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YOUR OWN EZINE? THE PROS AND CONS

By Mary Anne Hahn

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No doubt about it—having one's own ezine is an excellent promotional tool. Whether you sell goods or services, publishing an ezine is perhaps one of the very best online ways to develop and maintain a potential, targeted customer base.

Should you have your own ezine? It depends on whether it would be worth the time and effort to you. A look at the following list of ezine publishing pros and cons should help you decide whether creating, building and maintaining an ezine of your own is right for you.

THE PROS

Marketing:

Ezines provide you with an excellent way to find and target the market(s) you are trying to reach with your products and services. Suppose, for example, that you write or sell cookbooks; a recipe or cooking tip ezine would surely attract a dedicated readership which, over time, begins to know, trust and like your information. These subscribers would also be most open to buying your books as well, or visiting the Web site where your books are sold.

This applies to pretty much any type of product or service you sell. Whether you are a Web site designer looking for freelance work, own an auction or shopping mall site, or sell your own handmade crafts, creating a newsletter that caters to your targeted readership will also provide you with a promotional outlet for your other works.

Relationships:

Another way you can benefit from a dedicated ezine readership is the online relationships you build through it over time.

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Among your readers you may end up finding people with whom you can set up reciprocal Web site links or potential clients for your services. Someone who regularly reads your newsletter may contact you out of the blue with a joint venture idea that could turn out to be a real money-maker. Or perhaps you'll get ideas for new projects from a "Letter to the Editor" (that's you!).

Your subscribers get to "know" you through your ezine—your reliability, your talent, and whatever aspects of your personality that you choose to reveal. And you never know what nice little surprises will arrive in your email box from loyal readers.

Additional Income:

Although not in itself a get-rich-quick vehicle, having your own ezine can bring in some extra money in several ways: you can charge for classified advertising space in your newsletter, earn commissions through joining affiliate programs that offer products related to yours, and of course, make money from the sales of your books or services themselves.

THE CONS

Time consuming:

It takes me an average of five hours to put together each issue of my own ezine, WriteSuccess. That does *not* include writing my own articles for it, surfing the 'Net in search of markets and writers' sites for each issue, promoting my ezine on various announcement lists, trading ezine ads with other publications that complement mine, reading and responding to emails received, and subscribing or unsubscribing readers who can't do so themselves. Ezines, at least the good ones, are labor-intensive ventures.

Challenging:

This "con" could also be a "pro," depending on how you look at it. Maintaining a consistent, high quality ezine over months and years takes a great deal of dedication and motivation. You need to truly love the topic of your ezine in order to stick with it for any period of time.

And you can't take your readership for granted, either. In recent weeks, a few of my favorite ezines have disappeared off the face of the Web, with or without a warning from the publisher/editor. Not only was I disappointed that I would no longer receive their ezines, but—even if the ezines were revived—I would greatly hesitate to swap ads or pursue joint ventures with them in the future, due to the unreliability of the publishers.

Not all fun and games:

Ezine publishers get *a lot* of spam! We also sometimes get nasty-grams from people who forgot they'd ever subscribed to our 'zine in the first place.

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And of course there are the unexplained unsubscribes that occur after each issue, which hurt a little, seeing the amount of time and effort you invested putting it together.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Is ezine publishing hard work? Absolutely. But, at least from my perspective, the tangible and intangible rewards more than compensate for the drawbacks. If anything, I enjoy publishing WriteSuccess today more than I ever did.

In a world made even smaller by the Internet, you can reach potential clients and readers around the globe. Publishing your own ezine is an outstanding way to accomplish that.

Mary Anne Hahn is a freelance writer who wants to encourage people to follow their own dreams. She also publishes "WriteSuccess," a biweekly ezine of ideas, information and inspiration for writers. To subscribe, <mailto:writesuccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>

Should Outside Cats Use A Collar

By John Marcus

Most cat owners find themselves in a quandary over whether or not to use a cat collar on their outdoor cats. The debate still reigns over the pros and cons of outfitting an outside cat with a collar, but many veterinarians and cat experts agree that collars are the best way to go. However, before you decide, take a look at these pros and cons:

Pros:

- Cat collars can hold identification and registration tags. This is critical in case your outdoor cat becomes lost or is picked up by a concerned individual. Also, collars can hold bells or other noise generating items to scare away potential prey.
- Many cat collars are equipped with reflective material. Whether the collar is made completely out of reflective material or only contains a small strip, this will help your cat to become more visible in the dark. Cats, especially those of dark color, can become invisible at night, which is a potentially dangerous situation.

Cons:

- Cat collars can easily snag and cause your cat to become hung or stuck on branches, fences, or anything else in the great outdoors. Some cats have actually been strangled when their collar has gotten caught and cut off the animal's air supply.

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- Your cat may not be comfortable wearing a collar or the collar may be too heavy for the animal.

Given these pros and cons, consider choosing a collar that will maximize the positives and minimize the negatives. For example, there are many collars on the market that are specially designed to break away or unclasp when the cat is hung. These collars are considered strangle-proof and release when approximately seven pounds of pressure is applied. This way, the cat can break him—or her—self free from any snare.

Furthermore, there are many different types of collars on the market. Bring your feline friend with you to the local pet-friendly pet store and try on several different types of collars until you find one that best fits. Avoid choosing a harness for outdoor cats unless you plan on walking the cat on a leash. If this is the case, only allow your cat to wear a harness while supervised, as most are not snare-proof.

On a whole, collars are encouraged on cats that spend their time outside and inside. In addition to providing visibility to your animal, the collar will hold valuable identification information that will protect your cat and assist you in finding your pet.

John Marcus Specializes in Cat Collars



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