

The 12 commandments of publishing a membership website or online newsletter

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By Peter A. Schaible

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Like immutable laws of nature, some rules are ironclad. Follow these directives and you can expect to succeed. Ignore even one of them and your business and personal achievements will be significantly diminished.

1. You shall believe.

The first step in accomplishing anything is embracing the belief that it is possible.

You must believe in the viability of your project and you must believe in yourself. If you don't, stop right now.

You simply cannot succeed without the firm expectation that your idea is sound, that you have all the resources necessary to succeed, and that you deserve success!

These are self-fulfilling prophecies. If you believe you can succeed, you're right. If you don't believe you can succeed, you're right, too!

2. You shall find your passion!

If your sole motivation for starting an online newsletter is to make money, you'll probably soon tire of the topic. Making money seldom gets boring, but profit alone usually is not enough to stir your imagination and creative juices.

A niche market membership website succeeds best when the publisher has unbridled enthusiasm for her topic.

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Finding your passion may require some introspection. It can be an exhilarating process of self-discovery. It may even require you to change your lifestyle.

That's part of the excitement. That's part of what your subscribers are paying you to do. They want to have that same experience vicariously through you.

Find your passion and turn it into your online newsletter. Stake out your niche topic and prepare to dominate and defend it. Establish yourself as the authority on your topic and become a subject matter expert.

3. You shall become a marketer!

Don't get into the information product development business if your only care about your niche topic and have no enthusiasm for learning how to sell.

You must enthusiastically learn everything you can about marketing and sales promotion copywriting. Because in the final analysis, you will realize that, regardless of your newsletter topic, fundamentally you are in the direct response marketing business. Study the great direct marketers and copywriters. Immerse yourself in their courses. Devour their books. Read and reread their most successful sales letters.

If you're not committed to learning everything that you possibly can about this aspect of the business, you'd better marry someone who is!

4. You shall be unique!

One of the first rules of marketing: Establish your unique selling proposition (USP).

Define the essence of your online publication. What distinguishes your newsletter or membership website from all others?

Define your targeted member or subscriber. Who is he or she in terms of age, income, social status, occupation, etc.?

Define the reasons why he or she will join or subscribe. How will you measure these assumptions, prove or disprove them, and refine them?

Try to answer these questions before you develop your information product.

5. You shall create value!

When you develop your marketing message, how will you capture your subscriber's attention and interest?

How will you ignite her desire for your special, proprietary information product? What's in it for her?

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Does it contain irresistible, mouth–watering benefits for your customer?

Write out your most persuasive "call to action". Does it motivate your prospective members to reach for their credit cards and join immediately?

Make certain your subscription website addresses your member's heartfelt desires. Remember that customers buy what they want, not necessarily what they need.

6. You shall over–deliver!

Make it a bedrock principle of your business to keep and exceed your promises.

When you start your online newsletter or membership website, create at least 20 stories, videos, or other units of content. Then put a few of them in a public section of the site for anyone to view, read or download without charge.

You must create value by giving some of your content away before you can reasonably expect subscribers to pay for more. And after you create a customer for the members–only, premium content, reward her with unexpected bonuses of additional value.

7. You shall not deceive!

Creating and selling an information product is fundamentally about trust. If your readers don't feel you are treating them fairly, your information products will have no credibility.

From your very first day in business, you must be scrupulously honest with your subscribers. If you're not perceived as being 100 percent trustworthy, ultimately you will have no customers and no business.

Beyond being the ethical thing to do, honesty makes good business sense. It decreases returns and cancellations. It promotes happier customers and enhances your reputation.

Be circumspect about full disclosure. Don't give into the temptations that are "sins of omission." Customers will expect that your product has certain features, even if you don't make specific promises. If they find out otherwise, they will feel cheated and resentful.

Consider, for instance, your own membership website refund policy. Perhaps you state in some obscure region of your site that there are no refunds of subscription fees. But your customer assumes that you offer at least a 30–day, money–back guarantee.

She experiences buyer's remorse and wants a refund after only four weeks. Technically, you feel you are not required to return her money.

Do it anyway. It's less expensive than haggling with her, or worse, defending yourself to your credit card merchant account provider.

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Do you really want an unhappy, former subscriber bad–mouthing you to other prospective subscribers? Of course not.

It's better not to hide your refund policy or be deceptive about any part of your offer.

It's best to offer a longer, even a lifetime satisfaction guarantee. Very few people will ever exercise the longer guarantee, but it will go a long way toward giving prospective subscribers confidence in your offer.

8. You shall test!

Test everything that you can measure!

Don't assume. Don't guess. Test, measure and know for certain.

This is fundamental to all direct response marketing campaigns. You must test lists, headlines, copywriting styles, offers, prices, even envelop colors.

Learn to love testing or, as previously suggested, marry someone who does!

9. You shall profit!

There are numerous reasons why you must charge a sufficiently high price for your products and services.

First, the perceived value of your information is directly reflected in your prices. That means you're very likely to sign up more subscribers at a higher price than you will at a modest price. And those subscribers are more likely to be happier, more loyal and require less maintenance than those who join at a lower price point.

Equally important, you need to succeed financially in order to continue your subscription website enterprise. Financial success means paying the bills and enjoying the profits of your hard work and risk–taking.

Financial success is your right and your just reward. It is amoral for you to not to enjoy the financial rewards of success. If you believe that you deserve to succeed and enjoy financial success, you will!

10. You shall adjust!

The online marketing business is in a constant state of flux. Learn to be flexible.

Expect to make adjustments to your business model after you set your objectives. Resist the urge to dig in your heels and be foolishly stubborn about your initial assumptions, or about changes that loom on the horizon.

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Online publishers survive and succeed because they are nimble and quick to adjust to changes in market conditions. Try to be objective about your business plan, making necessary course corrections as you proceed.

11. You shall embrace humility!

The world is full of people who, upon achieving a certain level of success, begin to believe in their own infallibility. This kind of arrogance is not only unwise from a human and spiritual perspective, it's simply bad business.

As soon as you set yourself up as a know-it-all authority, you distance yourself from your customers. You lose touch with their concerns, questions, fears, etc. If you create a master/apprentice culture, people will begin to resent you and eventually look elsewhere for a different authoritative source of knowledge.

Because in the final analysis, subscribers come to you for nurturing, support and comfort as much as they do for pure how-to information. Your members want to feel as though you are genuinely interested in their success.

If you're not genuinely interested in your members, it will come across in the tone of your written as well as spoken voice. Your subscribers will sense it, and they will ultimately abandon you for another guide.

But if you're humble and loyal, and continue to deliver quality content, you can expect members to renew for several cycles. Some will even apologize to you for not renewing when they lose interest and move on to other pursuits and interests.

12. You shall give back.

Nobody achieves much in life without getting some help along the way, or without having some "lucky" breaks created by others.

There are many people who will help you succeed, either through advice, by example, or with encouragement.

Make a point of paying it back. Contribute something back to your community (however you define "community"), either in the form of financial support, or with the gift of your time.

Giving back will keep you grounded, help keep you from outgrowing your hat, and provide you invaluable perspectives.

7 Reasons Why You Should be Publishing an Ezine

By Merle

7 Reasons Why You Should be Publishing an Ezine by Merle

Ezines: They're everywhere you look, and for very good reasons. They are an excellent online marketing tool. If you have a website and aren't publishing your own newsletter, I'm going to give you seven very good reasons why you should start.

1) Establishes Trust: When people visit your website, they have no idea who you are. As far as they're concerned you might be some evil person lying in wait, just trying to get your hands on their credit card number so you can run up the national debt. The media is partially to blame for this unfounded fear, but you need to be aware it exists and get those visitors to trust you in order to turn them into paying customers. Publishing an ezine helps to establish you as a reputable business dealer and over time, inspires trust.

2) Brings Visitors Back: Statistics show a customer needs to see your advertising message six or seven times before making a purchase. But how do you get a casual browser to come back? When someone signs up for your ezine, the mailing itself will serve as a reminder to to revisit again and again, eventually turning your subscribers into paying customers.

3) Establishes You as an Expert; Builds Brand Loyalty: Just because you're in business on the web, does that really mean you know what you're talking about? By publishing a newsletter and writing your own articles, subscribers will come to see you as an expert in your field. This and the familiarity they feel from reading your newsletter will reinforce brand loyalty to your site, turning many of your current subscribers into future customers.

4) Keeps Current & Potential Customers Up to Date on New Products & Services:

We all add on to our current list of products and services on a regular basis. Pricing may change, we may add new sections of interest to our websites, etc. Your publications allow you to share

this important information with current and potential

customers keeping them up to date and possibly bringing them back for a new sale. Nothing is worse than having a client tell you he went to one of your competitors because he didn't know you offered that same service or product.

5) Builds Relationships: Let's face it -- Building a relationship takes time. Ezine publishing is one avenue towards doing so.

I can't tell you how often I get an email from someone who feels she knows me after subscribing to my ezine for the past year or so. Relationship marketing is important on the Web and publishing your own newsletter will help you do just that. The truth is, we'd rather spend our money with someone we like than someone we don't know.

6) Allows You to Build an Opt-In Email Marketing List:

Repeat after me: Spam is bad, opt-in is good. You can't buy a list of names and start blasting out your marketing message to people you don't know without getting yourself into a lot of trouble. But if those people have opted in to your ezine they have given you "permission" to send them email. They're an attentive audience who has already said they want to hear from you on a regular basis. You never want to abuse this right, but if you send out helpful information you'll be able to plug your company in between the lines without making anyone angry.

7) Keeps Your Website Fresh in Visitors' Minds:

Have you ever gone to a website and really liked it, only to forget about it later? Sure, you may have bookmarked the site, but maybe you haven't gone through your bookmarks in a long time. I love when I get an ezine from one of my favorite sites, which serves as a trigger to "pop in" for a re-visit. This technique of "reminding" someone about your site is important; it really helps to keep a constant flow of traffic returning to your website.

Ezine publishing is one of the most effective marketing tools online today. Not only is it powerful it's probably one of the most cost-effective tools you can use in promoting your website. If you haven't tried it, it's never too late to start. Publishing

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your own newsletter can be one of the most rewarding tasks you perform....not just financially, but also

personally. You'll get a warm and fuzzy feeling from all of the people you'll be helping.....and that, my friend, is a reward in itself.

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