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Return To The Basics For Web Success

By Joshua Rose

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I was watching Barry Bonds, of baseball's San Francisco Giants, when he hit a home run recently. At age 38, he is the most feared and respected hitter in the game. For those that don't know, last year he broke the single season homerun record and this year his batting average led the majors.

When he steps to the plate, boy oh boy, he sure has the pitcher's full attention. I think they'd really prefer root canal to that smooth, swift and powerful swing of his.

There's just no denying that when it comes to hitting, he has surely reached the mountain top and has joined an elite group of baseball's all-time best.

Maybe, if I copied him, I could become a major leaguer. And maybe, if he told me all his secret techniques, I could even join the elite as well.

Well, it may be fun to daydream. But you and I both know, quite realistically, that this just isn't very likely. Secrets or not, expert advice or not, reaching a goal like this takes years of training, experience, skill development, a certain inner fire and motivation and a number of other crucial factors.

The same holds true on the internet. There's some great advice available. But how come it works so well for those giving the advice, and usually not so well for those taking

it?

Well, it's due to the same reason that I won't be hitting a 96 mile-per-hour fastball for a 450 foot homerun anytime soon, despite all of Barry's gracious help. I just haven't developed the necessary skills to properly execute the advice. I don't have the eye, the bat speed or the power, yet.

So, What Is One To Do?

The answer is to backtrack – to return to the basics.

Guru tactics or not, without a like amount of first hand experience, without 'name brand' recognition and without friends and colleagues to leverage your efforts, the going can be understandably rocky at first.

Instead, recognize the skills that have led to their success. Focus on these, make them your foundation ... and THEN build your house.

* Settle for nothing less than developing exceptional communication skills. The written word still rules the web. Quick tip: Learn to write like you talk, not like you write.

* Build and NUTURE your list. Sure, almost everyone knows how important it is to build a list ... and it's hard enough. But the truth is building the list is the easier part. The real challenge is in keeping your list interested and responsive. Again, content and communication skills are vital here.

* Help others. This builds your reputation, as well as cultivates a network of resources, both informational and sales building. Somewhere down the road your friends may be excellent Joint Venture partners and/or Affiliates.

* Remember that the great majority of surfers are looking for information, not products. Many ezine ads and websites are 'tuned out' for the same reasons we change the TV channel during commercials. So, provide information, and then promote that information.

* Inject your personality. Not pleasing everybody is

better than not pleasing anybody when people just can't get a feel for you.

* Get your name out there. Write articles, post at forums, submit 'subscriber introductions' or 'subscriber feedback' where accepted. Brand, brand, brand for trust and credibility.

* Be unique. Stand out from the pack. Ads, ezines and websites can quickly blur into the mass of 'sameness'. Great copy and website design is wasted if the message is "same old, same old".

*Spend quality time with your Affiliates. Encourage and teach those who are making the extra effort.

Follow these basics and learn these skills. Sure, your favorite Guru can put up a new site, start promoting and quickly get a good response. But only because he or she has already built a solid foundation.

So, don't be tempted to jump ahead before you can even see those 96 mile-per-hour fastballs. Progress through the basics and you just may find yourself hitting them out of the park.

Wearing Many Hats as a Web Site Owner

By Marc McDonald

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If you've run a Web site for very long, no doubt you've discovered that the process of actually building your site is only the beginning of your challenge in creating a successful Web business.

It takes a lot more than knowledge of HTML to get a successful site up and running. Veteran site owners eventually become aware of the fact that one must excel in a number of areas in order to earn a living on the Net.

These include:

1. You must be familiar with at least the basics of HTML and other aspects of page building.
2. Additionally, it's important to learn the nuances of the various search engines out there and to become familiar with how to give your site the best exposure possible through them.
3. You must also become familiar with the Web's various revenue opportunities and learn how to properly implement them on your site, as well as get the most bang for your buck.

And all of this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to running a Web business. Depending on the format of your site, you may also have to learn specialized tasks, ranging from how to ensure that you have a stable hosting environment to learning how to set up and run a database.

As time goes on, it can all seem quite overwhelming. A successful Web site owner must indeed learn to be a jack of all trades. I'm often asked by fellow site owners for tips and advice on how one can juggle so many duties successfully.

It's been my experience over the years, that it's best to not try to do everything yourself, once your site is up and going and well established. Over the years, I've developed numerous relationships with other Webmasters, each of whom typically excels in one area of expertise. In effect, my colleagues and I have built up a common pool of knowledge that we share among ourselves.

These days, I'm much more likely to farm out a given specialized task to someone who excels in that area, rather than try to stumble through the process myself.

It's a far cry from 1995, when I first set up shop on the Web. In those days, I did everything myself: from writing the HTML to installing CGI scripts to creating my own custom graphic images, etc.

So the question remains: how many hats should a Web site owner try to wear? I think the answer lies in how far along you are in the development of your Web business.

If you only recently started a Web site, I think it's important to do everything yourself initially. You should become familiar with at least the basics of every aspect of Webmastering. Even if you're planning to farm out such work eventually, it's important for you to

at least know the basics, at the outset. It'll save you a great deal of grief, over the long term.

This holds true, even if you have a budget and you plan to pay to have work, such as HTML coding, done on a commercial basis. If you know at least the basics of a given task, you're likely going to get more bang for your buck if you pay to have someone else do it. If the process of coding HTML (or any other aspect of Webmastering) is a complete mystery to you, then you leave yourself wide open to getting a poor deal, if you're paying someone to do it.

The analogy is the same as if you take your car into a garage to get it repaired. If you're reasonably knowledgeable about the basics of auto maintenance, the odds increase that you'll get the repair job done right, and for a fair price.

At the same time, you should work hard to build up relationships with other Web site owners (preferably those who are roughly at the same stage of development with their sites as you are). As time goes on, you can share tips and advice and even specialized tasks.

If you try your hand at all aspects of running a Web site, then in time, you'll inevitably discover which tasks that you have a knack for. In my case, I discovered early on that my HTML and programming skills were mediocre—but that I had a talent for writing copy, site layout and site promotion.

These days, I rarely write raw HTML code any more. I farm that work out to my colleagues who are HTML gurus. In return, I can offer them my help in tasks in the areas that I do well in.

On the other hand, I know enough about the basics of HTML to where I can go in and make tweaks and adjustments to a page, if need be.

The bottom line is: if you want to succeed as a Web site owner, then it's important to learn the basics of all aspects of running a site early on.

Then, as time goes on, you can work to develop a network of friends and colleagues that you can share tasks and projects with, as your site grows and develops. And you'll be in much better shape to protect yourself from being scammed if you decide to pay someone to do Webmaster-related tasks for you.

Equally crucially, you'll know at least enough about the basics of

various Webmaster tasks that, in a pinch, you'll be able to jump in yourself and tweak or fix things in a pinch, instead of having to rely on someone else to get a crucial project done quickly.

Marc McDonald is a former journalist and editor with the FortWorth Star–Telegram and the creator of TheFreeSite.com as well as several other popular Web sites that have received extensive media exposure from CNN's "Headline News," the BBC, Fox News, ZDTV, CBS Radio, the Washington Post, and many more. Visit the TheFreeSite.com at: <http://www.thefreesite.com>



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