

Affiliate Classroom

The journal of affiliate marketing and management best practices

Email Marketing

**What Merchants
Look For In Email
Affiliates**



**Power Up
Your
Autoresponder**

**The Money
Is In The
Relationship**

**RSS for
Affiliates**

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AffiliateClassroom.com

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Staff

Helen Swann Montgomery, Managing Editor
Jeffrey Perren, Associate Editor

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Affiliate Classroom, Inc.™
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Top 5 Affiliate Programs



AffiliatePrograms.com

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Featured Program—Vomba

http://www.vombacash.com/go.php?adv_id=10698&campaign=photo

As a new affiliate program, VombaCash offers an amazing opportunity to maximize revenues from your traffic. Get paid to promote high quality free contents! VombaCash exclusively promotes safe and trusted products with high conversion rates and amazing benefits for you and your traffic.

You receive more for your traffic by experiencing up to 30% conversion, having payout up to \$0.45 per installation, accumulating points for VombaCash's Reward Program, and earning commission from referred webmasters. Join today at www.vombacash.com/register It's free and definitely worth a look.

Top 5 Programs: April 2007

Ice.com

<http://www.ice.com/content/ice-affiliatepage.html?hm=BBA>

The ICE.com Program has many great incentives and highlights. You get great high commissions (6-10%) and "30 Return Days." Not only that, average sales are over \$200! ICE.com offers incentives and bonus programs, as well as monthly pre-coded link newsletters. They also offer fast and convenient payment (no minimum threshold), dynamic banners, and datafeeds.

Zip Realty

http://www.ziprealty.com/affiliateprogram?referred_by=affiliateprog-dir-text---natl

ZipRealty is a full-service real estate brokerage that serves 24 major cities, offering guaranteed customer service and cash back to buyers and sellers. By sending your visitors to Zip Realty, you receive cash for EVERY qualified lead.

They offer service in all the major cities including: Atlanta, Austin, Bakersfield, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Fresno, Houston, LA, Las Vegas, Miami, Minneapolis, Naples, Orlando, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Diego, Seattle, San Francisco, Tampa, Tucson, Virginia/DC.

Diamond.com

<http://www.diamond.com/customer/diamond-affiliatepage.jsp>

Diamond.com offers one of the greatest incentive plans available to affiliates. They offer high commissions consisting of 4-10% and thirty day returns. With their high average order size, you receive great incentives as well as added bonus programs. They also offer monthly pre-coded link newsletters, fast and convenient payment (no minimum threshold), dynamic banners, and datafeeds.

Payday Loans UK Affiliate Program

http://directroi.com/index.html?super_affiliate_code=CD2716

By becoming a PayDay Loans UK Affiliate you can earn up to \$9.00 per commission! They offer a simple one page form and no sensitive banking info is ever required. All you have to do to become an affiliate is sign up to the network at DirectRoi.com. By becoming a DirectRoi Affiliate you have EXCLUSIVE access to their campaigns, including their high-paying US payday loan offers and other financial offers.

Liquidation.com

<http://www.liquidation.com/partner/affiliate/?tid=DC00002841>

The Liquidation.com Program in CJ not only offers you a parasite free auction program, but they pay \$1 per unique bid and \$25 for each closed transaction. With long life cookies, an attentive Affiliate Manager, and an easy to find and almost infinite audience, you will certainly not regret joining their program. Call Adam at 202.558.6223 or visit www.Liquidation.com/partner/affiliate to find out more information as well as join the Liquidation.com affiliate program today!

Until next time...

Check us out in our [Industry Watch Newsletter](#)
(http://www.affiliateprograms.com/industry_newsletter/10-17.htm)

In our newsletter you can find all the latest industry news, tips, and tools. Communicate with our team of experts through in-depth articles and free online resources. These resources will help you to dramatically, increase your knowledge of affiliate marketing. Here is a place where you can receive the guidance and support you need to reach your full potential.

How to Be a Good E-mail Affiliate

by Debra Rabin & Robert Dedich

<http://www.AmericanLifeDirect.com>



One of the mainstays of Affiliate Marketing is the e-mail marketer. A person or company who owns an email list and knows how to use it can make a great living as an affiliate. In the world of Affiliate Advertising, an emailer is very close to the top of the food chain. E-mailers have their pick of offers, most merchants and networks have plenty of email offers available.

In my line of work heading up Business Development at <http://www.LinkValu.com> Affiliate Network I spend most of my days seeking out email affiliates and providing them with the necessary information and tools to work with [LinkValu](http://www.LinkValu.com). The popularity of email marketing stems from one main fact – when e-mailers work they make money not only for themselves but for the Advertiser that they are representing because they can reach consumers quickly and efficiently through their email lists!

Our affiliates are selected because they have met our standards for success. E-Mail Affiliates need to show us a track record that shows they've worked on several other offers successfully, are CAN-SPAM compliant and will scrub their lists against our suppression files religiously. These things are non-negotiable.

Must-Have Qualifications

As a Merchant, and now as LinkValu Affiliate Network, the criteria we use when evaluating potential Publishers is quite rigorous. Our affiliates are selected because they have met our standards for success. E-Mail Affiliates need to show us a track record that shows they've worked on several other offers successfully, are CAN-SPAM compliant and will scrub their lists against our suppression files religiously. These things are non-negotiable.

Robert Dedich, E-mail Marketing Specialist for Spectrum Direct, the in-house publisher for [LinkValu.com](http://www.LinkValu.com) offered several valuable tips for email marketers starting out or seeking success in the affiliate marketing world:

- « **Know your list!** Lists segmented by demographic data are worth more money to merchants!

- « **Develop good relationships with major email service providers.** Listen to their advice.

- « **Get White listed.** Yes it's hard to do, but it can improve deliverability by 25%.
- « **Quality control is your biggest job.** Typos, errors and under-performing creatives just increase your un-sub rate, so proof read before your offers go out.
- « **Don't over-mail your list and be selective about the offers you choose to send into the homes of your customers.** This extends the life of your list.
- « **Abide by CAN-SPAM.** Download suppression lists regularly, keep an in-house "do not mail" list and check that un-subscribe links work before sending offers.
- « **Test offers.** Experiment with new creative and subject lines, measure every response so that you'll know a winner when you see one.
- « **To develop your list, remember that opt-in is good, but double opt-in is better.**
- « **Continuously upgrade, add to and grow your email list.** Think of your list as a living thing, your list grows better when you tend it, and dies when ignored.
- « **You can never have too much new creative material.** Deliverability and consumer response metrics are positively correlated to an ongoing stream of fresh creatives.

Finally, remember that successful email affiliates are not sitting back, playing video games and eating bon-bons; they are working hard every day.

As a merchant and network operator, we acknowledge that affiliates are the independent sales force we rely on to drive sales. So our last advice to email marketers is this: **go where you are wanted and well treated.**

Work with merchants who view you and your list as partners in profitability. We never forget that, and neither should you!

About the Authors

Debra Rabin, Business Development Specialist for LinkValu Affiliate Network.

Ms. Rabin develops ongoing profitable relationships with top affiliates, and is charged with growing LinkValu through acquisition of successful offers and affiliates. She can be reached at 949-600-7912 or drabin@linkvalu.com

Robert Dedich, Email Marketing Specialist for Spectrum Direct

Mr. Dedich re-engages visitors to the company website with the end goal of converting visitors into customers. His background is in IT, Business Management, and Marketing.

Run On Auto-Pilot with Autoresponders

by Evelyn Grazini

http://www.reawakener.com/free_gifts.htm



If you are collecting names at your web site (like you should be), an autoresponder (AR) is a must!

Seven, The Lucky Number

You may have heard experts say that it often takes seven or more messages before a prospective customer will make a purchase. If a customer signs up at your site, gets a freebie, then receives nothing else from you, you're not taking full advantage of the selling opportunities that are right at your fingertips.

A lot of profit potential is lost by not following up with these prospective customers - at LEAST seven times.

If a customer signs up at your site, gets a freebie, then receives nothing else from you, you're not taking full advantage of the selling opportunities that are right at your fingertips.

Sometimes however, the easiest thing for an experienced affiliate marketer to do is the most confusing thing for a "newbie.". I found this out when I posted an article on the Affiliate Classroom blog called: [Confirmation Emails - Waste Not, Want Not](#) . I was surprised at the number of questions that came up in reference to autoresponders.

Done In No Time

I have set up a lot of autoresponder messages for different niche markets and affiliate programs. For me it's almost second nature. I go through the same steps each time. Everything is done in about 30 minutes. Since it's not so easy for others, I'll take this opportunity to show you how it's done.

This article is going to be a little technical for some, but hang in there. The next time you need to set up a new series of newsletters, you'll be glad you have these step-by-step instructions.

This article is **NOT** about how to set up a squeeze page, or how to drive traffic to your site. Those subjects will be covered later. Today, I want to show you the exact process of setting up a new autoresponder.

This process will help keep visitors interested in your newsletter, and hopefully buy your current, or future, product. I'll end with a quick lesson on how (and where) to upload your files. This step is not done within an AR, but is a necessary last step to make sure everything links up correctly. It also includes one more selling opportunity.

By the time you're done reading, you'll be ready to make a few small changes to your AR set-up. Changes that could make a huge difference in the way you approach messaging. Hopefully, your bottom line will see a huge change also!

Choosing an Autoresponder

The first thing you need to do, of course, is select a company to do business with that offers autoresponders. You could do a lot of research comparing different systems, or use the one that most affiliate marketers use - [Aweber!](#)

I have tried other systems, but find that I am most satisfied with [Aweber](#). Their excellent customer service cannot be beat. I also appreciate the almost instant delivery of messages (including test messages). I use [Aweber](#) exclusively; and highly recommend them:

<http://www.affiliateclassroom.com/Keywords>

If you're using another AR company, this article will still make sense. However, it is based off the [AWeber](#) system (since that's what I use). Other AR providers may not offer all of the options that [AWeber](#) does, but most of them will have the basics.

Setting Up The Autoresponder

The first thing you need to do is select a name for the particular AR. Most providers give you unlimited ARs, so be sure to choose a name that identifies only with this set of subscriber newsletters.

Then, set up a web form on your site to collect subscriber names. This process is fairly self-explanatory. There's just one thing you might want to change - and that is the "Thank You Page" link. If you're in a hurry, you can leave this as is.

Since [Aweber](#) uses a double opt-in system, this section includes a default link that takes the subscriber to an **activation message** that says: " *Please check your email and click the confirmation link to activate your subscription.*" (That's just what "double opt-in" means: the customer signs-up, then confirms by responding to a confirmation email.)

If you want to increase your income, and ensure the subscriber completes the process, I suggest adding a page to your site that includes the confirmation message. You could use the default message; then add a banner or a link to another affiliate program. It's a good idea to remind the person that they will **not** get their freebie unless they confirm the subscription.

If you want to increase your income, and ensure the subscriber completes the process, add a page to your site that includes the confirmation message.

Here's a sample of one of my [confirmation pages](#):

http://www.midlifematchmaker.com/Subscribe_Thank_You.shtml

The Verified Opt-In Message

OK, now the visitor has signed up for your newsletter; and you've automatically warned them that they will be getting a confirmation message. Now write the short confirmation message. Go to the "Verified Opt-in" tab. A default message is available. This can be customized, but it should remain one or two sentences. It again reminds the visitor to opt-in, and gives instructions on how to do so.

The extra item on this page is an optional field called "Confirmation Success Page." Include a link here to give people instant access to download the freebie as soon as they confirm. People want information immediately!

By adding a download address to this field, they can be sent directly to the download page. This ensures they actually get the freebie without having to open another email message. The entire process runs smoothly, making your customer confident in your delivery ability. This confidence becomes important as your future newsletters arrive with affiliate product offers.

This does mean, though, that you will have to add another page to your site that includes the download instructions. Download instructions should be very simple. **Example:** Right click on the link below and choose "Save Target As" to save this eBook to your computer. But they can also have additional useful information, such as where and how to download the Adobe reader, etc.

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www.PLNewsletter.com



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The best way to find instructions that you like is to pay attention when you order something. Get a feel for what others are doing. Then you can use the aspects you like and add them to your page.

It's becoming more important to remind them that they asked to be on your list.

The First Newsletter – And the Opt-Out Link

Finally it's time to send your first official newsletter. Unfortunately, when you send that first newsletter, some people will have already forgotten they signed up for your list. It's easy for AOL and other users to report an email as spam.

For that reason, it's becoming more important to remind them that they *asked* to be on your list. Also make sure there is always an opt-out link at the end of your emails (most AR systems do this automatically). Make it easy to opt-out, so they don't have to hit the "Report as Spam" button.

Message Headers

The message I use to remind people that I'm their new best friend is as follows (and, I have not been tagged with a spam complaint since I started using this at the top of every newsletter):

To exclude yourself from all future mailings click the link at the end of this email. Feel free to send your friends to the site where you signed up for this self-help newsletter, and received your gift reports on Dreaming, Hypnosis and Stress Relief:
<http://www.reawakener.com>

As you can see, this header actually serves three functions. It reminds subscribers that they signed up for this list, and that they received something in exchange. It also encourages them to send it on to their friends. A good email has a chance of going viral if people find it informative enough to pass on.

Welcome Messages

After the heading, use the first newsletter for a welcome message. Also, provide the download page link again. This eliminates frustration and emails if they weren't able to download the freebie when they were there the first time. Here's what my first message looks like:

Hi [insert name field],

Welcome and thank you for signing up for our newsletter. You will continue to find valuable and interesting information as I research new and exciting subjects throughout the year. The link to the report is at:

<http://www.nameofsite.com/ebook.htm> (Note: this is not a real site)

(Be sure to include an offer for an affiliate product here.)

Final Tips

The link above is a direct link to the download page. This is the same page you sent the visitor to when they confirmed their subscription. When subscribers go to this page, they see a "Download PDF" link. When they click on the "Download PDF" link, they are sent to the eBook PDF that is hosted on my **server** (NOT on [Aweber](#)). Then they can save the report to their computer.

One more thing: When you have download pages like this on your site that you don't want people to find while searching, be sure to put the following code at the top of your page (where the HTML is located) so it doesn't get indexed by the search engines. Just add it under the other meta codes on your site:

```
<meta name="robots" content="noindex,nofollow">
```

Simpler Than It Seems

The entire process I've outlined above may seem a little complex at first, but you only have to do it once — well, once for each AR you set up. However, after completing the first one, you will have the right idea, and be able to do the others almost automatically!

Now that you have the autoresponder set up and the formalities out of the way, it's time to start loading it up with newsletters, or sales letters for affiliate products. If you're a member of the Affiliate Classroom's [PL Newsletter club](#), this will be easy. Just do a little re-writing of the sales newsletters. You'll get a year's worth of newsletters done in about an hour.

Then, all you need to do is send traffic to your site – the rest will run on autopilot!

About the Author

Evelyn Grazini is an Affiliate Classroom student and the author of "Directed Dreaming, Success From The Subconscious." Her specialty is Self-Help information, including Dreaming, Hypnosis, and Stress Relief. Her writings effectively condense volumes of professional research into one succinct resource. Get some of Evelyn's free reports at: http://www.reawakener.com/free_gifts.htm

The Money Is In The Relationship

by Mark Thompson

<http://www.income-academy.com>



How many times have you heard that the money is in the list? This often quoted statement is actually quite misleading. It should read the money is in a well-managed and highly responsive list. The problem that almost every email marketer faces when they first set out to make money from their lists is how to convert the names on the list into paying customers.

In this article we'll look at the whole process from gathering names to converting those names into valuable clients.

Email marketing can be summed up in one small anecdote: Two rustlers stood looking at a field of cows and the young rustler says: "Let's run into the field and grab a cow." To which the old rustler replies: "No let's walk in slowly and grab them all."

Many affiliate marketers first taste of email marketing is when they themselves get on the list of some Internet marketing guru. They then get the impression that email marketing is about sending out three or four emails a week, offering every new product that comes out. Email marketing is not necessarily like that. Email marketing for the rest of us is about building relationships based on trust.

Offer Incentives

The first step in a building your list is to get members to sign up.

You can achieve this in many ways. The usual method is to place a signup box on a web page and ask people to sign up to your newsletter. However there are more effective methods. You can offer incentives such as free eBooks, or video guides, or even a free 7-day course.

The better your offer, the more signups you will achieve. Many people would happily sign up for a regular newsletter. However, by adding incentives you increase your sign up rate and potentially increase your earnings from your list.

Getting Customers Through Forums

Now that you have decided how you will entice your members to sign up, it's time to get them to **read your offer**.

If we wanted to generate an email list that would focus on photography, then we could go to a photography forum and start to post messages. By answering questions and being helpful in the forum we would soon be recognized as an authority on the subject.

We could then add details of our newsletter to our forum signature. While this method is quite effective, there is one more step we could add that would help to really increase our signups.

The first step in a building your list is to get members to sign up. You can achieve this in many ways. The usual method is to place a signup box on a web page and ask people to sign up to your newsletter. However there are more effective methods.

Get Testimonials

Just as you can make incentives available to people who sign up to your list, you can offer these incentives directly to members of the forum. I have also seen this method work really well with a slight added twist.

Instead of offering a free guide to any particular member of the forum, one member created an ebook and posted that he was shortly going to sell this through Clickbank. He said he would be happy to give free copies of the guide to forum members in return for testimonials. Within a few hours he had 500 new members in his list, all of which were interested in the particular subject.

He may have lost out on a few sales of his book. But he gained in the long run from additional sales, and even from affiliate sales, since a number of members promoted the book he released. Many people would balk at giving away a book they intended selling. **But selling the book was never the main focus of this promotion, getting a list was.**

Don't Sell... Yet

Once we have a list, we need to give the members the value they joined for, and if possible surpass their expectations. The members most likely joined to get help and advice, but they are expecting you to sell to them. After all, that's what everyone does isn't it? You are going to surprise them by giving them what they wanted and not selling to them...yet!

Establish a Relationship First

Under no circumstances should you attempt to sell anything to your list before you have established a good relationship with them. This can take many weeks or months. In fact, I've heard it mentioned that you shouldn't attempt to sell to list in the first year. Personally I think that is a bit long. But it indicates that a list needs to be nurtured before you sell to it. I never attempt to sell anything to a list until they have had at least 10-15 informative emails from me.

Ease Into Selling

People join your lists for information. If you wish to keep your members subscribed, make sure that you only attempt to sell to them on an infrequent basis. You'll notice that many list owners will send two or three offers a week. The conversion rate on these lists is usually very poor and they rely on a constant influx of new members to replace members who unsubscribe.

I have one list of fewer than 60 people and if I send them an offer my conversion rate is usually in excess of 20-25%. This list has only had one offer sent to it in the last six months.

Yet this one small list is responsible for more than \$500 of recurring income every month. I have revealed these facts to demonstrate two things. First, you don't need a large list. And second, a well-managed list can be very profitable.

Give Valuable Advice

Maintain a good relationship with your list by supplying them with regular good quality advice. That is paramount to having a successful and profitable list.

Another great way of interacting with your list is to **ask questions** when you send out an email. Always make sure that your members can contact you; remember it's a 2-way process. It's all about establishing a warm relationship.

Offer Freebies

You can help **keep this relationship warm by giving free eBooks and courses**. With some of these, offer your members paid upgrades. If your members like what you are giving them they will be happy to upgrade.

Initially, keep the price low. By offering an upgrade at something like \$7 you can establish more trust. Also, this will help confirm that you have a list that doesn't mind spending money online.

Don't Cross Sell

One thing that is vitally important is that your list needs to be kept on topic. **Don't be tempted to cross sell to a list**. You may have a list that contains people interested in photography. You may also have a second list whose members are interested in weight loss, for example. Don't be tempted to sell a weight-loss product to your photography list. The photography list must get photography related emails, and the weight loss list must have only weight loss related content.

However, **there is nothing stopping you from casually cross-promoting your ezines**. For example, you could get some of your photography list to sign up for your weight-loss list by mentioning something about weight-loss in a conversational manner. Then mention that, if they're interested, they can sign up for your newsletter or free weight-loss ebook. Be sure to make this promotion an aside or a postscript, not a main part of the email.

What to Avoid

When starting out with email marketing I would strongly advise you to avoid the Internet Marketing sector. There is nothing worse than generating a list and then marketing a product to them, only to find that 20 other people have marketed the same product to them.

To work effectively in the Internet marketing niche you need to have good email marketing skills and access to excellent bonuses. You need to be able to offer your members something that all the other marketers can't. So, until you can develop these additional components to compete successfully, avoid it.

Seek a Niche You Know About

It is far easier to hone your skills in a sector that you have excellent knowledge of. Having knowledge of a sector will allow you to quickly establish yourself as an expert.

People are much more likely to follow the advice and recommendations of an expert. So selling to that list will be easier. Never be tempted to bluff your list, though. It's almost a certainty that there will be people on your list who know more than you!

Getting Started

So how do you get to the stage where you can sell to list? The first thing you should do is to **write 10 or more newsletters\emails giving general advice** and tips on the subject. Then **add them to your autoresponder.**

Establish a Schedule, Keep Them Interested...

Decide how often you want these sent out to members and configure your autoresponder to send these out (see "Run On Auto-Pilot With Autoresponders" in this issue). I would recommend once a week as a good frequency to start with. In these initial mails **give as much help and advice as you can.** If you keep your subscribers interested at this stage, then they should remain members of the list for a long time.

So, now we are up to about week ten. You can now start to send out weekly newsletters that you've just written. You can talk about recent developments in the sector and give more up-to-date advice.

Now might also be a good time to give your a list a good, related CPA (cost per action) offer, ideally one that gives your list something for free. For example, if you had a golf list you could look for a CPA offer where your members would get free golf balls. Give them the details of this offer and your affiliate link.

Such CPA freebie offers are a win-win. Your subscribers get free golf balls, and you earn income. Plus you've just proved the value of your ezine to your members, and you are on your way to maintaining a profitable list.

The End Result: Sales

We've seen that by keeping a good relationship with your list you can ensure that your list is responsive to your offers when you make them. Remember, don't treat your list as "pockets to be picked," but rather as friends to whom you give good advice. If you do, you will continue making sales for many years to come.

About the Author

Mark Thompson spent many years working in IT consultancy in London. Following a re-evaluation of his goals and lifestyle in 2004 he sold everything he couldn't fit into the family car and moved to rural Spain where he now pursues a variety of online ventures.

See: <http://www.income-academy.com>

An Introduction to RSS Feeds for Affiliates

by Katalin Torok, <http://mktg.idared.net>



As a web-savvy marketer you no doubt encounter web feeds every day in your work. But have you taken the plunge to implement RSS feeds in your own business yet? While email marketing is a great way of keeping in touch with your audience, RSS can be very helpful in getting your message out—in spite of email deliverability issues. In this article we'll help you get started with web feeds that can grow your affiliate business.

What Is It?

RSS is not limited to publishing new "articles" or news. Any snippet of content that changes over time can be a prime candidate for tracking in an RSS feed — price changes, special offers, new product releases.

A web feed (or RSS feed) is a **specially formatted XML file**, used to publish content that is frequently updated. If you look at the RSS feed in a plain text viewer, you will see that it is **formatted with tags that resemble HTML code**, with `<title></title>` `<description></description>` and `<link></link>` tags around your text.

While most modern browsers can display RSS feed content in a readable form, their real power is unleashed when the feed is opened in an RSS reader or aggregator. When the user subscribes to the RSS feed(s) in an RSS reader, the reader notifies the user whenever the feed was updated, and displays the new content.

Through RSS feeds, blogs and news sites can keep visitors automatically updated whenever new content is posted. But RSS is not limited to publishing new "articles" or news. Any snippet of content that changes over time can be a prime candidate for tracking in an RSS feed — price changes, special offers, new product releases.

Private, No Email Required

The private, unobtrusive, and real-time nature of RSS feeds makes them very user-friendly compared to email subscriptions. Users can keep up to date (up to the minute!) with a website without having to sacrifice their privacy by giving out their email address.

Whenever the users decide, they can unsubscribe with a click of a button — safely, and once and for all. (Not always the case with email subscriptions, unfortunately.) Since web feeds are

presented chronologically in feed readers, they provide an easy view of the latest content, in the order it was published.

While RSS has many user-friendly features, up until recently (with a few exceptions) the tools available to use with web feeds have lacked the ease-of-use necessary for mainstream adoption. RSS remained the powertoy of early-adopter, tech-savvy consumers.

Today, all the latest browsers have feed readers built into them. Thanks to the seamless experience, many RSS users aren't even aware that they are using RSS feeds to keep up to date on their favorite websites.

Built-In to Browsers

But things have changed. Today, all the latest browsers have feed readers built into them. Easy-to-use web-based RSS readers from popular web properties, like the Google Reader, or the RSS-powered My Yahoo service make subscribing to feeds quick and painless even for non-techie users. Thanks to the seamless experience, many RSS users aren't even aware that they are using RSS feeds to keep up to date on their favorite websites (via live bookmarks in browsers for example).

Now that we discussed the basics of what RSS feeds are let's look at how the affiliate world uses RSS already. We'll also supply a few ideas on how you can implement feeds in your own business.

Try It Yourself

If this is the first time you've taken a bite of web feeds, just sign up for a feed reader. To get a feel for how they're used, subscribe to your favorite blogs and websites that publish RSS feeds. Once you get the hang of reading websites in a feed reader you will quickly see what works and what doesn't.

Stay Up To Date On Industry News

Affiliate marketing blogs and news sites publish RSS feeds that allow you to keep up with the latest news from the affiliate world. As examples, try these news sources:

<http://blog.affiliateclassroom.com/> (look for the RSS feeds in the right sidebar)
<http://www.revenews.com/feeds.html>

Stay Current With Merchants

Many merchants — including the big networks — have now adopted RSS feeds as a communication tool for their affiliate partners. They can use it to keep affiliates updated on hot deals, coupons, special offers and bestsellers, or any kind of news about their affiliate program. Check your important merchant partners' sites for affiliate feeds, and be proactive — ask them to create one if they haven't already.

For a great example of merchants keeping in touch with affiliates via RSS, take a look at the AMWSO RSS feed here:

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/AMWSO>

Pick Up the Freshest Merchant Deals

If your merchant partner has an RSS feed directed at shoppers, that can be a great source of hot deals to promote. No more waiting for the monthly affiliate newsletter from the merchant. Pick up the deals, add your tracking code, and you will always have the latest high-converting deals on your site.

Ideas for Implementing Feeds

As with any new technology, the possibilities are endless for working with RSS feeds within your site. To start out, you can create an RSS feed from your content as it is posted on the site, to help visitors keep up-to-date with what's new. Such a feed will help you build visitor loyalty, as it keeps your brand and your site fresh in their minds every time they encounter it in their RSS reader.

Keep the feed properly updated, not too long and not too short, and relevant.

Keep the feed properly updated, not too long and not too short (see our tips below), and relevant. Your reader will keep coming back to your site through your feed, or clicking your merchant links included in the feed

Niche Feeds

When you are ready to move further, you can create category-specific feeds, a coupon news feed, or a weekly "hottest deals" feed. By diversifying your content into smaller interest areas, shoppers can find those angles that they are truly interested in.

Not all your shoppers will want to read about every single piece of content you publish. They may be reluctant to subscribe to a full feed. But bargain-hunters will appreciate a deal-notification feed that only shows the deals that they are truly interested in.

Add Scripting

Once you are ready to get your hands dirty with some scripting, you can create more advanced tools that use RSS. Just one idea: a price-watch feature to notify shoppers of price changes on your merchants' products.

How to Create an RSS Feed

To create an RSS feed is actually simple. You need to create a file on your server in the XML format that conforms to one of the web feed specifications. If this sounds scary, don't worry there are easier ways to do it than starting from scratch. The easiest way is to use a CMS that publishes an RSS feed automatically from your content. WordPress, or any modern CMS software will do that.

If you don't yet use a CMS, there are web-based services and downloadable software that will generate properly formatted feeds for you. Take a look at these sites for more details:

<http://www.make-rss-feeds.com/>

<http://www.feedforall.com/>

Once you have created your web feed, take a look at the services of Feedburner (<http://www.feedburner.com>) for some more advanced tools to spice up and track readership of your feed.

RSS Feed Best Practices

Use Full Text Feeds

If you use a CMS for publishing your site, the software will probably have an option to publish only teaser paragraphs or the full article in the RSS feed. A teaser paragraph includes your article's first couple of lines and the user has to click over to your site to read the entire content.

That is less user-friendly than publishing your full content in the feed, unless you have very long articles (or content that span multiple pages). Include your affiliate links in your content, and you will save the user one click on the road to converting to a sale. Everyone benefits.

Include Images

By including images directly in your feeds you can make them more interesting and catch user attention. Some feed readers combine multiple feeds into a continuous river of feed items (e.g. Google Reader). A text-only entry can be overlooked too easily, while an image always stands out to grab attention. Make sure the images are relevant and small in size.

Use Standard Icons

Use standard icons to link to your feeds on your site. Orange icons are the standard for pointing to RSS feeds (although you can, of course, link to your feeds any way you prefer). By using standard icons, your users can quickly find your feed even on a busy web page. It is a good idea to provide links to the feed(s) in the sidebar and in the page footer at the bottom, as well.

Grab a set from this site: <http://www.feedicons.com/>

Educate Users

If your audience is not very tech-savvy, educate them on the usefulness of web feeds by publishing an introductory article on what is RSS, and how to subscribe to your feeds. Take a look at <http://www.whatisrss.com/> for an example, or <http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/feed101> for more inspiration.

Craft Good Headlines

Work carefully on your headlines. Many feed readers display new feed items just like your email Inbox displays messages, one in each line. In such cases, your title or headline will need to

work well enough to convince the reader to click on the title to read the whole feed item. Keep it to the point, and use a tone that resonates with your audience.

Monetizing Your Feed

Advertisements in web feeds can further monetize your content, or provide some additional revenue if your main income source is affiliate commissions. But keep ads to a minimum and highly contextual, or you risk alienating users. Unsubscribing from a feed is one click away at all times, so you should keep the feeds useful and valuable to your users above all else.

Your web feeds should be used primarily for driving customers to your site and for loyalty-building, not as your major income source. For a great overview of RSS advertising options, take a look at this post on Prologger:

<http://www.prologger.net/archives/2006/10/21/rss-advertising-options/>

Here are some links to additional useful resources:

Google Reader: <http://www.google.com/reader/view>

Bloglines: <http://bloglines.com/>

Netvibes: <http://www.netvibes.com/>

Adding RSS feeds to your site is simple, and potentially income generating. Don't overlook a tool that can give your readers up-to-date, useful content, and make you money at the same time.

About the Author

Katalin Torok is an independent marketing consultant with a focus on Web 2.0. Her website and blog contains many helpful tips at: <http://mktg.idared.net> .

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