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Exclusive Interview

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Louis Allport - Hi, I'm Louis Allport, and today I'm speaking with Neil Shearing of [ScamFreeZone.com](#). Hi Neil, and thank you very much for being on the call today.

Neil Shearing - Hi Louis, thanks for having me.

LA - That's okay. I know you've been marketing online for a very long time - I think it may even be more than 10 years. What we're going to focus on in this interview in particular is autopilot income. We will look at how to create sites that generate income both quickly or over a longer period of time. But most importantly, these are sites that require very little work and very little upkeep.

So, okay first of all, if we can just briefly talk about your background and particularly your Internet business history?

NS - Okay, I first found out about the Internet in... it was about 1996 I think, so we're going back an awful lot of years. And it was in a lab, a science lab in Chicago - because I was basically a scientist up until that point.

I remember someone saying, "Oh yeah you need to get online, you need to do this stuff." And I was, "What's this Internet thing about?" So they pulled me over to the computer and they said, "Yeah it's great you can find anything. Type in your home town." So I did, I typed in the name of my home town and it came up with zero results, and this was probably Infoseek or Alta Vista because I don't think Google was around back then.

And I've just repeated the same search online now just to put it in context and it came back with like 603,000 results for my hometown. But when I first discovered the Internet there was zero, which shows the growth of the Internet.

I remember deconstructing the [GeoCities.com](#) homepage to try and work out how their tables all fit together to make their page - I was teaching myself HTML. So I was playing around with some free GeoCities.com pages, and then GeoCities was subsequently bought out by Yahoo in 1999.

And after putting up a few personal pages I thought I could start maybe writing a report and try to sell it online.

So I wrote a report and because I was a poor student at the time I didn't have any money to invest in the business. I basically figured it had to pay for itself, there had to be a way to do it. So I used a third party processor. A third party processor is a company that will process credit card orders for you and take a percentage of each sale. So if you don't sell anything in a month you don't owe them fees, that way you only pay a percentage of your costs.

So I used some free web space from my Internet service provider, the only thing I was paying for was the Internet service. And I put up a page on the free web space and I started selling this report through the third party processor and there was no instant delivery or anything. The report was basically just a Word document. There were no fancy eBooks and I don't think anyone had invented the term 'eBook' or the term 'Internet marketing'. It all predates that. And I started selling these reports from my free web space.

And then I thought, right, there must be other people who want to know how to do this now that I've put all the pieces of the puzzle together. So I started selling a report called "How To Make Money on the Internet" - which was incredibly naive back then, but like I say, it was before Internet marketing.

And I started selling this report and I was contacted by the Australian Government, some kind of anti fraud department they had, and they said, "What we think you're selling looks like a scam and we've made a note of your website." And I thought well that's nice of them. This is a perfectly legitimate report that shows you how to start creating your own eBooks - even though we didn't call them that at the time - and selling them online. So it wasn't a scam.

So that prompted me to start ScamFreeZone.com which I did in 1997 and that grew quite rapidly and I've held that website ever since, so that's 12 years of having that domain. And I've gone on to release more of my own eBooks and custom-built software. I have built (email) lists that I can use to contact people with and I have built private member sites and basically anything that's digital, I've created and sold. So that's a potted history of the past 12 years of my Internet marketing experience.

LA - Thanks for that. Okay, so if we focus on something I understand you know a lot about and you have had a lot of experience in, which is creating income from sites - as I mentioned - that are easy to put together and literally run on autopilot. Some of the examples you talk through I think will demonstrate that this is actually possible.

If I can first of all ask, from your direct experience, is such a thing possible?

NS - Yes it's definitely possible. I've created lots of different systems that are geared to creating autopilot income.

I think one of the biggest things you can do is create your own product and then have an affiliate program. Because once you have an affiliate program and you offer affiliates incentives to promote your product, such as commission or other ways of incentivizing them, then affiliates link to your site and they send traffic through and they make sales. You pay them the commission and that's pretty much autopilot income.

Okay, you have to do the delivery for the customer, deliver the product, but if it's digital then you can have that automated. So all you have then is the overheads of the technical support and customer support, for example if they say, "Oh I lost my password to the eBook" or whatever.

But if you have a good support system - I use the Kayako eSupport - it can allow you to have a knowledge based area and a frequently asked questions area. With digital products you can get the support function way down to virtually zero, so that's the way I consider most of my products to be autopilot income.

But there are ways to do it if you don't want to have a full-blown product and a full-blown affiliate program. If you just want to start off with a basic affiliate system, where you're the affiliate driving the traffic, then you can actually go to something like ClickBank and search their marketplace for products that have recurring billing.

And if you go about setting up a website on a sub-niche - say the product's about weight loss - the first thing you do is go to Google's Keyword Tool and do a bit of digging which will give you some ideas for a sub-niche. So say the sub-niche is weight loss eBooks, you build a little blog around that, capture the traffic for that sub-niche, funnel it through your ClickBank affiliate link to a product that has recurring billing. Then that will build up an autopilot income stream for you.

LA - I think that's a great high-level overview. Now let's start diving into details, and with this interview particularly I'd like to focus on 3 goals if possible:

- Showing listeners how to make income using autopilot sites within 90 days.

- How they could potentially make a fantastic long-term supplemental income using autopilot sites

- And even - if you feel the potential exists - to get to 6 or 7 figures a year with such sites.

So first of all, if we can focus on the first goal, for someone starting from absolute scratch how would you suggest they get started creating income with autopilot sites within the next 90 days?

NS - Right, well I wouldn't go with the 'being a merchant' method. I wouldn't go with creating your own product and setting up an affiliate program and all that initially. What I would do is go after the affiliate method.

So, like I said, if you go to ClickBank Marketplace at ClickBank.com and search the marketplace for products that have recurring billing, then you'll get a list of merchants that are offering their products such that they bill the customer every month. And if you refer your traffic through an affiliate link to their product and the traffic that you refer purchases the product, you will get credit every month, each time that customer is re-billed. So, that's one of the best ways to start generating autopilot income - look for products offering recurring billing.

If you like the look of any of the merchants' products that are selling on ClickBank, go to Google's Keyword Tool, and, and say my initial idea was just weight loss, if you type the word or the phrase 'weight loss' into this Google Keyword Tool, then it will show you sub niches - so basically keywords you could consider when targeting a sub niche and it will show you the monthly search results.

Now right at the beginning it will show you obviously weight loss, and I'm looking at it live here as I speak to you, and you don't want to go after the actual keyword phrase 'weight loss' because there will be so many people trying to get to the top of the search engines for that phrase that you won't be able to compete, it will be phenomenally complicated.

So all you need to do is drill down. I've typed in 'weight loss' - Google shows me there are 800 different phrases that include the words 'weight loss'. By the time you get down to about 60 to 80, the phrases number 60 to 80, you'll see the monthly searches drop down to about 600 to 800 searches per month.

That would be a brilliant niche, a brilliant sub-niche to build a little blog around, because then you'll be able to capture the traffic for that sub-niche whereas others won't be optimizing for it, others will be optimizing for different niches, for different terms, different phrases, and you'll have much less competition.

So I can see a phrase here. It says 'weight loss ideas' which gets 660 searches per month and a suggested bid for the pay per click search at Google of $2.62, this means that the actual phrase is worth quite a bit of money per click. So if you target that sub niche you should be able to capture traffic for that and then pass it through with a recommendation and a review of the product that is being sold at ClickBank on recurring billing.

So if you took the domain name WeightLossIdeas.com, or WeightLossIdeasAndTips.com, and then started a blog... I don't know if you think people will be familiar with how to start a blog, Louis, or whether we should go into that in detail?

LA - That's actually a question I wrote down, I was going to ask you for your suggestions for that, and particularly why you recommend blogs over a standard website?

NS - Well, basically there are just inbuilt search engine optimization advantages to blogs such that they come default with RSS feeds; you can plug in your RSS feed into RSS directories and submit your site to them, you can submit your blog to blog directories, which you can't do with just a regular plain website. Usually the actual structure of the URLs and the navigation of blogs are basically better for search engine optimization.

I find it a lot easier to publish a new page as a blog post rather than having to create it offline and upload it to your website and then create the links to that new web page and so on. It's a lot easier from a user's point of view to manage a blog - especially as WordPress is getting simpler and simpler. And they look really nice - you can change the themes just with a couple of clicks here and there to actually change the theme so your blog looks completely different and very professional. So it's just a lot easier all round to use a blog than to actually go about creating a standard static website.

You can download WordPress from www.WordPress.org, or if you go with some hosting company such as HostGater.com, which I recommend as it's a nice cheap and cheerful but pretty professional service, they have something installed called Fantastico, and with just a couple of clicks you can install a blog at your website. So, it's getting easier and easier to get a blog online.

If you just want to get your feet wet and you know nothing at all about blogging you could go to WordPress.com and sign up for a free blog and they'll host it for you as opposed to WordPress.org which is where you download the package for free that let's you install a blog at your own web space.

Or you can go to Blogger.com - they'd also give you a blog for free. But I generally recommend taking the extra time to learn how to install a blog - either using Fantastico with a couple of clicks through your web host's control panel, usually somewhere in the management admin area, or through downloading the actual WordPress package, uploading it to your website and installing it there.

It's not too difficult, it seems difficult at first but once you've done it a couple of times it's very easy to actually get a blog up and running online.

So once you get your blog online - as I was saying - I would go with a phrase such as 'weight loss ideas'. If you go to Google's Keyword Tool you can drill down further and find even easier phrases to optimize and to get traffic for, but obviously the further you drill down the less monthly searches there are, so it becomes then a relative thing.

Questions you need to ask yourself... Do you want to put your effort into building a blog which will be easy to rank at the top of the search engines but only get a couple of clicks a month, or do you want to go after a higher competition phrase to try and attract more monthly searches and more traffic?

It says here, look I've just drilled down a bit further, 'coconut oil weight loss.' What the dickens is that about?! That must be a very easy phrase to optimize around. There's only 230,000 pages online that contain the words 'coconut oil weight loss' so that can't be difficult to optimize around if you took the domain name CoconutOilWeightLoss.com and then did a bit of research, wrote some really good articles, then that will get indexed relatively rapidly.

Which is another advantage of blogs they come with a ping system which lets the search engine know every time you've created a new post. This ping system basically calls the search engine indexing spiders to come through and grab the new content which is something static websites don't come with - so that's another advantage of blogs.

So yeah, I would create some unique content. It has to be unique because if you just take someone else's content and put it on your site then it's likely that their site will rank above you in the search engines and you may have multiple other competing sites containing the same content, so you may just end up in [Google's supplementary results](#) and get no traffic at all.

So I recommend reading a bit around the actual phrase that you're going to optimize for and then writing some good quality articles, putting them on the blog as blog posts and then that will create the content for your site.

At the bottom of each article you will need to actually have a review, a partial small review and recommendation of the product that you're selling as an affiliate at ClickBank. So the weight loss product with recurring billing or whatever niche it is, whatever product it is, and say at the bottom of each blog post, "we highly recommend this product at ClickBank.com".

I don't recommend that you actually say you've tried it, tested it or anything like that, unless that is the case. You can't act like you're giving a testimonial for a product if you haven't actually tried it and tested it. It' s just a whole minefield to stay away from. Also the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) is now cracking down on unethical affiliate marketing. But, you can say the product looks good and the guy, whoever it is, selling the products claims these results and you can say this is where you get it, and give the people the affiliate link.

So then people will go through to ClickBank. You can check in your ClickBank account the stats; how many people are going through, how many sales you have made, and with a little bit of promotion, which we get into in a few minutes, that should get the blog up and running as basically a miniature auto-income system for you.

LA - You mentioned ClickBank a few times, would you also recommend adding [AdSense](#) to a site for increasing income or would you lean more towards having more focused sites pushing the visitor towards clicking through the ClickBank link.

NS - Well, it depends what you mean by autopilot income streams. Because if you have someone who signs up for recurring billing then that person has made a commitment, they know they're going to be billed every month, and then as an affiliate you know you're going to take a percentage of that every month. You can be sure that you're going to be earning income a few months into the future.

Whereas with AdSense it's income on a day-to-day-to-day basis and if your traffic drops down your clicks will drop down and you won't be earning the money. With brand new sites it is quite difficult to get authority links into them. You can't really get to the top of the search engines very rapidly because Google does not trust your site. So you don't particularly want to sign up with a service that sends you a thousand links to try and get you to the top of the search engines quickly - Google will just slap you with a penalty.

So you need to grow your links slowly over time; you need to build the authority of your domain and of your blog over time.

So I wouldn't think you would have enough traffic initially to make autopilot income from AdSense that you could be sure you would be getting month after month after month. New sites in the Google index bounce around a lot, they might go in at a decent position then they might drop down, they might go in low and over time come up higher so, I wouldn't think if you wanted to make money within 90 days, I wouldn't really suggest AdSense would be viable as a way of actually getting autopilot income over time.

But, having said that, if you use the ClickBank system, and if you have an on- topic blog sending traffic through an on-topic link to an on-topic product, you should have a fairly high conversion ratio, then the merchant will actually make sales and pay you affiliate commission on an ongoing basis which is one of the best ways you can set up autopilot income streams.

Before the call started Louis I just showed you one of my sites where I've been making money and receiving checks for almost 9 years from one service that I recommended that was in the financial services industry.

And they've sent me checks - started off at two checks per month, went down to one check per month and has stayed like that ever since. They've been sending me those checks for almost 9 years for a total of thirty-two thousand eight hundred and something dollars. So that is money that I know will pretty much be coming in month in, month out, because it's done that for almost 9 years.

Whereas I have, I think I have some AdSense on that site and it's kind of dribs and drabs, sometimes you make some clicks, sometimes you won't, it's not really the same as getting yourself in the middle of someone's recurring billing, that you know is going to be more likely to provide you with a residual income stream. So AdSense is good, but I wouldn't say it is the best idea if you want to build long-term autopilot income streams.

LA - One question I wrote was how to blog, and you've touched on that. I guess questions people may have are: What topics? What length of articles? How often to post? For what length of time to post?

NS - Well, that's actually a really good question because you don't want to make a rod for your own back. You don't want to start publishing say 3 blog posts per day and then realize that you can't keep up that momentum and drop down to 2 per day then 1 per day then 2 per week and 1 per

month. Googlebot will just stop coming to your site unless you have some really, really good links, because it will say well there's not going to be any fresh content.

So, what you want to do is be consistent and do say one blog post per day, or maybe just one per week. As long as you're consistent with your publishing schedule and you can keep that going then Googlebot will frequently come back to your blog looking for the next piece of content and the next piece of content and the next piece of content...

So it's not as important as to the exact publishing schedule whether you should post 2 per day or 3 per year, it's more important I think to be consistent in what you do.

I don't think the size of your blog post actually matters that much, I think it's more important that it's original content and that it's well-written and that other people find it valuable, because if other people find it valuable then they may use trackbacks or they may mention it and just link to your blog or they'll be other ways, they may bookmark it, they may use some social bookmarking tools to share it with their friends.

So it just needs to be useful, original content, not something that's been scraped from anywhere else - not something that is duplicate content elsewhere on the web because it's just not going to provide any extra value. Google wants to rank sites highly that are of use to the people that are searching Google, so if you give them what they want you will rank highly in the search engines.

And I think it is important that you write well. You can mix up the blog posts, you can have long articles with lots of links and well-researched articles, and then throw in a couple of light hearted ones that are short, because you don't know what people will prefer; you don't know what people will look for, what they will bookmark or share with their friends, so it's good to have a mixture.

And there's no rule that it has to be over 50 words or it has to be over 300 words or it has to be less than 10,000 words. Like I said, as long as it's of high quality and it's original then that's much more important than the size of the article or mentioning the keywords 12 times per blog post and anything like that.

LA - That's actually one question I was going to ask. Let's take your example of weight loss coconut oil and this is purely ...

NS - (Laughter) I don't know anything about that by the way.

LA - And this is purely a guess on my part, but let's say if you use the Google AdWords tool or even a tool like Wordtracker, and let's say you end up with 2,000 keyword combinations related to that. Would you say that over time you take each of those keyword combinations and create an article around them or really just use those as hints for what you're going to write about, and maybe over time just happen to use the keywords?

NS - I wouldn't create an article around each individual keyword because the main rule to remember - the main way to succeed - is to create high quality articles and then go after getting links into those articles, quality links into those articles. Because it's the links that give your article the authority in Google's eyes and then if anyone comes through and spiders your content or rips off your content or scrapes your content, they will put it on their pages but their pages won't outrank yours because yours have the links.

It's important to realize that Google does not care who created any piece of content, what they care is showing the most relevant result containing that content and you need to make sure that's yours.

So if you create 2,000 pieces of content you've created a lot of work for yourself because ideally you would then want to go and get links into each and every piece of content, and getting links is the most difficult part of SEO, not creating the content. So instead of 2,000 pieces of content I would maybe create 20 around not the individual keyword phrases but the overall theme.

So maybe there's weight loss coconut oil, weight loss coconut ... I don't know, I can't think off the top of my head about different phrases around that niche, because I'm not an expert in it, but you could do the research and see how you could group together different phrases.

A good way to think about it is - how would you categorize all those different phrases? Can you break them down into say 10 different categories? If you can, then create an article effectively around each of those categories and mention the keywords that you would put within those categories in the article. Then you've got 10 much bigger, better quality articles that mention all the other keywords and then you only have to build links into 10 different blog posts. That will do much, much better than 2,000 articles each mentioning one keyword phrase that you don't build any links into.

LA - I haven't had to use WordPress extensively, I've used in the past services like Blogger for certain things. But with WordPress you can actually add articles to the system and then set it up so they're published over the next week or two is that right?

NS - Yes you can do that.

LA - So you don't actually have to be at the computer each day - you can have a whole bunch of articles and then program them to be added over time?

NS - Yes.

LA - All right, that's great. Okay. And I'm attacking the questions I've written in no particular order. Maybe for someone who's short of time - what would be your suggestions or opinions about outsourcing, particularly the writing?

NS - It's good if you're time poor and cash rich. Then you have a little bit of money and you'd rather use your money than your time. You can outsource, but outsourcing itself is difficult because a lot of people will actually not write quality articles so you should test who you're going to hire first.

Don't say "I want 200 articles on X" because if they come back with 200 articles that are rubbish or 200 articles that they've sold elsewhere (so they're already duplicate content), you're going to have issues. You'd have to start with a small test and then if the person produces high quality articles and they are original you can give them more articles to do but you also need to keep on top of these people, manage them effectively, make sure they don't fall behind, make sure they don't decide to go on a holiday they didn't tell you about.

There are a lot of pitfalls to outsourcing, it's not a panacea that is an easy thing to do and you just say, "Okay I'd like to do this but I'll just outsource it and then I can be on the beach instead".

You go from actually managing the blog and creating the content yourself - basically doing everything yourself - to having to manage people. You need a graphics guy, you need a content creator and you need someone to do the SEO. You need someone to do this, that and the other. So you go from managing everything yourself to managing other people and it just is a completely different skill set that you need to acquire over time.

It's not easy to start outsourcing tasks. You need to be precise about what you want accomplished, you need to be precise about the time you need the job to take, about the amount it's going to cost. You need to set things like milestones. So are you happy to wait for 200 articles to be written and then have them all given to you at once at the end of the month, or do you want 50 per week for 4 weeks?

There's an awful lot that goes into outsourcing that people just don't consider when they say, "Oh well I'm just going to outsource all this."

It's possible, its definitely possible and it can save you time, but I would say if you're going to start outsourcing then start small and recognize that you're going to face problems and that it gets easier over time like anything else. It's like if you don't know WordPress you start off slowly and get used to it, outsourcing is the same thing.

LA - Right I agree, in my experience the quality level of work you get from outsourcing can differ wildly and the most expensive is not necessarily the best. For example, I found someone through ELance.com maybe 4 or 5 years ago, and I've used him for years now. I've sent a huge amount of work his way because he's very good at what he does. But then I've tried to find writers in the past and sometimes the quality is okay, sometimes it's not so great, sometimes people just disappear on you, so...

NS - Yes exactly.

LA - And often you find people who are very good at what they do and they're less expensive than people who aren't good as them. So price isn't always a measurement necessarily of quality but it does take time to find good people and build a team of people you work with regularly.

NS - And there's also the problem of where they are on the globe as well. If you have an outsourcer who's say in the Philippines, you need to realize that their business day is going to be completely different to yours and you may only be able to chat with them for half an hour a day or something, so that can also be quite tricky.

You may only be able to exchange a couple of emails per day, which makes the whole process more difficult than if the outsourcer was in the same country as you and working the same business hours as you, in which case you can have much more of an exchange of information on any given day than outsourcers who can be from all over the planet.

In fact you can make that work to your advantage. I remember Paul Smithson I think at Xsitepro.com who was telling me how he had a team of coders in India, and a team of coders in, I think Britain, and a team of coders in America maybe, I'm not sure of the actual places. And he was saying how one team of coders would work for 8 hours, pass it on to the next team of coders who'd work on it for 8 hours and then pass it onto the next team of coders when they woke up so he had 24 hours a day covered which I thought was absolute genius myself. But it takes a phenomenal amount of organization and management to be able to pull that off.

LA - And actually with some services I think you have to pay a monthly... well it's almost a retainer, you have to pay 'X' amount per month but what you're basically getting is a project manager who then looks after your team, some companies do offer that as well.

NS - Yeah that's how my Russian coders work.

LA - Oh right.

NS - I've had umpteen different Russian coders over the years but I've only ever had the one project manager. And fortunately he's been excellent and he understands English very well and maybe the coders don't, well I know the coders don't (laughter). No coder seems to understand English... even the English and American ones don't seem to understand instructions in English but they understand PHP I think and that's about it.

But yeah, so my Russian project manager coordinates the actual work at his end with the Russian coders and makes sure the job is done and if I want changes made then I relay them to him and he relays them to the coders. So yeah, I've had that system in place ... outsourced for all my software coding and server maintenance and stuff like that.

LA - Okay. Well what would be your comments about... let's say someone sets up a blog and they've set up Google Analytics on every page so they can keep a close eye on traffic - where it's coming from, what keywords people are searching for and so on.

Can you offer any suggestions for someone looking at exactly what's going on with their site and responding to that in order to make it more popular? How to do more of what they're doing right?

NS - Yeah one of the things I like best about analytics and web stats in general is that they will show you the exact keywords you're getting searches for. So you may have put up a page that is focused on weight loss coconut oil, but you may be getting tons of searches for weight loss coconut oil California or something.

So if you see that in your analytics or in your web logs then that's a good indicator that there's a ton of free traffic out there if you were to build a specific blog post around that phrase and then get some links with the correct anchor text pointing at the phrase. So analytics can be really useful for that.

Google Analytics will show you the bounce rate of your blog, so how many people as soon as they see your blog hit the back button and go back to Google, and that's an important determinant because, like I say, Google really wants to give their visitors, their users, their best, most relevant pages they can and if they're sending visitors to your blog but those visitors are hitting the back button then there's a problem and Google... I don't know if they'll directly penalize you for it, but they won't particularly want to rank your pages at the top if they think it's not giving the visitors the best, most relevant results. So that's something to keep a close eye on.

If that bounce rate gets up high - 60%, 70%, 80% - then you may want to change the layout of the blog, change the theme, add some other things to make it 'sticky'... maybe some videos, things like that.

Also if you do go with Google AdSense then you get a higher proportion of the value of the click if the visitor has been on your page a longer time, and a good way to increase that length of duration is to put on some videos from YouTube, some relevant videos, because people may read your

blog posts, watch the video and then click on the AdSense ad and you should earn more per click then if they've spent a longer time on your site.

So yeah, the bounce rate is important, the actual keywords that people have been searching and ended up at your blog is important. I don't think I use Analytics for a lot more than that though, just to work out which pages are getting the lion's share of the traffic and why.

LA - Okay. Something you've mentioned which I think is important we cover in more detail is links, how to get links to your blog. What would be your suggestion for that? Let's say there's a brand new blog... someone listening to this has purchased a domain, they've installed WordPress, they've let's say added 10 articles to the blog and they're adding 1 article a day, so what's the next step?

NS - Oh Louis I'm [writing a book](#) on links because it is an enormous subject.

But there are important golden rules you have to remember about building links and this is what I spend the first section of my book talking about, because Google doesn't like it if you put up a site and that site attracts a lot of links quickly, they think something fishy is going on there and you may well get a ranking penalty because of that.

So when you do build links if it's a new site you need to build links slowly over time. If you have an older site you can get away with getting a lot more links a lot more quickly, so that's quite important.

You need to consider your anchor text, that's the actual clickable part of a link on the other page that links to your site. It's good if that anchor text is descriptive, so if the anchor text actually says "coconut oil weight loss diet" or whatever it was we were talking about (laughter) then that's going to tell Google what the page it's going to is about, which is your page. That's good because it's descriptive and it describes your page.

So having lots of links with the anchor text describing your individual blog post is important. It's also important that all your links don't say the same thing in the anchor text, so if they all say "coconut oil weight loss diet" then that looks unnatural and Google's going to penalize you for that.

So it's good to mix it up with a few links that say, "click here" or a few links that just say "this" because that's how webmasters naturally link to other people. If you go to any random blog not written by a SEO expert, they'll link to other things just by words that say "this" or words that say "click here" and Google will expect to see links like that. So that's another important thing, you need to mix the anchor text up and not have it all be the same thing.

So gaining links slowly over time if it's a new blog, having relevant anchor text but not being dominated by all the anchor text being the same. Let me see, there are a few other rules. I need to go back through the book as I'm writing it (laughter). Go back and see what these rules were.

As for where you get links it's also... oh yeah, another one would be the IP diversity. You don't want links all pointing to your site from the same place.

It used to be that some search engine optimization people would go out and they would have a money site and then they would build a couple of other sites on the same web host, and the purpose of these satellite sites was just to link to their money site so that the money site went up in the search engine rankings.

But all those sites, if they were on the same web host would have the same IP address and then that looks 'spammy' as well, so you want to get links from a diverse set of places all over the Internet and different servers, different domain names.

So if you go to Alexa.com and type in your domain name or any domain name, it will tell you the number of links into that site but it will also tell you the number of unique domain names that link to that site. And that's important because as Google sees 2, 3, 10, 20 links from one domain it will start discounting the rest. And I don't know what the exact number is because only Google knows how their algorithm works for sure, but Google isn't going to count 20,000 links if you run a forum site or put in an ad at the bottom of a forum footer - one of these paid links. And if that forum has 20,000 pages it's not going to count as if it were the same as 20,000 links with 20,000 unique domain names.

So, it's important that you think about link-building from what looks natural. Google wants people to put quality content online that effectively get natural links of love - those are editorially given links. So, some webmaster or other writes on their blog that your blog had a really good post and is excellent and links through to you, that would be the perfect link. The thing is that webmaster or blogger may well link to your site just with the word "click here" or "here" which doesn't really help.

So what most good search engines and optimization experts will now do is tell you to put quality content online because that will attract a few good natural links, but supplement that with other links that you build yourself in a way that looks as natural as possible, because Google wants to see natural-looking links.

And if you have too many links too quickly it's unnatural; if you have too many links with the same anchor text it's unnatural; if you only link to your homepage, it's unnatural - spread your links throughout your site. What was the other thing? If you have too many links from the same IP address it looks unnatural.

So all these things... if you do it in an unnatural way it can raise red flags, and it may not be any one thing that causes a ranking penalty, it may be if you have three red flags raised or if you have four or seven red flags raised, it probably isn't one or two.

But these are the things that you need to be aware of before you even start building links because then you'll avoid the potential problems of attracting a penalty at Google and seeing your rankings disappear.

While there are loads and loads of places you can get links from, a good starting place is blog directories. Probably the best one is the Best of the Web blog directory. I think that's free if you decide to let them take their own sweet time about listing your blog or you can pay for an expedited listing.

And there are millions of other blog directories that you can submit to. There are RSS directories that you can submit to. If you install WordPress then you go to YourDomain.com you see your blog; if you go to YourDomain.com/feed you'll see your RSS feed. You can take that RSS feed and submit it to RSS directories. You can do Web 2.0 promotions such as creating a page at Squidoo.com, a page at HubPages.com, a page at WetPaint.com - all these various different places - Blogger.com, WordPress.com - and have them link back to your site.

Personally, I'm not so hot on doing the Web 2.0 stuff because I feel if I'm going to create good content it may as well be at my blog as opposed to putting on Squidoo, so maybe that's something you can consider outsourcing. Have someone else build a Squidoo Lens or a HubPages Hub rather than doing that yourself.

If you create original unique blog posts then something else you can do is just turn that content into an audio file. So if you read it out say, "This is YourDomainName.com. This is the latest blog post." Read it out, save it as an MP3 file and then if you create a special RSS XML page, now this is getting a bit technical but I go into details in the book. I could read out the page if you want Louis (laughter)?

But if you actually create a special XML file you can put that on your blog and link the XML file to your MP3 audio files and then that file you can submit to podcast directories. So basically all you've done is reused your same content. You've got quality original content on your blog, you've turned it into an audio file, saved it as an MP3 file, uploaded it, linked to it from your podcast XML page and it's that podcast XML page that you actually submit to podcast directories then you get links back from that.

You can create maybe a screen saver around whatever your actual blog is about - like weight loss. And then you can submit the screen saver as software to software directories - that's another way to get links. You can submit the site to general link directories.

So - this is an interesting topic in itself - whether it's worth submitting to link directories that charge a fee. Some people say it's not, some people say it is. I think if I were Google and I saw that someone had spent maybe a thousand dollars to submit to the top link directories I would consider that a genuine business. So I would see the links from those directories as more authoritative than other links.

And those directories are Yahoo at $299 a year, Business.com it's $199 or $299 per year. Best of the Web I think that's $99, but they often have discount coupons that you can save 25%. DMOZ is actually free - but it takes forever to get into if you happen to pick a category where the editor's asleep at the wheel. And Starting Point, I think Starting Point charge a fee as well, I'm not sure if it's annual or not. So those are the main directories to get listed in.

You can also do blog commenting. And that's another thing to think about - is whether blogs use the 'nofollow' attribute or not, which goes back to a time when blogs first came out and people who left blog comments got a link back to whatever site they wanted to link to along with their comment resulting in all the blogs getting spammed and Google releasing the 'nofollow' standard, so that bloggers could add 'nofollow' to any external links and then if a link contained the 'nofollow' attribute the search engine said well okay, we won't count that link for search engine ranking purposes so it won't pass page rank and we won't count it as a back link.

So then Blogger.com switched to using 'nofollow' and WordPress by default if you install it at your site uses 'nofollow'. So it became harder obviously by design for people to get links, genuine links, from blogs.

So what I created was some software called the Real Link Finder that is free from RealLinkFinder.com. If you download and install it and put in a keyword it will search for blogs that actually don't use the 'nofollow' attribute. Because there are some bloggers out there that said "Okay, I'm disabling that 'nofollow' attribute because I want visitors, I want people to leave comments, and in return I'll let them have a real link back to their website".

So that requires a bit more effort, a bit of moderation on the part of the blogger but they're willing to trade that in return for more traffic from people that are happy to leave comments and links .

So the [Real Link Finder](#) tries to find blogs where you can leave a comment and get a real link back to your website. And I try to encourage people to actually leave quality comments, you know read the blog post - do some research around the topic and leave a quality comment with a link back to your website because you want those blogs to remain 'do follow', to still provide a link back to your site. You don't want those blogs to get spammed and then they'll turn off the comments or make it 'nofollow' and then you have one less resource to get a link from.

So respect the fact that there are bloggers out there that have turned off 'nofollow', it's a risk for them... and leave quality comments to enhance their blog and also gain a link back to your site, so that's another place you can get links.

You could also exchange links directly with webmasters. Now, this is another interesting point because in the past Google frowned on reciprocal linking because it was abused. Everyone and their dog started exchanging links and Google said, 'well okay we can see you link to them, they link to you, we're just not going to bother counting as important'.

But, if you decide to create a list of links and exchange links with other webmasters in your niche, one thing I would suggest is to try and add value to that list of links. Don't just make it a list of links because if you say, "This is my list of links" Google will go yes, so what?

What I suggest doing is just adding a sentence or two, a short paragraph, saying why you're linking to that site: "This site tells you all about coconut oil... This site tells you where coconuts came from... "And just have a little review about what that site is about and then that adds value to your link page. And if the other sites link back to you as a reciprocal link then as long as they're all roughly in the same niche and it adds value to your visitor then I don't think Google would have a problem with it.

Because anything that enhances the visitor is what Google's looking for, looking to approve. It's the sneaky tricks and redirects and black hat stuff that Google wants to ban people about. So, I think that's just a few ideas for link building.

LA - Okay and I've just put down a few possibilities myself, so if I just quickly talk or quickly mention them... if you could just offer your comments on these as well. First one would be link building using articles?

NS - Still good, but not if you do it the old way.

If you do it the old way which was just to spam an article out there and have it listed on as many sites as possible, the exact same article, which is basically a block of text with your link at the bottom as the author with a link back to your site, then that's really no better than going back to 2000/2001 and having free-for-all link pages.

I don't know if you remember them Louis but they were great! (laughter) You had your link, your link gets listed and within 2 minutes it's disappeared off the bottom of the page as 10,000 other people add their links. Well, there's not a lot of difference really between that and article directories apart from you actually have to have some text above your link.

So that really doesn't count for much any more because there was an update to the page rank algorithm when they slapped the link sellers, the brokers who actually sell links. And they also slapped the article directories quite hard, so actually submitting articles the old way doesn't work.

What you want to do now if you're going to submit articles is (a) try to make sure there's a different version of the article appearing on each different site that it's used on; (b) try to get your links within the article copy not in a resource box or a biography box at the bottom; (c) have them appear over time on the Internet and not all as just one big lump, and then those links are much more likely to be counted as genuine links as opposed to just free for all links.

And there are different article services I use - SubmitYourArticle.com run by Steve Shaw here in the UK. He's changed his system from just submitting articles out onto the Internet to allowing you to distribute them over time; I think it's 30 days. And he allows you to rewrite sentences so that different versions of the articles appear on different websites that use them. I don't think he allows you to have the actual links in the body copy of your article yet .

But I also use the service by Mark and Daniel called ArticleMarketingAutomation.com. They do have a system where you can submit articles over time, I think it's 90 days. They appear on other people's blogs and they don't have the bio box, the resource box at the bottom, the actual links are in the actual copy of the article so it looks much more like just a natural blog post than it does an article appearing on someone's site with a biography box. And again, you can have that appear over time.

So what were the three things I said... (1) it needs to appear over time, which it does; (2) it needs different versions of the article on different people's sites, which it does; and (3) you need to have the links in the article, which it does.

So I use both of those services one of which ticks two boxes out three and the other one ticks three boxes out of three.

LA - Now I've done article submitting in the past and I find out of all the directories the one that actually sends the most traffic is EzineArticles.com. Would you say it's worth the time to submit any article manually to their directory?

NS - Yeah, that's not a way I've done it, I've used systems and services to send out articles to multiple different places. But yeah, if you just want to create a quick article and have it appear on their site.

It depends if you want to use them exclusively. I would imagine then you could put in the effort to become one of their... is it featured authors or most valuable authors, the people that have submitted the most articles? And then that might get you additional visitors because you would be seen as an authority within Ezine Articles.

It then turns into the Web 2.0 thing - should you create lots of pages, and lots of Lenses at Squidoo; should you create quality Hubs at HubPages; should you become an EzineArticles - featured author?

I have mixed feelings about all that, because you would probably spend a lot of time to accomplish that goal and that is time you could have been spending elsewhere, actually building your blog or promoting your blog so, I don't know, I haven't actually gone that route of manually submitting articles just to Ezine Articles in exchange for just the traffic that comes from that site.

LA - Okay. And also, of course, if you do write let's say, one exclusive article or a number of exclusive articles then you can choose to just submit each one of those articles to somewhere else. I know some sites and some quite high traffic blogs are looking for guest writers. So if the content is high quality enough and relevant enough to their blog they may publish it for you and then that's a valuable link from their high traffic site that is going to get you traffic. Would you agree with that?

NS - Absolutely, but they will need to know in the first place a bit about you. That comes from, like we said, creating quality content at your blog and then building links into your blog. So when you go to this expert authority blogger and say would you like me to write an article, a guest article at your blog? They're going to say "Well, where are you from and what's your website and what's your history?" So you need to focus on building that first.

If you say "Well this is my blog on weight loss coconut oil and it's been around for 2 weeks and it hasn't actually got any page rank yet but I'm working on it..." they'll say "Well come back in 12 months when you've built up your credibility a little bit", or at least I would.

Maybe if you write some scintillating article that they can't refuse then that demonstrates through the power of the article itself that you're an expert then that may get you access to their blog as a guest author straight away. But definitely, I agree with the basic point that getting exposure in that way would be very valuable and something to go after. I would just think that you would need to spend some time building up your credibility and authority before you can approach those people.

LA - One last potential link building way I've made a note of here, and then I'll think we'll start moving on to other questions, is what would be your comments on a service like PRWeb.com, providing you used it for press releases?

NS - Yes I've used PRWeb.com in the past. I think that's good for being yet another place that you can get links from. I mention that one in my eBook as well and show examples.

I like the fact that PR Web, although they're not the cheapest they do a good job of tracking things for you. So they'll show you the number of times people have clicked the print icon by your press release, so gone to print it out; and the number of times people have downloaded your PDF version of your press release; and the estimated number of people that have seen your press release and things like that, so they have some really good tracking statistics at PR Web.

Writing press releases is totally different to just writing blog posts or writing articles to submit to article directories. You need to write it in the way that a news editor would expect to receive it. So, if you want to write press releases I suggest... I think there's a really good tutorial section at PR Web where you can read about how press releases are written because it's a different style of copywriting, and it's important to try and get that right if you want your press releases to actually be picked by the media and maybe be printed in some prestigious places. So, yeah, that's a good extra idea that off the top of my head I hadn't included.

LA - This is the last link question and then we'll move onto case studies and expand on the business plan but something you mentioned a number of times - which I think is important to touch upon - is that you say it can be dangerous to your site or to the amount of traffic you get through the search engines if too many links appear linking to your site, too quickly.

Would you say there's a yardstick to keep in mind or is it just a case of proceeding carefully for the first few months? What would be your suggestion?

NS - Well the only thing I have to go from is when I built a blog and I went to, I think it was [Digital Point forums](). And I didn't want to do all the directory submissions manually so I paid someone to do some directory submissions, and I don't know how many it was - 100, 150 or something.

But the blog was brand new and in retrospect that was a big mistake because I didn't know which directories he submitted to or how many he actually accomplished, but whatever it was it was enough for Google to drop the actual site out of their index.

So, yeah, I would say that you need to be very careful with your link building efforts for the first couple of months. I wouldn't dare to put any hard and fast numbers on it because no one knows that information outside Google. But definitely hundreds of links or thousands of links is going to raise a giant red flag for any brand-new website.

Because when you think about it Google have indexed what, I don't know, billions and billions, 30, 40 billion web pages. They don't really need your website unless it is something that is magnificent and never seen before on the Internet, which is possible, so they'll come round and they'll have a bit of look - yes a new website, okay we've noted it.

But they don't really need to give you any authority or any trust or the benefit of the doubt. As soon as you raise a red flag on a brand new website that's it, they're going to say "No, we don't particularly need you. If you're going to start messing around and getting 10,000 links to your site in the first week then we're just going to keep you out of the index."

So, it's much better to take things slowly. And I actually drew a graph with time along one axis and the number of the links on the other axis, and there's a couple of lines saying "Between these lines is the shaded area of where you're good and you would be expected to get this number of links" because Google will know based on the sites appearing online and the averages of the number of sites being online and the average of the number of links they'll get over time, they'll have a profile for the average website.

And say, they would expect it to get maybe 50 links in the first month or 150 after 3 months or something like this, and they will know based on this profile what the average website would generate by way of links. And presumably they give you a couple of orders of magnitude either way, as leeway, but if you're outside that either with way too many links or your site never gets a link, which is also unnatural and shows your content must be rubbish, either way outside the gray area then they'll know something's up and they won't index your site and give it as high rankings as it otherwise could have had.

There may not even be a direct penalty; they may just not give it as high rankings as they would have had otherwise so, yeah, it's definitely important.

Another thing is when you look at the graph at the very beginning of the graph where the X axis meets the Y axis, as you start going out within the first couple days of the site, the actual gray area where they would expect your site - the number of links your site to have - is very small and narrow. That's why a site that's older can get away with having a lot of links thrown at it quickly because the gray area then is huge, as these links diverge from the X and Y intersection at time zero.

As the time goes along the bottom axis and the number of links goes up the other axis then you get more and more leeway as the site gets older and older and that's what we see in the search engine's index. It is easy to attract a penalty when the site is very young. It's harder to attract the penalty when the site is old because it's established and it's trusted more. So that's the reason behind not getting links too quickly when your site is new. It's important to grow them very slowly and very naturally for the first couple of months.

LA - And just from my own experience, I found obviously getting your site banned from Google is not a good thing. One of my own sites was affected this way several years ago when I was using Traffic Equalizer software, which doesn't work anymore but was popular at the time.

And that brings you a lot of traffic at the time but, yeah, it doesn't work anymore just because Google is a lot better at judging quality content. But the domain I had the Traffic Equalizer pages on was banned eventually after about a year of having those pages on it. I hadn't really paid attention to the site but I checked it quite recently and now it's back in the index. So even if your site does get banned, if you're patient with your site and if you stop doing the things that got your site banned in the first place, chances are it will reappear.

NS - That's right. I think Michael Campbell said that [Dynamic Media](#) was banned for 7 years or something (laughter) and eventually he managed to get back in the Google Index but, yeah, I don't think he was best pleased that he was banned for that long.

What you can do is, I think most penalties will be temporary and if you keep building links and keep adding content eventually Google will accept that it should re-index the site after, I don't know how long these penalties last but I don't think they're for the lifetime of the site so, as long as you keep building quality links and you keep adding quality content then they will say well, okay, maybe that site made a mistake at the beginning.

If you actually do something very naughty like cloaking and they find out or something like that, then you can stop doing what you were doing and submit a re-inclusion request I think.

That also works if your site was hacked and you end up with naughty words all over the website and Google de-lists it. You can say well, yeah the site was hacked and we've taken these steps to make sure it never happens again and would you please come and re-include our site and they'll come out and re-spider it, so there are ways back in, I don't think anything is ever permanent.

And even if you make a mistake it's important to note that Google doesn't ban you. Lots of people are like, "Oh Google's going to ban you if you do this" or "You'll get banned" and people think about themselves. Well, it's not you, it will be your website, and if you have a network, it may be the network. Google doesn't know who you are, you can appear with a new name and new credit card on a new web host and start a new blog, it's not the end of the world.

So, there are people out there who like testing these boundaries and see how far they can push Google before they get banned just to work out where all these parameters are set. But I think life's too short for that, I'd rather just play how Google wants the game to be played from the beginning, because I think Google drives what - 70%, 75% of all searches in the States, and I think it's higher in the UK - and it just makes sense to give them what they want and give the visitors what they want which is to create high quality content.

I was always worried that if you created really high quality content... say you spent 3 hours or 4 hours creating a really good article on whatever topic you're interested in and you put it on your

blog, then if you've ever looked at your web logs you'll see that there are scraper sites that come round and hit your sites all the time trying to take the content or looking for email addresses to harvest and things like this. So, it concerned me that Google never gave attribution to the original author. Obviously you get into huge copyright issues if you start doing that, so Google hasn't actually done it, all they do is list the most relevant result.

And I was thinking well if I create a really good article and it gets scraped and appears on other people's sites then their article could well appear above mine in the search engines. And it was only until I realized well, you can stop that happening by getting good links into the content you put online and being the most relevant result every time then it's the links that protect your content from being ripped off.

You can't stop it being ripped off, you can try and stop these different harvest bots getting into your server but they will just come with different IPs so you can't really stop it being ripped off, but, as long as you have built good links into your content you can be seen as the most relevant result for that content in Google and be at the top of the search engine, so it doesn't really matter if there are 8 sites in some foreign country listed in positions two through to ten, as long as you're number 1 you'll be getting the lion's share of the traffic for whatever searches that piece of content has.

So it's quite important to think about it in that context. Yes, you can spend a couple of hours creating a really good piece of content, but if you do that then you should also spend a couple of hours getting some really good links into that content and protect it against being ripped off. But then that allows you to, as soon as you accept that idea, that allows you to create really good content, get good links into your site and that is exactly what Google wants to see.

LA - If we can talk through a couple of case studies of your own sites and then we'll move on and take everything that we've talked about and discuss how that can be taken to grow a larger business...

You can start, for example, with blogs making a few hundred dollars a month, and how that can potentially grow to a lot more.

Okay, first of all your two case studies -- Now I forget the exact site, but I remember you talking about this. It was a blog you put together very quickly and in a very short period of time it was getting traffic and it was already making money for you, and this was quite recent?

NS - Yeah.

LA - Do you know which one? Sorry I can't be more specific, do you know which one I'm talking about?

NS - Yeah, what I did was I created a plug-in for WordPress. Plug-ins are basically just other ways to add functionality to WordPress, so it's just something that you can activate within WordPress.

You can have a plug-in that creates a site map for WordPress or a plug-in that shows the most recent posts or the most popular posts or things like that. It's just a piece of code that does some functionality.

Well I created a plug-in for WordPress that allowed me to use data feeds... and what data feeds are - they're small files, text files that merchants generate and give to affiliate networks so that the actual affiliates can get the information about all the products that the merchant sells.

So there could be, I don't know... in the UK there's an automotive and bicycle store called Halfords, and they maybe would have a data feed that would list all the products they sell from spare tires through bicycle pumps, through to headlamps and goodness knows what, and they put all this information in a data feed.

And I thought it would really good if I actually had a plug-in that took each line of the data feed and created a blog post around it. So the first blog post might be the Xenon Headlamps and then it would have a brief description taken from the data feed and then it would have a picture which would be supplied by Halfords and would appear in the blog post, and then it would have an affiliate link and that would appear as a blog post.

Now because of the way WordPress works and the SEO benefits that it has, I thought individual blog posts based around each product from the data feed would be attractive to Google because when I did a search for a phrase from the description, say for the first product in the data feed there were hardly any, if any at all, people using these data feeds.

So the merchant was going to the effort of making these data feeds and I think most affiliates didn't have a clue what to do with the data feed, it was an alien concept, so most of them weren't being used.

So I thought well, okay, the only time the actual product appears is in these product comparison sites so they'll say, "Yes, you can get the Xenon Headlight from Halfords" or you can get it from here or you can get it from here or you can get it from here, and... it wasn't particularly well optimized, they were just doing cost comparison for the different websites.

So I thought "Well, if I put a blog up based around each individual product, that should be fairly attractive to Google and anyone searching for that specific product would most likely end up at my blog, and they click the affiliate link and they would go through to the merchant's website and then they would buy the product they're interested in and I would get an affiliate commission."

So I had this plug-in created by my coders and I took a couple of data feeds, ran the data feed through the plug-in. The plug-in took the data feed, stored all the individual products from the data feed as posts pending in WordPress, so it didn't just publish them all at once, it had them pending in WordPress, and then I had a little script called a cron job which ran and published I think a post every hour or something.

So my posts on the blog would appear every hour, a new product would appear at the blog and Google would come through and they'd go "Oh, a new post... and a new post... and a new post...". And they were loving it.

When I started selling this plug-in I explained in the sales letter that I got the search engines round within a couple of hours, and I was indexed in Google in, I think it was a day or two I don't remember the exact numbers now. And I think I got traffic coming through from someone who had searched at Google and clicked on my link within 3 or 4 days. And I made the first sale as an affiliate based on this blog in 10 days I think, from actually registering the domain name to actually making an affiliate sale it was 10 days. Hence, '10 day Cash Secret' was the product name we sold the plug-in as.

And so it was very fast to get indexed, very fast to get traffic and very fast to start making affiliate sales. And the only link I ever got for the example site was I went to WordPress.com started a blog

for free and linked through to this new blog that was data feed driven. So that was the one free external link that I got that basically I think Google might have followed. I assumed Google followed that link to find my blog and then once they found it they kept coming back to re-index the new blog posts.

So, yeah, that obviously worked and that was only last year that I started selling that product. So it wasn't too long ago. But I think going forward it may be necessary to add a bit of unique content to each post, so maybe a short review or a paragraph or two about the product, so that it's unique content and Google doesn't see it as so-called thin affiliate sites.

Because as I've said several times, Google likes to actually provide sites and results that their users are going to get value from, and if your site doesn't provide any more information than the merchant who provides the data feed then Google may as well send the traffic direct to the merchant.

The only thing my blog post provided that was slightly more than the merchant provided was that I'd SEO'd them better - each post was specific, had the title for the individual product name and then mentioned the product name in the header tags and just a little bit of a description, then it provided the link so it was quite well SEO'd for each individual post in each individual product. And if the merchant hadn't done any better optimization than me I would get the traffic.

But I think that isn't going to work as well in the coming years unless people add a bit more content to the individual blog posts, but yeah, it worked really well when I did the test. And then I got loads of people saying that it was working well for them. And when I released the product a couple of months ago the guy said, "I'm definitely going to buy this because I bought the 10 Day Cash Secret Plug-in and the blogs I put up are still making me money."

So it must have worked for him for well over a year, so yeah, the actual concept worked. I'm not sure how much longer that's going to work for because it didn't have any unique content, it was just the fact that no-one else was using these data feeds that meant they actually appeared in the Google results and got quite a bit of traffic quite quickly.

LA - And, okay, a second case study is a site I think you put it online maybe 9 years ago or something, close to 9 years ago...

You don't have to give the web address if you don't want to create too much competition for the site, but if you can just describe the site, it's not a particularly large site is that correct? Not a huge amount of pages?...

NS - That's right, it was just a half dozen pages. Basically, like I said at the very beginning of this interview, when I started out online the way I started selling was to use third party processors, so companies would process the credit card order for me and only take a percentage of each sale.

At the time, it seemed that all over the Internet there were banner ads where people were promoting the fact that you should get your own affiliate programs. These banner ads were saying merchants should come online and they should get a MOTO - Mail Order Telephone Order. Then they should get Internet access as well to process credit cards in their own name, and it was costing about $1,000 to set that up.

And the reasons those banner ads were everywhere was because the affiliates were making an awful lot of money from anyone that signed up for a merchant account. So they would get a lot of

money from each individual sale therefore those were the banner ads that were being shown all over the Internet.

Now I knew that people, when they came online didn't have to use a merchant account in their own name, they didn't have to spend $1,000 up front, they could test the market with a third party processor. And if you started making loads of sales and making hundreds or thousands of dollars a day then, yes, eventually you could go and get your own merchant account. But it was better to test the market up front with a third party processor which meant you didn't have any set up costs or anything like that.

So I started a website that basically just listed half a dozen, to a dozen of these third party processors, and one of them let me use an affiliate link such that if the merchant signed up with them I would get a percentage of the fees that the third party processor levied.

So, say the third party processor charged 5% of each order, I don't remember the numbers but something like that, and they would pay me maybe 1% of that order - or 20% of their fees - so I would make a little bit of money every time a merchant that I'd referred to this third party processor made a sale.

And it wasn't a lot of money but it added up to being a couple of hundred dollars I think they were sending me every two weeks initially. And the first check they sent me was in August 2000 and it's now 2009, so they've been sending me checks ever since, so that's a 9 year uninterrupted run of receiving checks, because I put myself in the payment pathway and made sure I got residual billing.

Now there are other third party processors and other people who obviously pay you per individual sale or a bounty for each person that signs up, up front, but I think it's much more lucrative in the long run to get yourself into the revenue stream and take a small percentage over time than it is to just accept the initial bounty.

And so, I think I said at the beginning, that one site that I referred people to, that one site has paid me $32,800 over the 9 years they've been paying me.

So that's a quite a successful example of just a couple of pages that were there for the service of providing a comparison of these third party processors and I guess Google found that interesting and sent me the traffic and I sent the traffic through the different third party processors. There a couple that use affiliate links, a couple that didn't use affiliate links, and this one has ended up paying me over $30,000 over the past 9 years.

LA - And after you set up the site you haven't needed to add to the site since? And have you done much promotion for it at the start or since?

NS - No I did a tiny bit of promotion about 6 months ago and I actually released a couple of articles through the Article Marketing Automation site which we talked about earlier, the one that sends out your articles and they look like individual blog posts. I did a couple of those articles to promote the sites, but hardly anything.

I remember I took the name... it was nomerchantaccount.com, but because I thought (laughter)... because I thought short domains were better and that one would have been too long, I actually took the name NoMerchantAcct.com - 'account' spelt just 'acct' - which has to be one of the worst domain names (laughter) ever in the history of the Internet.

So after a while I put up the same content at 3rdPartyProcessors.com and there 'third' is spelt '3', the number '3' and then 'RD' - so that's hardly brilliant either but, now it's just half a dozen pages on each site.

I think Google likes them because they're old. And that's another thing, Google likes things you can't fake and you can't fake the age of your domain name. So they're not going to trust when it's brand new and conversely they do trust domains that are very old, and these domains I think they went online 2000 or 2001, so they're just sitting there basically, but because they haven't done anything risky in all that time I think Google quite likes them.

LA - Actually just related to that, a tip I read probably 2 or 3 years ago - I can't remember where I read it - but if you do have plans for certain sites why not get the domain... even if you're not ready to develop it yet, just get the domain online and just put some articles there from article directories which are related to the topic and maybe link to it from your other sites, or maybe just start a Blogger blog and link to it a couple of times.

But, basically, I think the point was even if you're not ready to develop a domain just put some relevant content there even if it's not yours, as long as you have the right to put it of course, and just let the domain get into Google and let the domain age.

NS - Yeah that's really important. But, yeah, like you say, put content on there, it's not enough just to own the domain and not put content up because I'm sure some people think, "Oh okay I need an auto insurance domain. So I'll take AutoInsurance.com or whatever and then I own that domain name and I'll let that age".

But, until you actually host it and put content on there then Google really will not care that it exists. So yeah, you need the content up there that's on topic and related to the domain name. And then yes, you can let that age.

LA - And sorry, just one further example then I'll move onto the other questions. A site, it's actually a Blogger blog, but it's set up so it's through a dedicated domain name rather than leaving it containing 'blogspot.com' in the address.

And it was for my niece who had a hamster so she wanted to write some hamster posts. And I think over the age of the site it's only had 6 posts or something. And for the first year, obviously it doesn't have any links at all because I haven't done any marketing because it was just a little hobby site, and I did submit it manually to Google and Google completely ignored it, but after a year finally it started getting some attention from Google and now a 6 page site with no links gets about 40 visitors a month.

So it's just funny how that happens and how sites can often be ignored at the beginning, but then Google does pay more and more attention to them over time.

NS - It's a good point. I've got a similar site about rearing guinea pigs, but unfortunately it doesn't make a whole lot of money - I don't think it's a massively lucrative niche. I should have taken AutoInsurance.com back in 1996 or 7 or something.

But that's a whole other story because back then when you took a domain name it was Network Solutions or no-one. And they wanted a minimum of 2 years and $70, do you remember that? I don't know if you do but... (laughter)?

LA - I do, yes (laughter).

NS - It was expensive back then. I remember thinking "Hmm, am I going to invest this money in ScamFreeZone.com or not?" So, yeah, back then you had to have quite a bit of money if you were going to seriously buy up several domain names. Now it's what, about 9 bucks a year (laughter)...

So whichever domain name you want... well, the best idea would be to get a domain name and age it if you can because then you know where it's been hosted, you know what contents appear on it and what link building you've done.

Another thing to potentially do is buy someone else's domain but you'd want to do quite a lot of research - use something like the Way Back Machine. Just type "Way Back Machine" into Google and they'll give you the link.

You can go back in time and look at how the site looked, but you still really can't guarantee that they haven't done anything suspicious, but if it's not in a highly competitive niche then potentially you could buy someone's site complete with the content and the links and change it to your ownership, and that should still count as an aged domain.

LA - The questions I have left... I'll maybe see if I can compress them into a specific question. Everything we've talked about - fantastic tips and strategies from your own business and also some examples we've touched upon - this makes money...

So what would be your suggestions for taking these tips, these strategies and maybe turning them into a good supplemental income - it's relatively easy to make a hundred dollars, a few hundred dollars a month with sites like this.

But how about turning it into a few thousand a month or even if you have very big plans turning it into 6 or 7 figures a year? What would be your comments or suggestions on that?

NS - Well, while it's nice to think about 6 and 7 figures a year (laughter) that is a whole order of magnitude more difficult, like you were saying, than getting started.

Once you get started it's relatively simple to start making some money, but the big trick is to go from knowing how to make a couple of hundred dollars a month, work out exactly what you have to do to get there, define the systems that you needed, so was it: the blog installation... the keyword research... the content creation... graphics creation... sourcing affiliate programs... all those different systems that went into it.

And then outsourcing that because there's no way you're going to get to 6 or 7 figures on your own, it's just going to take a long time even if you know what you're doing because you've got to create all the content.

So outsourcing every single system so that you can get these things built pretty much on autopilot... And then you need to realize that if it makes $200 per month but it costs you maybe, I don't know, say it's going to cost a lot, say it's going to cost $500 to set a site up through having everything outsourced, you're obviously going to take a couple of months before that site pays back the initial investment, which means you need to have funds up front in order to get it all working.

So, you're going to have to put in the time and effort yourself, to come up with seed capital that you can then put into outsourcing, to pay for the sites to be built up front, before they start making money, and before you see a return on your investment. So it would be doable, but it would be many orders of magnitude more difficult to make that amount of money than to make the couple of hundred dollars a month.

One really big tip is that Daniel and Mark, who run [Article Marketing Automation](#) in Australia, are guys that I really admire. What happened was they came online several years ago and worked really hard to create websites that were like affiliate sites and made some money. And then Daniel deconstructed exactly how everything was done and broke it down into systems and then outsourced the systems and... the guy, I don't think he ever sleeps, I'm not sure he even eats.

He works phenomenally hard at this and they're just about to release a product. I've only seen the first module of, I think it's 7 or 8 modules in this course, but I know how hard they've worked; I know their business is doing, I think it's several million dollars this year, and so his product is going through exactly how he did everything, and he did everything himself initially - putting in 100 hour weeks, creating all the content, building all the links, getting everything to make money and then deconstructed it and then outsourced it and then they've taken it to the next stage of making huge amounts of money from outsourcing everything.

So they're releasing a product, I think it's next week, maybe the week after, called The Outsource Method, and it's at [OutSourceMethod.com](#). And if anyone goes there now they won't see anything immediately, but the product should be available from there and I'm sure it will be absolutely brilliant.

I don't need to put together an affiliate link or anything to recommend that, I'll be devouring it as soon as he gives me full access to it. I think he's probably still putting in 100-hour weeks just to get this product done. But yeah, those are guys that unlike most Internet marketers who will tell you what to do without actually having the expertise and the wisdom of having done it themselves, which is what I've always tried to do. I've always tried to find a way to make money online, get it to work, test it, make sure it works and then sell the information, as opposed to some people who will just say "You need to do this. I'm an expert", "You need to do that", without having tested it themselves.

I know that Daniel and Mark have put in the groundwork of building all these sites and working out how to do everything through outsourcing. So if people actually, really, genuinely wanted to get to 6 or 7 figures per year through building these websites then that would be the recommendation from me - would be to pick up the [Outsource Method](#).

LA - So as we round up this interview... now, with everything to do with the Internet, things change quickly and constantly. From everything you've talked about what possible alterations do you think may need to be made in the future to the systems and the tactics and the strategies you've talked through?

NS - Well, yeah you're right the Internet does change rapidly, and that is a problem for building income on autopilot - because it's not always possible to.

I think I got lucky with this one that's paid me for 9 years; I think that's a bit of an outlier and it's probably one of the few affiliate programs in the entire history of the Internet that's paid out over almost 9 years, and the Internet hasn't been around commercially for that much longer than that.

I think what your question gets at is that it's not possible to have 100% automation and automatic income streams, because you do need to keep an eye on your business. And even when you outsource stuff like we're talking about, you need to manage the people who are doing the outsource work or you need to have a manager to manage them. And even if you have a manager to manage them that manager will still need direction presumably.

So if you have a business that is paying you income and unless you're just a passive shareholder then it will need direction and it will need input. And things like Google - like you say - they've changed their algorithm.

Now if you do the basics, like we've been talking about in this interview, and you do them well and you write quality content and you get quality links and you minimize the chances of raising red flags, then there really shouldn't be any problem with Google.

The one thing you'll need to keep an eye is that they add things and test things and change things. So if you type in a local name now, a local town name and say "Butchers..." - I don't know - "...Glasgow", or something like that, they will give you their local search results, so you won't just get a plain list of search engine results pages. Instead, a map will appear and next to it will be a list of butchers in Glasgow and their actual addresses will be highlighted on the little map, and then underneath that will be the regular search results. So that's their local search which they've just rolled out. Every time someone types in a local search you can almost guarantee seeing this map.

So that's interesting. Because if you're competing on local phrases - like one of the search engine guru's favorite things to say is "drill down into a niche" - so don't go for car insurance, go for "car insurance Denver", or go for "car insurance..." - I don't know, what's a town in Denver?

But say you're going for "auto insurance Denver", well you need to be careful because if you've built a site all around "auto insurance Denver Colorado", and then Google rolls out their local search results - instead of being number one on the search result page for "auto insurance Denver Colorado" you'd be pushed out by this map and all the different places with physical addresses in Denver, Colorado that sell auto insurance. They'll all be listed on the map and they'll all come above your website. So that could lead to a sudden drop off in traffic to a website that's specifically focused on phrases such as "Auto insurance, Denver, Colorado".

The other thing is Google sometimes integrates its news. If you type in a keyword phrase that is newsworthy or Google thinks it has enough news results for, it will show you the news results, which comes back to issuing press releases. Why? Because maybe you can get your press release picked up by Google and listed above the regular search engine results pages if anyone types in a phrase that relates to your press release. So that's something else to consider - how search engines such as Google are using different data and integrating it.

You'll often see videos when Google thinks it's appropriate, they'll put videos into the top 10 search engine results pages. So if you type in, I don't know... "Cooking Lasagna" they think, "Oh, maybe they're looking for a video" and they'll put in the video results.

So maybe if you have a page or a website or you're thinking of building a website that relates to something people can see visually you may want to create videos as part of the marketing for that website. So it's just trying to see if there are any changes that you need to keep abreast of, any changes that may impact the amount of traffic you get from Google. So that's quite important to consider long term.

I'm not sure what other things are necessary - you need to be checking that your affiliate links don't change. Sometimes merchants will say "Okay, we've moved to a new affiliate system and unfortunately all the old links aren't going to work any more and you need to be using this style of link".

Now that's not very friendly if you ask me, not a smart move on the part of the actual merchant, but they do it once in a while so you need to be testing your own affiliate links or at least make sure that the tracking works.

Oh, the other thing I was going to say is that script and server security changes often, so they'll be patches to things like WordPress quite often; patches to things like cPanel or Apache or various other things that run on your web server, and you need to make sure that your web host is installing these new security patches for you - and what is their responsibility, and what is your responsibility, so that you stay up to date.

You don't want to ever update your WordPress blog and then suddenly have it hacked into and have Viagra adverts appear all over your pages, so that's something else you need to keep up to date with. So yeah there are lots of things that it's important to stay up to date with.

You can't just think "This is autopilot" and you can walk away and never have to touch it again, it always needs some level of oversight. Having said that, if you do the basics, like we've been talking about: quality content, quality links, then there shouldn't be too much that you should have to keep up-to-date with and you should be able to have a high degree of automation, just not 100% automation.

LA - Okay that's great. And just as we wrap this up I think people listening may be interested in your WordPress... it's your WordPress plug-in, is that correct?

NS - Yeah.

LA - They can get that as part of the 10 Day Cash Secret, is that correct?

NS - That's right, but we're updating it at the moment, Louis, because WordPress changes so often (laughter). I don't know why WordPress changes so often, I think they hate me. But I have to keep up to date with the changes at WordPress to make the plug-in still work.

So yeah, at the moment it's not possible to buy that, it's only possible to opt-in and we'll let people know when that's available again.

LA - Where do they go for that at the minute?

NS - Just www.10dayCashSecret.com.

LA - Okay. And that's also linked from your main site is it? - ScamFreeZone.com?

NS - Yeah - ScamFreeZone.com and NeilShearing.com.

LA - For people listening who want to go even more in depth into link building, what's your book going to be called or where it's going to be available from?

NS - That's at TopLinkingSecrets.com.

LA - Okay, excellent. Well, thank you very much for your time today Neil, it's greatly appreciated.

NS - It's been a pleasure. It's been really good fun.