

BLOG TRAFFIC

By John Eye

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I was browsing the internet and began to see more and more references to blogs and blogging. After a bit of additional investigation, I discovered exactly what a blog was and how to build one for myself. After some more research, I learned about ways to possibly profit from the creation and maintenance of a blog. Google AdSense, for instance, seemed to hold real possibility for revenue production.

It was an exciting idea. I could create and easily maintain a dynamic web site on the subject of my choice and make some money at the same time! I dove in headfirst.

I enjoyed writing in the blog and tweaking with its layout. In time, I was sure, the blog would “take off” and earnings would start to compile. I was wrong.

I had everything: good content, a popular topic and well-placed advertising. Nothing was happening. The reason: few visitors.

Even after adopting some of the frequently recommended methods of generating content, my blog was still only producing a few cents a day--on its best days!

I abandoned my blog. Over the next several months, I would occasionally return to my research on blogging and money making. I kept noticing articles about those making real money with blogs and AdSense. My first experience had been a failure, but I was beginning to learn why.

I compiled my research, went through it carefully, and devised a plan of action for a new blog. Within thirty days of the blog's launch, I earned my first AdSense check. One month later, my check was for over four hundred dollars! Since then, I have added a few more blogs to my personal “network” and continue to post consistent earnings.

What was the difference between my first failed experiment and my subsequent success? The content was not better. In fact, I think my original blog was probably a better read. The design was only marginally better. The difference was traffic. I had found a way to create blogs that attract visitors.

That system of traffic production has some great applications. Of course, it can make blogging profitable for those who use AdSense or other advertising tools. Just as importantly, it can create an audience. Most of us who write blogs do so in order to say something to others. A blog may be an online diary for some people, but even many of them want to share those thoughts with the world.

I believe blogging can be fun, therapeutic, profitable and more. All it requires is having something to say, saying it the right way and helping people find the end result.

This ebook focuses primarily on helping people to find your blog and on convincing them to stop by to read what you have to offer. It outlines some powerful ways of creating blog traffic and should help any blog develop a readership. It is a guide to traffic generation. It does not discuss AdSense techniques or some other aspects of operating a profitable blog, so it should be of value to both those who are looking at blogging as an entrepreneurial pursuit and those who are more interested simply in sharing ideas with others. I hope you find it valuable and that you can find an audience for your blog.

KEYS TO TRAFFIC

What produces traffic? What is it about some websites that makes them popular destinations for a huge number of visitors? Why are some blogs checked out by tens of thousands of people every day while others struggle to find a single visitor? The issue of traffic can be complicated. There are a variety of factors at play, and every strategy can be dissected and the details debated ad infinitum.

However, there are two keys to traffic upon which everyone can agree: Content and Links.

Before briefly looking at each of these, we should establish some context for our evaluation. Traffic can come from a few different places. Direct links to your site may produce a stream of visitors if those links are in the right places. Search engines, however, offer the real key to high volume traffic numbers. Surfers rely on Google, Yahoo and MSN to help them find the sites that will provide them with the kind of information they are seeking. If your blog comes up early in those search engine results, you can expect a significant stream of traffic.

Content is essential to traffic flow.

You have to offer something that makes your site worth visiting. Content creates repeat visitors, increases their stay, encourages word-of-mouth type promotion and assists in improving a blog's standing with the search engines.

Every link can conceivably serve a traffic producer. If someone finds a link to your blog on another site, they are only one mouse-click away from being part of your traffic. Search engines also assess the number and quality of links to your blog. They regard sites that are linked to frequently as authoritative and reward them with higher placement in search engine results.

So, if you want traffic to your blog, you need to do two things: Provide content and acquire links. This ebook is designed to show you some great ways of doing both. The end result should be higher traffic numbers for your blog.

CONTENT

OVERVIEW

A blog is nothing more than a vessel into which we place content. Content refers to the materials presented in the blog. Content is so critical to the success of a blog, that we are going to address it first and look at it in isolation from all of the other traffic-producing strategies you can implement. Although there are blogs dedicated to podcasting, video casting and photography, this ebook will operate from the assumption that the bulk of your blog's content will consist of text.

The subject matter of your writing can be critical to your blog's traffic potential. The quality of your writing, the uniqueness of your perspective, the frequency with which you add content to the blog and the way the content is presented will also make a difference.

SUBJECT MATTER

Blogs that tackle a specific and limited range of concerns generally tend to outdraw those with a more scattered approach. Blogging within a particular niche is usually the best way to experience success. However, there are limits to specificity. If one chooses a subject area that is too limited, the potentiality for high-volume traffic is reduced. Alternatively, if one opts to blog in a well-covered subject matter they risk getting lost in the shuffle and not finding a regular readership.

There is no secret formula that will yield the perfect niche for your blog. There are, however, some guidelines you can follow when selecting a blog topic that will help lead you to a choice that has good traffic potential.

First, remember that you will be revisiting, updating, tweaking and researching the topic of your blog for as long as you decide to maintain it. Thus, it makes a great deal of sense to choose a subject matter in which you have a keen interest and a developed knowledge base. You may discover that there are a lot of people looking for information on widgets and that there are few great sources for that information online. However, if you don't know a lot about

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widgets and find them a complete bore, you will probably have a hard time maintaining the site over the long run.

Second, remember that there are two different factors you must consider when trying to choose a topic with real traffic potential. You will want to write about something in which others are interested. There must be a group of people out there who are regularly looking for information on your topic. That is a necessary factor. However, you must also consider how many other sources of information are out there already. It can be very tough to break out in a competitive field.

You can get an idea of the competition and interest levels by using any of a number of freely available online tools. One tool I have found to be invaluable and easy to use is Nichebot at <http://www.nichebot.com>. It operates almost like a search engine: you type in the word or string in which you are interested and it then supplies you with a breakdown of how many people are searching for that phrase (and related phrases) every month. It then provides you with an indication of how many sites online contain the words in your search phrase. It even goes so far as to express the ratio of sites to searchers, making determinations of a niche's viability relatively simple. Nichebot offers some additional tools that can make subject selection easier.

Ideally, you will find a hot topic with little competition. However, that is far easier said than done! One could spend days plugging possible subjects into Nichebot without finding a wildly underserved group of searchers for a topic in which the blogger has an interest. However, it does a great job of letting one know what they might be up against in terms of competition and occasionally you can discover some very interesting gaps in the information market.

Third, remember that although finding an underserved niche will make your life easier, it is not necessarily a requirement for success. There are some people who will tell you that operating in a competitive sector is great. After all, you know in advance that there are hordes of potential visitors on a hot topic. All you have to do is give them a reason to come to you instead of others. That is, of course, easier said than done. However, if you are up for a challenge and believe you can offer something that will truly separate you from the rest; you may consider blogging in a competitive field.

QUALITY & UNIQUENESS

There are many things you can do to produce content that really have no direct relationship to the quality of your blog, and you should consider pursuing them. However, nothing will turn a blog into a success like high quality content.

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Good content creates a readership. Those repeat visitors can be the lifeblood of a successful blog. Additionally, other people who operate blogs notice good content and web sites and they will often link back to your quality posts. This creates a direct traffic stream from those links, as well as adding to your total cache of backlinks, which can help in search engine results.

People will come back to a site they know provides grade-A information or that touches them in some way. Humor sites that are not funny do not get repeat visitors. Sites about technological advances that contain inaccuracies do not develop a readership. Blogs that are littered with grammatical and spelling errors seldom generate massive traffic.

Effective writing is key to a successful blog. It is beyond the scope of this ebook to outline what makes a writer entertaining or informative. Most of us, fortunately, have an idea of what separates the good from the bad. Writing effectively may take more time and effort than simply spewing forth a few posts to your blog, but the end result is worth the extra energy.

In addition to writing well, you should strive to produce unique content that will distinguish your blog from others. This includes choosing topics that are interesting, opinions that are compelling, and doing whatever else is necessary to capture and hold a reader's interest. You need to give people a reason to choose your blog over others in the same field. You must provide them with something they cannot get elsewhere.

This raises the subject of re-blogging. Re-blogging occurs when a blogger provides a synopsis of what someone else has written (perhaps even with an excerpt) and then adds a small amount of personal commentary. Re-blogging can be effective in two circumstances. If your blog is operating primarily as a news aggregator and a means of providing readers with an edited compendium of potential items of interest, it is a natural fit. Second, if your commentary somehow illuminates or provides an interesting twist to the original content it can also be effective. Too often, however, reblogging is nothing more than repetition of what could be found elsewhere and fails to impress readers.

Instead of relying upon re-blogging, a successful blogger will generally try to stay on top of his or her chosen field and will become the initial source of exciting information and opinion. It is fine to share the remarkable work of others--making sure that information gets out to everyone is one of the great things you can do with a blog--but it is even better if you can make yourself into a primary source of quality, unique content.

UPDATING CONTENT

People like new information. If they are interested in your topic, they want to see more information about it as often as possible. Search engines mimic people in that regard. They absolutely adore frequently updated sites. They reward blogs that provide frequent updates with better locations in search results. Providing regular content is one of the best ways to appeal both to your human readers and the search engine robots that will lead even more real people to your blog.

There is no magic number of posts per week you must add to your blog. However, the general rule of thumb is that more is better. Some bloggers will update their blog several times per day. Others will provide one weekly update.

Finding the right patterns will be a byproduct of experimentation, combined with your own personal time limitations and interest levels. I personally recommend updating a blog at least a few times per week. If you can update more frequently, do so. However, make sure these updates offer something of value. Writing for the sake of writing may help with respect to fooling search engine spiders, but it will undoubtedly antagonize real readers so much as to render the strategy useless.

Those who make a living online will tell you that “content is king.” Content is what brings people to any site. It is what keeps them there, too. It is also the favorite discover of every search engine spider. The more content you have, the better off you are going to be.

Some niches may be so underserved that a blog can continue to successfully generate traffic with infrequent updates. However, more competitive fields will require more and more content to stay afloat.

Updates can vary in length. Generally speaking, however, extremely short posts will have less value (both to the search engines and readers) than more involved writing. However, the desire to provide more lengthy and meaningful posts will need to be balanced against usability considerations, which we will discuss later. Many will argue that content additions that “weigh in” between 250-600 words are optimal.

KEYWORDS & CONTENT

Search engines operate on keywords. Put simply, keywords are the words for which people are searching. By making sure you use these keywords in your content, you are more likely to be discovered.

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Thus, you can produce some pretty remarkable traffic jumps by using the keyword phrases people are typing into Google. This is obvious, but it does bring up a few interesting questions.

How do I find which keywords are popular for searches in my niche? There are a variety of free online tools available to help with keyword research. Earlier, we mentioned Nichebot, which does an admirable job of showing what phrases and keywords are in “high demand.” A quick Google search for “keyword finder” and other similar phrases should provide you with some other options. There are paid services, like WordTracker, that also assist in keyword research, but free options remain available.

How should I use the keywords once I have found them? This is a subject of some debate. The question about how many times keywords should appear in order to trigger a positive response from search engines is a constant topic of argument in the search engine optimization field. Some will argue that a keyword should be used enough to comprise 3-5% of the total text in any post.

Others will argue that a higher density is necessary. Some will maintain that keyword density is not as important as producing content that contains the keyword and related relevant terms.

There are a few ways of making sure your content does its job when it comes to keywords. One is to carefully monitor your use and to write posts around popular keywords related to your topic. Another is simply to focus on turning out good, relevant content and assuming the volume of your output and its overall quality will produce desired keyword results. Generally speaking, the best strategy for most bloggers probably lies somewhere in the middle of those extremes. By producing content with an understanding of keywords while not compromising its integrity in an effort to stuff every post with popular search terms, one can usually be relatively successful.

One should strive to make use of their primary keywords in the titles of their blog’s posts. They should also attempt to use those words and phrases, along with keywords of secondary importance within the posts themselves. There are free keyword analyzers available online that will give you breakdowns of keyword density for your posts. It makes sense to check your work against these at least occasionally to make sure your content is working its hardest to get you that coveted search engine traffic.

One should beware of overusing keywords. Search engines grow smarter all the time, and the days when one could get real results by stuffing keywords onto a page without rhyme or reason are gone. Remember that the search engine algorithms are designed to reward sites that are using keywords in a valuable

context. They are able to discern that an endless stream of keywords is probably nothing more than an effort to fool their robots.

CONTROVERSY

Nothing gets noticed quite like the controversial. If you are looking for a way to get some attention (and, thus, traffic), it is possible to do so by taking controversial stands on issues related to your topic. This can get you noticed in a hurry!

However, utilizing controversy as a means of generating traffic is not usually a reasonable long-term strategy. First, how controversial can you be on a regular basis? If your blog's success is based upon your willingness to take outlandish or controversial positions, you will put yourself in a position where you are forced to either constantly one-up yourself or becoming boring by comparison.

Second, intentionally taking a non-mainstream perspective just to get some attention risks alienating a portion of your potential audience. You want traffic, but you would probably prefer that not all of it came from people who want to argue with you! If you have a strongly held position that might create some controversy, don't feel as though you have to hold back. Self-expression, after all, is what blogs are all about. However, you probably should not fall into the rut of using wild claims or inflaming rhetoric to drive traffic to your blog. Instead, concentrate on authoring relevant, quality, thought-provoking content.

CONTENT USABILITY

Usability, as it relates to online endeavors, can involve everything from site structure to color choices. With respect to written content, we will primarily be concerned with constructing posts that comport with readers' preferences and expectations for written materials.

Internet readers tend to be "scanners." They generally scan a page or post and then make a determination as to whether or not to invest more time and effort in reading the material carefully. If their scan does not provide them with something to grab their attention and interest, they are more likely to click away than they are to continue reading.

Thus, content should be offered in a way that is easy for users to scan. It should also be provided in a way that encourages online reading. What does this mean in terms of practical considerations?

One should offer text in a size that is easily read. They should also offer content in the form of shorter paragraphs and make use of “white space” to make scanning easier. Long paragraphs are not as well-received as shorter ones.

The choice of a font should be based on readability rather than on whether or not one feels it possesses some greater aesthetic value.

Content usability is important and any blogger truly interested in maximizing the comfort and value of the user’s experience. That attention to detail can increase repeat visitation and total page views.

BONUS TIPS

1. Show Off! Although your blogging software will archive your old posts, they probably won’t be seen by visitors who didn’t find them via a search engine. That might be fine in some cases, but occasionally you will have written a real gem that you would love to keep right up in front for all to see. If you want to encourage visitors to take a longer look at your blog (and to keep coming back for more), consider creating a blog “highlight reel” on your blog’s sidebar. You can provide a few links directly to some of your best work and maybe even provide a tempting excerpt along with the link.

2. Write it down! Writers are often in the habit of having a notepad and pen around at all times. It’s a good idea for a blogger, too. Frequent updates are important for a blog’s traffic success, and there is nothing more frustrating than experiencing a case of “blogger’s block” when you sit down in front of the keyboard. If you have an idea for a great post, make a note of it somewhere. If you don’t, you are sure to forget the idea when the time comes to add more content to your blog.

GETTING INTO THE SEARCH ENGINES

OVERVIEW

In order for your blog to come up in search engine results, the search engine must know it exists. Getting discovered, and indexed, by search engines is a critical first step to securing search engine traffic.

Contrary to the beliefs held by some, a search engine cannot simply “find” your blog on its own. It must be led to the blog in some fashion. There are two general ways by which this can happen. You can either tell the search engine about your blog, or you can devise a means by which it will find you.

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At first glance, it seems like just telling the search engine would be the optimal solution. At one time, this strategy was the easiest way of getting indexed. However, it is no longer the best way to go about things.

You can directly submit your blog to Google, for instance. However, it may take the search engine months to get around to your request. At some point, in frustration, you might be led to submit the information again. There are fairly credible reports that frequent submission of a blog directly to the search engine may actually lead to a penalty. They would prefer to find you all by themselves. I have personally not noticed any problems with direct submission to MSN's search engine. However, considering the variety of ways by which one can be found without utilizing direct submission, it does not seem necessary to tip off MSN in that manner.

WAYS TO BE DISCOVERED

All it requires for a search engine to find you is a link to your blog on another site. Eventually, the search engines will spider that link and discover the blog. You can increase the likelihood of being found quickly by getting multiple links for your site out there and by trying to get links that are likely to be spidered quickly.

Large, popular sites are frequently spidered and a link on a site of this sort can lead to your blog's inclusion in the search engines relatively quickly. A link from a frequently indexed site could lead to your blog's discovery within as little as a day.

Any of the link-building strategies mentioned in this ebook can be used to lead the search engine to your blog. Things like link trades, sigging, articles and directory listings can do the trick.

Remember, building these links not only encourages necessary indexing, it also serves as a way of improving long-term traffic, as every link can be helpful.

LESSER SEARCH ENGINES

Right now, the search engine field is dominated by three players: Google, MSN and Yahoo. These are the three search engines that matter and care must be taken to make sure all three index your blog. There are, however, other search engines out there. Some are rarely used relics that have managed to hold onto a small chunk of cyberspace. Others are paid-for-inclusion engines that are little more than ways to separate a blog owner from his or her money.

None of these smaller search engines will produce a great deal of traffic. However, it is often very easy to submit to the free search engines. Additionally, there is some information to suggest that inclusion on a lesser engine may lead to inclusion on a bigger one. There is very little harm in direct submission to smaller search engines. It is unlikely to be a huge manufacturer of traffic, but it takes so little time that you may want to consider it. Just use one of the popular search engines to search for other search engines. Then, visit a few of these places and look into submitting your site.

BLOG SEARCH ENGINES

The tactics mentioned above apply to websites of any sort. As a blogger, you can make use of them. However, the growth of blogging has led to the creation of blog-only search engines. You would be remiss if you did not submit your blog to these engines.

A simple Google search for the phrase “blog search engine” will yield many additional opportunities to get your blog noticed. Realize that often the terms “blog search engine” and “blog directory” are used almost interchangeably and can overlap a great deal. Information about many blog directories that also have search functions is included in the “Directories” portion of this ebook.

There is at least one blog search engines that warrant additional discussion-- Technorati, which can be found at <http://www.technorati.com>. Technorati is a widely used blog search engine. Getting your blog listed at Technorati can increase your traffic more than most other blog search engines. Technorati also supports a tagging function whereby you can “tag” your posts with descriptive keywords making them easier for other Technorati users to find.

There is some debate over the value of Technorati in terms of traffic and with respect to some customer service issues the site apparently experiences. However, serious bloggers would be remiss if they did not take a long look at Technorati and consider making it part of their traffic creation arsenal.

There are other services offering a tagging function that seem to be developing an avid following and may be worth investigation. These include FURL and Del.icio.us.

BONUS TIPS

1. Patience is a virtue! It can sometimes take a little bit of time before the major search engines cozy up to your blog. Don't be offended or too frustrated. Continue working on your blog and following other traffic generation methods.

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The nice thing about the content tactics covered here are that they are all mutually reinforcing. If a long period passes, go back and check your work. But don't get frustrated too early.

2. Don't become too Google obsessed! Google is the biggest search engine player, but the other two can drive a lot of traffic to your blog. There are entire communities dedicating to dissecting Google and its algorithms. Google often befuddles even the most veteran search engine optimization experts. If you want to crack the top 10 in Google, it might require a great deal of work--probably a disproportionate effort for most hobbyist bloggers. You want Google traffic, but it is usually not worth developing an obsession to obtain it.

TRADITIONAL LINK-BUILDING

OVERVIEW

There are a variety of specific tactics one can use to create links to their blogs. Many of those strategies are outlined in this ebook. However, despite the power of articles, signing and other strategies, one must still consider some of the traditional means by which they can acquire links.

Links are half of the traffic battle. By taking advantage of some tried and true link building strategies, you can really help your cause.

LINK TRADES

This is one of the original free link-building techniques. You find a site that compliments your own in terms of content and you then send the webmaster or blogger an email inquiring about trading links.

The upside is that it is completely free and can create an opportunity for cooperative and interesting interaction with someone who shares your interest.

The downside is that the success rate is pretty low. Some people will even recommend avoiding this tactic altogether, because you are likely to be ignored more often than a trade occurs.

Trades can be tough because no one likes the idea of linking to a potential competition. Additionally, if you are operating a fledgling blog, you probably have far less to offer your trading partner than they have to offer you. There are also legitimate concerns about honesty in link trading. Many people have been known to agree to link trades only to never put up the reciprocal link or to keep it there only until you have verified its presence.

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In some circumstances, however, a link trade can be a good decision. If you find a site that seems like a natural companion to your blog, it is worth floating an offer.

FREE LINKS

There are many sites that will accept and list links without any obligation or only with the requirement of a link back to them. These sites can be a great way to building your backlink totals. Note that this strategy is not particularly different than the link exchanges noted above. However, these processes tend to be automated and are generally more reliable. Nonetheless, one must be aware of the possibility of getting a raw deal.

Screen these options carefully, however. There is little value in a link from a disjointed “free for all” site. Additionally, your blog could be penalized if you reciprocate with a link to a bad neighborhood. Instead, stick to sites that are related to your own and that are of a high enough quality that you won’t feel guilty sending your blog’s visitors there.

You can find sites that offer this opportunity by doing a Google search involving your keyword(s) and phrases such as “add a link,” “add your link,” or “add URL.”

Clearly, you want to amass as many links as possible. However, you don’t want to put yourself in a position where you are compelled to offer thousands of backlinks from your blog. First, the design of most blogs is ill-suited for this.

Second, there are concerns about the number of outbound links on your site and how a search engine might perceive them. Finally, there are those will argue that if you have too many outbound leaks, your site could become too “leaky,” leading to visitors wandering from your blog to someone else’s site.

BONUS TIPS

1. Track your trades! Make sure the other side is holding up their end of the bargain. Check your backlinks occasionally and make sure those who are supposed to be offering links to your site are doing so.
2. Ask for anchor text! A link to <http://www.widgetz.com> is fine, but it is not quite as good (in the eyes of the search engines) as a text string stating All of the Best Widgets that serves as a hyperlink to your site. This is called anchor text and it can produce better results than a traditional URL link.

DIRECTORIES

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OVERVIEW

Links are a key to traffic, and one great source of free links is directory submission. You have undoubtedly seen these sites online. They are organized compendiums of websites on a variety of subjects. They feature a brief description of a site and then a link to the site. You can get traffic a few different ways from a directory. There will be those who surf there and click on your link.

You can also get that highly desirable search engine bump from adding to your blog's backlink collection. To make things even more enticing, some of the directories actually have their information "scraped" by a variety of other sites, multiplying the potential value of a link. There are paid directories. They charge a fee (sometimes nominal, sometimes costly) in exchange for listing your site. For our purposes here, we will focus on free directories.

TYPES OF FREE DIRECTORIES

Free directories are those that will list your blog without charging you for the privilege. Their acceptance criteria may vary, and there is no guarantee that a directory will list your site. In most cases, however, inclusion is a very strong likelihood.

Some directories are wide-ranging and contain an immense variety of categories. Others are specific to a certain geographical area or topic niche. Be sure to submit your blog to only those directories that would be interested in your content.

Free directory listings can be completely free without obligation of any sort. Other sites, however, will require a link to the directory placed on your blog. Is the value of the link from the directory worth the hassle of the link from your blog? It depends on the directory. If you are dealing with a directory that is frequently visited and highly regarded by the search engines, it may be worth a link. If it is related to your specific niche and may be of value to your readership, it may also be a good decision. However, there are enough directories that do not require backlinks to justify avoiding many directories requiring reciprocal links.

DMOZ: THE OPEN DIRECTORY PROJECT

The "mother of all directories" is DMOZ. This is a human-edited compendium of web resources with an expansive array of categories and sub-categories.

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DMOZ ostensibly filters out “junk sites” and lists only those pieces of the internet that contain content that meets the varying standards of editors.

DMOZ listings are coveted by many webmasters because Google apparently relies on the listings as one component of its valuation process for sites. A DMOZ listing can also generate some traffic in and of itself.

Getting into DMOZ appears to be deceptively simple. You browse through the categories until you find the one that best matches your blog. You then click on the link for adding a new URL. A few simple questions are asked in a form, which you then submit.

Although the “application procedure” is simple, getting listed is not a piece of cake. The amount of time a category editor will take before getting to your site and looking at it can vary considerably. Some have said that it took several years before DMOZ took a gander at their site.

Even then, inclusion is not guaranteed. The requirements and expectations of editors vary and many seemingly adequate sites have been rejected by DMOZ.

It is worth trying to get into DMOZ. The possible upside is sufficient to warrant a quick application. However, the best advice to bloggers is to submit your blog and then forget it about it. If you get in, that’s great. If not, you are not alone.

FINDING FREE DIRECTORIES

There are literally of thousands of free directories available. Most of them will probably have a category that is related to your blog. There are places online that maintain a list of directories. One example can be found at <http://www.seocompany.ca/directory/free-web-directories.html>, which provides several hundred directories.

New directories are being launched every day. Submitting to a new directory may not produce results on par with using an established directory, but inclusion can be a great deal faster. Additionally, new directories are often excited about adding new listings and are more likely to make free listings available without the requirement for a reciprocal link.

You can find many new directories that are looking for sites by perusing forums populated by people in the online business. The Digital Point Forums, for example, contain an entire forum area dedicated to new directory announcements.

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SUBMITTING TO DIRECTORIES

Most directories make submission intuitive. Generally, you browse the categories until you find the area that is best-suited for your blog. You then click on a visible link to add a new listing. This generally brings you to a form you must complete.

There are certain bits of information you will want to have handy when submitting to directories. You will need to know your site's URL, its title, your email address, and you should have a brief description of your blog (as well as some of its keywords) available. Filling out forms like these can be redundant. As a result, special form submitting software (some of which is freeware) has been created to make the process easier. Those who use Firefox as a browser can also make use of a handy extension that makes completing forms of this sort much faster.

BLOG DIRECTORIES

The directory tips we just covered will work for any site. One of the great advantages to using a blog is that you can make use of these traditional tactics easily and effectively while also benefiting from strategies unique to blogs. An example of this is the blog directory.

Blog directories live up to their name. They are organized directories consisting completely of blogs. They will list your blog under the appropriate categories with a description and other relevant information.

The submission process is similar to that required of other directories. You may be asked to provide the URL for your RSS feed (if available), as well. Often, blog directories request either a link back to the directory or the inclusion of a graphical button on your blog as a precondition for inclusion.

As blogging grows in popularity, these blog directories are becoming important locations for many searchers. Some people rely on these to find timely and interesting information instead of traditional search engines. You cannot afford to overlook listing your site on some of the more popular blog directories.

You can find lists of blog directories in many places, or you can simply search for blog directories using your favorite search engine. One good list of directories can be found at <http://www.toprankresults.com/blog-submit-list.htm>.

Some of the blog directories also attempt to double as active blogger communities. Thus, in some cases it may be necessary to create a membership to the site first. This is generally a quick and easy process.

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PINGING BLOG DIRECTORIES

The ping is another unique tool for blogs that enables you to notify blog directories that your site has been updated. A ping is nothing more than a quick transmission to the blog directory, notifying them that there is new content.

These pings can send you to the top of the “updated blogs” lists, improve your visibility and increase traffic. It has also been shown that pinging can alert spiders from search engines to check out your site for updates and indexing.

Pinging should be done every time new content is added to your blog. However, if you are adding several posts in rapid succession, you may want to either ping only once or spread out your posts over a longer period of time. Many directories and blog services do not look at over-pinging favorably.

The easiest way to ping directories is through the use of an automated tool. There are two popular ping devices you can access that will notify a host of services every time you have made an update. The more venerable of the two is Ping-o-Matic which can be found at <http://www.pingomatic.com>. A newer entry into the free ping tool category is Pingoat. Pingoat operates a bit more quickly and seems to service more directories. It can be found at <http://www.pingoat.com>.

BONUS TIPS

1. Break it into Pieces! There are so many directories that you might want to make directory submission an ongoing process. You can add your blog to a few directories each day in your spare time. The cumulative effect will be significant!
2. Write a good description! When describing your blog, make it an attractive and interesting possibility for a reader. You also want to make sure your description contains keywords related to your site. Most directories want legitimate, accurate descriptions. Avoid superlatives and “advertising” rhetoric when writing your description.

ARTICLES

OVERVIEW

Article distribution has grown into one of the web’s most popular viral marketing strategies for sites of all types. Although many bloggers are not acquainted with this technique, they benefit as much from it as can any other site. Promoting with articles not only creates a direct stream of traffic from your article, it also

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enhances your backlink totals, making your blog even more attractive to the search engines.

The underlying idea of this strategy is relatively simple. You write an article (preferably something directly related to the subject matter of your blog). You then make the article available to others free via one or more article repository sites. Webmasters looking for content for their sites find your article at the repository and then use it on sites they own. The article contains a “resource box” that includes a little information about you and a link back to your blog. Thus, every time the article is used, another link back to your blog is generated.

The unquenchable thirst for valuable content makes this technique a real winner. A single article on a hot topic may eventually find its way onto scores of other websites. Each time that article is used, your traffic potential is enhanced.

Surfers who find and read the article may be inspired to stop by the source’s blog for more quality information. Search engines, meanwhile, will notice the links and make note of them, increasing the standing of your blog in terms of search results.

WRITING AN ARTICLE

One can write articles from scratch on topics related to their blog’s subject or they can produce articles based on posts already placed on the blog.

In order to avoid any potential risk of a duplicate content penalty from Google or other search engines, it is generally a good idea to produce an article that is not merely a word-by-word reproduction of an existing post. The risk of experiencing problems is minimal and could only occur in some fairly specific circumstances, but the ease with which a post can be modified while turning it into an article is slight enough to justify taking a little extra care.

Remember, although the articles will serve as a form of advertisement for your blog, they should be informative and compelling pieces, not just a direct pitch for visitors to stop by! Ideally, your article will serve to show off some of your better writing and insight and will persuade readers to take a look at what else you have to offer. Well-written pieces are also more likely to be nabbed by webmasters on the hunt for free content.

Ideally, articles used for this strategy should be somewhere in the neighborhood of 400 to 700 words.

WRITING THE RESOURCE BOX

The resource box will contain whatever biographical information you would like to impart, along with a note about your blog and its URL. It is critical to make sure your site's address is included in the resource box--that is how others will find their way from your article to your blog.

Most article repositories will have a size limitation on the resource box in order to prevent people from writing advertising copy for their site or blog. Be prepared to provide a brief synopsis of who you are and what your blog does in the resource box.

Optimally, your resource box will contain your name, a brief observation or two about your experience or expertise in the field under consideration, a note that you operate a blog (make sure to include the blog's title), and a link to the blog. There is no need for superfluous information. Your goal is to put a "face" on the well-written article you have provided. If your article is effective, the end result will be success. If the article is miserable, no amount of hyperbole in a resource box will help you.

SUBMITTING THE ARTICLE

There are scores of sites that will accept your article. A quick Google search of "submit articles" or even "free articles" will give you a variety of options.

Many sites limit acceptance to articles on a particular theme. For instance, there are many business-related article repository sites. These sites will not be interested in your article about dog grooming, no matter how often you send it their way! Only submit articles to sites that are a good match for your article's content.

Some sites will allow you to instantly submit an article using an online form. Others may require you first create a free author's membership. This is a relatively quick and painless process. Since you will be promoting your blog with some regularity via the use of articles, it is worth setting up these accounts at some of the higher profile article sites.

When submitting your article, make sure it is consistent with all requirements. Some sites have different rules about the inclusion of HTML in an article, for instance. Also make sure your resource box is properly formatted and that you will end up with a "live link" back to your blog upon completion.

REPETITION

Increasing traffic via the submission of articles is a great way to give your blog a boost. One great aspect of this traffic-generation technique is that it is not merely a one-shot proposition. You can repeat the process as often as you would like, simply by writing a new article.

Some bloggers will author a new article monthly. Others weekly. Some will just do it when the mood strikes them. Every new article sent out into cyberspace, however, has the potential of creating a flood of links back to your site, as well as convincing some article readers to visit.

Thus, it should be repeated whenever it is feasibly possible. Additionally, the process becomes a bit faster each time it is undertaken. You will have author accounts established.

You can also maintain a list of the article submission sites you use, making it easy to find and access them. Articles are an amazing way to create free links back to your site. Links, as noted, are one of the key components to traffic success vis-à-vis search engines.

This is a powerful strategy and is one that is too often overlooked by bloggers.

BONUS TIPS:

1. Hot Topics! Your article is likely to find a home on more websites and to attract more interest if it provides information about a red-hot topic. If there is some aspect of your subject matter that is of particular interest, consider authoring an article on that topic.
2. Consider Automation! There are products available that will allow you to submit your articles to hundreds of article repositories automatically. They decrease the amount of time required to effectively implement an article distribution strategy. These tools may be a wonderful fit for a blogger who is really interested in driving a great deal of traffic to a blog on a very competitive subject matter. There is a cost involved and there are some concerns about the efficacy of automatic submission, but it is worth investigation if you are ready to take your article distribution plan to “the next level.”

TRAFFIC EXCHANGES

OVERVIEW

There are a variety of traffic exchange sites online that are willing to send visitors to you in exchange for you checking out other members' blogs. Basically, you visit someone else's blog and earn credits that can then be "cashed in." The site then directs other traffic exchange members to your blog, where they earn credits.

Usually, the exchange works on a two to one ratio. For every two blogs you visit, the exchange program will send one to your blog. Occasionally, you may be given random "bonus credits" that improve the ratio somewhat. Some exchange programs also allow you to use the credits you have earned to place banner advertisements for your blog on the site.

Most exchange programs are easy to use and do require that visitors spend a minimum amount of time at your blog in order to earn credits.

TRAFFIC EXCHANGE VALUE

No one will charge you a penny for participating in a traffic exchange. The programs are invariably free of charge. All that is required of you is your time surfing. Thus, the question you need to be asking is whether a minute of your time is worth a traffic exchange visitor to your blog.

If you enjoy looking at other blogs on a variety of subject, it may be a justifiable expenditure of time. After all, you would probably be doing it anyway, so you might as well get some free benefit out of it. However, if you wouldn't be checking out others' blogs otherwise, it may not make a great deal of sense to participate in a traffic exchange.

This is primarily because the quality of traffic you get from exchange programs is limited. Most participants are involved simply because they, like you, want to drive traffic to their blog. They are not really particularly interested in your blog or what you have to say. They may not pay much attention to what you offer on your blog. Instead, they will simply stay there for a few moments (as required to earn their credit) and will then click on to the next blog. You will get traffic. You won't get targeted traffic.

Now, if your blog is truly spectacular, you might be able to grab the attention of some of the exchange program members. You may also encounter some members who are genuinely interested in your blog. However, the overall quality of traffic exchange visitors is not what you might be hoping for.

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FINDING TRAFFIC EXCHANGES

There are numerous exchanges, each offering some slightly different twist on the same overall theme. They can be found easily. A simple Google search of “blog traffic exchange” will bring most of the major players in the field to your immediate attention.

BONUS TIPS

1. Don't participate as a key part of your strategy! The only time participation in a traffic exchange program makes good sense is if you are going to be cruising around the blogosphere anyway. There are plenty of things you can do with the time you have set aside for blog marketing that will produce longer-lasting and more beneficial results. However, if you are going to be checking out blogs for fun anyway, a traffic exchange program is a nice way of getting something for your time.
2. Don't let the numbers fool you! Even though participation in a traffic exchange program can get you a slew of visitors, you should realize that many of those directed to your blog probably didn't pay a great deal of attention to it. Building large traffic numbers is wonderful, but it is only meaningful if the people who took a look did so for some reason other than building traffic exchange credits.

RSS FEEDS

OVERVIEW

RSS, or Really Simple Syndication (sometimes referred to as Rich Site Summary) is a means by which blogs can broadcast their content to a number of services and individuals easily. Some have gone so far as to argue that RSS is one of the chief reasons why blogging holds so much potential.

An RSS feed collects the content of your post (depending on your software, you can opt to syndicate the entire post, just a headline, or some other combination) and then sends it in readable, plain text, to any of the targets you might choose.

Bloggers often submit their RSS feeds to popular blog directories, RSS directories and search engines. Users can then find the feeds in which they are interested and “subscribe to them,” reading them with an RSS feed reader. They may also simply read your feed and then hop on over to your site.

RSS feeds are a great way of promoting your blog. There is also some evidence to suggest that RSS feeds can serve to boost the results of your blog in search

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engine rankings. They are also a wonderful way of getting noticed by at least one of the major search engines.

CREATING AN RSS FEED

Your blogging software will probably handle the process of creating an RSS feed for your blog automatically. For instance, those blogging at Blogger.com are automatically “given” an RSS feed (in Atom format) that they can burn and use. Other blogging services provide RSS feeds, as well.

If your blog service provider or software doesn’t automatically create an RSS feed for your blog, you can build one yourself. Those experienced with HTML may want to hand-code their RSS feed. Those of us who prefer a quicker solution can choose from a variety of software tools (many of which are freeware) to accomplish the goal.

SUBMITTING YOUR RSS FEED

Having a feed will not do you much good if no one reads it! Thus, you must share your RSS feed with others. This can be done, in large measure, by using one of the multiple site ping services mentioned earlier. Pingoat, for instance, will request your RSS feed and will transmit it to a number of sites that aggregate these feeds.

You can also opt to submit your feed to any number of other RSS aggregators. A relatively long list of options, for instance, is currently available at <http://www.rss-specifications.com/rss-submission.htm>.

A great place to manage your RSS feed needs is at Feedburner, which can be found at <http://www.feedburner.com>. This free service provides you with a number of tools that can make sharing your RSS feed easier and more effective.

It also offers free circulation traffic (just in case you want to know how many people are tracking your feed) and a lot of handy ways to help other subscribe to your feed.

RSS FEEDS AS A WAY INTO YAHOO

There is a now well-known technique that may enable your site to be discovered and indexed by the Yahoo search engine in record time. This technique makes use of your RSS feed and is a relatively simple thing to do.

You must have a free Yahoo account in order to do this. Create an account if you do not already have one. The sign up procedure is fast and simple.

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After logging into your Yahoo account, go to the “My Yahoo” page. There you will find an option to add content to your page. You can add content in the form of your blog’s RSS feed. It is a simple and intuitive process that will only require you to have the URL of your RSS feed (which is easily locatable via your blogging software or service).

Once you add your RSS feed to your content page, Yahoo will track the RSS feed in order to keep your page updated with developments. As a result, you have instructed Yahoo to find and note changes made to your blog.

This strategy has successfully allowed many blogs to find their way into Yahoo results in record time. It has been referred to as the Yahoo backdoor and is now a practice commonly used when launching a new blog. With greater use by more people, its effectiveness may have diminished somewhat (especially in terms of search engine results), but it still is the fastest way to crack into any of the big three search engines.

BONUS TIPS

1. Don’t forget to update! Make sure you remember to either ping using a mass-ping service or to manually alert RSS aggregators about your feed every time you update. Otherwise, you are losing some of the potential value of the feed.
2. Make your feed a moneymaker! Some bloggers who are particularly interested in making their blog pay may want to consider using their RSS feed as a vehicle for advertising. Google’s AdSense program has operated a program to allow some AdSense publishers place ads in their feeds and other means of feed advertising are growing.

COMMUNITY

OVERVIEW

Blogs are a magnet for traffic, in many ways. Initially, their very structure and layout tend to be conducive to good results in the search engines. The constantly-updating nature of a blog intensifies that effect. Blogs have another traffic advantage that traditional sites are largely lacking. There is a vibrant and active blogging community that can also help you spur traffic.

COMMENTING

One of the best ways to get others to find your blog is by visiting theirs and leaving comments about their posts and observations. Blogs are often something akin to mini-online communities and comments play a large role in the communicative function of blogs. Bloggers tend to check the blogs of those who have visited and you can develop some regular readers simply by making comments on other blogs.

In many cases, you can leave the URL of your blog in the comments, making it easy for all of that blog's readers to find you, too.

Trackbacks, which are means by which one blog notifies another of a visit and or comment, can also be used for this purpose. Not all blogging platforms support track backs, but if yours does, you should avail yourself of the opportunity to use them.

The fact that links could be left behind in blog comments led some people to use this as a strategy for increasing their total number of backlinks in order to help with search engine placement. They would leave comments of a suspect nature (or even, in some cases, complete gibberish) along with an address simply to claim the backlink. Blogging services recognized this growing comment spam problem and have taken actions to minimize its effectiveness.

These safeguards include a "no follow" HTML tag that makes the link meaningless in terms of search engines. Some bloggers and services also require users to manually type in a code when commenting, freezing out automated blog spamming attempts and making the process of comment spamming less attractive.

Comment spam still exists, and it is a hated commodity in the blogging community. Thus, if you are commenting on other blogs, please make sure your contribution is legitimate and thoughtful. Feel free to provide your URL, but don't turn your comment into mere advertising for your blog.

BLOGROLLING

A blogroll is a list of links to other blogs. They can often be found on the sidebars of some blogs and are a way of telling readers what other blogs they may find of interest. Bloggers are notoriously generous about putting other bloggers on their blogrolls and it can be a great way of increasing the links to your blog and direct traffic, too.

Not all blogging platforms support a blogroll, per se. However, any blogger can add links to other blogs and sites of interest on their own blog. Sometimes this

is done as a link exchange, sometimes it is simply done because one writer finds another's site valuable.

Feel free to add other legitimately interesting blogs to your blogroll. If you add a blog, you might want to notify the other blogger. In many cases, they will reciprocate. You don't want to minimize the value of your blogroll or to direct your readers to poor sites, so don't pollute your list with a series of sub-par blogs simply in hopes of generating backlinks.

ALLOWING COMMENTS

In most cases, a blogger is well-advised to allow comments from others. This inspires the sense of interactivity and community that makes blogging so attractive.

You may have to deal with blog comment spam as a result of your willingness to accept comments. This can be a hassle, but most providers offer tools to help you combat the comment spam. If you can do a word or code verification, it will filter out most comment spam. You can also choose to moderate your comments, which means you will have to personally approve them in order for them to appear. This may sound like a good idea, but it can be a really time-consuming process if your blog develops a "talkative" readership. It can also slow down the commenting conversation, which runs contrary to your objectives.

Keep your blog an open forum. Allow as much interaction as possible. This makes your blog more interesting and gives you a great chance to interact with your readership. You can learn a lot about what people are interested in and how to improve your blog by reading the comments left by others.

BONUS TIPS

1. Be an active participant in the blogging community! Find some blogs on your topic that you enjoy and read them regularly. Comment when you feel you have something valuable to add to the conversation. This can inspire others to find you--and they are the kind of targeted traffic you really crave.

2. Engage your readers! When you find comments on your blog, respond to them. Keep the dialog going. Blogs are loved by many because of their interactive nature. If you can make your comment sections lively and interesting it will make for a better blog--and more traffic.

FORUMS

OVERVIEW

Online message boards and forums are a great way to socialize and learn. They are also a neat way to promote your blog. There are forums devoted to almost every topic, and with very little research you are sure to find an active community of people interested in the subject matter of your blog. They can be a great place to interact, to refine ideas that may later become staples of your blog, and to enjoy yourself.

Most forums allow participants to have a “signature” attached to their comments. A signature usually consists of a name and a few lines of additional information about the commenter. These signatures can be a great way to let the world know about your blog.

The term “sigging” refers to using your forum signature as a promotional tool.

WRITING YOUR SIGNATURE

You want to use your signature as a means of promoting your blog, but you don’t necessarily want to convert into a block of advertising space. Subtlety is a good idea! Include your name and a link to your blog with a brief description.

Signatures are usually authored via a control panel at the forum. It is worth noting that most signatures will not be written in plain text or in traditional HTML. BB Code and other similar styles will be used. Invariably, the forum will offer a quick guide to the code so that you can construct a signature easily. It is important to make sure you have done this correctly--you want to be sure to have created a “live link” for your site.

USING YOUR SIGNATURE

Your signature will automatically attach yourself to all of your forum posts, assuming you have your settings correct (check your settings at the control panel to be sure).

Resist the urge to post a series of “me, too” responses to threads in an effort to get your signature out there. Forums succeed because users impart real information and opinion. Make yourself into a valuable contributor and it will, in turn, make people more interested in pursuing the link in your signature.

Active participation in forums can be a surprisingly effective way to generate traffic. Not only will other forum readers check out your blog, you will also find

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that search engines will spider forums and collect your link, adding to your total backlink numbers.

BONUS TIPS

1. Use forums to your advantage! Don't just look at forums as a means by which to promote your blog--use them as a community and learning tool. There is a lot of great information and expertise being shared in forums and you can benefit as much from that as you can from the increased exposure for your blog.
2. Choose strong forums! If you are going to make use of a few forums in your "sigging" and learning strategy, choose well-populated and vibrant communities. Check to see how often new posts are being made and how many people tend to be at the forum. You have a limited amount of time, so you should spend it in areas that will do you the most good.

ADDING IT UP

OVERVIEW

A counter of some sort is a necessity for your blog. It will allow you to monitor your traffic, to determine its sources, and will provide you with information that can help you to improve your blog to produce even more traffic.

GETTING A COUNTER

This ebook focuses on free traffic production strategies, so we are only going to address free counters and stat services. If you are running your own blog on a domain you own, your host may provide you with tracking tools you can easily use. These tend to be more comprehensive than those offered by free services and should be used when possible.

Free counters are readily available. Sitemeter is a popular source for free counters. You can find them at <http://www.sitemeter.com>. Sitemeter counters will let you know how many visitors you are getting, where they are coming from and other critical information. There is an additional data available to those willing to pay for an upgrade in service, but for many bloggers the basic free package will suffice.

Signing up for a free counter is an easy process at Sitemeter and most other free counter sites. Placing the counter on your site may require some manipulation of your template and will require that you copy the HTML code

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provided by the counter service into your template. Sitemeter, for instance, offers very simple directions on doing this for a variety of blogger sites. Those more experienced with HTML will be able to add the counter in a matter of moments.

USING YOUR COUNTER

The first use of your counter is simply to monitor your traffic. You will be able to find out how many people are visiting your blog, when they are coming and from where they are coming. Raw traffic numbers help you to determine whether your traffic building efforts are succeeding.

A second use for counters is to learn a bit about how people are finding you. For instance, if you check the referrers for your traffic using your counter service, you may discover that very few visitors are coming from one search engine while others are coming in droves from another. This will give you an idea of where you need to better concentrate your efforts.

Additionally, the referrer logs will often tell you what people were searching for when they found your site. This can be very valuable information. If you notice an influx of people searching around a particular phrase, you may want to make sure to construct a post on that subject, for instance. It will also give you an idea of whether or not the people who are visiting your site are actually finding what the things for which they were looking.

Getting traffic is great, but it is even better when you know it's happening. If you operate without a functioning counter, you will have no way of knowing whether or not your traffic-building efforts are paying off.

BONUS TIPS

1. Don't count yourself! If you are frequently checking out your own blog, be certain that you take that into account when interpreting your statistics. This often occurs early in the lifespan of a blog when you are tweaking the layout, etc.
2. Look at page views! The number of people who come by your blog is important, but the amount of time they spend there and the number of different pages and entries they read will give you a really good indication of whether or not they are responding well to what you have to offer. Generally speaking, those blogs that post good page view and time numbers tend to have more repeat visitors.

DISCLAIMER

The techniques outlined in this ebook are designed to increase traffic levels to virtually any blog. However, it should be noted that the author makes no guarantee or warranty regarding the levels of traffic that will be produced as a byproduct of these suggestions. Traffic levels are influenced by a plethora of variables, and exact predictions are an impossibility. All of the methods of traffic generation outlined in this ebook are believed to be efficacious, legal and without risk to any user. The author, however, reminds the reader that any and all liability associated with the use of the methods detailed herein is to be borne by the reader. The author refuses to accept responsibility for any losses, financial or otherwise, claimed to be caused by techniques mentioned in this ebook. The author shall not be held liable for any damage alleged to arise from the use of information contained in this ebook, including damages that are alleged to arise from error, omissions or inaccuracies of any sort. Any reader relying upon the information herein or making use of said information does so at his or her own risk. The author disclaims any liability and shall not be held liable for any damages (including, but not limited to) loss of revenue, loss of profit or loss of opportunity.