

Make Money Online By Blogging

Ranking, Sorting & Filtering The Web

Posted 11/13/09

Analyzing The Web's Current State

The topic of organizing the web, more specifically, the content of the web is very interesting in my opinion. The main crossroads of the web, Google, built their revolutionary search algorithm several years ago and has dominated the web and made billions for the one who controls it. Interestingly, while Google constantly tweaks the algorithm and improves it, the web is still a very different place when compared to its state when Google started. One of the biggest changes, web 2.0 fueled blogging, has created exponential growth in content and way more “stuff” for Google to filter.

As the web fills up with crap from millions of individual bloggers and other content producing entities, the challenge of ranking, sorting and filtering through all this data is challenging. I continue to believe that while Google will continue to provide the best mainstream search, there are other opportunities for different methods of finding information on the web.

This conversation, for me, naturally turns towards blogging. Or more simply put, individual content producers. Currently, search is very effective at searching specific topics. For example, I want to find information on the Hyundai Genesis 2009. Searching for that keyword, I get a number of quality results ranging from Hyundai’s official site to a blogger’s review of the car.

The discussion becomes more interesting when you start to consider searching for what I call trusted sources. What if you are considering becoming a gun owner. You have no idea what gun to buy, what guns are legal, how to buy a gun, etc. Basically, you want to find a trust source on a wide range of topics within the larger topic of fire arms. The ideal recommendation would be a top blogger or demonstrated expert in the field of fire arms.

Search is currently focused on keywords. If I searched for “buy a gun”, I will get a range of results, most of them will not be close to my ideal result as identified above. Some results will be crap sites of people luring search traffic by manipulating search results with “optimization” techniques. Unfortunately, Google not only allows but encourages these crap sites because they are typically filled with Google AdSense ads. These sites although hardly any use to the end user still make Google money. Again, I’m looking for a trusted source for many different pieces of quality content. Most of the trusted sources that I have are sites that I stumbled upon over time and continued to visit. It was a more natural process by chance versus searching for such a trusted resource.

For example, let’s say a college student was looking for a trusted resource for financial advice that is pertinent to him. 20smoney.com would be a great resource for such an individual. However, the only way’s he would find it is if he searched for “20s money” or some other keywords that some of my articles rank high for (check out “unemployed college graduates” and

“government take over 401k”). He’s not likely to search for those keywords; therefore, he’s unlikely to find my site. Thus, the limitations of search. Great for specific, isolated terms; not great for finding more broad based trusted resources.

If you think about an expert in a field who writes a blog about his area of expertise, you can see how his site can easily be hidden from the individuals searching for such a trusted resource. By spending his time and energy on his field of expertise, he could potentially be ignoring the area of search engine optimization (SEO). Contrast this with someone who is an expert on SEO and hardly an expert on the same field. The SEO expert is more likely to be more visible to search traffic and thus more found, even though the former resource would have been the better recommendation to a web surfer. Most people will say that quality content will always eventually lead to a higher ranking because of the back links it will generate over time, but this doesn't always develop perfectly.

Some Potential Future Developments

One might consider that search algorithms start to put more emphasis on "trust" indicators. The main one that I can see is subscriber count. The number of subscribers typically indicates how trusted you are with readers. Google, through its acquisition of Feedburner, has access to these counts for most blogs.

Other indicators could be the traffic stats such as average time somebody spends on the site. Or, how many pages per visit a visitor will view.

Google's rankings are primarily driven by back links - the number of quality links a site has pointing to it. This won't change, but will most definitely be tweaked in some way.

I'm very curious to see if Google eventually tries to filter out the "crap sites" that are so pervasive around the web where people attempt to get high ranked for a specific term and monetize that search traffic. As I mentioned above, Google still is profiting from these sites, so at this point, I don't see a change happening.

What This All Means

So, why analyze the web and how it works? As a web entrepreneur or someone who is into online business, it's important to understand how to position websites for more traffic and ultimately, more profit. It's important to acknowledge the limitations of the current system and monitor the changes to the way people find information.

By positioning a website or blog early in a changing environment, you can position a site as an information leader in a certain field. This would undoubtedly result in higher profitability.

I do think there are some opportunities in developing a website that helps people find the trusted resources in a fashion similar to what is described above. The model in my mind would be something like a directory (see dir.yahoo.com, botw.org, etc.), but more based on expert recommendations versus a centralized "approval process". Allow experts in physics to

recommend the best online resources in physics, allow a trusted financial expert to recommend the best financial blogs on the web, etc. Expert recommendations fuel the ranking algorithm. The goal is to find trusted resources or expert bloggers versus a single piece of content on a specific keyword. If there is something similar to what I'm describing, please leave a comment below. Also, if someone is a developer looking to partner with me on building a similar site, also let me know (I don't have time to develop it by myself).

The Slow Grind Of Building A Successful Blog

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Building a successful blog is a long, slow process. It takes determination and consistency. Most people struggle to make money online through a blog because 1) they see the slow growth and give up or 2) because they see how hard it is to monetize traffic (what little traffic they have) and give up. The most important thing you can do to build a successful blog that can actually make money is to blog about something you are really, really interested in or blog about something related to work or preferably both.

From my perspective, you should have two goals that you should pursue in tandem as you grow your blog.

Engaged Readers

Your first goal, and by first I don't mean most important, should be to develop a regular readership. This readership should be fairly engaged with you and your content. The discussion that arises through your readers typically comes in the form of comments. If you are not getting any comments from your readers then perhaps your content isn't interesting enough or it does nothing to elicit an actual reaction from the person reading.

Comments are crucial because they add content. Content can be indexed by search engines and it can elicit further reactions from readers in addition to the main article or post content.

You should measure your level of engagement as you grow your blog over time. The best way to do this is to measure the number of comments per post. Hopefully as the number of engaged and regular readers grows, you will see more and more comments per post. This is a good sign of a successfully growing blog.

Some blogs have such good commenting and discussion that it becomes a primary reason to visit a blog. For example, I regularly read [ZeroHedge](#) partly for the actual posts but even more so for

the witty and interesting comments from their large readership. Their readers are a big asset to the blog.

Search Traffic

The other kind of growth that a successful blog will see is search traffic. This will be a function of the quantity of your content (how much content you produce) and the degree to which your content targets specific keywords or topics (seo).

There are two reasons you want your search traffic to grow. First, search visitors will occasionally be converted into regular readers. Second, search visitors tend to be the visitors that click your ads which means your blog makes money. While this isn't the only way to make money, it's certainly the easiest through a system like Google's AdSense. Search traffic overwhelmingly clicks on my AdSense ads much more than my regular readers (over the last 30 days, search traffic is 57.7% of my total traffic yet 97.6% of all AdSense revenue comes from search traffic), which makes sense if you actually think about it.

In order to grow your traffic, I don't believe in spending a great deal of time trying to intentionally target specific keywords and optimize your content in order to get an article to rank higher. This will result in your quality of content being lowered which is bad business. Also, interestingly, my articles that bring in the most search traffic were articles that I did not intend to be "search allstars" - it just happened. The articles that I did create specifically for search traffic tend to not bring in much search traffic.

Search traffic tends to do better when your blog is being regularly updated. I don't have much proof for this, but I've definitely seen better performance when my blog is having new content regularly added. This would mean that Google potentially gives your website a bump in preference or ranking if it's an "active" site. This would make sense, but again it is only a guess on my part.

The best formula for success is to make sure your site is optimized for search but don't spend much time on the actual content. I know some blogs that attempt to blog about "hot topics" on Google just to capture the short term boost in traffic because of the popularity of a specific keyword. I think this is pretty pointless, because that article you spent time working on doesn't provide much value and it doesn't become an asset after the day is over. Your content should become the assets of your site and hopefully will draw in search traffic for a long time.

Content

More important than anything is your content. I'm a believer that blogs should be more than news sites. Why compete with Drudgereport or CNN? Blogs should offer an opinion, and an educated, interesting opinion is best. Your opinion should be backed up by facts and data but you should take a position and you should be interesting. If not, why would someone read what you have to say?

Subscribers

I don't place the huge emphasis on subscriber count that many bloggers do, but obviously, a higher count is better. First of all, I'd rather readers come to my actual website than read the content through an RSS reader. If they are on my site, they can comment, add to my traffic statistics, click on ads, etc. These are all good things. Because of this, I don't jump through hoops to try and get people to subscribe. I give them the option if that is their preference. That's it.

Naturally, your subscriber count should increase as your blog grows because lots of people do read blog content through RSS. It's tough to identify a standard growth rate for this though because some blogs do things to incentivize or convince readers to subscribe where I don't. The growth rate will definitely be a function of how hard you try to increase the count as well as the other factors that go into general blog growth.

What Kind of Growth Should You See?

This is a tough thing to narrow down, but there's no reason that your blog can't achieve a minimum of 5% visitor growth each month. This requires work obviously and doing a lot of things right, but assuming you're doing them, 5% should be a minimum with regards to visitor growth. This would mean if you have 100 visitors one month, you should be able to bump up to 105 visitors the next month; or if you have 10000 visitors one month, you should be able to attain 10500 visitors the next month.

To obtain consistent growth on a website, it takes a great deal of work and even more so, it takes consistency and dedication. You really have to keep at it in order to achieve any level of success. You often see stats about millions of blogs are created everyday. What you don't see is how many blogs are closed or deleted every day (probably just as many). If you're like me, you have a busy life even without adding a blog into the mix. The only way it works is because I'm blogging about something that I'm involved in and have an interest in. If I had tried to blog about travel (even though I really like it), I would have quit long ago because frankly, I don't travel enough to write consistently about it. I've written almost 500 articles now for this blog and honestly, I'm just getting started. Do you have that in you? If not, your blog is unlikely to get anywhere.

Reinvesting Your Income Back Into Your Blog

If you have an established blog getting even a little traffic, you can easily start to monetize your traffic. Even if you're only getting [\\$30-\\$50 per month in income](#), this is money you can easily reinvest into the blog. Reinvesting the cash flow back into the blog is just like any business does. The objective is growth.

Sure I love getting a little extra income each month, but honestly I'm not blogging to earn a few hundred bucks extra a month. I'm blogging to earn a few extra thousand a month or more. It just takes time to get there. In the meantime, I reinvest almost all of my income from the blog back into the blog in an effort to grow it. How do you reinvest funds into a blog? You can buy traffic through Adwords (which I don't do), you can pay for directory listings that will help your blog rank higher in Google, you can pay writers to write content for your blog, you can buy reviews from other prominent blogs, you can buy ads or links on other blogs, you get the idea.

When consistent growth is the goal, it takes effort and some strategy. [Growth is a long term objective](#); traffic spikes are for the birds. I want real, consistent, increasing growth over months and years so that I can develop this blog into a real business, a real income stream requiring less and less effort to maintain the income. I will continue to document the progress towards this goal.

A reminder why I talk about blogging on this site: I believe blogging can be a real [income stream opportunity](#) for 20-somethings as long as you approach it as a business and a long term project.

Making Money Online: How Secure Is It?

Posted 10/8/09

If you read my blog, you know that I'm a big fan of online income. It's one of my main pursuits and it's something I encourage frequently to anyone. I know several people who make good money off the web, and I also know a few people that make enough to replace a full-time income from their online sources. While many individuals might consider making an actual living by making money online as an incredible feat, many still wonder how secure such an income might be?

Online Revenue Types

Before being able to come to a conclusion on the security of your online income, we first need to break down the different types of revenue from online sources. The level of security will vary for each.

Advertising Revenue

Probably the most common revenue type, advertising can come in many forms. The easiest is through a service such as Google AdSense. Other forms include private, direct ads are common for people who run websites or web businesses.

Online advertising, as a whole, is still in its early stages. Even in an economic downturn like we're experiencing now, online advertising continues to grow while traditional advertising struggles. Because of the fact that we're in an early stage of online advertising, the risk to this revenue is very minimal. **Risk: Low**

Affiliate Marketing & Sales

Affiliate marketing sales are another huge source of revenue for web entrepreneurs. By recommending products or services to buy, you are definitely exposed to the success of that product or service. While you remain in much better shape than a traditional retailer in an economic slowdown, if you depend 100% on affiliate marketing, you may have a higher level of risk than other website operators. **Risk: Medium**

Direct Sales

If you run an online sales or retail channel, you can easily be susceptible to an economic downturn or a new competitor. You must stay on top of your industry or sector and ensure you are offering the right products at the right prices. **Risk: High**

Bloggers

Since bloggers typically focus on the advertising and maybe the affiliate marketing revenue, blogging is a pretty low risk business model. It's also very difficult to get to a level of high income where you can actually support yourself; but, I believe that if you can get there, you have a pretty stable, secure income.

I've read feedback from a few bloggers that make a living off their blogs and they view it as extremely secure since they don't have to depend on anyone else. Unless something makes search engines disappear (unlikely), their traffic and income is very secure.

Getting Started

I think the biggest challenge for most people is that they fail to get off their butt and just start plugging away at a potential online income source. Since the cost is so low and it doesn't require any special skills, just failing to get started must be the main reason that most people fail to pursue online income.

First, decide that this is something you want to pursue. Second, read through the blog posts in the [Online Income Streams](#) category here at 20smoney.com. These posts will help you determine the best course of action and provide tips on getting started with ease and with very little money. All it takes is you deciding that it's time to make some money online! Who knows... it might turn into a full time living.

Why You Should Blog & Why You Shouldn't

Posted 2/26/09

Blogging has exploded over the last 5-6 years. I saw a stat once about how a million or so blogs are started every day. If that is the case, then I imagine a million blogs also are shut down every day. I've had this blog online for about 10 months now and I've made a little cash with it. I imagine 99.99% of blogs make zero money so in that respect, I have to be happy.

Three Reasons Why You Should Try To Make Money Blogging

1. It's Always "On"

The internet always runs and so does your blog. If you can build up a nice blog, you can make money while you sleep. Not bad!

2. Your Content Doesn't Go Away

The more content you write, the more content builds up. Your content doesn't go away and search engines will continue to index it, which means eventually you can have a pretty significant level of content pulling people from search engines to your site.

3. There Are Easy Programs To Implement To Earn Cash

The internet has a multitude of great offerings to implement to try and monetize your traffic, assuming you have traffic. Google AdSense is the most popular and extremely easy to use. Also check out Kontera, Commission Junction, etc.

Three Reasons Why You Shouldn't Try To Make Money Blogging

1. It's Very Hard To Get Traffic

Any serious level of traffic is very hard to come by, especially in the beginning. It can be very hard to get started and you can easily get frustrated with your lack of progress. You need a well defined niche and strong content. Then you need to figure out a way to get the word out. Eventually search engines should send some traffic.

2. It's Time Consuming

Many people like to call blogging for money "passive income". It's definitely not passive, it requires a great deal of time. Researching, brainstorming, writing, getting the word out, it all takes time.

3. It's Crowded

Worst of all, the blogosphere is very crowded. You can find blogs about every topic you can think of, which makes it hard for a new blog to gain serious traction. Find a specific niche that

you know a lot about. Take a look at technorati.com to see what kind of blogs are out there regarding the topic you're considering.