

# Affiliate Classroom

The Real  
Truth About  
Keyword Density

The magazine about building an affiliate business...not just small checks

## Losing The Affiliate Game? Maybe It's Not Your Fault!

**Commissions stolen?**

**Merchants double-crossing you?**

**How to protect yourself... and even catch the bad guys in the act!**

**Build Those  
Holiday Sites  
and Now!**

**How To Choose An  
Ethical Affiliate  
Merchant**

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[www.AffiliateClassroom.com](http://www.AffiliateClassroom.com)



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## EDITORS' CORNER

“Just because  
I’m paranoid...”



**“We, as affiliates, need to confront the demons that could swallow our industry whole. We should start talking about what we can do to stick together, support each other, and save the affiliate marketing industry from greed, corruption... and the complacency of our elders.”**



“...doesn't mean you're not out to get me.” A lame old joke? Not when you consider the unsavory aspects of affiliate marketing discussed in this month's [Cover Story](#) by Anik Singal. If you've been stumped by the Mystery of the Disappearing Commissions, look for clues in Anik's eye-opening article.

And speaking of paranoia, an hour in the forums might leave you wondering, “Who's out to get who, anyway?” Lately the Internet marketing community seems more intent on denouncing the evils of search engine spam than discussing threats that could destroy the entire industry - and our own livelihood.

For example, spyware and parasiteware have had the potential to do widespread harm to affiliates for at least five years. Have the Internet marketing gurus, the writers of stirring emails about instant millionaires, been educating affiliates about how spyware and parasiteware hijack commissions? Not unless they're plugging the latest anti-spyware software (for a commission, of course),

Or why aren't any of the respected names in affiliate marketing reporting on accusations of collusion between mega affiliate tracking companies and powerful merchants? So many gurus are in a unique position to rally the tens of thousands of affiliates who not only read their newsletters, but support them by purchasing the latest ebook or course or software through their affiliate links. With untarnished reputations before them and their loyal fans behind, affiliate marketing leaders could not just heighten awareness, they could apply vast public pressure on some of the most powerful companies in the world.

Here at [Affiliate Classroom](#), we hope that more affiliate marketing leaders will enter into discourse about these serious topics. They could call for independent oversight of affiliate program providers, and begin a dialogue about how all affiliates - not just super-affiliates - can stand up for their rights.

Strangely enough, it seems that the people who are most concerned about the abuse of affiliates are the youngest marketers. It would be heartening to see more concern for justice, legal remedies, and organized action from the respected people who taught us all about this business.

Perhaps the day will come when an affiliate won't have to fight all alone against a merchant who lies about cookie length or “loses” commissions. Perhaps that affiliate will have some powerful allies from within her very own industry, instead of just a hired attorney (who probably gets paid nearly as much as a Google algo engineer). Perhaps someday affiliates will stick together long enough to demand accountability from powerful program providers. Affiliates might even wake up consumers, who need to take back their desktops from intrusive, malicious, and thieving software.

We, as affiliates, feel that once you consider the larger consequences of parasiteware, spyware, and merchant/administrator collusion in defrauding affiliates, landing on a spammy scraped site doesn't seem so darn important. Sure, it matters if that site usurps your top placement. But those sites have such a short shelf life, they seem like a minor threat compared to looming merchant irregularities and the lack of channels for investigating stolen commissions or one-sided terms.

Life's short. Which means we have to choose our battles. The smart, handsomely-paid engineers at the Googleplex can noodle the code so the minority that skims a few bucks from AdSense scrapes loses its rankings. And the Adwords accountants can spin out combinations of higher mathematics and lower minimum bids to soothe the nerves of advertisers.

But we, as affiliates, need to confront the demons that could swallow our industry whole. We should start talking about what we can do to stick together, support each other, and save the affiliate marketing industry from greed, corruption... and the complacency of our elders.

*Helen Swann*

*Managing Editor*

## LETTERS

# Is all online business a money-sucking black hole? What is “parasiteware?”



Write to us at [Editor@AffiliateClassroom.com](mailto:Editor@AffiliateClassroom.com). Don't forget to put "AC MAGAZINE LETTER" in the subject line of your email. Sorry we can't reply personally to all your questions. Current members of [AffiliateClassroom.com](http://AffiliateClassroom.com) always receive personalized answers to any marketing questions in the Members Forum.

## Do ALL online businesses take forever - and demand major outlays - to make a profit?

I have to say yours is the best magazine I have ever encountered on the internet. Yes, I know you're doing it to promote [Affiliate Classroom](http://AffiliateClassroom.com), but if the magazine is any indication of what your program is all about, I'm sold.

But the problem is, I'm actually scared to spend an extra \$29.97 a month! Talk about desperate... in the last year I've gone from a high-paying, executive level salary to selling everything I own on eBay. I've wasted so much money on "this training" and "that system" that I am skeptical of everyone and everything. Basically I need to make money NOW for medical and household expenses.

To be blunt, is it REALLY possible in the [Affiliate Classroom](http://AffiliateClassroom.com) to learn how to make money with affiliate programs in a short period of time? I'm not naive, I understand an online business is an ongoing project, but I need to know there is some hope of an ongoing income!

I am very disillusioned because every program I have ever joined promised so much... but then immediately wanted me to spend a fortune before I could make any money! As soon as I plunk down a few hundred dollars, they want me to spend another five hundred to a thousand on software or seminars or coaching.

Answer honestly, please. How much money do I actually need to make it in affiliate marketing? And how long will it take before I can make money? - *Name Withheld Upon Request*



**“I'm not naïve, I understand an online business is an ongoing project, but I need to know there is some hope of an ongoing income!”**

## LETTERS... CONTINUED

Your letter is the perfect opportunity for us to plug **Affiliate Classroom**... so we won't. As of this writing you can try Affiliate Classroom for 14 days for \$1, so you can see for yourself whether it's right for you.

Instead, let's get to the heart of your letter, which boils down to "is an online business the answer for you NOW?" We'll also address your specific questions in detail, after we make a few comments about the **reality** of an affiliate business. Reality is one of the big themes of this issue, and we think it's important that everyone who reads this magazine - whether they join **Affiliate Classroom** or not - have a reality-based approach to marketing online TODAY. Not last year, not two or five or seven years ago, but TODAY.

And with the way the marketplace and technology is TODAY, we believe **it's unwise to sink ANY funds you can't afford to lose into an online business**. Whether that amount is \$27 a month, \$270 a month, or \$2700 a month, if you can't afford to lose it, don't spend it! That's probably true of ANY business today, whether it's online or offline. But it's even more important to have your head on straight with an Internet business because of two enormous pressures:

### 1 - Constantly evolving technology.

Whether it's the search engine algorithms, spam filters, programs that allow your competitors to spy on your sites, software that skims profits from affiliates, or the latest and greatest site-building and tracking scripts, the tools we use to sell online change constantly. This means that if you can't rapidly adapt to a technological change, your entire business could be at risk. That can make online business very exciting... but also very stressful if you're financially shaky.

### 2 - Hyper-competitive marketplace.

Very few of the people who started online in 1998, 1999, or even 2000-2001 fully comprehend the obstacles faced by those starting out in affiliate marketing TODAY.

## Why are so many online marketers joining Affiliate Classroom? Because...



## We turn down the static!

### Tired of all the guru noise?

Step by simple step, we'll teach you a **PROVEN** affiliate business formula. **NO fads, NO tricks, no cheats. Just the lasting way to make a great living from affiliate programs. [Click here now!](#)**



The Home Of  
Future Power-  
Affiliates!

## LETTERS... CONTINUED



**“You work hard, try your best... but soon realize you’re competing in a marketplace that doesn’t respond as predicted. You’re trying to win a cross-country race with a horse and buggy, when your competitors are riding Harleys.”**

*Perhaps those early entrepreneurs were able to begin with a lot of hard work and a few dollars. But today, if you don’t have at least \$100 US a month to spend in building your business, you will need to work much, much harder than they did.*

**Why? Because there are more people with large budgets doing business online today!**

*If you had an original idea for an ebook in 1999, all you needed was an auto-responder, a micro-site, a way to accept credit cards, and your own affiliate program to make money quickly.*

*Today, that MIGHT work. But if you have any initial success, within a week five marketers will hire ghostwriters to rewrite your brainchild. They will then bundle it into a package with ten or twenty other “copycat” products and offer master resale rights to the whole world.*

*Is this wrong or evil? Of course not! It’s just the simple plain REALITY of today’s online marketplace. Those who are agile manage to cash in the most quickly. And to be agile in such a marketplace, you need a certain amount of ready cash so you can move quickly, outsource time-consuming tasks, and waste a little money on making mistakes.*

*Remember, this is the type of hyper-competition that early online marketers never really had to face. And unless they’re lazy or foolish, they won’t need to. They own established, solid, well-capitalized online businesses.*

*And that’s the problem. Most have not experienced the barriers to success faced by today’s affiliates. They TEACH online business principles without understanding the marketplace. They advise you to do what worked for them - and that means trying to apply techniques that worked five to seven years ago to TODAY’s online world.*

*The result? You work hard, try your best... but soon realize you’re competing in a marketplace that doesn’t respond as predicted. You’re trying to win a cross-country race with a horse and buggy, when your competitors are riding Harleys.*

*Since no guru, however convincing, can turn back the clock, you must look to yourself and decide whether you have the temperament and finances to continue. First you must accept the two factors we just discussed - technological change and a hyperactive marketplace - as a necessary part of doing business online.*

*Second, if you’re not in a position, either financially or emotionally, to cope with these factors AT THIS TIME, you ought to consider*

## LETTERS... CONTINUED

other income producing options. Any business - whether online or offline - is challenging to our psyches as well as our pocketbooks. If yet another outlay, even it's only \$29.97 a month, will add to your stress level, don't do it.

To answer your question about whether it's possible to learn to make money with affiliate programs in a short period of time, yes, it's quite possible. Speed depends on two things: how many hours a day you can work on your business, and how quickly you grasp certain technical challenges, like modifying a simple HTML web page, setting up an auto-responder, learning to use FTP software to upload your web pages, and understanding how search engines work so you can build your sites to get visitor traffic from them.

You will also need to learn about researching keywords and finding link partners for your web sites and invest time on doing these tasks yourself. Finally, can you write copy quickly? If so, you can take advantage of all the free traffic that article submissions and press releases can send to you.

All these business tasks are covered, step by step, inside **Affiliate Classroom**. By energetically accomplishing them, full-time, you could probably get one to three sites up and running, possibly even making sales, in a month. (The first few always take more time - some students are working on a dozen sites simultaneously now.)

To answer your question: "How much money do I actually need to make it in affiliate marketing?" remember this: beyond your **Affiliate Classroom** enrollment, you'll need one domain name for each site you build (typically around \$9 each), and \$15.97 a month for our recommended web host (that's for up to 7 web sites). High speed-Internet is also a wise investment, since it can save you hours of time each day, especially when looking for good products to promote. Broadband can add \$50 (or more) to your monthly expenses, depending on where you live.

Spending additional funds on well-chosen software and research tools, as well as advertising, can add speed. But if you have more time than money, you don't need anything beyond your domain names, hosting, **Affiliate Classroom** fee, and Internet. Still, that adds up! You must decide whether you're ready for it.

Finally, let's look at your closing question: "How long will it take before I can make money?" And the honest answer is, longer than you'd like - unfortunately. The reason is, with almost all affiliate programs, even if you make a sale in the next two minutes, **it takes TIME to GET PAID.**

There's often quite a lag between the time the sale is recorded in

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## LETTERS... CONTINUED

**“Even if you start making sales right away for merchants who pay promptly, you should still allow several months before you see your first affiliate check. That’s the reality of selling other people’s products for a commission. It’s best to have some financial wiggle room until the money hits your mailbox.”**



*the merchant’s database, and the day the checks are cut and sent. A few smaller merchants pay monthly, straight to your Paypal account. But most take much longer. Some pay 30 days AFTER the end of the first month in which you make a sale. Some only pay quarterly. Some have a minimum payout (like \$100) that must be reached before they cut a check. There are no real industry standards, and every merchant has a slightly different policy.*

*If for financial reasons you decide to rely on search engines to bring you free traffic, remember that Google currently takes forever to index a site. Your pages may get crawled - meaning examined by Google’s software - quickly. But you could wait months to get into the actual search engine results. With Yahoo you can blog and ping to get indexed quickly. But Yahoo also tends to de-index these sites, at whim, just as quickly, making it an unreliable engine for long-term traffic. So even if you build dozens of sites, you need to give those sites time to mature in the search engine databases. All these timing factors are largely out of your control.*

*So even if you start making sales right away for merchants who pay promptly, you should still allow several months before you see your first affiliate check. That’s the reality of selling other people’s products for a commission. It’s best to have some financial wiggle room until the money hits your mailbox.*

*What you can do now is find a stop gap job to make some immediate money, and learn everything you can get your hands on, for free, before you invest more. In ANY business, on or offline, it’s always best to have a fallback plan, which will allow you to learn and make mistakes without risking very much.*

*Luckily, if you are persistent and dig around online, you will find plenty of free information. In the July issue of [Affiliate Classroom](#) Magazine we mentioned a dozen free forums that will allow you to get a glimpse of the wide variety of experiences people have in affiliate marketing - good, bad, ugly, and wonderful. Just don’t get sucked into buying everybody’s courses and ebooks.*

*In July we also ran an article about "instant" income ideas. The first few require nothing more than what you already have - an email account and some friends - and would be a simple way to experiment and learn. We also mention free resources in the Letters section.*

## LETTERS... CONTINUED

*Back issues of this magazine will also give you a strong reality-based overview of everything involved in building an affiliate business. You may not “get” everything you read immediately, but the exposure to concepts few gurus discuss, such as choosing a good online business model for your talents and personality, should turn your natural distrust into an educated opinion about the industry.*

*Finally, remember that the people who talk about getting rich FAST on the Internet are selling dreams. And there’s nothing wrong with dreams - they can be highly motivating! But you can also become disillusioned if the dreams don’t come true right away. So continue to cultivate your healthy skepticism while relying on critical thinking to find the path that’s right for you. Learn to read between the lines, and question EVERYTHING.*

*For example, when you read a success story in an ezine or forum, ask yourself this: “Based on my knowledge and experience, how much money and time was needed to make that happen?” A monthly income of \$10,000 isn’t very impressive if \$8000 is going out the door for PPC, outsourcing, offline or direct mail ads, radio spots, or a professional publicist who can get you on Oprah or Good Morning America. All that outlay might be a stepping stone to a multi-million dollar online empire. But in the meantime, it’s also a gamble.*

*At least now, after your difficult experiences, you know enough to know better! You won’t assume that the marketing is the message, and that those big numbers are “take home pay.”*

*Most people who get rich quick already have a lot of knowledge, have blown a lot of money on mistakes, and have invested heavily in purchased traffic, advertising, and outsourced services like web design and copywriting. This allows them to move very very very fast. That’s a viable but high-risk business model. It’s not for someone in your position.*

*In the **Affiliate Classroom**, our whole approach is based on combining consistent and organized effort, what works TODAY, and a patient, long-term strategy. Can that start making you money in a relatively short period of time - say a couple of months? Yes. But can we guarantee it will? No. Nor can any other marketing training, even the most aggressive, high-risk high-reward systems.*

*What we do guarantee is you will learn to do it RIGHT. And you won’t get lost, wonder what you should do next, or have no one to turn to. We make it fun, we share what REALLY works NOW, we’re not afraid to go out on a limb, and we tell the truth. And you can decide for whether we’re telling it like it is for just \$1 :-)!*

**“Most people who get rich quickly already have a lot of knowledge, have blown a lot of money on mistakes, and have invested heavily in purchased traffic, advertising, and outsourced services like web design and copywriting. This allows them to move very very very fast. That’s a viable but high-risk business model.”**



## LETTERS... CONTINUED



**“Ever download a browser plug-in, a toolbar, music, games, screensavers, pictures, or movies? Then you just might have installed parasiteware!”**

**For heavens sake, what is “parasiteware?” I have see this on a few blogs, but I haven’t been able to find a clear “newbie” explanation of what it really is! - *Emi D***

*Get ready for this one. ParasiteWare (with the capital letters) is a trademarked technology that can destroy an affiliate’s ability to earn a commission. The code can be contained in free software that is distributed via the Internet, or in various types of ads.*

*Ever download a browser plug-in, a toolbar, music, games, screensavers, pictures, or movies? Then you just might have installed parasiteware (we’re going to use the generic lowercase term). Some pop-ups, pop-unders, or sliding ads can also contain parasiteware. The disturbing thing about it is, you usually have NO way of knowing that cute little toolbar or that innocuous FTP program actually carried software for ripping off your fellow-affiliates - maybe even YOU.*

*How does parasiteware function? The “parasite” is code that hides inside a “host” - usually a piece of software or some other file. The parasiteware rewrites affiliate link code by hijacking certain aspects of the way your browser works. It’s similar to the spyware Anik Singal talks about in our [Cover Story](#).*

*Spyware can record your site viewing habits, keystrokes, what you buy, how much you spend, and even your credit card numbers and passwords. It can also harass you with those mysterious, infuriating little popups that appear AFTER you’ve shut down your browser. Ever had a popup appear that you kept trying to close but wouldn’t go away? Welcome to spyware.*

*What’s the point of parasiteware and spyware? In theory, it’s supposed to do market research - collect information that companies can use to develop more targeted offers and give consumers the products they really want. And most people don’t mind getting a cool little piece of free software in exchange for viewing an ad once in a while. They don’t mind, that is, until the parasiteware begins to make their lives miserable.*

*Once you install the software, the parasiteware begins to collect data about you (often called data mining). It can literally examine the deepest innards of your computer, including personal information and details of your online activity. This information gets sent back to the originating company via the Internet. The parasite company then trades or sells the information it collects in exchange for more*

## LETTERS... CONTINUED

advertising dollars. While that may sound creepy, it's not illegal - yet.

*But what's more damaging is that companies who advertise via parasiteware may not know that the technology is also rewriting affiliate cookies and codes. For example, some of the slickest ads you see on the biggest portals contain parasiteware. That software can disable a cookie, or even hijack a commission by substituting its own affiliate link for yours. Brrrr!*

*Parasiteware, like spyware, can also do nasty things to your PC. It can slow your browsing to a crawl, make it almost impossible to connect to the Internet, and even hose your applications and operating system. One member of our staff spent an entire week - that's 40 hours - hunting down and removing ONE piece of parasiteware that had completely disabled a family member's email, browser, and Internet connectivity. She then spent another week helping a friend remove parasiteware that forced his laptop to shut down without warning.*

*The reason for these PC nightmares is that the parasiteware installs to your hard drive, conflicts with running applications or other spyware, eats up system resources, attempts to transmit data before you've had a chance to connect to the Internet, and in general hijacks core functions needed to keep your PC running smoothly. Spyware and parasiteware bypass antivirus and firewall protection, making them an extremely effective means of destroying affiliate cookies or codes.*

*Getting rid of persistent parasiteware is usually a big project. Even if you uninstall the host software, you probably won't remove the actual parasites. Sometimes you can even SEE the parasiteware in your Temporary Internet folder or your Program Files, but you won't be able to drag it to the recycle bin. Or you'll remove it, only to have it reappear when you reboot. Yes, it's that obnoxious!*

*What's even worse, some affiliate merchants INTENTIONALLY contract with parasiteware and spyware companies. As our [Cover Story](#) explains, they WANT to make it difficult for affiliates to collect commissions. But most merchants don't have a clue that parasite companies, who eagerly distribute ad placements, are actually hijacking commissions.*

*This month's [Cover Story](#) by Anik Singal discusses the implications spyware can have on affiliates everywhere. And since anti-virus software is largely ineffective on spyware and parasiteware, you can protect your own computer with two free programs. The first is AdAware SE Personal, available from LavaSoft at <http://www.lavasoft.com>, which REMOVES existing spyware, adware, parasiteware, and data miners from your PC.*

*The other is SpyBot Search and Destroy at <http://www.spybot.info>, an outstanding free product that runs in the background and PREVENTS malicious spyware from being installed on your PC in the first place. You will be safest if you use BOTH programs, one to clean your system and one to prevent infestation.*

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## COVER STORY

# Hey! Merchants! Affiliates Have Rights, Too!

By Anik Singal



**“If affiliates can’t trust the merchants they work so hard for, the affiliate industry is in trouble! It’s time for affiliates to start to stick together, to document cases of abuse, to share information about bad merchants, to ask leaders in their industry to make their stories heard, and to stand up for their rights.”**



The reports of affiliates signing up with a merchant, making sales, and then not getting paid their rightful commissions have increased dramatically over the past year. As someone who not only makes a good living from affiliate programs, but trains and educates power affiliates to compete in an ultra-competitive marketplace, I’m alarmed by these reports.

If affiliates can’t trust the merchants they work so hard for, the affiliate industry is in trouble! It’s time for affiliates to start to stick together, to document cases of abuse, to share information about bad merchants, to ask leaders in their industry to make their stories heard, and to stand up for their rights.

But even more importantly, it’s time for merchants to start investigating the legitimate complaints of the scores of webmasters who have made affiliate marketing a \$1.5 billion industry.

Of course, I recognize there are all kinds of reasons why you may not get credit for an affiliate sale. If you’ve been in this business for any length of time, you know that even the best affiliate tracking system can develop serious glitches, either through software bugs or human error.

And I still believe that the majority of affiliate programs want to do right by their affiliates. Most affiliate program managers strive to be ethical business people and give credit where it is due.

But some merchants, and some tracking companies, don’t care about affiliates. Maybe they deliberately deceive affiliates into working for them - and then don’t pay. Or maybe they skim a certain number of sales from their affiliates every month, either to avoid paying bonuses or to simply keep more profit for themselves.

## COVER STORY... CONTINUED

Or sometimes they simply don't adequately correct technical issues with tracking or payment software, as recent payment fiascos at LinkShare have demonstrated.

The point is, ALL affiliate merchants need to start working on the issue of affiliate trust. They should be working WITH affiliates to improve communication, transparency, and fairness. They need to realize that if the trust breaks down between affiliates and merchants, the entire system is in jeopardy. And they ought to treat ALL affiliates - not just the top earners, but the beginners and modestly successful - with respect.

### Clueless merchants cause trouble

But how can merchants fix these problems? Where do they start? Since I am both a professional marketer and a professional educator, I believe the first thing merchants should do is get a clue! They should educate themselves about all the possible ways that technology and human error can hurt their relationship with affiliates.

Knowledge is power. If merchants don't have the the essential business intelligence that keeps them in touch with the issues and needs of their affiliates, they can't expect their programs to stay successful.

Take the whole issue of spyware and parasiteware. These technologies specialize in invading a consumer's computer through unethical means, and then literally replace an affiliate's ID with their own.

Spyware is a computer program that consumers download onto their computer. It's usually buried in or attached to another harmless looking program they download for free. In fact, spyware companies develop all kinds of freebies for consumers to download, just so they can invade their computers!

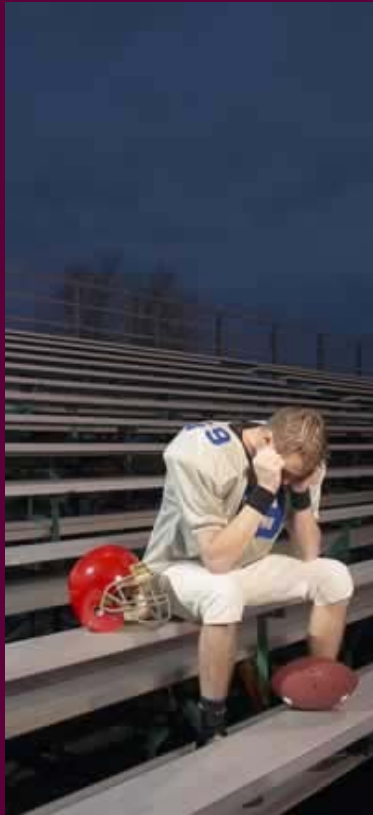
Once the program gets installed, the software pretty much takes over the consumer's computer. It can replace affiliate IDs, create new cookies, make pop-ups appear and even steal passwords or other private information. Yes, spyware companies are the evil masters of viral marketing - they spread their disease via freebie information and programs that unsuspecting consumers download!

Now in any other context - say a banking transaction - this would be considered fraud, pure and simple. It's stealing someone's

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## COVER STORY... CONTINUED



**“Would you believe that studies have shown that spyware companies could be stealing more than 50% of your affiliate commissions?”**

commissions by re-writing what is, in effect, their account number. You don't need a Ph.D. in Business Ethics to feel in your bones that is just plain wrong!

But it gets worse. Spyware is so crafty and sly, it can steal ALL your FUTURE affiliate commissions by making sure all new cookie IDs get automatically replaced with their own. Some of this software can even cause a pop-up for a competing product - with their own affiliate ID in it, of course - to appear so frequently that it's impossible for you to make a sale from that computer ever again.

How is this the merchant's problem? Many merchants actually set up contracts with spyware companies! They unknowingly hire these companies to distribute free software that contains their advertising, never suspecting that the REAL agenda is to defraud their affiliates. These merchants haven't got a clue how the spyware works. They assume everything is legit, and that they're getting a good deal on a viral promotion.

What's worse, a few merchants know EXACTLY how spyware works. They don't care about the affiliates who are getting ripped off. They are even delighted when the spyware company splits the take with them. Should merchants like this be in the affiliate business? No!

But unless affiliates know what's happening, they can't dump those dishonest merchants and switch to ethical ones who don't steal from them.

### **How much is being stolen from affiliates?**

Plenty. Would you believe that studies have shown that spyware companies could be stealing more than 50% of your affiliate commissions? Some estimates go even higher, but 50% seems to be a number agreed upon by the experts who monitor the spyware and parasiteware companies and their software.

So if spyware didn't exist, you could potentially be making TWICE the money you are making now. Ouch! Yet some merchants continue to use this technology, and so far very little has been done to crack down on them. Technically it's not illegal... but it should be!

What is being done to stop spyware? Not much. It's not because no one cares. But the people who DO care - like you and me -

## COVER STORY... CONTINUED

don't have much of a voice. And the more we try to stop it, the more technically advanced these companies get. You need diligent human intervention to track down and stop these companies.

And that's where merchants come in. The merchants have the power to fight spyware. They can work with the companies that create anti-spyware software. They can contribute funds to these companies, so they can develop more powerful protection. They can fund consumer awareness programs. They could even sue spyware companies for the stolen commissions!

The good news is that affiliate managers are becoming far more active in watching out for spyware. Affiliates are also becoming more vigilant in reporting these companies.

### What can affiliates do?

More than you think. Affiliates should demand that merchants pressure affiliate networks like LinkShare and Commission Junction to take a proactive stand AGAINST spyware. Although these companies have said they will shut down spyware operators, more and more cases seem to be slipping through. Just because an affiliate network SAYS it's going to do something, doesn't mean it will.

You can also do your own due diligence. One very effective method is to get a friend to make occasional purchases through your affiliate link. Make sure the exact date, time, and any transaction numbers are carefully documented, and that there's no question about the link being purchased through. Then check to make sure you get paid for those transactions.

That's the method some super-affiliates have used to discover that the information about cookie length and leads from their affiliate network company did not match their merchant's marketing copy! Whether it's just sloppy programming or something more sinister, it's disturbing to think that a company like Commission Junction isn't keeping better tabs on this data by spot checking it, or auditing merchants for accuracy.

While getting someone to purchase through your links may seem like an expensive way to keep merchants honest, it can be a real eye opener. Your friend can always return the purchases - in fact, you can even explain to the merchant WHY you're doing it. Some merchants will be indignant. If so, ask them what they have to hide... and then start looking for a better merchant in that niche!

If you decide to dump a suspicious merchant, keep all your records

**“Just because an affiliate network SAYS it's going to do something, doesn't mean it will.”**



## COVER STORY... CONTINUED

**“If affiliates raise the cry, new fraud-monitoring businesses may even be created. Companies like this might, for a monthly fee, make random purchases through your affiliate links, and then check whether you get paid commissions for those purchases. Such independent watchdog companies might be the best defense of all against spyware companies.”**



of dealing with that merchant. Eventually the Internet marketing community may wise up, and develop sanctions against merchants who cheat their affiliates.

If affiliates raise the cry, new fraud-monitoring businesses may even be created. Companies like this might, for a monthly fee, make random purchases through your affiliate links, and then check whether you get paid commissions for those purchases. Such independent watchdog companies might be the best defense of all against spyware companies.

### What merchants should do

**First, merchants should be more proactive about affiliate tracking and cookies.** In a study published by Marketing Sherpa at the end of 2004, many affiliates were shocked at merchant attitudes about these tracking issues. Here is what Marketing Sherpa reported:

- ◆ 37% of surveyed merchants had no plans to track new versus returning customers from affiliates in 2005.
- ◆ 35% had no plans to track affiliates' campaigns by lifetime value.

The measurements most merchants currently apply to their affiliate campaigns are:

- ◆ Total sales per month (91% of merchants)
- ◆ Total clicks received (84%)
- ◆ Click to conversion rate (78%)
- ◆ Commission level (71%)

Just 58% track by type of marketing tactic used.

You know what? If my students tracked their own online businesses that poorly, they'd go broke! And it's obvious that many merchants don't even bother with this primitive level of tracking. If merchants don't measure and track what affiliates are doing, there's no way of knowing whether those programs are worth promoting.

**Second, merchants should stop discriminating against new or inexperienced affiliates.** Some merchants, and even some affiliate networks, will simply drop an unproductive affiliate from their rolls. I can only understand this up to a point. It's always good to keep your database clean and tidy. But these days many content web sites can take MONTHS to get indexed in the search engines. These are exactly the types of sites so many affiliate programs claim they prefer to work with.

## COVER STORY... CONTINUED

Well, Mr. Merchant, if it takes months to get my site into the search engine results, it's going to be many months before I make a sale. Those links may be out there on hundreds or even thousands of pages. But until they're indexed, and people find them, click on them, and buy through them, no sale! Merchants definitely need to understand the realities of search engine indexing.

While some sites can start producing sales immediately, others may not kick into gear for 12 months or more. Sometimes it's because the Google Dance has rewarded your site with a big boost in PR. Merchants should work WITH the search engines, and that includes being patient with all those pages, filled with all those affiliate links, that may take ages to get indexed.

And if you are an affiliate manager, my question to you is "Why does it bother you to have a few underachievers on your rolls?" It costs you practically nothing to keep an affiliate in your system. So what if an affiliate referred only \$300 in sales rather than your minimum \$500? Why rely so heavily on "super affiliates?"

Why not work with the beginners, train and help them, gain their loyalty? Learn a lesson from network marketing and MLM. Those companies survive and thrive, often in spite of weak products, because of the way they motivate and organize their sales force. By relying so heavily on "super affiliates," Mr. Merchant, you are placing too many eggs in one basket.

Of course, there are times when a program MUST "fire" an affiliate. Those times are when...

**Their actions can hurt your company.  
They are strictly violating company policy.  
They give inaccurate contact information.  
They use the banner, logos, or trademarks in unethical or illegal ways.**

When it is wrong to remove affiliates?

**"And if you are an affiliate manager, my question to you is 'Why does it bother you to have a few underachievers on your rolls?' It costs you practically nothing to keep an affiliate in your system. So what if an affiliate referred only \$300 in sales rather than your minimum \$500? Why rely so heavily on 'super affiliates?'"**



## COVER STORY... CONTINUED

**“The only way we can fuel this growth is by providing the proper training to our new colleagues. Excluding them just because they are new is foolish. If we don’t let people with ‘no experience’ enter the marketplace, how will we expand the industry?”**



**Their website does not get enough traffic.  
They did not meet a “quota” even though they were trying.  
They are new and have questions.**

**Third, don’t have a “terms of service agreement” with ridiculous requirements.** In some of our research here at [Affiliate Classroom](#), we were shocked to see so many programs that require thousands of unique monthly visitors before you can promote their products.

What is the point of this? Are affiliate IDs so precious that you can’t issue a few to new site owners? Why exclude new sites or affiliates who have no experience?

**I believe that every affiliate should be given a chance to promote any product.**

Why? Because affiliate marketing is still a young industry. It’s also a powerful industry. There’s massive room for growth in affiliate marketing - more than even industry leaders realize.

Growing industries MUST have a constant influx of new blood and new ideas. The history of business bears witness to this fact.

The only way we can fuel this growth is by providing the proper training to our new colleagues. Excluding them just because they are new is foolish. If we don’t let people with “no experience” enter the marketplace, how will we expand the industry?

So all you merchants out there, remember this: the larger the affiliate industry gets, the better it is for you. And today’s newbie affiliates are tomorrow’s super-affiliates. Work WITH them, not against them. Teach them to sell for you. Show them you have their best interests at heart.

If you do, you’ll not only have a profitable affiliate program. You’ll also be a leader in an online industry that’s poised to explode with growth!

## NEWS &amp; REVIEWS

## Products &amp; News

LinkWit, PowerRSS, and RSS to Blog  
Portal visitor's search habits... Yahoo's AdSense  
clone for blogs, and new Google ad formats

**LINK WIT**

**LinkWit**  
Top Pick! ★★★★★

**Author:** RickyJ

**Rating:** Five out of Five Stars

**Level:** Intermediate to Advanced

An ingenious, easy-to-use, all-in-one link crawler, sitemap generator, and link-rotator that runs on your web server and can crawl multiple sites simultaneously, **LinkWit** is especially useful if you use automated page generators as add-ons to your existing sites or blogs. Advanced marketers will quickly see endless possibilities for this script. Unlike static sitemap generators, **LinkWit** gives you the freedom to create unique link structures and distribution, on both hand-built and machine-generated sites.

Create a MySQL database, then install the **LinkWit** script, which takes two minutes provided your host runs Perl 5.8.x. Then grab the step-by-step guide, click a few times, and watch **LinkWit** crawl your site (or your competitor's). Once you insert the code into your web pages, you can rotate links from internal pages, other sites you own, and even the sites of other directories.

The customization options **LinkWit** offers are staggering. You can vary the layout and number of the links displayed, the number of links on one page, make them static or dynamic, and even combine static internal links and dynamic internal links. You can create link maps in either PHP or JavaScript. You can even specify what percent of your site's pages the links should appear on, so if you want **LinkWit** to display your links on only 60% of your pages, no problem. There are too many variations to list them all here.

**LinkWit** was obviously written by a very smart programmer who understands the needs of today's stealth marketer. The bonus tips for page generator users are pure gold, but **LinkWit** isn't about creating spammy sites. It's a tool that allows you to shave time off the process of developing advanced internal and external link strategies.

The software currently comes with lifetime upgrades, an unlimited use license, and a solid guarantee. If you're comfortable with scripts, inserting code into pages, and thinking outside the box, the best recommendation we can give is to grab **LinkWit** and try it - before your competitors do!

**PowerRSS**

**Author:** Adrian Ling

**Rating:** Five out of Five Stars ★★★★★

**Level:** Intermediate

This easy-to install and configure RSS archiver and aggregator will not only add unique newsfeed content to HTML or PHP pages. It also automatically adds an individual news page to your site every single day, archives it, and updates a sitemap of all the news pages. All it requires is the ability to run PHP scripts and CRON jobs on your server.

Don't think that's exciting? Think again. Because **PowerRSS** creates news pages and updates the sitemap automatically, you could use it to set up any number of "autopilot" sites that will slowly build themselves, one page at a time, for years to come.

With **PowerRSS**, you don't have to worry about duplicate content, since you needn't settle for the standard newsfeeds to populate your pages. You specify the feed, as long as it's readable as RSS (hmmm, how about your own blog feeds?). With a few extra maneuvers, you can even set up two separate feeds,

To make **PowerRSS** even more "footprint-proof," you can randomize the number of news items on a page (anywhere from one to ten), use no follow tags, and even make a specific keyword in the feed go to your affiliate links or pages on your own web sites.

**PowerRSS** takes away the worry about your sites getting banned for a bunch of spammy links or duplicate content. This is REAL content, on REAL web pages that can be based on your own template. For sites that build slow but steady and 100% automatically, **PowerRSS** is a great choice.

*More reviews on page 21*



**"Just one technique I learned from you made me over \$20,000 just this year!"**

"Joining Affiliate Classroom could be the life changing event you've been looking for. Want proof? Late last year, Anik gave me one small tip that has kept on putting cash into my bank account every month! The crazy thing is that, I make this money with no added effort on my part. This year alone, I've used his technique to pull in over \$20,000 in profit." *Nana Gilbert-Baffoe, Internet Technology Consultant*



**"Stop wasting money on out-of-date ebooks, overpriced seminars or fluff 'mastermind' courses!"**

**"In The Affiliate Classroom, you can get REAL money making instruction for less than the price of your daily coffee! Visit [www.AffiliateClassroom.com](http://www.AffiliateClassroom.com) now to see why top Internet marketers call us the home of future power affiliates!"**



## NEWS &amp; REVIEWS... CONTINUED

**RSS to Blog v.2****Author:** Michelle Timothy**Level:** Intermediate**Rating:** 5 out of 5 **TOP PICK!** ★★★★★

Some products just keep getting better with each version, and **RSS to Blog** is one of them. **RSS to Blog** goes far beyond automating the process of posting search engine results, news feeds, RSS feeds, a series of text messages, or even product datafeeds to your blog. It can literally put all your blogs on autopilot... forever.

**RSS to Blog** has long been preferred by savvy marketers for its ability to post intelligible material to Blogger that looks as close to the real thing as possible. Not having that "spammy" look is worth the price alone, especially if you've got AdSense on your blogs.

But now **RSS to Blog** will also post to Wordpress, TypePad, Moveable Type, MSN Spaces, and Live Journal Blogs. And you don't need to do multiple installs of **RSS to Blog** for every blog. Set it up once, then add as many blogs as you wish. Each blog has its own configuration screen.

Say you have two blogs. With **RSS to Blog** you can set the first one up so it gets four posts every 12 hours, and set the other one up so it gets 2 posts twice a day. Keep right on going, adding blog after blog.

**RSS to Blog** also allows you to randomize not just the content of posts, but the time of posts. You set up one CRON job, then **RSS to Blog** randomizes the posts based on either a time interval or how often you want to post each day. You can also have **RSS to Blog** find news or search engine results by keyword - and so far we haven't found a limit to the number of keywords it will rotate.

You can also add keywords to post titles, randomize news sources, post to individual Wordpress categories, and even have blog links open in a new window. And yes, you can also use **RSS to Blog** to ping on whatever schedule you wish.

Current purchasers will get all future upgrades free, plus some excellent free bonuses.

**Early Reports Reveal New Google Ad Technology**

Google is testing changes to its AdSense and Adwords programs that will give advertisers more control over ad dollars and allow publishers to display ads based on off-page factors. In the test phase is a change to AdSense that would allow publishers to send more "signals" about their web site back to Google, allowing for ads that are more tailored to a site's actual visitors.

Even though AdSense already sends signals based on site content, this proposed change would allow advertisers to serve up different ads based on user demographics and other publisher-dependent factors. Google says this will allow publishers to feed them more data about who is visiting the page and what the page is actually about. It would also make ad relevancy less dependent on content that is "on-page," introducing influence from information not appearing directly in the site's text.

The proposed changes include offering publishers the option of listing topics that users of their site might be interested in, as well as telling Google more about the site's typical visitors (for example, male senior citizens). The program is currently in testing with a few selected publishers.

AdWords is also testing a new ad size with a selected group of advertisers. This format allows room for more text, with up to 200 characters for descriptive content instead of the previous limit of 95 characters. Google hopes that for some advertisers, this will increase their conversion rates and ROI, since they will be more likely to get qualified clicks. The Adwords format currently in testing automatically feeds the better performing creative - longer or shorter.

Google has not said whether the longer format will be adopted. Some search engine marketing experts are already speculating that the longer ads may never be rolled out, except perhaps for a few selected advertisers. Why? Because the new format may be less profitable for Google. More targeted ads mean fewer clicks - and less revenue.

**CNET Reports Yahoo To Launch Blog Ad Network to Compete Against AdSense**

According to CNET, the web technology news site, Yahoo has a new ad network in the works. Targeted to small web publishers and designed to compete with Google's AdSense. Yahoo's service will be tailored to bloggers and other web micro-publishers.

Though it has competitors, Google's AdSense is a virtual monopoly due to its broad advertiser bid costs and high payouts. Industry experts see Yahoo's offering as a challenge to Google's supremacy in contextual advertising. Yahoo's product will display relevant text ads, and advertisers pay only when a reader clicks.

Yahoo's service will differ from Google's in some respects. It will use human editorial input on the selection of ads, unlike AdSense which is dependent upon technology.

Some speculate that Yahoo's service will be similar to its Y!Q search technology, released in Beta earlier this year. If so, this would be an exciting development for small publishers using contextual advertising to monetize their sites.

Y!Q analyzes the text of a Web page and shows search results based on context. Publishers can add code to their Web pages that automatically generates a list of related links, and can even embed the links into paragraphs of text.

## NEWS &amp; REVIEWS... CONTINUED

**Recent Majestic Research Study Says Portal Users Don't Do Much Searching**

A recent study by Majestic Research shows that even though search engine revenues depend heavily on advertising, when users visit portals they spend more time on email and messaging than they do on actual searching.

The study revealed some interesting details about what users spend their time doing when they visit each engine. Even though almost all of Google's revenue comes from search advertising, actual search activity makes up only 21 percent of the time U.S. visitors spent at Google during June. A whopping 45 percent of their time was spent on Gmail, Google's beta email service.

The search numbers were even lower at Yahoo. While its users clocked nine times more total minutes than Google's - 101.4 million minutes vs. 10.8 million - only 2 percent of that time was spent on searching. 42 percent went to Yahoo Mail, and 22 percent to Yahoo Messenger.

'User minutes spent on search' is a departure from the norm for measuring search engine usage. Unique visitors or page views are the standards for benchmarking sites and setting ad costs. Google had a total of 80 million unique U.S. visitors in June, while Yahoo had 118 million.

Gmail users account for only 6 percent of Google's unique visitors. 55 percent of Yahoo's unique visitors use Yahoo Mail, while 19 percent use its messaging service. In fact, Yahoo Messenger lost 200,000 unique visitors per month over the last year.

88 percent of Google's unique visitors actually performed searches in June, compared to only 55 percent of Yahoo's unique visitors.

Google's dependence on search for revenues appears to be growing. Google's domestic clickthrough rate has been increasing approximately 50 percent annually, while Yahoo's has remained flat.

Google recently reported revenue of \$1.38 billion, including traffic acquisition costs, during the second quarter of 2005. 89 percent of its revenue was search-related. Yahoo had revenue of \$1.25 billion in the second quarter. After removing traffic acquisition costs, only one-third of Yahoo's revenue was generated by search.

# Do you know what you're missing?



**If you're not a student in The Affiliate Classroom, you're missing out on real-world, up-to-date marketing tactics like these:**

**A real life case study on how to build an opt-in list that generates \$6000 a month...**

**The no web site, no product, no writing, no PPC way to get rich fast (all you need is a phone and email)...**

**How to go from zero to 40,000 visitors a month with nothing more than search engine traffic...**

**And that's just a tiny fraction of what you're missing out on!**

**[So click here now...](#) and find out why The Affiliate Classroom is the secret weapon of today's upcoming marketers!**

## ARTICLES &amp; FEATURES

# How to Choose Ethical Merchants Who Will Treat You Right!



**“Because The Affiliate Classroom teaches you to START your site building process by choosing a product to promote, finding the right merchant up front is crucial to your success.”**



For many affiliates, their worst business decisions involve merchants. Choose the right one, and you're part of a win-win scenario that can last a lifetime.

But choose the wrong merchant, and you'll find yourself generating sale after sale, yet never see your commissions! Because The **Affiliate Classroom** teaches you to START your site building process by choosing a product to promote, finding the right merchant up front is crucial to your success.

This article will recommend some tested tactics that should help you to choose a good merchant, as well as pointers about what to do if a merchant turns out to be a real jerk.

## **Check out those cookies!**

From an affiliate's perspective, there are two types of merchants: those who use cookies and those who don't.

If a merchant doesn't use cookies, it means that the visitor must not only click your link, but **MAKE A PURCHASE AT THAT MOMENT** for you to get credit for a sale. If that visitor doesn't make a purchase, and then clicks a **DIFFERENT** affiliate's link and buys, you won't get credit for the sale. It's the **LAST** click that determines which affiliate gets credit.

While at first this may sound unfair, it's common in many high-competition niches, such as affiliate marketing. It's designed to motivate affiliates to do what's necessary to close the sale immediately, or to develop strong relationships via an opt-in list so your readers will buy from your ezine links.

The second type of merchant tracks referrals using cookies, and is very common with merchants who sell hard goods, consumables, and high-ticket items. Since most people don't purchase on a first visit, the cookie tags potential buyers with your affiliate ID. It does this by writing a tiny bit of code, usually to your visitor's temporary Internet files. When they come back to the site, you'll get credit for the sale even if they didn't come directly through your affiliate link.

The problem with cookies is that they expire. Some only last one session, or 72 hours, or 30 days, or 6 weeks, and so on. And these days, you can't always take it for granted that the reported length of a merchant's cookie is, well, true.

## ETHICAL MERCHANTS... CONTINUED

How can you be sure that a merchant's "90 day cookie" really lasts for 90 days? The only absolutely reliable method is to have someone click your affiliate link and make a test purchase shortly before the end of the cookie's lifespan. (Make sure they're not blocking cookies or nuking them with anti-spyware software!). Then document the time and date of the sale, when the sale shows up in the merchant's affiliate management software, and whether your commission gets paid.

If that sounds like it's a lot of trouble, yes, it is. It's usually only worth it in very lucrative niches, and for high ticket items. But if the facts reveal that the merchant, or his software, is sloppy about tracking your rightful referrals, you can also feel 150% justified in returning the item. Include an explanation of why the purchase was made and copies of all documentation.

If you get a hassle from this merchant, you can call your local department of consumer affairs or the Federal Trade Commission (or comparable agency in your home country).

Some affiliate networks, which represent many different merchants, give you reports that are supposed to track clicks and referrals through your affiliate links. But in practice, most network's reports are primitive and, even worse, can't be independently audited or verified by a third party.

You should also understand that a merchant can't control some cookie problems. If the consumer is using a browser that blocks cookies, that's not the merchant's fault. Or sometimes, the merchant doesn't realize that their affiliate program software has malfunctioned and isn't setting cookies correctly. Many merchants aren't technically savvy enough to spot this.

You can also do a quick and dirty test to see if the cookie and "expire" date are correct. Click on one of your own affiliate links. Then find your browser cache folder and open it. Look for a file with a name similar to one of these:

```
cookie:yourcomputername@merchanturlname.com/  
cookie:yourcomputername@www.merchanturl.com/
```

The code should have an expiration date. Check to see if it's accurate, based on the length of the cookie the merchant claims to set.

Can't find the cookie? Contact the merchant. Don't accuse them of anything. Just politely ask about the cookie length and send them a copy of the cookie code. If the merchant is honest, you'll get a grateful reply and a promise to follow up. If you're using email, remember that spam filters might be trashing your emails before the merchant can see them. So look for a phone number or even a snail mail address. If after repeated tries you get no response, check the cookie one more time. If it's still not working right, you're better off trying to find another merchant.



**“Some affiliate networks, which represent many different merchants, give you reports that are supposed to track clicks and referrals through your affiliate links. But in practice, most network's reports are primitive and, even worse, can't be independently audited or verified by a third party.”**

## ETHICAL MERCHANTS... CONTINUED

**“An Affiliate Program Manager often has the authority to investigate and report on matters with a simple phone call or email. Programs like this are worth promoting!”**



Which brings us to our next recommendation:

### **Check out the current reputation of merchants and networks**

Don't rely on press releases or corporate public relations copy for an accurate assessment of the quality of a merchant. The web's informal network of forums, blogs, and marketing sites will usually give you a better feel for the ethics of a merchant. This is an essential step, especially if this is the only merchant in your chosen niche.

Go to your favorite search engine (we recommend Dogpile, Yahoo Search, or Google) and query the merchant's name plus words like "cheat," "scam," "commission theft," and so on. Do some serious digging down through several pages. You should also look for posts about the merchant on all the big affiliate marketing forums (see our July issue for our list of the dozen best affiliate marketing forums).

The same applies to affiliate networks like Commission Junction and Linkshare. Both these networks have been in the spotlight recently for reporting and payment problems. While working with these networks can be convenient, it's best not to rely on any single network when you choose merchants.

If you belong to a trusted membership site with a private forum, such as [Affiliate Classroom](#), you can check out the merchants they recommend. Blogs are another good source. For example, [PartnerCentric](#) has been getting good feedback from affiliates recently. But even then, always check out an affiliate network provider for yourself.

How? The way you would check out any other company. Study their support page. Do they have phone and email support? Do they have a trouble ticket system? Networks and merchants with proactive management will always be easier to work with, especially if you have a dispute over commissions or referrals.

You're even better off if the company has a dedicated Affiliate Program Manager. Dealing with a real person - not an automated system - can make all the difference. An Affiliate Program Manager often has the authority to investigate and report on matters with a simple phone call or email. Programs like this are worth promoting!

### **Be wary of merchants who use multiple consumer payment processors**

The easiest way to explain this is to give you an example. Let's say you want to promote DIE-SPYWARE-SCUM software (yes, we're making up all of these names).

## ETHICAL MERCHANTS... CONTINUED

DIE-SPYWARE-SCUM uses ACME INC AFFILIATE NETWORK as one its many distribution partners.

You decide to join ACME's affiliate program, since they carry all kinds of stuff you can make commissions on, not just Die-Spyware-Scum.

The problem is, you don't notice that Die-Spyware-Scum isn't only using ACME INC. to process payments. It also offers visitors the option to make payments through DARN INC, PHOOEY INC, and YIKES INC.

And bless their hearts, DARN, PHOOEY, and YIKES **are all there, waiting to accept payments for the product.** So in theory, **you refer someone to the Die-Spyware-Scum site.** They like the product, and buy it. **But somehow your referral ends up paying through PHOOEY's payment interface.**

Unfortunately, **you're not signed up as an affiliate of PHOOEY.** You joined ACME's affiliate program. So bye-bye commission!

This is only a potential problem if the affiliate network is also acting as one of several payment processors. Which is why you should ALWAYS check a potential merchant's payment page to see if they work with several payment processors.

If so, take a step backwards and think about how you can make sure that your referrals actually buy through YOUR chosen affiliate processor. **This is one time where it's critical to contact the merchant to ask whether they have any systems in place that make sure you get your fair share of the pie.** If the merchant doesn't get it, or doesn't care, move on.

### Telephone order options

Certain types of affiliate sales are vulnerable to being by-passed via an 800 number. Some examples are satellite TV systems, cell phone contracts, prescription consumables (such as disposable contact lenses), and Internet access.

The visitor sees the offer on your site. They may even click your link. But then they see an 800 number on the merchant's landing page... and end up ordering over the phone. Is this another bye-bye commission situation? Most of the time, yes.

### Paying commissions only on selected products

Grrrr... even some otherwise decent merchants with great products are guilty of this one! The merchant offers several excellent products... but only pays commissions on one or two items. Usually these are entry level or loss-leader types of products.

This isn't bad if the merchant doesn't tempt the visitor to buy their other, non-commission products. But many merchants do. They get free traffic from you, and you don't get paid. That's not fair.

This is yet another reason to ALWAYS read about the merchant's program



**“Certain types of affiliate sales are vulnerable to being by-passed via an 800 number. Some examples are satellite TV systems, cell phone contracts, prescription consumables (such as disposable contact lenses), and Internet access.”**

## ETHICAL MERCHANTS... CONTINUED

**“If you don’t feel like checking out merchants before you start promoting, think of the worst jerk you ever worked for. Now ask yourself, would you work for that person FOR FREE? Uh huh, we thought so. So DON’T work for a borderline merchant in the first place.”**

completely BEFORE you start promoting. Read the entire agreement, including all the details of how you get paid. We know... it’s time consuming. But it’s also your paycheck!

### **Affiliate link phobia or prejudice**

As every affiliate knows, most affiliate links are long, ugly, and stick out like a sore thumb. And a certain percentage of people just refuse to click on them.

Why? Some people are suspicious of complicated URLs. Others are prejudiced against affiliates. All that can add up to lost commissions.

This is one problem that’s fairly easy to correct. Disguise your links with a cloaking script so people don’t see your actual affiliate link. Many merchants offer these cloaked, user-friendly URLs as part of their affiliate management package.

If your merchant doesn’t offer this option, a quick search online for “affiliate link cloaking script” or “affiliate link protection script” will yield dozens of sites that offer low-cost or free scripts you can try. If your web host is like the one Affiliate Classroom recommends (EHosting4U.com), you could easily set up a redirect for your links.

### **How to protect yourself... and fight back**

**First, accept the fact that monitoring and documenting your income is vital to your success.** Just roll up your sleeves and log into the management screens of all your programs on a routine basis. Software like [Hypertracker](#) can help you track all your links and make this less of a chore.

**Second, do your best to work things out with a merchant - so you can COLLECT.** Calling a merchant a thief before you’ve even given them a chance is not just rude, it’s stupid. The problem could be as simple as a software malfunction. Polite, professional dialogue often solves many problems, and moves the resolution and payment process along.

**Third, if a merchant won’t communicate with you or doesn’t offer any type of support at all, don’t sell for them!** This may sound absurdly obvious, but many affiliates won’t even bother to see if a merchant’s email links or phone numbers work. Remember that it’s a lot harder to nail a merchant who has just ripped you off than it is to avoid them in the first place.

If you don’t feel like checking out merchants before you start promoting, think of the worst jerk you ever worked for. Now ask yourself, would you work for that person FOR FREE? Uh huh, we thought so. So DON’T work for a borderline merchant in the first place. If they lose affiliates, soon they won’t have any at all. Then they won’t make any money. Isn’t that exactly what they deserve?

**Fourth, if a merchant is rude to you, collect what you can - and then DUMP them.** Don’t be a doormat for companies that are eager to USE you, but refuse to respect you.

## ETHICAL MERCHANTS... CONTINUED

**Fifth, READ the ENTIRE service agreement with your merchant.** We know, we know, it's a hassle. But at the very least, examine the section that discusses tracking, cookies, referrals, commission payments, and disputes.

Remember, this document is legally binding, and your paycheck is completely dependent on it! If this merchant's products are worth the time it takes to build a site, write content and get link partners, it's worth taking ten minutes to make sure you aren't signing away your right to question a reporting discrepancy.

**Sixth, DOCUMENT any merchant screw-ups, errors, omissions, or thefts.** If you don't keep records of WHAT the problem was, WHEN it occurred or was discovered, what the merchant did or didn't do, and what YOU did in response, how are you going to back up your claims?

So keep detailed evidence - in HARD COPY form - of any problems with merchants or affiliate networks. Digital evidence is also important, such as emails. But to be safe, PRINT everything. Remember that a sleazy merchant can easily hack his affiliate management software to cook your records. If you have a printed copy, you'll at least have something that explains why you initiated a complaint.

**Seventh, if you've been abused, consider contacting legal and professional authorities.** In the USA, the Federal Trade Commission investigates accusations of fraud, and is a good place to begin. Small business owners can also contact an organization called SCORE. It offers free and low-cost small business help from retired executives, and if you hook up with the right counselor you may get some excellent advice.

Local agencies and business networking groups sometimes offer low-cost legal advice. You may even be able to consult with a professional organization in the merchant's industry. These groups usually have a published Code of Ethics that their members are required to follow. If your merchant belongs, you may get some help.

Bottom line is, you can usually get someone in authority to at least LISTEN - provided you've got DOCUMENTED evidence of the problem (see Sixth, above). Hiring an attorney is a last resort - and might not be worth it. Before it gets to that stage, get all the free or low-cost input you can.

**Finally, let other affiliates know that you've been ripped off - but do it very, very carefully!** You may be tempted to rant against the merchant in the forums. DON'T. You could find yourself slapped with a libel lawsuit. Sometimes it's permissible to post FACTS about a given case, especially if you're adding your problem to an existing thread about the merchant. But it's much safer to share your woes in a PRIVATE forum, like the one at Affiliate Classroom, than to expose yourself to legal action in public venues.

You could also send your story to your JV partners and friends, and to the affiliate marketing leaders who publish ezines. Ask for their advice. Also contact us at [support@affiliateclassroom.com](mailto:support@affiliateclassroom.com) if you've been abused by a merchant. We want to know!

**“You may be tempted to rant against the merchant in the forums. DON'T. You could find yourself slapped with a libel lawsuit. it's much safer to share your woes in a PRIVATE forum, like the one at Affiliate Classroom, than to expose yourself to legal action in public venues.”**

## SEO TALK

# Backlink & Keyword Basics

By Brad Callen  
Professional SEO  
[www.seoelite.com](http://www.seoelite.com)



**“Since most of your links (and almost all of the ones that you will get in the beginning) pointing to your website are artificial, you have to make them look organic to avoid any penalties from the search engines.”**

## Q: How often should I change the anchor text in my backlinks?

The short answer to that is: pretty often. The long answer?

Well, it starts with a definition.

Whenever we talk about link-building, it seems necessary to mention organic SEO - where other websites link to your website “by themselves” (as opposed to an “artificial” link exchange) because they genuinely find it useful. Why is this important? Because once you understand what search engines are looking for in links, you’ll know how to dominate the rankings.

Relevant to the question, search engines try to measure the “originality” of the link - that is, the chances that this link was natural or “artificial”. Since most of the links (and almost all of the ones that you will get in the beginning) pointing to your website are artificial, you have to make them look organic to avoid any penalties from the search engines.

For example, suppose that you are setting up a website on copywriting. Assuming that you have the on-page optimization done and dusted, let’s talk about how you can regularly change your anchor text.

## Your Anchor Link Strategy

First, we take your core list of keywords:

- Copywriting techniques
- Learn copywriting
- Copywriting seo
- Copywriting tips
- Copywriting course
- Copywriting services

And so on. Now, take each keyword, work it in an attractive headline and write 1-2 lines describing your website – no hype, no keyword

## SEO TALK... CONTINUED

spamming – make it attractive and useful to the reader. Make sure that each description is different – it cannot be totally different, but it should change a bit.

If you do that for each keyword, you have 10 or more sets of link details – the headline makes the anchor text and the 2 lines will act as a description. Once you have this set, start from the first combination and switch to the next one after 25-30 links.

This way you can cycle through your list and maybe get to 300 to 400 backlinks before you get through your set of anchor text and description combinations. If you have fewer core keywords (a tiny niche), you can space out the changes – say every 50 links or so.

What to do when the list is up? Alter the anchor text and descriptions for each keyword and do that for the whole list, then start all over.

If you follow this formula not only will you be able to regularly alter your anchor text (and thus make the link-building process look natural), but by targeting so many keywords within the list you can also end up ranking highly for all of them.

**I'm confused about whether I need to worry about keyword density. I'm using an online site builder that analyzes the number of times a keyword appears in my copy. Sometimes it gives me some really weird analysis (like "you need to use your keyword 32 more times on this page!"). Yet I have been reading that Google hardly pays attention to keywords at all these days. Should I even bother dealing with keyword density?**

**Keyword density** is now an outdated concept in SEO, especially when it comes to Google. In the past, it was the single most important factor for judging the value of a web page. But I'm talking back in the pre-Google era (now if THAT doesn't give you a hint about how **outdated** keyword density is...).

With Google's reliance on its PageRank algorithm - and the general trend towards off-page factors determining more and more of your website's rankings - the importance of keyword density as an on-page optimization tool began to diminish. Yet people continued to theorize about what the ideal keyword density should be. Estimates ranged from 2% to 8%. Keyword density, in case you are wondering, is measured by the following formula:



**“Make sure the site map links to every page within your website. Next - and I know this is going to take some effort - is to be sure that every single one of your pages links back to your site map. Do not use any ‘clutter,’ only straight HTML links. That means NO javascript menus on either your site navigation or on your site map page.”**

## SEO TALK... CONTINUED

### Keyword Density Formula

$d = x / y$  where:

$x$  = no. of times a keyword is used in a block of content (page)

$y$  = total word count of the page

$d$  = keyword density

The problem with keyword density is quite simple – it is very, very easy to manipulate and spam.

Spammers used automated content generators to create highly optimized web pages with high keyword densities. As search engines started to set limits on “acceptable” keyword density, spammers got smarter and smarter and reduced their keyword density as well, making it especially hard for search engines to separate spam content from genuine, useful content.

### Search Engines and Keyword Density

Since search engines could not conceivably check every page manually (Google indexes about 8.1 billion pages – and pages are added daily), and they couldn't tolerate spam in their search results, search engines have significantly devalued keyword density as a ranking tool.

In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if keyword density did NOT affect your rankings! **Keyword positioning** (placing the keywords in title tags and header tags) as well as **thematic keyword relevance** (a fancy term that refers to how related your core keywords are to your website's main theme or niche) are far more important than the number of keywords in terms of on-page optimization. And that, of course, pales in comparison to how important off-page optimization, or link building, is.

I suspect the page building tool you're using was designed way back in the days when keyword density mattered. It sounds like it may rely on a fairly high keyword density percentage (32 keywords on a page is probably more than most ultra-spammy auto-generated sites contain). It's almost impossible to repeat a keyword that many times in a normal web page and make it readable.

So ignore those messages about keyword density and focus on the following instead:

- Good, useful, quality content
- Keyword positioning
- Keyword relevance

And once you're done writing your copy and positioning your keywords, start building links with relevant and varied anchor text as described in the answer to the previous question.



**“Keyword positioning (placing the keywords in title tags and header tags) as well as thematic keyword relevance (a fancy term that refers to how related your core keywords are to your website's main theme or niche) are far more important than the number of keywords in terms of on-page optimization.”**

## ARTICLES &amp; FEATURES

# Build Those Holiday Sites Now!



**“Some merchants provide ready-made datafeeds that won’t require much tweaking. You can also create your own datafeeds. It’s a little more work, but it allows you to focus on specific niches.”**

Do you want to cash in on the Christmas holiday buying frenzy? Then put away the sunglasses and tanning lotion, and get in front of the computer!

**Affiliate Classroom** students are already building their Christmas shopping sites, and for good reason. With Google taking months to properly index new sites, and sites dropping in and out of the Yahoo index from week to week, if you expect any search engine traffic at all, you need to get your sites up and running within the next 30-60 days.

Even if you do, expect to purchase some incoming links ([TextLinkBrokers.com](http://TextLinkBrokers.com) is good) and build a few automated blogs (see [RSS to Blog](#) in our Review section) to speed up the process of getting your site crawled and added to search engine databases. You might also want to budget for PPC from Adwords, Overture, or both. And starting those campaigns before the crunch, when bids might be lower, is always a good idea!

Okay, so you’re ready to build those sites and get indexed... what do you do for IDEAS? Hasn’t the holiday niche been done to death? Not necessarily. Here are six hot holiday niche ideas that have barely been touched. All require a little bit of creativity, personality, and flair to pull off. But that’s easy if you’re not a Scrooge!

So if the winter holidays make you happy, then throw that beach towel in the hamper, put the air conditioning on the “deep freeze” setting, turn on some Christmas music... and have FUN with these holiday niche ideas!

## **#1 - Use the power of blogs to build Christmas sites fast.**

This is Christmas fun and money on autopilot! The idea is to start a few Christmas shopping blogs. Then combine a sophisticated automated blogging tool (like [RSS to Blog](#), page 21) with product datafeeds you either get from merchants or create yourself. The auto-blogger will post a few products to your blog each day, every day, automatically, until Christmas (or until you tell it to stop).

Some merchants already provide ready-made datafeeds that won’t require much tweaking. For an example of a gift datafeed for a wide audience, see [http://www.genericgifts.com/affiliate\\_program.jsp](http://www.genericgifts.com/affiliate_program.jsp). You can also create your own datafeeds. It’s a little more work, but it allows you to focus on specific niches. Cusimano scripts [www.c3scripts.com](http://www.c3scripts.com) offers reasonably-priced scripts that ease the learning curve.

## HOLIDAY SITE IDEAS... CONTINUED

Or if you're one of those irritatingly organized people, and keep nice detailed spreadsheets of affiliate products, check out FourthWorld Media Corporation. One of their cool software tools allows you to publish any spreadsheet into an HTML page in just a few clicks [www.fourthworld.com/](http://www.fourthworld.com/), Convert to HTML, copy into your auto blogging tool, test and tweak, and just let it build on its own.

BONUS TIP: We've tested several autoblogging tools, and **RSS to Blog** wins hands down for stability, reliability, ease of installation and set up, and support. But if you're going to use it, we strongly recommend that you create your own **Wordpress** blogs on your own domains, and avoid **Blogger** like the plague. **Blogger** has been arbitrarily deleting blogs that use automated posting - even if the blogs contain original content.

### #2 - Focus on the busy, frazzled, or uninspired gift-giver niche.

For every person who loves waiting for the shopping mall doors to open the day after Thanksgiving, there's another who hates holiday traffic jams, parking hassles, and crowds. So build affiliate sites that cater to all those Christmas shopping-phobic people!

To make this effective, you should sell the idea of LOW-STRESS shopping, far from the noise, crowds, cranky people, long lines, and other unpleasantness. And go for an attractive, "clickable" URL. For example, as of this writing all these domains were available:

[No-Hassle-Christmas-Presents.com](http://No-Hassle-Christmas-Presents.com)  
[No-Hassle-Christmas-Shopping.com](http://No-Hassle-Christmas-Shopping.com)  
[Hassle-Free-Christmas-Gifts.com](http://Hassle-Free-Christmas-Gifts.com)  
[No-Hassle-Christmas-Shopping.com](http://No-Hassle-Christmas-Shopping.com)  
[No-Hassle-Christmas-Gifts.com](http://No-Hassle-Christmas-Gifts.com)

Just combine those with sub-domain names that contain some good keywords in your chosen niche.

### #3 - Build whole family shopping sites.

Build a portal site filled with gift selections for the entire family. Create subdirectories or sub-domains for dads, moms, grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, stepdads and stepmoms, infants, toddlers, teen guys, teen girls, etc.

We like this one because you can niche it by region, country, or nationality. And don't forget all those people who celebrate non-Christian winter holidays. In addition to "Christian whole family shopping," you could do "Whole family shopping for Hannukah" or "Kwaanza."

And content for this one is so easy, it's a joke. Simply write out suggestions for gifts ("Here's a great one we found for the grandpa who has everything. Can you imagine how surprised he'll be? We think this battery operated martini shaker's just perfect to take the burden off those arthritic joints. Just put in some batteries, turn it on, and watch Gramps smile!")



**“For every person who loves waiting for the shopping mall doors to open the day after Thanksgiving, there's another who hates holiday traffic jams, parking hassles, and crowds. So build affiliate sites that cater to all those Christmas shopping-phobic people!”**

## HOLIDAY SITE IDEAS... CONTINUED



**“What do you get that isn’t too personal, too gender-specific, or too boring? This is one great way to cash in on pay-per-lead programs for gift cards, gift certificates, and restaurant certificates.”**

Want a domain that could work with this niche? How about adding family directories to [Fast-Christmas-Presents.com](http://Fast-Christmas-Presents.com)? (As of this instant, it’s still available).

### **#4 - Free gift wrapping or free shipping merchants.**

Here’s the perfect way to WRAP ☺ a Christmas theme around an existing niche site. As the holidays approach, feature ONLY those merchants who offer free Christmas shipping or free/low cost gift wrapping. As of this writing, all these domain names are available:

[5-Dollar-Xmas-Gift-Wrapping.com](http://5-Dollar-Xmas-Gift-Wrapping.com)  
[Free-Gift-Wrapping.com](http://Free-Gift-Wrapping.com)  
[Free-Delivery-Christmas-Gifts.com](http://Free-Delivery-Christmas-Gifts.com)  
[Free-Delivery-Xmas-Gifts.com](http://Free-Delivery-Xmas-Gifts.com)  
[5-Dollar-Gift-Wrapping.com](http://5-Dollar-Gift-Wrapping.com)  
[Free-Xmas-Gift-Wrapping.com](http://Free-Xmas-Gift-Wrapping.com)  
[Free-Shipping-Christmas-Presents.com](http://Free-Shipping-Christmas-Presents.com)  
[Gift-Wrapped-Christmas-Presents.com](http://Gift-Wrapped-Christmas-Presents.com)

### **#5 - Corporate, professional, and classroom gift giving.**

Shopping for employees, co-workers, colleagues, managers, and the kid’s teachers is a pain. What do you get that isn’t too personal, too gender-specific, or too boring? This is one great way to cash in on pay-per-lead programs for gift cards, gift certificates, and restaurant certificates. Believe it or not, these keyword-rich domains were still available last time we checked:

[Gifts-For-The-Boss.com](http://Gifts-For-The-Boss.com)  
[Gifts-For-Your-Employees.com](http://Gifts-For-Your-Employees.com)  
[Gifts-For-The-Teacher.com](http://Gifts-For-The-Teacher.com)  
[Gifts-For-Your-Neighbors.com](http://Gifts-For-Your-Neighbors.com)  
[Gift-For-The-Boss.com](http://Gift-For-The-Boss.com)  
[Gift-For-Your-Employees.com](http://Gift-For-Your-Employees.com)  
[Gift-For-The-Teacher.com](http://Gift-For-The-Teacher.com)

### **#6 - Add special holiday incentives as freebies or cross-sells.**

For high-ticket or high commission items, offer original free Christmas e-cards or screensavers to customers who buy from your site. You’ll need to invest some cash in graphics and programming, but a quick visit to [Scriptlance](http://Scriptlance.com) or [Rentacoder](http://Rentacoder.com) will prove that the investment needn’t be huge. Animated cards that are funny, inspirational, or sentimental seem to have the most appeal. (Make sure you can handle the additional bandwidth charges, though!)

Since many merchants don’t share customer information with you, a unique freebie is a great way to build an opt-in list or announcement list. It’s also the kind of viral marketing that spreads fast during the holidays. Plus it makes your site memorable, and inspires customers to return and buy from you next year.

Another point: this past month Internet marketers seem to have “rediscovered” direct mail. But at [Affiliate Classroom](http://AffiliateClassroom.com) we’ve been teaching students to build, if at all possible, some sort of direct mail list, even if it’s small. Well here’s your chance to build a direct mail list easily. If your budget can swing it, offer to

## HOLIDAY SITE IDEAS... CONTINUED

send a physical Christmas card in addition to the one the merchant sends. Of course, to get this extra special touch, people need to give you a mailing address. Nice! And considering what leads are worth these days, the cost of a card and postage may be a tiny fraction of other lead generation methods.

Just be careful, since some merchants could consider a free greeting card to be an "incentive" that's not permitted in their affiliate agreement. When in doubt, contact the affiliate manager, get permission, and confirm it in writing. You may be pleasantly surprised to find that merchants who otherwise don't permit incentives become a little less strict about holiday cards.

But if you can't or don't want to use free incentives, then charge for them! Many simple holiday incentives, such as a personalized letter from Santa, a physical greeting card/gift announcement, logo items, and holiday or inspirational screensavers can be offered as cross-sells. Price them anywhere from "covering your costs" to \$9.95 (or more). Call some of them "stocking stuffers" and grab some easy profits!

Remember that during the holidays, people have got their credit cards right next to the computer. And they're in a buying mood. This may be the only time of year when they don't think twice about an extra \$10, \$20, \$50, or even \$100. Speed, convenience, and overall warm fuzzy feelings are what matter to them. If you can satisfy those needs with some dirt cheap cross-sells, go for it!

### **#7 - Promote post-holiday specials during the holiday rush.**

Are you in the infoproduct business? Then incentives - as in bonuses - are a way of life for you. Unfortunately, you won't be selling many ebooks around the Christmas holidays. But it's a great time to gear up for a big post-holiday clearance or a "triple the bonuses" special in January.

So instead of springing this offer on your list on January 2, instead of pressuring your maxed-out audience to cough up their money in 7 days or "it's gone," why not steal a technique from the big retailers? Start promoting a post-Christmas "sale" during peak shopping season. Well BEFORE Christmas, inform your readers that your big sale is coming "sometime in January."

The ones who really want your products will keep a very close eye on all your mailings, especially starting January 1. That means you can promote like mad during January without losing your audience. Some readers may even reserve some limit on their charge cards, specifically for your special deal (kind of brings tears to your eyes, doesn't it?). Be sure to make your deal EXTRA special, so the perceived value outweighs any post-holiday spending hangovers.

You could also set up a web page on which you plan to announce the exact date of your special sale. Remind your prospects to check back FREQUENTLY throughout November and December for the exact date. Then populate this page with Christmas gift suggestions and some AdSense ads or affiliate links. Refresh them frequently. Think you'll get a few clicks or sales? Well, the odds are good, especially if you add a little holiday cheer, gift ideas, and decorating or gift wrapping suggestions to the page!

**“Remember that during the holidays, people have got their credit cards right next to the PC. And they're in a buying mood. This may be the only time of year when they don't think twice about an extra \$10, \$20, \$50, or even \$100. Speed, convenience and overall warm fuzzy feelings are what matter to them.”**

## ABOUT AC MAGAZINE

### Affiliate Classroom Magazine is...

- ◆ Written by the staff of the Affiliate Classroom
- ◆ Published monthly
- ◆ Archived in the members area of [www.AffiliateClassroom.com](http://www.AffiliateClassroom.com)

### Advertising

Full, half, and quarter page ads are offered. For current rates, contact: [editor@affiliateclassroom.com](mailto:editor@affiliateclassroom.com), or [support@affiliateclassroom.com](mailto:support@affiliateclassroom.com).

### Article submissions

**Feature Articles:** 700-1500 words, in plain text format ONLY (no html or formatted text), on one detailed affiliate marketing subject.

**News:** 400-700 words, in plain text format ONLY (no html or formatted text), on one general interest Internet marketing news item.

**Letters:** Send to [editor@affiliateclassroom.com](mailto:editor@affiliateclassroom.com) with the words AC MAGAZINE LETTER in the subject line.

**All Submissions:** Include your name, email address, resource box, URL, and a photo in .jpg or .png format. Contact the editor via email: [editor@affiliateclassroom.com](mailto:editor@affiliateclassroom.com)

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