Real World Affiliate Profits

make real world profits
from real world products

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Introduction

Every day, thousands of people from all over the world make the decision that they would like to start earning money from the internet.

Whilst the specific reason that people decide to try their hand at making money online is not especially relevant, there are some common features that people who decide to become involved in online business exhibit.

Not surprisingly, for the vast majority of people who decide that this seems like a good idea, it is also a very new idea. In other words, the people that we are talking about tend to have no established 'bricks and mortar' real-world business of their own. In effect, they want to earn money but have no way of doing so as yet.

Moreover, to most of these people, the idea that that you can earn money from the internet is a new concept that they had probably never considered before. The majority of new online entrepreneurs have no product or service of their own to sell. They are also likely to have very little money available to fund their new online business venture.

It is for these reasons that most people who approach online marketing for the first time will start their online money making adventure using affiliate marketing as their method of choice.

This is not to say, however, that it is only beginners who are trying to make money from affiliate marketing. There are some extremely experienced marketers who focus all of their efforts on affiliate marketing, and are very successful at doing so. These people are regular six-figure income earners and every single cent of their income is derived from affiliate marketing.

However, well over 95% of people that start out as affiliate marketers never make a brass nickel, and in the majority of cases, they actually manage to lose money.

There is clearly something going wrong for these people.

Some make the mistake of treating the exercise as a hobby, and by doing so almost inevitably consign themselves to being a failure. A hobby is something that you do when the mood takes you, and business is far more demanding than that.

If you have your own small business and sell a product to a customer who is not satisfied, you cannot address their complaints when it suits you. It does not matter whether your business operation is run mainly

online or offline. In all business the customer is king. In other words, when the customer says 'jump', that is what you have to do.

Of course, marketing online is a business where you can work on a part-time basis and can do so from home. Nevertheless, whether you work one hour or ten hours every day in your online venture, you should still treat your business as a business.

In my experience, the biggest reason that most people fail is a lack of focus, and this is most commonly exhibited in their willingness to buy every new 'magic formula' product that they see.

They also buy every new manual that comes onto the market in an effort to discover the secrets that will make them a millionaire overnight.

The truth is that online business is no different from business as it has been practiced for hundreds of years. The only significant difference is that your 'shop window' is on the internet rather than being a high street store.

You still have to find the right customers and supply them with the products that they want or need, and if you can do that, your affiliate marketing business will be a success.

What is affiliate marketing?

Affiliate marketing is nothing more than selling the products or services of somebody else in return for a percentage of the sales proceeds as a commission.

It is a little like working as a commission only salesman for a real-world business. Just as would happen in this real-world scenario, if you make no sales, then you do not get paid.

Having said that, there are many advantages to selling products as an affiliate for the original creator:

- You do not need to create your own product (!).
- You do not need to carry inventory or worry about delivery.
- You do not need your own merchant account to accept payments.

All you need to do is find a product and promote it successfully, and then cash your 'paychecks' when they arrive.

As you will discover while reading this book, there are thousands of merchants looking for affiliates to sell products for them.

Also, the types of products or services that are available to be sold by affiliates vary enormously, as do the commission rates that are paid by the product creators.

Depending upon the product, you will sometimes see businesses offering commission rates as high as 75%, whilst at the other extreme you will see percentages as low as 4% or 5% quoted.

However, viewed on their own, these figures mean little or nothing. I would much rather earn 5% of $10,000 than 75% of $50! In other words, you must look at both the percentage commission rate quoted and the product price to form a complete picture of whether a particular product offers you an attractive deal as an affiliate.

Being digital isn't everything

I have never sat down and counted the exact number of affiliate marketing 'how to' manuals and guidebooks on the market, but I would bet that there are probably thousands of them available. However, the majority of guides about how you can start making money on the internet by selling as an affiliate follow much the same well trodden path.

Central to this basic online affiliate marketing model is that you should focus all your efforts on selling digital products, such as software programs, e-books, special reports, online training courses and so on.

Undoubtedly, there are reasons for this specific focus, and some that are most commonly put forward to justify this position do have some substance.

- Such products are capable of being delivered instantly, and this is certainly an advantage for certain types of consumers.

- There is no question of additional costs for packing or shipping with a digital product, and once again this will appeal to a certain type of consumer.

- Most importantly for you as an affiliate marketer, the major advantage of selling digital products is that you will get paid extremely quickly for any successful sales.

There are, however, several very important but nevertheless widely ignored disadvantages to selling digital products. These disadvantages increasingly lead me to believe that most affiliate marketers are being misled by the common wisdom.

It is not too difficult to understand why this happens. Many leading online business experts make a significant proportion of their income by selling 'how-to' manuals to would-be affiliate marketers. It probably pays such people to ensure that new affiliate marketers are not instantly successful, because if that were to happen, they clearly would not want to buy any more 'how to' manuals.

To understand the disadvantages, let us forget digital products for one moment and take a look at the non-digital 'real world'.

Looking beyond the internet

Whilst an ever-increasing number of people are working or spending their leisure time online, there is still a high proportion of the global population who do not have access to the internet. In addition, of those who do have access to the net, a significant proportion is either unwilling or unable to directly purchase products or services online.

In other words, there is a massive global market that people who promote only digital products online can never make a successful sale to.

Added to this is the fact that digital products of themselves are limited by their own format. For example, if someone wants to buy an e-book that teaches them 50 great ways of making fresh orange juice at home, then of course this can be delivered digitally. If, however, they just want to buy the orange juice itself, or the machine to make it, then this clearly cannot be delivered in the same way.

By promoting or selling only digital products, a significant market of people who are more interested in buying a real product or service is being ignored.

The final and most important point that is widely overlooked by most of the advocates of promoting digital products as an affiliate is competition in the marketplace.

I have no exact figures, but I would suspect that over 90% of new (and perhaps even existing) affiliate marketers put all of their efforts into selling digital products.

Whilst the internet marketplace is undoubtedly growing bigger every day, nevertheless this means that there are ever increasing numbers of affiliates who are pushing the same digital products and services.

This can be seen most clearly when one of the big-name 'gurus' releases their latest product. Generally, such a launch will be a mega-event, and you will inevitably see details of it all over the internet.

Every time you see such details on a website or blog, you know that it is yet another affiliate for the product who is fighting for their own share of the market.

Every one of these affiliates is in competition with each other for business. A customer will only ever buy this particular product once. In other words, there can only be one successful affiliate who makes the sale of this particular product to each customer.

Backing up a little, consider the person who is selling the e-book listing 50 great ways of making fresh orange juice at home. How many times are you going to buy this book? Only once, right?

If, however, you decide that you have neither the time nor the patience to make your own juice, and therefore buy the finished product, how often are you going to purchase this?

Once or twice a week every week is the answer. In other words, because orange juice is a consumable product, you will become a regular customer rather than a one-off buyer.

Whilst I can see that there are advantages to selling digital products, the fact is that the overwhelming majority of new affiliate marketers start off trying to do the same thing, and fail to do so successfully for all of the reasons I have highlighted above.

Affiliate marketing is a superb business model, both for the original product creator and for any affiliate who is successful in selling the product or service concerned.

However, focusing all of your efforts on only digital products is a mistake and is a major reason why in excess of 95% of new affiliates will fail. They are all fighting for a share of the market place where only one affiliate can ever be successful and even then they can only succeed once.

The alternative

It would appear to make more sense to be an affiliate for a program that:

- Sells products that can be used by everyone, and not only those who work or play online; or

- sells products or services that are in constant demand from an ever-increasing marketplace; or

- sells products or services that are consumed and therefore need regular replacement.

There are many such programs available in the market. However, the majority of online affiliates ignore them, because they are blinded by the common wisdom that digital products are the be-all and end-all of affiliate marketing.

What I am therefore proposing is that non-digital products should form a part of your overall affiliate marketing plans.

This is not to say that you must totally ignore digital products, because they do represent an avenue of sales opportunity, and there is never any sense in ignoring a valid opportunity.

The approach that you should adopt to selling non-digital products is different from the one you would use where you are able to deliver your product instantly via the internet.

In order to illustrate and highlight the differences between selling digital products and those that are available offline, I am going to focus on two of the leading affiliate program network sites for non-digital products.

These are Commission Junction and Amazon.com.

Commission Junction

Commission Junction is probably the largest non-digital affiliate program network site and offers affiliate programs from many of the best known businesses in the world.

The site is entirely free to join as an affiliate, and once you are accepted as a member, you can then apply to be an affiliate for a huge range of different product and service providers.

It is important to appreciate from the outset that Commission Junction acts as an affiliate program manager for individual companies, and that you must apply on an individual basis to every company that you wish to be an affiliate for. It is then up to each individual company to accept or decline your application to be their affiliate.

The process is therefore completely different from the leading digital affiliate network sites like Clickbank.com, where it is the management site that deals with and accepts your affiliate application on behalf of the product creator. This means that every individual affiliate program manager for the businesses concerned will be looking for different factors when they consider your application.

This is something that makes using non-digital affiliate program manager sites different, and is something to which we will return later when looking at the specific affiliate program application process.

Getting started with Commission Junction

Once your application has been submitted and approved, you will log in to the Commission Junction (often referred to as CJ) homepage.

All the businesses who list themselves with Commission Junction do so primarily by business name, and each business is listed on the site separately. You can scroll down to the bottom of the homepage and see a table of all of the new companies who have just listed their affiliate program with Commission Junction:

Advertisers & Links

New Advertisers

Advertiser	Joined	Category	Sale	Lead	Click
Creative Lighting	28-Feb-2008	Furniture	Sale: 10.00% USD		
Modern Bathroom	28-Feb-2008	Bed & Bath	Sale: 8.00% USD		
OutInStyle.com	28-Feb-2008	Camping and Hiking	Sale: 6.00% USD		
Pierre & Vacances FR	28-Feb-2008	Vacation	Sale: 35.00 € EUR		
Desmazieres-Schoenen NL	28-Feb-2008	Shoes	Sale: 12.00% EUR		
Scarpe-Desmazières IT	28-Feb-2008	Shoes	Sale: 12.00% EUR		
Schuhe-Desmazières DE	28-Feb-2008	Shoes	Sale: 12.00% EUR		
TicketNetwork	27-Feb-2008	Events	Sale: 12.50% USD		
Vivastreet France	27-Feb-2008	Classifieds	Lead: 1.00 € EUR		
Desmazieres-Shoes UK	27-Feb-2008	Shoes	Sale: 12.00% GBP		
TravelRes - Reserva hoteler...	26-Feb-2008	Hotel	Sale: 7.00% EUR		
hotel.de Il vantaggio di pr...	26-Feb-2008	Hotel	Sale: 7.00% EUR		
TravelRes-Réservation d'hôt...	26-Feb-2008	Hotel	Sale: 7.00% EUR		
TravelRes - online hotel re...	26-Feb-2008	Hotel	Sale: 7.00% USD		
TravelRes - Online Hotel Re...	26-Feb-2008	Hotel	Sale: 7.00% GBP		

Show all advertisers: in my country or servicing my country

From this, you can see an overview of the main product or service that the company concerned is involved in, and also the commission rates that they are paying.

You may also note that whilst the majority of companies are paying commissions for sales generated, some will pay for leads.

Also featured on the homepage is the 'quick tasks' feature of the Commission Junction site and this highlights another interesting difference between the affiliate programs offered for digital and non-digital products.

The 'Quick Task' box highlights that there are two businesses that want to invite me to join their affiliate program!

Quick Tasks

Today's Tasks

Review 2 offer(s) pending your approval.
Review 1 pending application(s).
Program Terms set to expire.
Program Terms set to be replaced.
Review new transactions.
Review 0 click(s) from invalid links.

Now, the question to ask here is why would these particular affiliate programs want to invite me to join?

The answer is that they have seen the website that I built and then registered with Commission Junction and from this they decided that they want to be featured on that particular site.

This highlights another extremely important point about the non-digital affiliate programs being offered from a site like Commission Junction.

You must have a website in place which you can show to the affiliate program managers of the individual companies who promote their affiliate programs using the Commission Junction site when you apply for your account.

In other words, as each individual application you make to become an affiliate is assessed on its own merits by the company concerned, you must have a site already in place where you plan to advertise their products or services.

Let's look at this in a little more detail.

Your website

The basis of any affiliate program is that you advertise the product or service that you are an affiliate for and make a commission on any sales generated from these efforts.

Any affiliate program you apply to join through a network site like Commission Junction will be something that you need to advertise in order to make sales, and in this case it will be done on your own site.

There are two ways that you can do this.

- You can, in the first instance, simply build content web pages on which you carry advertising materials for the products that you are promoting. These could be banner adverts or text links that, whilst they are directly related to the product you are promoting, nevertheless give very little information about it.

- The alternative method of promoting the product is to use a page or a couple of pages of your site to write reviews of the product in question. This is a particularly powerful tactic to which we will return later.

There are however no particular restrictions or requirements for the kind of website that you build in order to advertise affiliate programs that you will apply to join through Commission Junction. For example, you could use a WordPress or Blogger.com blog site as the basis of your promotional activities, if you wished.

However, many of the world's leading businesses use Commission Junction to promote their affiliate programs. You would therefore have to decide whether such businesses would want to be associated with any specific site that you build as you're building it.

For example, if you want to become an affiliate for Dell, Apple or Hewlett Packard, you would apply for any of these programs through Commission Junction. Similarly, if you want to become an affiliate for Citibank or any of their subsidiaries, then Commission Junction is the place where you apply to do so.

Given the obvious quality and international status of companies like these, it seems unlikely that they would want to be associated with or feature on a hastily constructed and poorly conceived blog page, for example.

Designing and creating your website is therefore a fundamental part of the process of becoming an affiliate for programs that are advertised on the CJ site.

You have to build a site that is going to attract affiliate program managers in much the same way as you would want to attract visitors to click on any affiliate program advertising that you are featuring.

Your site and the advertising that you feature must be a 'match', otherwise you are likely to find that your application to be an affiliate for a particular program will be declined.

Individual affiliate program managers are not required to publish their company's specific requirements on the Commission Junction site, nor does it follow that your application will automatically be rejected by a big company if you do not have a big site.

For example, I have seen websites with Google page rank of only two being accepted into the affiliate program of very well-known, international brand name companies.

This leads me to believe that the fundamental design of your site is more important to the affiliate program managers than achieved traffic results to date, although, as every individual program is different, every application is inevitably going to be assessed based on its own merits.

From my own experiences and research, I can also say that the domain name of the site where you want to feature advertising for any particular affiliate program is a consideration that affects whether your application is accepted or not.

For example, advertising on a site whose URL was 'best-holiday-destinations.com' will be far to be more attractive to a travel or hotel affiliate program than 'joesoap.com/best-holiday-destinations.com'.

However, I would again stress that every individual affiliate program is different, and sometimes, no matter what you do, your application will be declined.

All you can do is build your site as professionally as possible and make sure that it has quality content that matches the products or services of the affiliate program you wish to promote. Then, make your application and see what happens.

CJ application process in detail

The first information that you need to input into your account is your name, address and payment details.

You do this from the 'Account' tag, highlighting the 'Administrative Settings' tag beneath that:
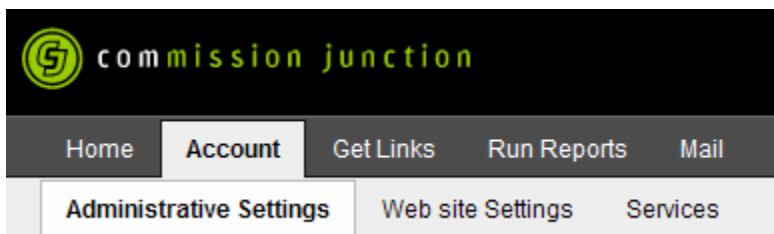
The current minimum commission payment that Commission Junction will make is $25 which can be paid either by check, or by direct deposit in several different countries and in a wide range of international currencies, as illustrated below:

If you do not have a bank account in any of the countries listed, then you will have to accept payment by check. If that is the case, you should seriously consider setting your minimum payment threshold higher, as the bank charges for clearing a foreign currency check would most likely eat up a significant proportion of $25!

Next to 'Administrative Settings' you have the tag for inputting your website settings:

At this stage, you want to add a new site by clicking on the box shown:

Account Website Settings			
Edit Web site Settings			
	* Required fields		
Status			
Site Name	*		
Site URL	*		
Description			
	Total size: 1500	Used: 0%	
SmartZones	Create a SmartZone		

Input the site name, the URL and the description of up to 1500 characters. Make sure that you use your most important keywords when entering this information.

Also note the 'SmartZone' highlighted in blue just below the main box. This is something we will return to soon, because it is an extremely important feature of the CJ site.

Next, you need to choose one primary category under which your site should be classified, and up to three subcategories that you believe will further define exactly what your site is about.

The subcategory headings are voluntary, but I would definitely recommend that you use all three whenever feasible. I have found that using all three allows affiliate program managers to whom you apply to see what your site is about in far more detail, and this is a very effective tactic for hiking your acceptance rate.

It also indicates a greater attention to detail and a higher level of professionalism on your behalf, which means that those sites where three subcategories are listed are more regularly accepted by individual program managers than those where subcategories are ignored.

I would therefore recommend that you test this tactic for yourself.

However, from my own experiences, when I have tried listing the same site with and without subcategories added, including targeted subcategories certainly seems to improve your chances of being accepted for good quality affiliate programs:

Site Categories

Select **1** primary category (with radio button on left side,) and check up to **3** general categories for your site (on right side.)

Information used to match your program with the most profitable partners.

Accessories
- ○ ☐ Handbags
- ○ ☐ Jewelry
- ○ ☐ Shoes

Art/Photo/Music
- ○ ☐ Art
- ○ ☐ Music
- ○ ☐ Photo

Automotive
- ○ ☐ Cars & Trucks
- ○ ☐ Motorcycles
- ○ ☐ Parts & Accessories
- ○ ☐ Rentals
- ○ ☐ Tools and Supplies

Beauty
- ○ ☐ Bath & Body
- ○ ☐ Cosmetics
- ○ ☐ Fragrance

Books/Media
- ○ ☐ Audio Books
- ○ ☐ Books
- ○ ☐ Magazines
- ○ ☐ News
- ○ ☐ Television
- ○ ☐ Videos/Movies

Business
- ○ ☐ Business-to-Business
- ○ ☐ Marketing

Health and Wellness
- ○ ☐ Equipment
- ○ ☐ Health Food
- ○ ☐ Nutritional Supplements
- ○ ☐ Pharmaceuticals
- ○ ☐ Self Help
- ○ ☐ Vision Care
- ○ ☐ Weight Loss
- ○ ☐ Wellness

Home & Garden
- ○ ☐ Bed & Bath
- ○ ☐ Construction
- ○ ☐ Furniture
- ○ ☐ Garden
- ○ ☐ Home Appliances
- ○ ☐ Kitchen
- ○ ☐ Pets
- ○ ☐ Real Estate
- ○ ☐ Utilities

Insurance
- ○ ☐ Commercial
- ○ ☐ Personal Insurance

Legal
- ○ ☐ Services

Marketing
- ○ ☐ Business-to-Business
- ○ ☐ Network Marketing

Non-Profit

And that is essentially all that needs doing to register your new site with Commission Junction.

However, before moving on, you should go back to set up a 'SmartZone', and you should also remember to do the same for any other websites you register with CJ.

This is important for several reasons, not the least of which is that it is very easy to have your affiliate program applications declined because you did not ensure that the correct website was tied to the particular application in question.

For example, one of the websites I have registered with Commission Junction (featured a couple of pages ago) is related to 'quick payday loans'. The affiliate programs whose advertising I am interested in including on this site are going to be money related, and specifically focused on loans, mortgages, debt alleviation and so on.

Imagine, however, that the first site I registered with Commission Junction was related to keeping tropical fish. The first site that you register with CJ is treated as your application 'default' website, so, unless I specify otherwise, the mortgage related affiliate programs that I apply to will look at a tropical fish site when they review my application!

Not surprisingly, therefore, my application to be an affiliate for his program would be dismissed immediately.

Using the 'SmartZone' feature is one way of solving this problem.

For each website that you have added to your Commission Junction account, you can create several different 'SmartZones', all of which are associated with a particular format of advertising as well as being tied to one particular site (as illustrated here):

Once you create a specific 'SmartZone', a snippet of code is then generated which you copy and paste onto your website. This allows you to update and rotate the adverts you are showing on that site from the affiliate programs that are listed in your account manager.

In each 'SmartZone' that you create, you should list all of the different advertiser links you want to include. This is therefore an excellent management tool that you can use to make sure that the correct advertisers are being pointed at the websites that are most appropriate to them.

I would thoroughly recommend that you start using 'SmartZones' right from the beginning, and that you create your 'SmartZone' before finalizing the addition of any individual website to the Commission Junction system.

Choosing programs to affiliate to

Okay, having got the tedious setting up part of the job done, it is now time to start finding advertisers to whom you can affiliate:
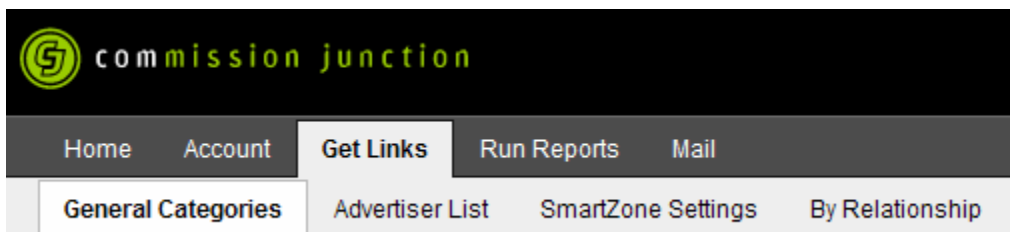
When you click the 'Get Links' tag, it should open by default on the 'General Categories' page:

Here, you will see everything listed by category on the left-hand side of the page, whilst on the right-hand side of the page you have the

new advertisers, and those companies who have special promotions on at the moment.

Let us continue to use the 'quick payday loans' example highlighted earlier. In this situation, we would be looking under the financial services category for the companies to whom we could affiliate our site:

Financial Services
Banking/Trading - Credit Cards - Credit Reporting and Repair - Investment - Mortgage Loans - Personal Loans - Real Estate Services - Tax Services

Whilst there is no specific subcategory for 'payday loans', both mortgages and personal loans would be applicable to this particular subject matter.

Let us therefore look at what is available on the mortgage loans page:

Advertiser Search Results

Results 1 - 25 of 35

☑ Apply to Program   Select All

△ Advertiser	3 Month EPC (USD)	7 Day EPC (USD)	Network Earnings	Sale	Lead	Click
1x1KREDIT.de Online Portal für schufafreie Kredite — 1x1Kredit » View Links	$11.46	$2.49	▪▫▫▫▫	Lead: 5.00 € EUR Performance Incentive		
BANK OF INTERNET USA — Bank of Internet » View Links	$6.60	$3.25	▪▫▫▫▫	Lead: $5.00 - $60.00 USD Performance Incentive		
Cash Advance Now » View Links	$15.89	N/A	▪▫▫▫▫	Lead: $5.00 USD		
CASH CENTRAL — Cash Central » View Links	$5.28	$1.04	▪▫▫▫▫	Lead: $30.00 USD Performance Incentive		
Chase Education Finance » View Links	$233.11	$195.05	▪▪▪▪▪	Lead: $55.00 USD		
citi financial — CitiFinancial » View Links	$263.32	$235.64	▪▪▪▪▫	Sale: 100.00% USD Lead: 100.00% USD, $0.00 - $12.00 USD Performance Incentive		

This is the top of the mortgage loans page, sorted by alphabetical name.

Across the top of the table, next to the advertisers name, you can see that there is a column for '3 Month EPC'.

What this represents is an average commission payment per 100 clicks over a three-month period, assuming that the particular advert has enjoyed at least 1000 clicks during that time. Next to this is a similar figure for the last seven days, once again based on the earnings per 100 clicks.

Next to this is a column showing 'Network Earnings' which compares the commission levels being paid by this particular merchant to those who are in the same line of business, as represented by the 'Network'

to which they belong within the Commission Junction system. This is a relatively meaningless figure as the EPC figures are far more important for you as an affiliate.

Much more important than even the EPC figures are the figures shown in blue to the right-hand side of the table which indicate how much you will earn per completed transaction.

Mortgage and personal loans is an area of business where providers are willing to pay not only for sales, but also for genuine leads. A similar situation pertains to other service based industries, such as online gambling and dating.

In order for you to get paid for such a lead, it is usually necessary for a visitor to the affiliate programs site to complete a form asking for further details of the particular lender's loan schemes.

As you can see from the table above, the majority of the companies listed are paying for leads, rather than for outright sales. If, however, we look at 'citi financial' in a little more detail, then you see that the situation is somewhat different for this particular company:

They are willing to pay for both sales and leads, and with both a three-month and a seven-day EPC in excess of $230, this would certainly be an advertiser to whom you would want to affiliate.

In order to apply for the program, you simply check the small box to the far left of the program details, and scroll to the top of the screen to click 'Apply to Program ':

In this case, my application had been declined out of hand, which is pretty much the response that I would have expected, because, being realistic, the bigger the advertiser, the harder it is to be accepted for their affiliate program.

Sometimes, however, you will receive a response that the advertiser assesses applications only after manually reviewing the website that is being submitted to them, and that they will come back to you in a few days with a confirmation. If, therefore, you do not hear from them, then your application has not been accepted.

In a minority of cases, your application will be automatically accepted, although this situation is much more the exception than the norm.

One of the attractions of promoting non-digital products that was highlighted earlier is that many such products are consumable or products that people generally buy more than once. This proviso clearly does not apply to mortgage loans although many people do make a habit of utilizing payday loans far too regularly!

Let us therefore look at some other products and service providers that offer affiliate programs through Commission Junction. These are programs that offer you the opportunity of creating a residual income stream by promoting products or services which people need or want to buy on a regular basis, hence the specific attraction.

Residual affiliate income building

It is a reasonable assumption that once people decide to eat a healthier diet in order to control their weight and improve their health, they are unlikely to stop doing so once they begin to enjoy positive results.

Health and Wellness
Equipment - Health Food - Nutritional Supplements - Pharmaceuticals - Self Help - Vision Care - Weight Loss - Wellness

Building a suitable site and becoming an affiliate for health food supplies is a very good opportunity to build a long-term residual income, as it is likely that people would buy again and again.

☑ Apply to Program	Select All					
	Advertiser	3 Month EPC (USD)	7 Day EPC (USD)	Network Earnings	Sale	Lead
☐	Diet-to-Go » View Links	$65.61	$91.00		Sale: $75.00 USD	
☐	Bistro MD » View Links	$41.63	$79.46		Sale: $75.00 USD	
☐	Vitalicious » View Links » View Products	$41.02	$54.94		Sale: 10.00% USD	
☐	America's Only 5 Star Diet® Chefs Diet » View Links	$17.85	$26.73		Sale: 8.00% USD Performance Incentive	
☐	Testclear.com » View Links » View Products	$9.78	$12.88		Sale: 12.00% USD	
☐	Kalyx.com » View Links » View Products	$3.52	$3.73		Sale: 15.00% USD	
☐	FRS Healthy Energy Drink - Free Trial » View Links	New	New	New	Lead: $18.00 USD Performance Incentive	
☑ Apply to Program	Select All					

As noted earlier, when you build a 'SmartZone' for any particular website, you are encouraged to include the links of several programs so that you can rotate them on your site by using the 'SmartZone' module.

If, therefore, you are going to promote health foods as part of a website that focuses on losing weight, living a healthy lifestyle and so

on, then it would make good sense to be an affiliate for two or three of the programs highlighted above.

The EPC figures shown in the table will give you an indication of the kind of earnings that you might be able to anticipate from each.

However, the fact is that you have no idea which program will earn you the most money until you start advertising.

Your site that is going to feature the advertising is obviously not the same as other peoples, nor are your site visitors exactly the same as those who go to other webmasters' advertising pages either.

Featuring the advertising from two or three different programs on your site will allow you to test them against each other in order to ascertain which is going to be the most profitable for you on a longer-term basis.

Once you have established this fact, then it make sense to focus your primary efforts on promoting that particular affiliate program at the expense of others. This is the reason you should have at least two or three affiliate programs that you can rotate on any website that you create.

In my case, I have already been accepted for a couple of the affiliate programs shown, so let's take a look at another.

How about this one?
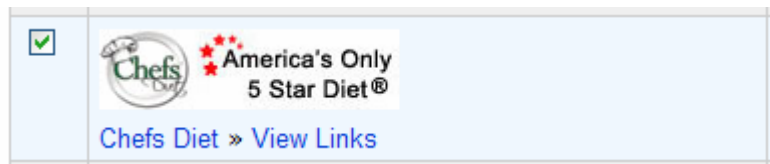
It certainly sounds interesting, so the next thing that I look at would be the details of the affiliate program itself. I would also view the advertising materials that they make available, because these would be what I am going to feature on my site, so I want to make sure that they look good.

By clicking on the 'Chefs Diet' link below the product title, I am taken to a page giving full details of the company and their affiliate program:

America's Only 5 Star Diet®

Chefs Diet

Contact: Ellen
Email: ellen@chefsdiet.com
Country: UNITED STATES
URL: http://www.chefsdiet.com/?cpao=119
Currency: USD United States Dollar

Joined Network: 20-Dec-2004

Category: Health Food (show similar advertisers)

Description: Founded on the belief that a diet plan should always be healthy, delicious and convenient, Chefs Diet™ delivers balanced meals that helps our clients to loose weight safely. The Chefs Diet™ affiliate program was designed specifically to bring the best results and rewards for our valued affiliates. As an affiliate member you can earn up to 6.5% per sale that you refer. $1 to $9,000 in total sales per month, you will receive 5% per sale $9,001 to $18,000 in total sales per month, you will receive 5.5% per sale $18,001 to $30,000 in total sales per month, you will receive 6% per sale $30,001 or more in total sales per month, you will receive 6.5% per sale The average cost per sale for our products is $700. ** GREAT NEWS!! Chefs Diet™ is raising commissions by 35% from January 30, 2008 through March 31. Earn an amazing 8% or more on every sale you refer. From January 30 through March 31, 2008 1 to $9,000 in total sales per month, you will receive 8% per sale $9,001 to $18,000 in total sales per month, you will receive 8.5% per sale $18,001 to $30,000 in total sales per month, you will receive 9% per sale $30,001 or more in total sales per month, you will receive 9.5% per sale ** We offer an incredible 120 return days, which means YOU get credit for YOUR leads. No other affiliate program can make you this promise. Don't miss out on this opportunity. Join Today!

You also have the URL of the website, so you should check out the site to see what impression it makes upon you.

Does it look professional and well organized the first time you open your browser to view it?

If it does, then that is likely to be the other people's impression as well, and, given that most people only scan a website in any case, that would be enough to keep me happy.

The next thing to look at is the advertising materials that the program makes available. Again, this is a critical consideration, as poor looking graphics or advertising materials almost guarantee that you are not going to make many sales by using those advertising materials.

Get Links

By Type	By Promotion
Product	All
All(Except Products)	Coupons
Banner	Sweepstakes
Advanced Link	Hot Product
Text Link	Sale/Discount
Content Link	Free Shipping
SmartLink	Seasonal Link
Advertiser SmartZone	
Keyword Link	

From this, you can see that the program offers banners, text links and Keyword links. They also highlight that there are coupons available as well as discounts.

Although you may not want to use banner advertising on your own site, I would nevertheless recommend that you view the banners on offer. They are perhaps the strongest indication of how much time, effort and care the company put into their advertising efforts.

240x400 Vertical Rectangle
Sale/Discount

250x250 Square Pop-Up
Sale/Discount

Those banners look pretty professional and have a good initial impact, and I think the slogan 'Lose Weight by Eating!' is particularly effective and powerful.

Incidentally, it is not absolutely necessary that every single advertising banner looks good when you are looking at them. The idea is that there is supposed to be something there that appeals to everyone, so some will inevitably look better than others in your eyes! You should make sure that the advertising that you really like and want to use fits in with the 'SmartZone' that you created earlier (in terms of size and type of advertising).

Okay, the website looks good and the advertising materials appear to be professional, so this is a program that I am going to apply for.

Join Advertiser

Chefs Diet : To join this advertiser program you must approve some terms and conditions in addition to the Commission Junction publisher service agreement. To complete the form, please review the special terms and conditions and press the accept button at the bottom of those terms.

☐   Yes, I have read and accepted the Special Terms & Conditions - 08.03.07

[Continue]

In this particular example, there has been a recent alteration or modification of the 'Terms & Conditions' and you have to read and accept the new ones. In order to do this, you'll have to click on the blue hyperlink, because trying to check the box to the left manually will not work! However, after you visit the new Terms & Conditions (which is where the hyperlink takes you) and confirm that you accept them, then the system automatically checks the box for you.

☑   Yes, I have read and accepted the Special Terms & Conditions - 08.03.07

[Continue]

Click 'Continue' and we see that in this case, our application has been successful immediately:

Chefs Diet : Congratulations. Your application has been approved and you are now a member of the advertisers program.

[Close]

Commission Junction product selection

When you look at the 'General Categories' page of Commission Junction, you will immediately understand that the breakdown of categories into subcategories is very detailed.

If, therefore, you are approaching this affiliate marketing project without any specific target market or product in mind, then using Commission Junction can give you a significant boost in terms or ideas and inspiration for the direction that you can most profitably take.

Use the 'General Categories' page to locate products and services that people need on a regular basis.

For example, we have already established that people do <u>not</u> need mortgage loans on a regular basis, but they do need healthy diet foods, pharmaceuticals and so on.

Do not restrict yourself to only the necessities of life either. People enjoy traveling and going on vacations, and for most people, the more holidays they can have, the better. For this reason, travel and hotels are things that people need on a regular basis as well.

Also, try to use the 'General Categories' page to give you an indication of how you can tie several separate websites together into a network.

For example, if you have a travel site, then having a recommended hotels blog would be a naturally complementary partner site.

Most people who travel (and especially those who go overseas) will take out travel insurance and possibly health insurance as well. It would therefore make sense to have sites or blogs focused on these topics as well, and have each one linked and cross advertised.

Understand that with most affiliate program managers, you only need to be accepted into their program once, and then they do not usually restrict the sites that you can place their advertising on. So, there would not be any reason why you could not place a banner advertisement for travel insurance on both your hotel and travel websites or blogs, for example.

In this way, browsing around the Commission Junction site can be a great way of coming up with ideas for networks of sites, all of which are complementary to one another and able to increase your revenues by appropriate advertising cross-fertilization.

Amazon.com

A finger in many pies

Amazon.com is widely credited with being the first company to come up with the idea of using affiliates (or 'associates' as Amazon terms them) to promote their products and services.

Whilst they are still the indisputable number one online book seller in the world, Amazon.com is also a major worldwide supplier of a huge range of other products and services as well, as indicated.

They also offer different sites for the major international markets such as Canada, Germany, the UK and Japan.

Amazon.com is therefore a truly global business institution.

They are also an extremely good brand name to associate with your own website and business. However artificial it may be in reality, having an apparent relationship with an international brand leading company cannot do your business any harm.

How it works

The first thing to understand about using the Amazon.com affiliate program is that, unlike working with Commission Junction, you are dealing only with Amazon.

Once you apply for and are accepted into their associate program, you are able to promote and sell any of the products available on the

Amazon.com site. This presents you with an enormous range of products that you can immediately promote, and so the first thing you need to do is select what products you are interested in promoting.

In a similar manner to working with Commission Junction, you can use the products that you find at Amazon.com to add advertising to your existing site, or utilize the information to give you some ideas for new sites that you can start to build.

For example, looking at the categories 'Window' on the previous page, if you select any particular category, you will then see all of the subcategories beneath it:
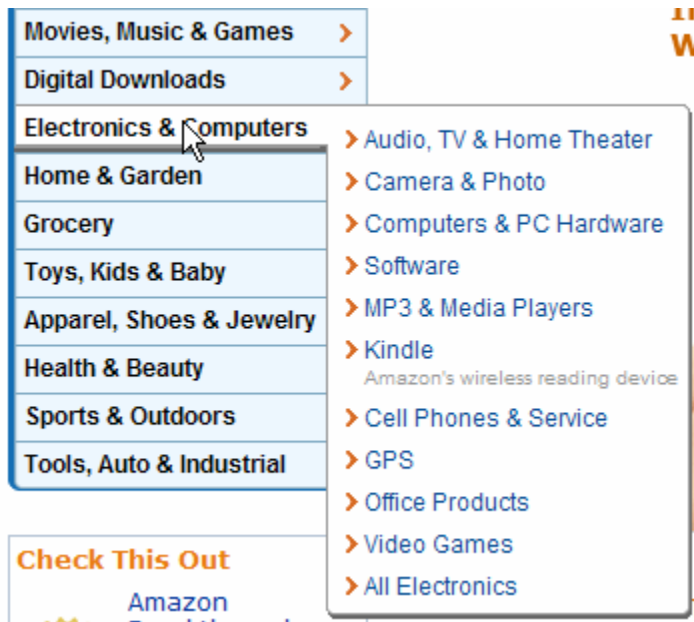
Clicking on any of these subcategories takes you to a page showing all of the most popular products or services within that subcategory:

The great beauty of using Amazon is that it allows you to dig down a little further into the site with every additional step you take, thus allowing you to progressively refine your search until you find exactly the product you want.

For example, if we now try to follow the 'Point-and-Shoots' link (as highlighted above) you land on a page that highlights all of the most popular 'point-and-shoot' digital camera models that Amazon currently offers:

Showing 1 - 24 of 2,014 Results   « Previous | **Page: 1**   2   3   ... | Next »   Sort by Bestselling

1.

Canon PowerShot A570IS 7.1MP Digital Camera with 4x Optical Image Stabilized Zoom
Buy new: ~~$199.99~~ Click to see price
48 Used & new from $124.50
In Stock
★★★★☆ (363)

2.

Canon PowerShot SD1000 7.1MP Digital Elph Camera with 3x Optical Zoom (Silver)
Buy new: ~~$199.99~~ **$166.95**
56 Used & new from $155.00
Get it by **Monday, Mar 3** if you order in the next **15 hours** and choose one-day shipping.
Eligible for **FREE** Super Saver Shipping.
★★★★☆ (569)

3.

Canon PowerShot SD850 IS 8.0 MP Digital Elph Camera with 4x Optical Image Stabilized Zoom
Buy new: ~~$299.99~~ **$239.23**
67 Used & new from $222.00
Get it by **Monday, Mar 3** if you order in the next **15 hours** and choose one-day shipping.
Eligible for **FREE** Super Saver Shipping.
★★★★☆ (231)

4.

Canon PowerShot SD870IS 8MP Digital Camera with 3.8x Wide Angle Optical Image Stabilized Zoom (Silver)
Buy new: ~~$610.31~~ **$297.00**
49 Used & new from $294.95
Get it by **Monday, Mar 3** if you order in the next **15 hours** and choose one-day shipping.
Eligible for **FREE** Super Saver Shipping.
★★★★☆ (169)

5.

Canon PowerShot Pro Series S5 IS 8.0MP Digital Camera with 12x Optical Image Stabilized Zoom
Buy new: ~~$499.99~~ **$326.66**
71 Used & new from $310.00
Get it by **Monday, Mar 3** if you order in the next **15 hours** and choose one-day shipping.
Eligible for **FREE** Super Saver Shipping.
★★★★☆ (234)

6.

Canon PowerShot SD750 7.1MP Digital Elph Camera with 3x Optical Zoom (Silver)
Buy new: ~~$249.99~~ **$195.95**
76 Used & new from $160.00
Get it by **Monday, Mar 3** if you order in the next **15 hours** and choose one-day shipping.
Eligible for **FREE** Super Saver Shipping.
★★★★☆ (290)

Assuming therefore that you have a website concerned with photography, you can now promote any of these cameras on your site by utilizing your Amazon associate account.

You can do this using several different advertising formats as shown below.

Individual product links

THE INCREDIBLES

The Incredibles
Holly Hunter
Best Price $9.01
or Buy New $14.96

Buy from amazon.com

Privacy Information

Individual product links like this one display one specific item from the Amazon.com catalogue.

Using this ad format therefore provides your site with the flexibility to decide exactly what products you would like to promote based on the profile of your site and the likes and dislikes of your visitors.

These individual display units can be modified to show exactly what you want about the product in question. For example, it can show the product image, the title and the pricing if you want it to - or not, if that is more to your liking.

Omakase links

Using what Amazon call 'Omakase' links means that you basically leave it up to them to decide what they will display on your site.

They make the decisions based upon your site content, plus your input and the historical trends that you have previously established for this particular site.

All this information is collated to dynamically generate appropriate advertising in the format shown above. Once again, however, there is a wide range of customization options available with this particular advertising method, so that you are able to present the most appropriate Amazon products in the manner that is best suited and most relevant to the page on which it appears.

Product previews

The idea of the product previews utility is that it allows your visitors to 'hover' the mouse over a line of text to cause a small independent window to appear. This window contains additional information about the product in question. Hovering the mouse in this way will produce a product image, prices and other product details as appropriate.

Using this particular resource enables you to offer your site viewer what Amazon say is 'a convenient, seamless option for adding products to the shopping cart'.

The Amazon shopping cart facility is, incidentally, something which we will look at a little more detail a little later.

Recommended product links

This is a dynamic form of linking, where Amazon automatically choose and then serve the content that they feel is most appropriate.

As the site owner, you simply need to enter the type of products you want to see displayed in the advertising unit and Amazon then deliver the best selling products based upon your selection criteria.

One of the advantages of this is that it is Amazon who are going to automatically update the advertising content, so this particular format will ensure that there is far less work for you to do.

You can build this type of link unit using either product categories or keywords and can also serve them in different sizes, with varying color backgrounds, text style and colors and so on.

You therefore have the ability to build this particular advertising unit in a way that best matches your site.

Creating your 'aStore'

The Amazon 'aStore' facility is an option where you can create a dedicated shopping area on your site which is populated by various Amazon products.

Rather than advertising product by product as you were doing earlier, having an 'aStore' enables you to display a whole range of different products on your site in what effectively amounts to your own online store.

This should have the advantage of keeping shoppers on your site longer, because they have more to look at and hopefully buy.

You have the ability to select the items that go into your store by including a full range by category or by selecting only from the categories that you choose.

In addition, having an Amazon 'aStore' allows you to include a shopping cart within that store. This then enables your customer to make multiple purchases, and, since check out is completed on the Amazon.com site, this will help you build both trust and credibility with your site customers.

Within the 'aStore' you can include product reviews, recommended products, themed products and detailed product descriptions.

Here is a booksellers 'aStore' example:

From this, you can see that using the 'aStore' option would enable you to build a very professional and attractive looking online store promoting a superb range of products from a brand leading, internationally known name with little difficulty.

In addition, the ability for customers to check out directly through Amazon will add massively to the credibility of your business and of your site.

Added to all this is the fact that everything is completely free, including the integration of the shopping cart into your 'aStore'. This is a facility that most merchant account providers charge large sums of money for, so to be able to add this to your store for nothing is a big bonus.

So, whether you choose to use individual advertising blocks on your website or you decide to build a fully fledged 'aStore', working with Amazon.com can bring significant advantages to you and your business.

You may, therefore, wonder why you do not see Amazon advertising blocks or 'aStores' on practically every website that you visit?

The bad news!

The rate of commission that Amazon pays is not desperately attractive, starting at a relatively miserly 4%.

Of course, the attractiveness of the payout that you receive is going to be predicated on the price of the product that you are promoting. If, for example, you are selling a $1000 digital camcorder, then 4% commission is worth having. If, however, your site sells $20 books, then it is extremely difficult to see how you could ever expect to earn a living from promoting Amazon products.

The rate of commission is not 4% on everything, of course, but even when you get to be an associate superstar, you are still never going to enjoy anything more than 10% commission on the sales that you generate for Amazon.

For this reason, few serious online businesses consider or can afford to build a complete business around being an Amazon associate.

Promoting Amazon products on your site is, therefore, something that you should do in addition to other promotional activities, rather than as a focus of all your commercial promotions.

You should also appreciate that the majority of products that Amazon sell that they are not consumables and are not products or services that people will change or replace on a regular basis.

For example, if your customer wants to buy a particular book, then once they have read it they are unlikely to want to buy it again. Similarly, if somebody buys a camera through your link, then they are unlikely to replace it for several years at which point they are almost certainly going to go elsewhere to make their purchase.

Therefore, the majority of products that you can sell from the Amazon site are going to be single, one-off purchases that are unlikely to be repeated, certainly in the short term.

Include Amazon on your site by all means, as doing so certainly increases the credibility of your website as a professional and well connected business, but do so as an 'add-on' rather than as the primary money making focus of your site.

For example, affiliate products from Amazon would be an excellent and extremely well focused addition to your sites if you decide to build web pages that are intended to generate income from [AdSense](#) advertising.

Alternatively, going back to an earlier example, if you have created a network of sites and blogs that are focused on all aspects of travel, you may use affiliate programs that you find at Commission Junction as your main money earners.

In this case, Amazon advertising materials would be a great add-on for your web pages, particularly as this would allow you to focus your Amazon related efforts on promoting higher priced goods and services. People who go on holiday are amongst the best candidates for buying a new camera, for example, and if they are going to visit family, they may want to buy presents from the 'Toys. Kids & Baby' section of the site.

So, used correctly, being an Amazon associate can make you a reasonable amount of money, but it is far more likely to do so if you can somehow focus your efforts on promoting higher priced items, rather than $20 books.

Other real world affiliate considerations

Other ways to find products

Whilst they are amongst the biggest and best known affiliate program managers, Commission Junction and Amazon.com are not the only two places where you can find excellent affiliate programs for real-world, tangible products.

For example, there are many other affiliate program managers who deal with real-world businesses. A couple of examples sites would be LinkShare and ShareASale.com

Alternatively, you may have a specific type of product, or even a product by brand-name that you want to promote on your site.

If so, then you need to head over to your favorite search engine and try using any of these phrases as the basis of a search (after replacing 'product type/name' with what it is that you are seeking, and removing the '+' sign):

' product type/name + affiliate '

' product type/name + affiliates '

' product type/name + refer '

' product type/name + referral '

' product type/name + associate '

' product type/name + associates '

Typing any of these into your search engine should produce some results and give you an indication of which companies are making efforts to work with affiliate promoters.

Test your product

You must never lose sight of the fact that the quality of the product you are promoting is of supreme importance.

It is of course possible to promote and sell a junky product or one that breaks within an hour of starting to use it, but you must also understand that the modern consumer is conditioned to complain and ask for their money back at the slightest hint of problems or dissatisfaction.

Promoting a product that is low quality or is not effective for doing the job that it was theoretically designed to do is not a sound business decision in the long run. Not only will you get many refund requests, but you will also find that people complain about you and the product you promote online, and that this news will get around very quickly.

If, therefore, you're going to build your business around promoting affiliate products, then the first thing that I would urge you to do is test the product that you plan to promote. You may be able to obtain a free sample of the product itself, or you may be forced to buy it, but even if you have to spend money, consider that to be an investment in your own future.

If you know the product inside out, then you are able to answer most of the questions that your customers will ask, and doing this will undoubtedly reduce the number of refund requests that you might otherwise receive. In this way, your initial investment in the product will be returned to you almost immediately.

Being able to answer your customer's questions in this way has another major advantage as well. When people buy the product from you and are satisfied with it, as well as being happy with your ability to handle any problems that they have or answer any queries, this will quickly establish you as an authority in that particular customer's mind.

Do you think it likely in these circumstances that this particular customer would recommend you to their friends or family members who were interested in buying the same product? The answer to the question is obvious.

It is therefore very important that you have tried and tested any products that you are actively promoting, and that you can give an unbiased and objective opinion of it.

Do not, therefore, be overly effusive in your praise for the affiliate product that you promote, and be willing to acknowledge any shortcomings that it may have.

Nobody realistically expects a product or service to be absolutely perfect. If, therefore, you insist on telling prospects and potential customers that the product for which you are an affiliate is ideal for everything, then you run the risk of severely damaging your credibility and reputation, and that is not a smart long term decision.

On-site promotion

Two options

As mentioned earlier, there are two ways that you can use your website to promote the product for which you are affiliate.

The first way is to build pages that have content that your visitors will find both interesting and informative. The search engines love this kind of page, because they see them as providing the visitor with a valuable experience.

It would therefore make sense to include advertising materials on these pages, such as banner ads and text links in order to direct visitors to the product for which you are affiliate.

I would, however, recommend that you go further than this by creating specific pages of product reviews, where you give a relatively honest opinion of the product.

Effective reviews

Note that I used the term 'relatively honest' above. Only you can decide how upfront you want to be with your site visitor about the pros and cons of the product that you are, after all, selling.

As suggested earlier, if you are too wildly enthusiastic about the product for which you are an affiliate, then the site visitor will see through the façade of your 'unbiased opinion', and that will kill your potential sale stone dead.

On the other hand, if you are too negative about the product then that will harm your prospects of making a sale in exactly the same way.

Here is what you should do to create an effective review site.

While these ideas may not be very original, they are extremely effective, and they have worked very well for me, so I commend them to you.

This is an outline of how you should write your product review.

First, don't be too over-enthusiastic about the product, but do make sure that, in the final analysis, the review decides in favor of the product that you are promoting at the end:

- Headline. This has to grab the reader. Tell them, for example, how you heard about the product but did not believe the claims that were being made for it – they simply seemed too good to be true!

- First paragraph. You bought the product but did so against your own better judgment, and still had no great expectations of it.

- Second paragraph. You did not expect to be overly impressed, but you gave it a try anyway.

- Third paragraph. Begrudgingly, you found that it worked better than you expected.

- Fourth paragraph. It was a lot better than you expected, while not being perfect. Suggest who you believe the product would work well for, and also highlight those for whom you do not think it will be effective (but keep this group as small as possible!).

- Fifth paragraph. Re-emphasize the major benefit, and the fact that it worked for you. Tell the visitor that there is a detailed free report available at XXXXXX/com (this is something I will come back to below).

Into this review, you should then add any genuine personal results that you have enjoyed using the product.

Remember that this is intended to be a reasonably honest and unbiased review, and the more you can impose your personality and character on what you write, the more impression you are likely to make on your reader.

Not everyone will buy

No matter how good your site is, or how attractive the product you are promoting, you cannot realistically expect every visitor who comes to your website to become a buyer.

If, however, you can capture your visitor's name and e-mail address, that gives you an unlimited number of possibilities of promoting products and services to them in the future.

You should, therefore, have a page on your site where you offer people a free gift or a special report which you will send them as long as they give you their e-mail address and name. After all, you cannot very well send the gift if you have no e-mail address to send it to!

Incidentally, despite the fact that you are primarily focused on selling real world, tangible products, this free gift should really to be something digital that can be sent immediately by e-mail. In this way, it can be delivered instantly, which for most people adds to the attraction of a free gift which should be attractive anyway!

This is the free gift referred to in the fifth paragraph of the review, and if you cannot make a sale, then grabbing somebody's name and e-mail address is an extremely valuable fallback position.

With your review page in place, and several content pages on your site, all of which feature advertising for the primary affiliate programs that you promote, you are ready to start driving traffic to your site.

So, there is just one final observation to make before moving on.

As mentioned, you will not make a sale to everyone, and, even when you do, those people that buy from the affiliate program will be their customers, rather than yours.

It is they who will have all the customer details and will be able to send future product mailings to the customer in question, rather than you.

For this reason, it is vitally important that you include your free report or free gift offer on every page of your site.

Whether people buy the affiliate product through your link or not, you must take every opportunity presented to you to build your own mailing list. It is only by doing this that you will be able to accumulate a list of people to whom you can send all your future promotional literature without any fear of being accused of spamming or sending unwanted promotional materials.

In fact, in the long run, many online marketing experts suggest that the value of a responsive mailing list is far higher than that of any single sale. No matter how keen or even desperate you are to make the sale, do not ignore the intrinsic value of adding the name of another long term prospect to your list.

It's not only about sales

Leads can make money too

Remember that when looking at Commission Junction, there were advertisers who would pay affiliates for leads? This can be a terrific source of income that is not available to those affiliates who sell only digital products.

Search Commission Junction and other similar sites for companies in your market who will pay you for any leads that you can generate for them. Then, create a web page that is designed to harvest these leads by encouraging people to take whatever action is necessary to gain you a 'credit'.

For example, many such 'leads' sites require people to complete an enquiry form in order for them to qualify as a lead for which you will get paid.

In this situation, why not write a short piece commending the services of this particular company and recommending that the reader completes the enquiry form simply to get more information? Emphasize that there is no cost involved whatsoever and that there is no commitment either.

You have already seen from the Commission Junction mortgage loans page how much many lenders are willing to pay for such leads, so it is definitely worth doing.

Do not, therefore, focus all your efforts on making sales, as sales obviously involve the prospect spending money, and leads are therefore generally much easier to generate.

By definition it will be much harder to get people to spend money than fill in form that costs them nothing, so don't underestimate how much money you can earn from lead generation. Focusing all of your attention on sales is not something that you should do, although selling might remain the main focal point of your business site.

Driving traffic

You must have visitors

You can have the best website in the world, but if no-one ever visits it, you cannot make any money. Driving quality traffic (i.e. people who are interested in whatever it is you are selling) to your site is therefore of great importance.

Here are a few of the most popular and effective traffic generation techniques. Some of them need investment, while many of them are free (but not generally as quick).

For example, using Pay Per Click advertising like Google AdWords is effective and very quick, but it does nevertheless need you to spend some money. If you have money available, generating traffic using AdWords is therefore an extremely efficient and quick method.

I am, however, assuming that you are working on a tight budget, and that therefore you do not necessarily want to spend money on advertising and site promotion.

Bearing this in mind, the following are the free traffic generation tactics that will bring the most accurately targeted visitors to your site:

Writing articles

The upside of using articles as a promotional tool is that it costs you absolutely no money to do so, and they are very effective over the long-term. The downside is that it does require work to create the articles in question, and that they can sometimes take a little time to have any genuine beneficial effects for your business.

However, I would definitely recommend that you write articles about your topic or subject matter, and submit them to the leading article directories like ezinearticles and goarticles. At the end of every article, you should include a resource box, which gives details of you and your business website.

The details that you include about your website should send article readers to the page that you built to capture names and e-mail addresses (usually called your landing page).

Alternatively, you may send visitors to specific pages of your site most directly related to the article subject matter (as long as they also feature the name capture form somewhere). For example, if you had a website that was related to dogs, and a page about each particular breed, then an article that you write about spaniels might point to your 'spaniel' page.

As long as each page on the website promotes the affiliate program you are representing, and includes a way of capturing the visitor's name and e-mail address, then this is likely to be an extremely effective promotional tactic.

This method of marketing also helps in another way.

Most people who search the net will do so by using search engines. In order to instigate a search, they will type a phrase into the search engine which will then return a page of results.

If your site can be featured in these results, then this will send visitors to your site, who will then view your ads and hopefully investigate the offer that you are making.

One of the criteria that the search engines use for including your page in these results is the links that come into your site from other sites.

Having your articles published in the best known directories usually offers a major boost as to the number of incoming links you have.

Forum marketing

No matter what you website is about, there will be hundreds or perhaps even thousands of other people who are interested in the same topic or subject matter.

It is likely that many of these people have got together before to create forum websites where they can 'meet' to discuss and debate their passion.

Find out where these forum sites are, and get involved in the discussion. Most forums will allow you to add what is known as a signature file, where you can add a link to your website, although you're not allowed to overtly promote your site.

Nevertheless, if you get actively involved in a community that is focused on your particular subject or topic, then it should be relatively easy to invite people to view your site.

I have, in fact, found this tactic to be particularly effective when working with non-digital affiliate products.

I believe this to be a side-effect of the fact that 99% of online affiliates are working with digital products, and when they see something that is clearly different (i.e. your non-digital affiliate product) it generates immediate interest.

In other words, by being different (by not promoting the same products as everyone else) you and your products stand out. This is something that I have found is a major plus point when working with forums and community sites.

Big-boards.com is an excellent resource for finding appropriate forum and notice-board sites.

Traffic exchanges

Traffic exchanges are a seriously maligned but much underused and underestimated source of traffic.

The concept of a traffic exchange website is that people join and they view other people's websites. In return, they earn credits which the site then uses to drive other people to view their webpage.

The major problem with the vast majority of people who use traffic exchange programs is that they try to sell their product or service from the page to which they send other exchange users. This does not work. People do not buy anything in this situation.

If, however, you can present your site visitor with an attractive free offer, then using traffic exchanges becomes a viable method of building a long-term business.

We have already covered the idea of building a page on your site where you offer a valuable or attractive free gift in return for your visitor's name and e-mail address.

This is the page that you use for traffic exchanges, and as long as it will make an impact in the two or three seconds that you have available to 'hit' the visitor straight between the eyes, then using traffic exchanges can be an incredibly effective way of generating responsive traffic at no cost.

It is also a traffic generation tactic that is underused, so if you promote your real world affiliate product using this method, you will probably be the only person doing so. This in itself is incredibly powerful.

Create a blog

A blog is a basic prerequisite of any well constructed website. It is like an online journal, and when associated with your business oriented site, it allows you to constantly update your site with the latest news and opinions surrounding your topic or subject matter.

Furthermore, the blog community is massive and growing by huge numbers everyday. If, therefore, you were to search using a term such as 'product type/name + blog', you would probably find hundreds or perhaps even thousands of other people with sites like yours that have blogs attached to them.

Visit as many as you can, and leave useful and informative comments on the blog pages. Doing so will create back links to your own site,

and that will drive traffic from both sides as people visit and are curious about what you say.

Social bookmarking sites

Over the last couple of years, social bookmarking sites like Digg and StumbleUpon have become incredibly popular. If you can get a story featured on the front page of Digg, for example, you can realistically expect in excess of 20,000 unique website visitors in a 24-hour period!

The best part about using any of the social bookmarking sites is that they are entirely free. All you have to do is write or create something that is so newsworthy that other people will add it to their 'bookmarks' folder on the social bookmarking site in question.

If this happens, then you can expect thousands of people to visit your site within a very short time. You must, however, understand that this is likely to be a very short term 'buzz', and these traffic levels are not going to be sustained.

Nevertheless, if your website is interesting enough, then some of the visitors will return again.

All you have to do, therefore, is create a site that justifies people taking the time and making the effort of visiting you again.

Promoting offline

You are an affiliate for a product that exists in the real world. It is not digital, or something that exists only online.

Why not create flyers promoting your product and sending people to a page on your website where they can enjoy a discount on the first order?

You simply rebate some of the commission to the buyer, on the basis that if you can turn them into regular customer you will make significant amounts of money later on.

Of course, in this scenario, there will be some customers who do not come back and buy again, and therefore they will be people that you theoretically 'lose' money on.

Nevertheless, if you have a product or service that they want or need, and are willing to offer them a deal, then there is no reason why they should not buy from you.

Conclusion

Affiliate marketing is the most popular entry point to the world of online business and marketing for most people. It is, however, unfortunately also the 'grave' for many people who were interested in making money online.

Everybody follows the same beaten-down, over-trodden path. They are told that selling digital products is the way to go, and like sheep, they follow the commonly held wisdom.

Before Thomas Edison invented the electric light bulb, the commonly held wisdom was that it couldn't be done. From this, perhaps you can see that it does not always benefit you to follow the common wisdom, and, sometimes, doing things your own way is the best way.

Over the years, I have promoted both digital and non-digital products as an affiliate and whilst I would freely admit that digital products do put money into my bank account more quickly, they tend to do so far less consistently than non-digital products.

The competition in the digital marketplace is also much harder to defeat than it is in the non-digital marketplace. The vast majority of affiliate marketers focus on the (digital) marketplace where they are repeatedly told the profits are to be made.

Selling tangible, real-world products as an affiliate can, however, have significant advantages, for example, being able to generate a residual income from products that the customer has to buy again and again and again.

Promoting the correct type of non-digital affiliate products should represent an unrestricted goldmine for any savvy online marketer.