

Chapter 2

Demonstrating Your Expertise

Now that you have your website in place and it is functioning as your home base, you can make the world aware of your expertise using both on and offline vehicles. In this chapter, we will concentrate on using the World Wide Web to spread your message, to demonstrate your leadership in your chosen field. and at the same time to promote your book.

The succeeding chapters will look at using traditional print vehicles and broadcast to accomplish these tasks. While some of the digital techniques we discuss are more effective for nonfiction books, novelists can pick and choose those they consider suitable for their purpose.

As a published author, writing articles that demonstrate your expertise in your specialty should be a very simple task, whether your book is fiction or nonfiction. It may seem hard to believe, but the Internet offers you the opportunity to reach anywhere from 40,000 to 60,000 recipients with each article you pen. And by using the technique outlined here, it won't cost you a penny to reach those thousands!

Using Online Syndicators

You submit your article to online article syndicators (also known as distributors). The syndicators will review them, and if they meet their standards (and they are very basic standards, not at all hard to meet), they will send out your articles to thousands of newsletters and websites

related to your specialty. The recipients can then reproduce them. Believe it or not, this remarkable service is free!

Each syndicator offers a lengthy menu of article subjects. When you submit your piece, you select the category into which it best fits. That way, you are better assured that your article will be directed to sites and newsletters that specifically deal with your topic.

These subjects range from business to philosophy, insurance to medicine, writing to religion and on and on.

Successful Sydication

The key to a successful syndication program is to ensure that the content of your article has real meaning for the reader. Narrow each article down to a specific subject. For example, let's assume your nonfiction book deals with dogs and their care. Or the main character of your novel is a dog lover who prizes his/her pet pooch. Before you begin to write, outline all of the categories that are relevant: food, grooming tools, collars and leashes, cages, pet clothing, etc. Then break each of these down into subcategories. As an example, food then divides into specific types based on the level of the dog's maturity or possibly its breed. Within that subcategory, develop articles on the nutritional aspects, dry vs wet foods, foods that pose a health threat to some breeds, etc.

Be Specific

While this is only on simple example, what I want you to realize is that the most effective articles deal with very specific subjects. Internet surfers recognize the subject as something they are concerned about and respond. The articles don't have to be lengthy. In fact, the ideal length is approximately 700 words. If your subject is worth only 500, that's fine. Don't try and pad it. If you need additional space, take it.

An article that is anywhere from 500 to 1200 words is readily

acceptable. The only requirement is that you present worthwhile, meaningful information. Over and over again, you will hear me state, “Content is king.” The quality of the information you offer will determine the effectiveness of the article.

Makeup of an Article

A strong, selling article consists of three basic parts: title, body content and bio box (often called resource box). Some syndicators

require a brief summary of the essence of the article to be placed above the title. Clicking on to the website of the syndicator(s) you choose will give you the editorial guidelines it (they) require(s).

Most syndicators are fairly flexible about the style of your article. Perhaps you want to create a list of key points using either numbers or bullets. These are very attractive to readers, for they can be digested easily and quickly. You may prefer to create it in narrative style, describing more fully the points you want to make.

Syndicators' Rules

However, syndicators are very demanding in some aspects. Most will not allow profanity, pornography, terroristic or violent content. No text will be allowed that is in violation of the law, defamatory or libelous. Many require that the article be original and be submitted only by the author.

Those of you who are familiar with HTML will find guidelines for its use as well as specific limitations for using it on the syndicator's site. Some syndicators allow authors to submit in two forms, basic text and HTML-enriched. If you are not familiar with these terms, don't fret. You can prepare and send very effective articles without using HTML. However, once you learn more about it, you will find it can be a very helpful tool as you design your content.

Titles and Body Text

There are usually restrictions on what you can place in your title. For example, one of the biggest syndicators does not allow quotation marks or a period at the end of the title. HTML is not allowed in a title. This company urges you to make your title keyword rich, but warns strongly against overdoing it by stuffing it with keywords. Other syndicators may have different restrictions.

Most do not allow the content to be a press release, a selling tool, an advertisement or any form of blatant self-promotion. There are a

number of other companies you can use that specialize in distribution of press releases and other selling documents. But the content in your syndicated articles must provide information to the reader and, as I said above, it must be an original work by the submitting author.

Optimize with Keywords

Optimize your article for the search engine spiders by sprinkling keywords judiciously throughout. But as we discussed in Chapter 1, don't overuse them so that the text seems stilted or unnatural.

The number of links to other websites you are allowed is usually limited. The leading syndicator that I referred to above allows three "self serving links" (links back to your own sites) and three more that are not self-serving. You may want to link to a source of information that relates to your specialty, and that's fine as long as you don't overdo it.

Resource Box

This is your selling tool. The resource or bio box identifies the author of the article and explains where more information on the subject and on the author can be found. Obviously it must contain your name, a bit on who you are and a means of contacting you. If you are promoting your book, you must tell the reader how to find it. But the resource box must do far more.

It should pose a benefit for the reader...tell the reader what he/she will gain by clicking on your website, by reading your book, by using your services (like book coaching or ghost writing) and so on. You emphasize whatever products you wish, but stay focused on one specifically. This is your chance to stand out above the competition.

Polish your pitch until it fits into four or five sentences that are short and easy to understand. Capture the essence of what makes you, your book or the service you are offering unique. These sentences form your Unique Selling Proposition. Don't be shy about outlining the benefits you offer to the reader, but don't oversell to the point where your pitch seems unrealistic.

Call to Action

Include a Call to Action in your resource box. This is where you ask for the sale, whether the “sale” is purchasing your book, setting up

a consultation or simply paying a visit to your website. Whatever it is, make the ability to accomplish it as easy as possible for your readers. Give them your e-mail address or website or any other contact to complete the action you want them to take.

Most experts in syndication recommend offering only one Call to Action in your resource box. They feel that the immediacy of responding is compromised when you offer the reader the chance to select from more than just a single proposition. Give him/her just one action to take.

Additional Article Outlets

My emphasis on syndicators certainly doesn't preclude you from sending articles to specific websites, blogs or newsletters that you know deal with your topic. Once you've written an article, you have the right to submit it yourself anywhere you choose. Make a list of relevant places to which you can send it.

Enter your topic on your favorite search engine, followed by the word "articles" to find new outlets. But be careful to select only those that are of sufficiently high quality to reflect favorably on you.

Getting Help

One last thought on articles. If you are convinced that neither you nor any associate or acquaintance is capable of writing a first-rate article, you can turn to a freelancer for help. That doesn't seem reasonable if you were able to author a book, so I urge you to try and accomplish this yourself before you take that path. As a published author, you certainly should have the ability to craft quality articles.

If you do use the services of hired writers, be sure to give them very specific instructions on the content they are to include. You know your specialty better than any outsider does. It's your responsibility to plan each article and to give the writer the information you want included.

Be sure to review it carefully before any article is submitted under your byline to a syndicator or other outlet.

Functioning as an Expert

Three important programs on the Internet that will help you as you move up the ranks to expert status are *HARO* (Help a Reporter Out), *Pitch Rate* and *Reporter's Source*. HARO is the best of the three. Journalists, publicists, freelance writers, broadcasters and book authors seeking interviews, quotes or additional information from qualified experts post their information needs on one of these three programs. You can obtain more information on their websites and sign up to receive these queries at no cost.

The reporter or other author seeking your input submits his/her needs on a form that's available on the listing company's website. It is reviewed by the staff and then made available by e-mail. Pitch Rate and Reporter's Source produce an e-mail once a day containing the requests. HARO usually publishes new leads three times every day, morning, mid-afternoon and late afternoon. The HARO list runs on average between 15 to 30 leads with a brief description of each.

What To Watch For

Many of the leads are time-sensitive, so it makes sense to check them regularly. If you find a query that matches your expertise, the person and address to which you must respond will be on the query. Because newspaper reporters work on a very fast turn-around, respond as quickly as you can. The required time frame is usually posted.

Note that the websites for the three, particularly HARO, insist that you only respond if what you have to say is precisely on target. Reporters are extremely busy and usually pressing a tight deadline.

They have no time to waste on a response that is only peripheral to the subject. If you submit obviously unrelated responses in an effort to gain publicity for yourself, you will quickly find that you are banned from the site.

Blogging Your Way to Success

For those of you who are somewhat more ambitious, it makes a great deal of sense to consider participating in the blogosphere. This incredible new world has boomed over the past few years and now extends far beyond its beginnings as a personal message carrier or a source of current news. Today, smart authors are using blogs to promote themselves and their books to the millions of viewers available on the Web.

Earlier in this book, we mentioned a study by the noted Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism that found that 98% of media turn to the Web to find their experts. Another study the school undertook found that 70% of working journalists turned specifically to blogs as a source of information for the stories they write. That number has risen substantially since the time the survey was taken. A number of reporters and editors produce their own blogs. Journalists really have a two-way kinship with the blogosphere, very much a symbiotic relationship.

Opening the Door

What that offers to you is the ability to place your information where a reporter searches, making it more likely that he/she will turn to you for quotes and background information.

In addition, bloggers stay abreast of information produced by fellow bloggers. A favorable comment about you or your book on one of the larger blogs with a huge audience can be of immense value. The magnitude of the response may astound you. It is also important to know that bloggers are a rather tightly knit group. Perhaps that's because they received so much negative publicity when blogging first

Attracting Bloggers

Bloggers tend to give preference to fellow bloggers who send them press releases or other information. In addition, as a blogger, you can exchange responses (posts) with blogs that are related to your specialty. When you do that, you automatically publicize your own blog, and often other bloggers will then visit your site.

Bloggers as a group are not terribly competitive with each other except for the news blogs that constantly strive to beat the competition with breaking news. Most do not demand exclusivity, so you can post the same information to multiple blogs, if you wish.

Guest Posting

Similar to HARO, Pitch Rate and Reporters Source, the blogosphere has sites that offer lists of guest posts that blogs are seeking. They also list posts that are available for you to use on your own blog. Click on www.cathy@ideallady.com to find a sample.

You can develop a blog yourself with the help of the simple, free support systems offered by companies like Blogger. Enter “Free Blog Tools” into your favorite search engine, and you will find a great deal of information, as well as helpful resources. Creating a blog is not a terribly difficult task if you follow the simple directions these sites outline.

However, if you are looking for a standout design, you can find professional blog developers on the Internet who will design your blog for a fee, host it if you wish and make the entire process extremely easy. Many authors feel the modest expense of hiring a designer is well justified since the blog really is your representative to much of the public and should reflect the quality of your work.

Creating a Successful Blog

The key to successful blogging is consistency. You probably don't have the time or will to blog on a daily basis, as full-time bloggers do. But whatever schedule you set, you must keep to it religiously. I blog on Wednesdays of every week. If I am away on either business or pleasure, I make sure I have produced and scheduled a blog in advance to run during the period I am absent.

Like the articles you syndicate, the blog must offer meaningful content. Surfers come to your blog to learn more about the topic in which you have expertise. If you use the blog for self-aggrandizement or for purely promotional purposes, you will see an immediate fall-off in visitors. However, there is nothing wrong with devoting a portion of the blog to advertising yourself and your book(s). I devote part of the right hand column of my blog to promoting my latest book and my services as a writing coach.

Optimizing Your Blog

Be sure to scatter keywords throughout your blog copy. The search engines send out their spiders to roam blogs, just as they do websites, newsletters and articles. Since you are mounting and controlling your blog yourself, you are under none of the restrictions you face when you submit articles to a syndicator. In addition to keywords, you can include links to other blogs or to websites that you select. But be reasonable, and always use SEO tools judiciously.

As you develop the list of blogs you hope to link to, check with sites like Technorati that monitor them and can provide a tremendous amount of pertinent information about the popularity of individual blogs, the issues they cover and more. Don't expect to be welcomed by the major blogs until you have proven yourself as a quality blogger with a respectable following. But I am sure you can find more modest blogs and link to them with good results.

When you prepare a post for your blog, think about expanding that to an article that you can send off to a syndicator. That way you double the effectiveness of what you are writing. But do realize that the article and the blog are two different formats, and the text cannot be identical. They must be reworked to fit the medium.

This gives you the basic knowledge you need to make a meaningful impression on the Internet. In the next chapter, we'll turn to offline

promotion, emphasizing the available opportunities in print.

WHERE TO FIND...

Article Syndicators ezinearticles.com

isnare.com

thephantomwriters.com articlecity.com

Blog Creation

blogger.com

typepad.com

wordpress.com

The website designers listed in Chapter 1 also create blogs

Blogging Info

technorati.com

blogsearchengine.com google.com/blogsearch blogpulse.com

blogorama.com

cathy@ideallady.com

HTML Info

htmlcodetutorial.com/quicklist.html reference.sitepoint.com

Reporter Direct Contacts helpareporter.com (HARO)

pitchrate.com

reporterssource.com