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Trading *Words* for *Traffic*

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Introduction

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How to Trade Words for Traffic

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Viral Blogging.

Link Bait.

Tagged.

Dugg.

If you know what those words mean, you're likely looking to *do* the first, *create* the second, and have the third and fourth *happen* to something you've written. If you **don't** know what those words mean, relax. They're simply new terms for a timeless concept you likely already understand.

Publicity.

At their essence, these fancy digital terms are simply the new nomenclature for gaining attention. *Getting press*, as it was labeled in days now past, when intermediaries known collectively as "the media" decided who the public became aware of.

These days, you don't have to spend the money, or the years networking, to achieve media access. You don't need an expensive PR firm or a rolodex stuffed with the contact info for ink-stained reporters, grizzled TV field anchors, and your sassy local drive-time disc jockey.

Online, *the public* decides who gets publicity. What a concept, huh? You'll still need to catch the attention of some pretty influential people, though. People sitting at home in front of computers, wearing perhaps a bathrobe and slippers.

That's not necessarily easy, though. This can be a tough crowd, too.

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Welcome to the Blogosphere

It's been said time and time again that links are the currency of the web. Without links, your odds of achieving significant online traffic (either from other websites or search engines) without big ad bucks are slim to none.

Without links, no one knows you exist online. Technorati ranks the popularity of blogs by the number of incoming links. Google's search engine algorithm thinks you're more important when you have links aimed at you from important people.

It's not enough anymore to just get people *talking*... they need to be *linking*. It's more important these days that they spell your URL right, rather than your name.

It can be awfully lonely on the web when no one stops by.

If you're trying to do business online, lonely equals poor. Whether you're selling products, services or advertising, you need visitors who not only stop by, but return again and again.

So what do you do? Issue a press release? **Sure**. ().

Drop turkeys from a helicopter? Never! (more on that later).

First of all, you'd better be blogging. You've got to join the conversation and have something valuable to say before anyone will bother acknowledging you.

In the excellent business blogging book *Naked Conversations*, authors Robert Scoble and Shel Israel envision a day when a business that *doesn't* blog will be viewed with suspicion by the public. Blog marketing has been dismissed as fad and reviled as fanciful, but the denial stage is over, and everyone is getting in on the action.

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What's Your Goal?

We know we all need to blog, and we all need traffic. And to get traffic, we need links from other blogs. But you've also got to think about how that traffic will perceive you when it stops by, and whether those visitors will likely ever return.

Are you a professional looking for new clients? Are you selling novelty items, or expensive modern art? Do you cater to a sophisticated advertising demographic, or are you after more of a *Blue Collar Comedy* crowd?

> **In 1993, seven years after leaving Van Halen, David Lee Roth was busted in New York City for buying a small quantity of marijuana. Afterwards, Howard Stern had Roth on his show and asked, "So, Dave, you looking for publicity?"**
>
> **"Howard, this is a $35-dollar pot bust," Roth replied. "If I was looking for publicity, I would have pooped on the sidewalk."**
>
> Source: Anecdotage

The lesson? Make sure the attention you receive reflects well on you (or at least in the way you intend). It's all too easy to achieve temporary notoriety as a fool.

Not All Traffic is Created Equally

You should also be thinking about the type of traffic that you attract, rather than just the quantity. Back when it broke, posting the Numa Numa dance on your law firm blog would have brought in traffic, but

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I'm not sure it would have translated into a spike in retainer agreements.

Here's another example: I recently posted an article that used the Spanish introduction to an alternative rock song as an illustration of the point I wanted to make. Making that point to my English-speaking audience required a translation. Within days I began getting search engine traffic from people who wanted to know what that Spanish intro means in English, thanks to the fact that the article leads off with both versions.

Now, having one alternative rock fan find another—who also happens to blog about copywriting—isn't a bad thing. But it's likely they'll just leave after finding what they want, never to be seen again.

Targeted traffic is more valuable than *tons* of traffic. Unless of course the tons of traffic is targeted.

Say *that* five times fast.

The Importance of Headlines

Your headline is the first, and perhaps only, impression you make on a prospective reader. Without a post title that turns a browser into a reader, the rest of your blog may as well not even exist.

At its essence, a compelling headline must promise some kind of benefit or reward for the reader, in trade for the valuable time it takes to read more. Your headline is the first critical step to getting a link to your post.

Why? Because it's got to be *read* before it can be *linked*! For more tips, take a look at How to Write Headlines That Work.

Story Time

The key to truly connecting with anyone, online or off, is a good story. Stories are the foundation of good business, great romances, and inspirational living.

The essence of a compelling story is an unwavering focus on the reader. Forget what *you* want, what's in it for *them*? Like Seth Godin says, it's a marketer's job to tell people [a story they want to hear](#).

> **During eBay's rapid rise, the company nurtured a quaint rumor about its origins, claiming that founder Pierre Omidyar had created the site in 1995 so that his fiancee could trade Pez candy dispensers with other collectors.**
>
> **Alas, the Pez myth, it was later revealed, had been fabricated by eBay's public-relations director in 1997 to generate buzz about the site.**
>
> Source: [Anecdotage](#)

It's up to you whether *your* story is a complete fabrication. I tend to lean aggressively toward complete honesty, delivered in a creative fashion. Ethics aside, the blogosphere will call you out at the first opportunity. And it won't be pretty.

No matter what, you *must* have a story that people *want* to hear, and then you've got to *live* that story. In that regard, eBay CEO Meg Whitman was often photographed with Pez collections and had more than 100 dispensers displayed in the lobby at eBay headquarters, despite the fact that the company origin was a fairy tale.

Are you ready to become a storyteller? You can learn how to formulate and tell better stories by developing good copywriting skills.

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Copywriting (*attention-grabbing, reader-focused, persuasive writing*) is an essential element to all great publicity efforts. But in the blogging realm, there's a specific type of copywriting that can also help immensely.

Direct-response copywriting is a form of marketing designed to solicit an immediate action that is specific and quantifiable. Meaning, you've essentially got one shot at getting a certain percentage of readers to respond in the way you want them too. The *response rate* dictates your level of success.

Now apply that methodology to blogging, and your quest for links. You want to write things that truly connect with people, *and* that also result in a direct, specific and quantifiable action — a link, a Delicious tag, a vote at Digg.

Each link, tag and vote you earn has a tendency to create others, depending on how well your copy offers something of *real value* to the reader. Check Technorati for how well you did. Rinse, repeat.

You're now trading words for traffic.

Applying direct-response copywriting techniques "right out of the box" to a blog in a quest for links *or* sales will not only fail, it'll get you shunned (think junk mail). Blogging is a unique media environment, based on conversations and an ongoing relationship with customers, prospects, and other bloggers.

Copywriting techniques are still applicable, but must be conversational and adapted to match the context. That's the kind of stuff I talk about over at my place, Copyblogger.

Stop by for a visit, or subscribe for free to keep up to date.

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Be Persistent

Not long ago, you could post a picture of your cat on a Friday and get attention. Bloggers still love to link, but as any environment becomes more crowded, people become more discriminating. After all, a link is a form of personal recommendation, and it says something about both ends of the hypertext.

You may work hard on an article or resource that you're just *positive* will spread like wildfire, and yet hear nothing but lonely crickets chirping upon release. Not even a measly comment.

Bummer . . . back to the drawing board.

> **As she left the theater following the *Forrest Gump* premiere in 1994, Sharon Stone was dismayed to see that the paparazzi had failed to notice her. She returned to the theater and tried again.**
>
> **Again they failed to notice her...**
>
> **Finally, on her third attempt, she was noticed, and pestered, as planned.**
>
> Source: Anecdotage

Just keep at it. Put your audience first with everything you write, and success will come. Creating viral copy is actually a process, not a single event. You're building relationships that result from showing up, day after day, giving your readers the best you've got. Sometimes it just takes a while to get noticed, but the time invested is still likely a better value than advertising.

Link Early and Link Often

"Link bait" is such a harsh term, isn't it? Sounds aggressive, and a bit, well, *fishy*.

Link bait is just another term for viral copy (and maybe *viral* copy isn't all that attractive, either). On the other hand, people have been giving out *link love* to those who deserve it for a lot longer than the other two terms have been around. And to get love, you gotta *give* love.

Don't worry about losing readers. The counter-intuitive rule of the Internet (to quote Dave Winer) is the more you send them away the more they come back.

Start linking out to others from day one. Choose carefully, and put your readers (not your own desire for attention) first. But definitely link.

The love will follow.

Four Viral Categories

There are all sorts of ways to get links in the blogosphere, but it's helpful to place the various strategies into four categories:

1. **Publicity Stunts**
2. **Resources**
3. **Irresistible Offers**
4. **Meme Propagation**

The first category contains explosive techniques, but also the most potential risk; the second is lacking in sexiness, but is a slow and steady performer over the long term; and the last two require real

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ingenuity and a bit of luck, as anything with the potential for life-changing levels of attention demands.

1. **Publicity Stunts**

When properly planned, targeted, and executed, publicity sought for publicity's sake can be an incredible force. It can turn an idea into a business and give a fading star a fresh chance to brave the media glare.

From Howard's Stern's Union Square give-away of 500 free satellite radios to commemorate his switch to Sirius, to the Britney and Madonna kiss at the MTV Music Awards, to the Janet Jackson "wardrobe malfunction," publicity stunts create attention.

But stunts are hard to control, and sometimes the after-effects can be mixed or downright *nasty*. Here's an example of an engineered maneuver that had the exact *opposite* effect from what was intended.

Elvis Presley laid the groundwork for the modern celebrity publicity stunt by joining the U.S. Army on March 24, 1958. It wasn't *his* stunt, though. Despite the lack of a war, he was *drafted* for a two year tour of duty in Germany until he was honorably discharged in 1960.

Presley's peacetime draft was a conservative political move to protect the country from the corrupting influence of his music, and it had exactly the *opposite* effect. Here's how Alan Levy's book *Operation Elvis* describes the move:

> *By pretending he was just like anybody else, the Army had demonstrated to the world The Importance of Being Elvis.*

Thanks to a political miscalculation, Elvis became more famous than ever, and publicists ever since have worked this angle to amplify the importance of being [*insert celebrity client name here*]. The irony is, before leaving for Germany, Elvis had already agreed to make nearly

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ten years of really *bad* movies, which would help send his career — all decked out in bejeweled white jumpsuits — on a one-way trip to Vegas.

2. Free Resources

A slow and steady (but much less risky) way to catch people's attention online is to provide good value at no charge, without necessarily trying to make it into a media circus. In the Howard Stern example above, he did (naturally) create a lot of media attention. But he also gave away something of value (a satellite radio) that was extremely relevant to his ultimate goal (recipients could now hear Howard's new show, provided they subscribed to Sirius).

Online, graphic designers give away templates, programmers give away plug-ins, and writers give away words. All in exchange for traffic and attention.

You'd think "free" would be an automatic lock. But online, nearly everything is free. We're *drowning* in free. In the early days of the web, a free e-book or other gratis resource would almost automatically garner you plenty of viral propagation via email forwards.

Now days, free still works, but it must be something very good, and very relevant. You'll also find you need to "sell" your free giveaway almost as if you were charging money! Remember, links are the gold of the web, but getting someone to pay attention carries a cost to both parties as well.

Make your resource worthy of attention, but also make your case for *why* it's worthy. Copywriting techniques can help.

3. Irresistible Offers

Nobody in business is looking for traffic just for traffic's sake — they want to sell something. While fundamentally related to the "Free Resource" category, an *Irresistible Offer* (coined by Mark Joyner in the book of the same name) creates buzz and sales in one fell swoop.

In other words, a fundamental element of your product or service offering is so compelling that it gets people talking, linking, and buying en masse. Domino's Pizza presents an interesting offline case study.

While trying to expand his pizza business, Tom Monaghan faced near bankruptcy and franchise disputes that almost buried Domino's. But one single promotional idea changed everything and put the pizza chain in an overwhelmingly dominant position in this ultra-competitive field:

> *30 minutes or less... or it's free.*

That simple guarantee was explosive. The secret to the offer's success resides in the nature of your average tired, hungry, time-strapped citizen. What seems like the safer bet — the tastiest pizza in town with unpredictable timing, or the pizza that arrives in a half-an-hour or else ends up a free meal?

A recent online example of an irresistible offer is the *Million Dollar Home Page*. Alex Tew, a 21-year old student from Wiltshire, England, decided to create a simple web page and sell pixels to advertisers at $1 each to offset his tuition costs.

1,000,000 pixels, one million dollars. Cute, huh?

That's what I thought when I stopped by the site shortly after it was launched. Hardly anyone had purchased pixels at that point, so I figured Alex might make a little cash to help with school and have a laugh at the same time.

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Boy, was I wrong. The buzz about the site exploded, and more people started buying blocks of pixels. The more people bought, the more buzz generated . . . until the "tipping point" when people realized that buying pixels allowed them to share in that massive attention.

It was a masterful win-win, because the publicity Alex gained rewarded his customers at the same time. Tew ended up selling every last pixel (with the last 100,000 selling on eBay for a premium) and he did, in fact, collect over a million dollars. So, you might say Alex got the best part of the deal, but *only* because it was a brilliant idea combined with a recognizable benefit to the others who participated in his self-propagating irresistible offer.

4. Meme Propagation

The big idea behind blogging is the capacity to share ideas in a way that has been impossible in the past. Simple word-of-mouth recommendations and continuing conversations — once confined to the town square, country club or neighbors sharing over the back fence — now take place on a lightning-fast global scale.

There's never been a better time in history to have a good idea. From the crassly commercial to the purely philosophical (and every point in between), you can be heard by millions for little to no expense . . . but only if your idea resonates strongly with others.

Coined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, a **meme** is a unit of cultural information that is transmitted from one mind to another, resulting in "cultural evolution." A powerful meme replicates profusely, thereby causing true cultural change (hopefully for the better, but unfortunately not always).

But as with traffic, not all memes are created equally. Some ideas cause significant cultural change, while others ripple along, spreading quite nicely, but having little to no true cultural impact. In fact, it

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might be fair to say that the word *meme* is thrown around a little too casually online.

A recent "chain-meme" making the rounds is "4 things." It's a questionnaire asking about four jobs you've had, four places you lived, four favorite movies and TV shows, etc.

It's fun — a nice vehicle to find out more about the people behind blogs, and a way for bloggers to see what they have in common with each other. It also results in some nice link love, since you "tag" the next four people that are to participate by linking to them.

Is it a real meme? Not sure, but if so, it's fairly lightweight in its capacity for cultural evolution. Plus, from a purely promotional standpoint, "4 Things" may not have benefited the originator much at all. Do you know who launched this idea?

Me neither. I even tried to Google it, but I gave up after the first page of results. It's not really important who started it, anyway. It's just a fun thing to do.

Now, let's take a look at some *heavy* Internet memes. Who does the term "permission marketing" bring to mind? How about "the long tail?" What group of guys wrote the *Cluetrain Manifesto*?

If you don't know, Google will tell you lickety-split.

What's *your* big idea?

Eleven Strategies for Link Love

Now, it's time we get to the nitty-gritty. The following are eleven strategies for gaining link love, with online and offline examples and some pros and cons to consider. Let's jump right in.

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1. You May Already Be a Winner!

When we think of companies like Publisher's Clearing House and American Family Publishers, we think of prize money. You remember... Ed McMahon on television, showing up at someone's front door with a camera crew. Next thing you know there's a dazed Midwestern housewife holding a gigantic million dollar check.

It's easy to forget that what these companies *really* did was sell discounted magazine subscriptions — lots of them. They didn't promote the magazines on TV though, just the sweepstakes.

Using sometimes dubious tactics, the impression was created that subscribing to a few magazines would increase the chances of winning the big money. It worked all too well.

In the competition for attention, contests have always been a useful tool. Online is no exception, and it's certainly not something that originated with bloggers. But the practice is getting so much more meta-fabulous in the blogosphere.

Case in point, the *BizNicheMedia* ("BNM") Link Baiting Competition. The prize? $1,000 in cold hard cash.

Here's how the announcement explained it:

> *The problem is, we want some exposure for our blogs/network. But we're too lazy and uncreative to think of good link bait ideas. So we thought to ourselves, how can we outsource link baiting?*
>
> *The answer, of course, is to hold a **link baiting competition**.*

Of course, BNM co-founder Andy Hagans is as lazy and uncreative as you want to believe he is. By opening up submissions in the public comment section (thereby immediately negating every valid idea) and essentially rigging the second $500 of the prize by making it

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contingent on landing on the [Delicious](#) popular page, BNM was simply *buying* links for $500, based on the publicity from the competition itself. And according to Andy, the return on investment was [more than acceptable](#).

Most of the submissions were snarky jokes that clearly demonstrated an understanding of what was going on. The few earnest submissions were truly sad to see — especially since a winning link-bait idea is worth *so* much more that $1,000.

2. And the Oscar Goes To . . .

The Oscars are an ingrained aspect of American pop culture, and that appeal has spread worldwide in the global media environment. We may no longer think much about the fact that the Academy Awards ceremony is merely an annual publicity stunt for the film industry.

> *On the evening of May 16, 1929, some 300 film industry figures and their spouses gathered in the Blossom Room of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel to dine on squab and lobster and hear Douglas Fairbanks Sr. announce the first awards of the fledgling Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. There was scant press coverage and zero suspense. The winners had been disclosed two months before.*
>
> Source: [A History of the Oscars](#)

Compare that to the hype that goes on (and increases) each year in anticipation of the Awards. The Oscars went from a low-key achievement dinner to an international red-carpet extravaganza.

Online, some bloggers stage their own version of the Oscars in the hopes of getting immediate, and perhaps long-term, exposure (in fact, 2006 is the 6th year for the [Bloggies](#)). Loren Baker of Search Engine Journal put on the Search Blog Awards, and then chronicled [the resulting link love](#). Popular blogger Darren Rowse did a tongue-in-

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cheek spoof on the proliferation of blogger awards by holding the first annual Award for Best Blog Awards and actually received a multitude of nominations!

A related attention grabber online and off is an *event* that naturally draws attention from your peers. Examples include the *Web Contest Awareness Day* and Andy Wibbels' *Shut Up and Write* all-day writing support group.

3. Shocking Revelations

Controversy may well be the easiest link-bait strategy of all. And the title of this section has a bit of a double meaning, since religion may well be the easiest *target* for inciting controversy.

A profile of *Penthouse Magazine* founder Bob Guccione in the April 1, 2004, issue of *Rolling Stone* demonstrates how Guccione boosted subscriptions to raise cash in the early days of his skin mag. He decided to promote the magazine via direct mail in the UK and produced a color brochure filled with photos of half-naked women. While the mailing itself was racy, there's nothing too crazy about using targeted direct mail to gain subscribers — magazines continue that practice today.

The interesting angle was the mailing lists he purchased. He had bought the names and addresses of priests, convents, Members of Parliament, nurses… anyone who might be easily outraged by pornography.

Guccione ended up being denounced in Parliament, and the front pages of the London newspapers branded him a "sex fiend." But to say his magazine did fairly well is an understatement.

Perhaps the biggest online effort to be labeled heretical by those who disagree with it is *The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster*. The site is an open letter from a guy named Bobby Henderson to the

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Kansas School Board, objecting to the alternative theory of Intelligent Design being taught along with the theory of Evolution.

Rather than explicitly arguing against intelligent design or for evolution, Henderson satirically sets forth his own competing theory that the universe was created by a Flying Spaghetti Monster; a theory he demanded be taught in the Kansas schools as well.

The level of publicity, debate and hate mail has been staggering.   And because most life-changing ideas culminate in a book deal, Henderson's is due out in March, 2006.

4. Attack of the Cowboy and the Mary Chain

A particularly effective method of inciting controversy is the attack, where link-seekers go on a major offensive against someone in the limelight, drawing attention to themselves by pointing out some type of logical flaw, failing, or hypocrisy in the other. And an even more inflammatory method is to attack one's *own audience*.

Back in October of 2005, David Krug started blogging about the blogging industry at *Jack of All Blogs* (warning: not work safe). As part of Paul Scrivens' now-defunct Fine Fools network, Krug adopted the persona "Cowboy" and went on a tear against other bloggers and other blog networks. In other words, he was attacking his very audience.

Although every rant seemed to have a bit of a wink accompanying it, Cowboy managed to make lots of people *very* angry while he gained lots of attention. Having an audience of ticked-off bloggers naturally resulted in links flowing back to him (even if the link was just to continue a heated name-calling volley). After announcing that he was starting his own blog network at the end of 2005, Krug had a very vocal and very *public* falling out with Scrivens, Fine Fools, its much larger sister network 9 Rules, and whomever else wanted a piece.

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Seems like a fairly well-engineered method for launching a big project, right? While it's been done successfully many times before, an attack strategy carries with it a very tough set of criteria by which people will evaluate what you do next. Here's an offline case study from two decades ago:

When you name your band *The Jesus and Mary Chain*, you're definitely not shying away from controversy. But Scottish brothers Jim and William Reid were only getting warmed up.

Unknown and playing to a small attendance, the Mary Chain earned spectacular notoriety by being an affront to their own audience: playing ten minute gigs consisting of feedback and distortion with their backs to the crowd. When the ten minutes were up, the Mary Chain smashed their equipment, often causing the already incensed crowd to riot.

Mary Chain manager Alan McGee loved it and would invite the music press to attend the shows, which resulted in extensive coverage for the fledgling band. With plenty of reporters in attendance at a March 15, 1985 show in front of one of its largest crowds yet, the group incited what was dubbed "The Jesus and Mary Chain Riot" after the crowd completely lost it.

That's a lot of attention for a band that hadn't yet released an album, and plenty of people were watching to see what the Mary Chain would deliver (many hoping for a flop). That same year, the band released their debut album, *Psychocandy*. The record was critically acclaimed and hugely influential, and the Mary Chain continues to serve as an inspiration to indie bands all over the world.

Will David Krug be critically acclaimed and hugely influential in the blogging world? That remains to be seen, but plenty of people are watching.

5. The Blue Dress Scoop

According to *Wikipedia*, a *scoop*:

> *is a colloquial term to refer to a news story (especially an exciting one) that is reported in a particular newspaper or magazine before it appears anywhere else, implying a high level of investigation skill; 'a scoop' and a 'scoop reporter' are highly positive assets for that newspaper's reputation.*

The blogosphere allows anyone to become a "scoop reporter," and some of the most popular sites deal in breaking celebrity gossip and new product leaks. Geography is irrelevant — your virtual network of tipsters makes you or breaks you. No tipsters? Land yourself an exclusive interview with a leading figure in your industry instead.

Looking at offline examples of the scoop would be exhausting, due to the long history of news reporting. Luckily, one of the biggest scoops in history was made online, and it almost brought down the President of the United States.

Founded in 1994, *The Drudge Report* was news fanatic Matt Drudge's way to publish to the world (and perhaps the earliest version of what would become the blog). He toiled in obscurity, working odd jobs in convenience stores and gift shops to support his true passion, which he broadcast from his tiny Hollywood apartment in his free time.

Eventually Drudge started to beat the mainstream media on a series of reports. In 1996 he received national attention when he scooped everyone with the news that Jack Kemp would be Bob Dole's running mate in that year's presidential election. But that story was *nothing* compared to the tempest that Drudge would unleash two years later.

Although *Newsweek* had the story and was sitting on it, *The Drudge Report* was the first outlet to break the 1998 news about President Bill Clinton's affair with an intern, later to be identified as Monica

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Lewinsky. The resulting scandal led to *The Starr Report*, impeachment, a tutorial on what the definition of "is" is, and the confiscation as evidence of an otherwise non-descript blue dress purchased by Ms. Lewinsky at The Gap.

Drudge reportedly earns somewhere between $800,000 and $1.2 million per year via his website, reporting from his upgraded Miami, Florida, condominium.

6. Funny How?

Humor is one of the most viral types of online content. From the joke email mania of the early Internet, to the lightning-fast replication of cartoons and videos today, funny spreads far and fast. But the fastest-spreading and most beneficial humor pieces are usually produced by websites that specialize in comedy.

During the 2004 U.S. Presidential campaign, JibJab shot to fame with its Flash animation sing-along duel between John Kerry and George W. Bush, set to the tune of "*This Land is Your Land*." JibJab then gained even more attention from the copyright battle that ensued with the estate of Woodie Guthrie (the owner of the rights to the original recording).

JibJab's founders, Gregg and Evan Spiridellis, followed up with several other high-quality humor cartoons, proving they were no one-hit wonder. That consistency landed JibJab a distribution deal with Yahoo, which raised their profile, and revenue, considerably. Overall, funny sells *funny* best.

So how can business bloggers, or those writing about a niche topic that wants to increase traffic, use humor to their benefit? The first rule is, don't feel like you need to go over the top. While having a good sense of humor is a wonderful asset, it's all too easy to offend those you're trying to attract. Remember, not everyone *else* has a good sense of humor.

Your best bet is to use humor in a very "insider" way, to make those in your industry or niche feel the camaraderie that working in a particular field, or sharing a passion, can engender. Attempts at broad humor will likely fall flat and attract neither links nor readers.

7. The Generosity of Doggs and Panthers

A good charitable gesture always makes for a story worthy of attention. Many times, the most charitable people want absolutely nothing in return (not even recognition). Other times, the motivation for charity is not always altruistic good will.

Introduced to the world via Dr. Dre's successful 1992 *The Chronic* album, Snoop Dogg quickly became the most famous star in rap, partially because of his unique rapping flow and partially because his gangsta lyrics seemed all too legit after he was arrested on charges of being an accomplice to murder. The murder rap helped propel his debut album to number one on the charts in 1993.

However, his legal troubles were quite significant (and hence, I cannot endorse the original publicity technique). In a calculated effort to improve his image, Snoop's record company arranged for him to pass out Christmas gifts at a community center in South Central Los Angeles. Snoop's handlers were obviously inspired by the Black Panther's late 1960's inner-city breakfast programs, which had been one of that group's most effective political tactics. Snoop (a/k/a Calvin Broadus) was later found not guilty, and is now a husband and father who seems more interested in his family than in "keeping it real."

Online, *Blogathon* was started in July 2001 when blogger Cat Connor rounded up 101 participants to raise money for charity by updating their blogs around-the-clock for 24 hours. By July 2003, Blogathon attracted enough attention that the mainstream media got on board,

and the event drew more than 400 participants, collectively raising $102,534.

Blogathon got so large that it ran into organizational issues that were beyond the capacities of the hobby bloggers involved. Regardless, charity not only promotes the greater good, it helps you get the good news out about your blog. What can *you* do to spread some love, and get a little link love in return?

8. Steal This Book

The free e-book has historically been the most viral of the resource category. Usually distributed in Adobe PDF format, a free e-book, report or whitepaper can be linked to, downloaded, saved, printed out, and emailed all over the world. It's a great way to spread ideas, because the format allows the reader to control the method of consumption *and* distribution.

Internet marketer Mark Joyner lays claim to being responsible for popularizing the use of free e-books. His *Search Engine Tactics*, released way back in 1994, was downloaded over 1,000,000 times by 1998 when he stopped counting. Joyner gave express permission not only to pass along his e-book, but also to bundle it with other products for sale (the ubiquitous "free bonus" that is a hallmark of digital information sales). His money came from affiliate links and backend sales of his own products.

In 2000, Seth Godin may have released the most popular free e-book ever with *Unleashing the IdeaVirus*, also at over 1,000,000 downloads. Whether it's the most popular free e-book of all time is not the important point. The real point is that despite giving away *IdeaVirus* digitally online, he still sold the hardcover and paperback versions of the exact same book, and it was a huge bestseller.

These days, the free e-book, report, and whitepaper are mainstream workhorses that get the word out online. In the battle for traffic and

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attention, you may write something not to make a sale, but to gain an audience.

9. Slow, Steady, and Golden

Tutorials are golden opportunities to provide great value to your readers. And as we've seen, whenever you provide great value, there's a good chance someone will repay you with a link, which leads to more readers, and possibility more links, and so on.

Amy Gahan of *Contentious* developed a great RSS tutorial two years ago that, despite the fast-moving nature of the subject matter, is still valuable reading today (and she's planning an update). Amy said in an email exchange with me that she gets "tons of inbound links to my site from that. A lot of people post a link to it under their feed link [to explain web feeds to those not familiar with them]."

Darren Rowse teaches people how to make money with blogs at *Problogger*. As of this writing, he's right in the middle of a Blogging for Beginners Series. A smart cookie, Darren regularly presents surveys to his readers, and he discovered via one of them that a high percentage of his audience had not yet started blogging or were fairly new at it. That's a prime example of finding out what your readers might need, and then giving it to them. In the process, Darren's gotten plenty of link love, notably a server-shaking mention from Gawker Media's Lifehacker.

Over at *Copyblogger*, I wrote a Copywriting 101 series of posts right out of the gate. To many, copywriting is not a familiar subject, so I needed to make sure that my readers understood the fundamentals before they could appreciate the tweaks and adaptations necessary to utilize copywriting skills in the blogging and RSS feed environment. I've now shifted to my next tutorial, which examines psychological triggers that help you better connect with your audience.

Once again, always put your *readers* first, and the links will start happening.

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10. Dave Barry, Dilbert, and You

What do you have in common with Dave Barry and Dilbert? Well, if you're blogging, you're *syndicated.*

RSS means "Really Simple Syndication." It's the web standard that allows blog content to be broadcast to your subscribers when you publish updates (think email newsletters, but automated and anonymous). But the term "syndicated" also carries forward the original media connotation — content that appears in multiple locations.

In essence, a feed reader is republishing your content to subscribers. The same technology also allows your content (whether just headlines, short summaries, or full reproductions) to be featured on other websites. Any valid (non-theft) syndication requires attribution, which in the blogosphere always means a link back to your site.

And, oh, by the way . . . Dave Barry recently quit his newspaper syndication deal, and will now only blog and write books. Does that sound like something important is going on?

Another syndication strategy that has been around since Web 1.0 is article marketing. Back before blogs, there was the e-zine (an email newsletter). Back then, everyone wanted to be Chris Pirillo and stick $1,000 ads between articles they sent out to subscribers via plain-text email. Then people figured out that creating content isn't that easy, and started publishing other people's content, with attribution links. This led to e-zine article depositories (the largest of which is Ezine Articles — antiquated name, solid service), where publishers can select from thousands of articles to reprint in emails and blogs, all with attribution links. You could land hundreds of links from a single article.

It's better to submit original content to these directories, rather than just reposting your blog content. Why? Some people feel that having

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duplicate content all over the web will hurt you in the search engines. That remains a debatable point, because search engines look at links as a sign of express recommendation, and what higher recommendation can someone give you than posting something you've written on *their* site, *plus* a link? Regardless, it may be better to write some content purely for promotional purposes, and turn it loose to those with no time to write.

And, oh, by the way . . . despite the huge success Chris Pirillo has had with e-mail publishing via <u>Lockergnome</u>, he's now a blogging and RSS evangelist. Does that sound like something important is going on?

11. Being Conversational

Finally, we arrive at number eleven.

Eleven is a strange number to end with, isn't it? Wouldn't *ten* have been a lot nicer and neater? Besides, this last strategy — *being conversational* — is pretty important. Why not give it its own separate section?

Well, I'll tell you why, but not yet. First, let's look at what I mean by *conversational*.

If you're blogging about a particular field, industry or niche, you need to be reading everything you can about what's going on in that arena. One of the best ways to do that is to read all the *other* relevant blogs. This is the reason RSS feed readers are so heavily used by bloggers — they help prevent information overload while keeping you connected and up-to-date.

Being conversational *does not* mean simply regurgitating what someone else has said, or creating a link farm. It means summarizing another's point, linking to it, and adding your own expertise to the

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mix. If you have a new blog, it may take a bit before bloggers start doing the same to you. But it will happen.

Of course, you should also be tossing out original topics yourself. Conversations can start anywhere, anytime, as long as the dialogue is worth pursuing. For an example of conversational storytelling that works, read this guy's blog (and yes, he *is* a guy).

Sometimes, expounding on (and expanding) a conversation can lead to a great deal of links to you via others joining in, or by those simply referencing the dialogue that you have helped create. In essence, being conversational is the most natural, relevant and value-added thing you can do with your blog, both for satisfying readers and for gaining links.

So, add "conversational" to your toolbox along with the other ten. Because as the U.S. Army taught us, by pretending it's just like any other strategy, you'll come to greatly appreciate *the importance of being conversational.*

Thank you very much, Elvis.

Avoiding the Dark Side

Turkeys Can't Fly

"As God is my witness, I thought turkeys could fly!"

Arthur Carlson, **WKRP in Cincinnati**

Many of you may have been puzzled by my earlier reference to dropping turkeys out of a helicopter. Others got it and smiled.

In 1978, the sitcom <u>WKRP in Cincinnati</u> (still in syndication somewhere, I'm sure) broadcast what many (especially among PR practitioners) consider to be the show's finest episode. Bumbling radio station manager Arthur Carlson (played by the late Gordon Jump) arranged to have live turkeys dropped out of a helicopter as a publicity stunt.

Unfortunately, this was a terribly bad move, if you know anything about turkeys and their capacity for flight. WKRP's earnest and dependable Les Nesman was there to recount the horrible details on the air:

> **It's a helicopter, and it's coming this way. It's flying something behind it, I can't quite make it out, it's a large banner and it says, uh - Happy... Thaaaaanksss... giving! ... From ... W ... K ... R... P!!**
>
> **No parachutes yet. Can't be skydivers... I can't tell just yet what they are, but - Oh my God, Johnny, they're turkeys!! Johnny, can you get this? Oh, they're plunging to the earth right in front of our eyes! One just went through the windshield of a parked car!**
>
> **Oh, the humanity!**

The lesson goes well beyond making a catastrophic mistake in judgment. While you may need to make a few (or many) attempts before you score some sweet link love, don't waste your time on ill-conceived stunts.

Turkeys *never* fly.

Believe or not, this sitcom episode was inspired by the real life *Turkey Trot Festival* in Arkansas, where turkeys were dropped out of low-flying airplanes until animal-rights protestors finally shut it down in 1989. Some things you just *can't* make up.

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Repeat After Me . . .

It's not about you. It's about your readers. Say it again and again.
It's should be your new mantra, unless you want to end up like
compulsive attention-seeker Tony Kaye.

> **After Tony Kaye's antics directing *American History X*, a
> studio executive sent a memo around town warning that
> Kaye was "mad, bad, and dangerous to employ."**
>
> **Some time later, Kaye befriended Marlon Brando, who agreed
> to appear in an instructional acting video entitled *Lying for a
> Living* directed by Kaye.**
>
> **Unfortunately, Kaye could not resist turning the legendary
> Brando's lessons into the *Tony Kaye* show. To demonstrate
> how to transform into a character, Brando was planning to
> teach the class in semi-drag. Kaye decided he'd upstage
> Brando by dressing up like Osama bin Laden.**
>
> **It was November 2001, less than two months after the
> terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.**
>
> Source: Anecdotage

If you seek attention without a win-win scenario for everyone
involved, *you'll* be the one who loses in the end. Don't make that
mistake. There are too many people watching and linking, *especially*
when the news about you has turned sour.

The one big problem with an environment that has the potential for
lightening-fast gains in attention is this: the attention can simply
disappear, twice as fast.

So don't be evil. ☺

About the Author

Viral Copy is the work of entrepreneur Brian Clark, who blogs about copywriting techniques at <u>Copyblogger</u> (www.copyblogger.com). Copyblogger teaches you **how to sell with blogs and RSS feeds**, and since you can't sell to an empty room, Brian continues to explore strategies for **trading words for traffic** beyond those included here. <u>Subscribe for free today</u> and discover the amazing business-building opportunities presented by blogs and RSS.

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