do just that as soon as you make a few dollars.

Because a few dollars a month is all it costs for a hosting accounts. You can get good hosting through a company like HostGator.com for less than \$5 per month. A domain name will cost you under \$10 per year, so for roughly \$5-6 a month you can control your own destiny.

Static HTML vsWordpress

As far as deciding whether to build static HTML websites with a tool like Dreamweaver or use Wordpress as a CMS, they both have advantages and disadvantages.

The biggest advantage of Wordpress is how easy it is to add new content - articles, images, and so on. Wordpress handles all the background stuff like the site design, search engine optimization and so on - all you need to do is post new content.

The disadvantage is less control over the layout of your website, unless you're comfortable digging into the code a bit or working with a more advanced theme.

Static HTML sites can be designed however you want, so it's easier to make little tweaks to the layout or even have different layouts for different pages on the site.

Ultimately this choice is going to depend on what you're comfortable with, but in my experience, Wordpress is the best choice for most people.

Getting Traffic To Your Websites

Once you've got your site built, the next step is to actually get visitors to it. You obviously need a website before you're going to get any visitors, but if you just build a site and sit back waiting for the traffic to start rolling in, you're going to be pretty disappointed.

"Build it and they will come" doesn't work on the web.

There are many different ways to get traffic, both free and paid - far more than we can cover in this report. Instead, we're going to look at three traffic methods that are very effective and will cost you little or nothing to implement.

Article Marketing

Article marketing, sometimes called **Bum Marketing**, is probably the easiest strategy for virtually anyone to implement. As long as you can write articles about your niche topic, you can use this method.

The way it works is you submit articles to article directories, which let you include links back to your website in a "resource box" at the end. This has two benefits:

1. Direct traffic from people who click those links and visit your website
2. Backlinks pointing to your website which will help your site rank higher in the search engines

Other webmasters can also use these articles as content on their websites, as long as they leave your resource box intact. This means that if you write high quality articles, it's quite likely that you will continue to get new backlinks as other websites use them to add content.

Article marketing isn't restricted to article directories, mind you. There are lots of other ways that you can syndicate your content onto other websites. For example:

- **Guest blogging**, where you write blog posts for other sites and they include an author bio with a link back to your site
- **Content swaps**, which means you write content for another site and that webmaster writes content for yours, and you each provide a link to one another's website
- **User generated content sites** like Squidoo.com, Hubpages.com, etc. let you post your articles on their sites, again including a link back to yours

The more places you can find to share your content in exchange for links back to your website, the better your SEO results will be - and the more traffic you will get.

Forum Marketing

Forum marketing is another easy-to-implement traffic method that doesn't have to cost you anything. The way forum marketing works is you post regularly on forums that are related to your market, and include links back to your website (or even directly to affiliate offers if the forum allows it).

The catch is that most forums won't let you post these links directly in the body of your posts so you need to create a "signature file" that includes them. This signature gets added to the end of every post you make, giving people an opportunity to click on the links.

This can also help you with SEO over the long term if the forum isn't password protected, because those links will get indexed by the search engines.

The key to making forum marketing work is to **provide value when you post**. Don't just post meaningless comments to get your links in front of people. Become an active member of the forum, and provide value in your posts. This will go a long way to getting people to click on your links because they'll get to know and trust you.

List Building

A lot of affiliate avoid building an email list, and it's a huge mistake. Building an email list gives you a source of traffic that *you control*. You don't have to rely on Google, Facebook or any other traffic source. If you want to get traffic to a new page on your site, you can just send an email to your list with a link to the new content.

The catch to building a list is that you're giving up some immediate income potential in exchange for more future potential.

Let me explain that a little further.

If you're building a list, you don't want people to click on the affiliate links on your website. **The goal is to get them to sign up for your email list**, first and foremost. So you will probably be giving up some immediate commissions by doing this.

But once you have that list built, you'll be able to send multiple offers to each person on it, and hopefully direct them back to your website many times. This gives you a lot more potential than a single click on an affiliate link, after which they might never come back to your website.

If you want your email list to actually respond to offers and other things you send them, you need to build good relationships. That means you need to provide them with value, and give them a reason to want to open your emails.

So yes, list building does take some work. But it's really no different than creating content for your website, you're just sending it out through email instead. You can even "recycle" content from your website to use in your email messages if it's relevant to the people reading your messages.

Which brings us to the final thing we're going to discuss in this report - content strategies.

Content Strategies

There's a phrase that you've probably heard many times in internet marketing, and it's no different for affiliate websites:

Content Is King

What that means is the content on your sites is a critical piece of your business. Your content is what is going to engage your visitors, and ultimately convince them to click on your affiliate links and actually buy something that generates a commission for you. It's also what is going to help your site rank well in the search engines, to get more and more visitors.

Creating content can be a lot of work, however. Let's look at a few ways you can create content, some of which will require more effort than others.

Writing Original Content

Writing your own original, unique content is ultimately the most effective method, since you're going to have content that your visitors won't be able to find anywhere else. It's also more effective at attracting traffic from the search engines.

The problem with creating original content is that it's hard work. Particularly if you're working in markets that you're not particularly familiar with yourself. You can probably write articles fairly easily with a little bit of research, but those articles might not have a lot of "meat" in them, which can affect the results you'll get.

Outsourcing

Another option for creating original content is to outsource it, that is pay someone else to write it for you. This frees you up to do other things, and you may be able to hire a writer who is an expert on the topic and will be able to write much more valuable content than you could create yourself.

The drawback to outsourcing, of course, is the fact that it costs you money. Once you're generating income from your sites you can start to reinvest some of it into outsourcing, but when you're getting started this might not be feasible.

Autoblogging

Autoblogging is another option for generating content for your sites. The way this method works is you install a plugin on your Wordpress site that will go out and grab content from other sources, mix it together into a semi-unique post and then add it to your site automatically.

These plugins can be configured to run completely on autopilot, so once you set them up you could be getting content added to your site every day for years to come. The problem with this "set it and forget it" method is your results probably won't be very good.

You'll get better results by putting a bit of manual effort into the process as well. Write some unique posts every now and then and add them to the site as well. You can even edit the posts that are added automatically, and add your own comments and other content to them. This is essentially a form of content curation.

User Generated Content

Another effective way to create content without having to do all the work yourself is with "user generated" content. This can come in many forms, such as:

- Blog comments
- Forum posts
- User-submitted reviews

While this method can generate content without you having to do all the work, it's important to review that content and not just allow it to get posted automatically. You never know what people are going to submit, so it's important that you edit it before it goes live on your site to avoid any unsightly content.

Conclusion

Hopefully this report has given you a better idea of how affiliate marketing works. It can be a great way to earn money online - and you can earn a lot if you work at it - without having to deal with all the hassles that come with selling products of your own.

Just keep in mind that while you're not selling your own products, it's still important to build good relationships. That includes with your site visitors, your email list, affiliate managers and anyone else that you might deal with.

If you build solid relationships, you'll find your results will multiply much faster, without having to work any harder.