

# Affiliate Classroom

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The journal of affiliate marketing and management best practices

**Monetizing Blogs  
and Communities  
without Alienating Users**

**Monetization  
and Content  
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The Basics**

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# Monetization and Content Marketing: The Basics

By Evelyn Grazini

[www.bestaffiliateniche.com](http://www.bestaffiliateniche.com)



**Text links are still the major form of profits for many affiliates. It's not hard to write an interesting article for a blog or website and put links to merchant products in the text of the article.**

Many times, when affiliate marketers think of monetizing a website, they think of putting affiliate links and banners on their blog and/or website. Blogs are usually thought of as more content-based. Web sites can be content-related, product-related, or simple landing pages built to attract sales or offer a free report or book aimed at adding names to the site owner's subscriber list.

With both types of websites, there needs to be content in order to maximize the site's ability to appear in natural search results and thus minimize PPC costs. For niche sites, a lot more options are available now than they were in the past.

This article will take a look at what is now the basics of content marketing (text links and banner advertising), and at the same time discover more creative and profitable ways to monetize a blog or website.

## Banner Ads and Text Links

Affiliate marketing started out with merchants developing banners that visitors could click on to get to the merchant's site. This worked well for quite a while, until banners were all over the place and readers started to develop what was called banner blindness. As the term implies, it means that people no longer saw the banners; they just ignored them as they read through the content.

Affiliate marketers started to make less money as people no longer paid attention to the banners. That being said, however, people will still click on banners if they are interesting enough or have interesting text in them. They just don't click as often.

That's when text links became popular, and these are still the major form of profits for many affiliates. It's not hard to write an interesting article for a blog or website and put links to merchant products in the text of the article. This type of advertising became even more popular as review blogs started to appear. Now an affiliate could review an item, put a picture of the item on the site, and then lead the visitor to that particular item through a text link.

This is still the best way to market with text links today. After all, if you've done your keyword research correctly and are getting very targeted traffic, that traffic is looking for what you have to sell. Therefore, it just makes sense that they would click on a link and make a purchase for that item. As far as making profits from affiliate sales, that's about

as good as it gets! Fortunately, there are many other ways that site owners can profit from their work.

But not many marketers use them. Why? Because they require just a little more work and personal contact with others. However, if they are done right, these marketing methods could pull in much more cash than just simple affiliate marketing.

### Charge a Fee to Place Banners on Your Site

With affiliate marketing, you get paid when someone clicks on your banner or text link and buys something. However, if you have a site that is highly specialized towards a particular niche and gets a high amount of daily traffic, you might want to consider selling advertising space on your site. Usually this type of advertising is in the form of a banner placed in a highly visible area of your site. Many times, companies who buy these banner placements are more interested in getting their brand image recognized than in making a sale.

In order to make this type of advertising work, you need a decent number of page views, or impressions, on your site. You can then sell banner advertising based on how many people will probably view the banner. You can charge for this service two ways:

**Pay-as-you-go:** With this method, advertisers will pay the site owner per thousand impressions (also known as CPM). You can charge more (or less) depending on how targeted your traffic is. Less targeted traffic sites can charge anywhere from \$0.25 to \$5.00 per thousand impressions. Usually companies won't bother to buy just a thousand impressions.

They buy in bulk, more like 10,000 or 100,000 at a time. So if a company purchases 10,000 impressions and you receive \$5.00 per thousand, you would add \$50.00 to your bottom line. If they purchased 100,000 impressions, your income would increase by \$500 — just for showing their banner on your site.

Also, if your site is narrowly focused on one niche, you can command much more — as much as 10 times more. So, if you've done your research right and concentrated your writings on a particular niche subject or demographic, you could make from \$10.00 to more than \$100 CPM. That's definitely worth working for!

**Flat Fee:** You can also charge a flat fee for a particular spot on your blog or website. A highly desired position to sell is a spot on your home page, above the fold. You'll need to do some research on what others are charging, but again, if you offer a top spot on your site, and have a good amount of traffic, you should be able to make some good extra income.

**Note:** Before offering either of these services to merchants, be sure you can prove how many unique visitors your site gets.

If your site gets a high amount of daily traffic, you might want to consider selling advertising space on your site. Usually this type of advertising is in the form of a banner placed in a highly visible area of your site.

**With Google AdSense, you can choose to display banner ads, text ads, or both. The nice thing about AdSense ads is that they're easy to install on your page; Google does all the work.**

## Contextual/Pay Per Click Advertising

Don't forget to use Google AdSense on your pages. While it's debatable whether AdSense ads take away affiliate revenue or provide more in AdSense revenue, it's worth testing. With AdSense, you can choose to display banner ads, text ads, or both.

The nice thing about AdSense ads is that they're easy to install on your page; Google does all the work. Ads that appear on your site are relevant to your site's topic. You already have targeted traffic that is interested in what displays. So you're more likely to get a click. You get paid for each click even if the visitor doesn't buy anything.

Again, you'll need to test this against affiliate banners and text links because AdSense pays much less per click than you would make with an affiliate sale. In today's world, though, every penny counts!

## Opt-In Forms

Be sure to have an opt-in form on your site and collect email addresses of visitors interested in your topic. This is the oldest and best way to monetize your site. Subscriber lists are priceless! People who have received something from you in the past are more likely to buy again. You can sell other niche items to your list whenever you discover them.

Make sure you give something of value away to get people to sign up. And don't just give away some PLR book. Make sure that what you give away has your company name in it and a link back to your site. You can also find [brandable PLR](#) that will allow you to add your affiliate links to the book. This way you can easily make that first affiliate sale as people read your freebie.

## Use Social Networking Services

There are a huge number of social networking services available now, many of which are free to use. Here are a few services that will help get your content out to other sites:

### BlogLinkr

<http://www.bloglinkr.com>

Bloglinkr looks very promising as an advertising venue. It's still in beta mode, but you can sign up and be notified when they roll out. This looks to be the next big thing to get links to your site, as well as make a few extra bucks. Bloglinkr will allow you to select categories that are of interest to your readers, and your readers will see links to blogs that fit in those categories.

You won't have to subject your readers to sales pitches; instead, you provide them with content from those blogs, and you will be paid on a per-click basis. And when readers click on ads on the blogs that you've referred to Bloglinkr, you'll be paid for those clicks as well.

This sounds like a promising way to add extra income to your blog. It's definitely worth a try.

### Google AdSense for Feeds

[https://www.google.com/adsense/www/en\\_US/feeds/index.html](https://www.google.com/adsense/www/en_US/feeds/index.html)

Google AdSense now has a way for you to earn revenue by putting ads into your RSS feeds! By displaying relevant text and image ads, you can Google AdSense for Feeds allows you to:

- Place ads in your RSS feed content, wherever it's viewed.
- Draw from Google's extensive network of AdWords advertisers.
- Utilize ad targeting that is optimized for feeds, thus ensuring relevant, user-friendly ads.

In order to qualify for this service, you need to be a current AdSense publisher with more than 100 subscribers currently subscribed to your feed. If you don't have enough subscribers, it might pay to ramp up your advertising a little and get them.

### HubPages

<http://hubpages.com/tour/affiliate/>

With HubPages, you can bring in revenue by publishing content-rich Internet pages, known as "Hubs," on topics of use to your readers. HubPages authors are known as "Hubbers," and a community-wide ranking system enables Hubbers to earn recognition among fellow Hubbers. You'll need to set up an account and create your web articles.

Then, when a visitor clicks on your article's (Hub's) ads, you share the revenue. It's all done by linking affiliate IDs from eBay, Amazon, and Google. Your Hub actually displays products as if it were a professional website or magazine — and it's free to sign up!

Try a few of these options at a time and monitor your increase in income. See which ones work the best. Once you've set them up, they practically run on autopilot, becoming a nice slice of recurring revenue for you.

### About the Author

Evelyn Grazini has been marketing as an affiliate for over five years, and teaching marketing for two years. Find her blog and affiliate marketing resources at <http://www.bestaffiliateniche.com>.

**Be sure to have an opt-in form on your site and collect email addresses of visitors interested in your topic. This is the oldest and best way to monetize your site.**

# Monetization Builds Strong Websites 12 Ways

By David Long  
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**Banner ads may enhance the value of your site by providing welcome information and products for your visitors. Or, they can be viewed as just a sleazy attempt to make a buck.**

In the '50s, Wonder Bread promised to build strong bodies 12 ways. Having been around by then for 30 years, I guess it had the right to make the claim. But whether that baked good could live up to its ad copy, you can bet on one thing: monetizing your website can supply you with lots of nutritious "bread." And, like its namesake, there are at least a dozen ways to do that.

## 1. PPC

Pay per click is, by now, a classic way to combine the fun of creating a website around your personal interests and making money out of it at the same time. Google AdSense and Yahoo Search Marketing are two of the best known and most often used (though MSN still holds about 5% of the market).

They're ultra easy to implement. In the case of AdSense, for example, you just stick a little bit of Google-supplied code in your HTML, and the company takes care of the rest. Every time a visitor loads your page, Google puts one or more subtle related text ads on the side, at the top, at the bottom — wherever you decide.

And, in case you're wondering, many people do actually make money this way — some very little, some a great deal, depending on their traffic and the style of the website. Some sites are better suited to generating PPC income than others. If you run a modest-traffic site that discusses literary classics, you probably won't see big bucks from affiliate book sales. On the other hand, you might run a honeymoon/travel site that pulls it in big time from a dozen different sources.

## 2. Text Link Ads

One generic form similar to the familiar Google ads is that of the so-called text link ads, and they're available from many more companies than Google or Yahoo (<http://www.text-link-ads.com>, for example). Investigate a few as part of your regular effort to seek out new markets for additional income. (That is on your to-do list, right?)

## 3. Banner Ads

Banner ads are a variation on the PPC theme, since they are still a type of revenue generation from user clicks. In this case, though, the differ-

ences are probably greater than the similarities. You get paid for clicks, but the ads are almost always graphics-oriented rather than plain text. That has pros and cons, since the graphics can dress up your website or make it look cheap and gaudy. It may also enhance the value of your site by providing welcome information and products for your visitors. Or, it can be viewed as just a sleazy attempt to make a buck by a visitor who didn't come to be sold anything. Which turns out to be the case depends, not surprisingly, on how you implement them.

Banner ads are as easy to implement as PPC — you just stick some merchant/advertiser-supplied HTML into your own, usually at the top of your page (hence the name, after the banner of a newspaper). But the technical aspect is a very minor issue. The bigger portion is exercising wisdom in choosing the ads.

If you select banner ads that integrate well with the theme and purpose of your site, you are likely to see both higher revenue and happier visitors.

Most people do not object to ads, per se. They understand that building and maintaining a site takes effort, and they do, after all, often want to buy things. (Consumer spending is roughly a third of the total economy.) They just prefer that the ads relate to something in which they're interested, usually signaled by the theme of your site.

If your site is very generic, then any type of banner ad might fit. But that's rare. Most sites have a more specific purpose, content, and style. Select ads that fit right in and watch your bank account grow.

### 4. CPM

One variation on both PPC and banner ads is a CPM ad, which stands for cost per thousand impressions. (The "M" refers to "milli," the Latin prefix for "thousand." Go figure why it isn't called CPT instead.) Whether in the form of text ads or graphics, the idea is you don't get paid for every click, but for every thousand instances of the ad.

The differences can get complex, usually revolving around how you get paid rather than the type of ad itself. The short version is that you get paid for the number of page views your website page enjoys. Don't bother scratching your head, though. Treat them just as you would PPC and simply measure whether or not one brings you revenue. (More on that subject at the end.)

### 5. Pop-Ups

Pop-up ads are yet a further variation, more or less related to banner ads, since they're almost invariably graphic in style. (Some are mini-forms, however, that ask only for text input.) No doubt you've seen one, probably more often than you would prefer.

Sometimes they appear the instant you visit the site, but most are designed to execute when the user takes some action, such as clicking on a portion of the page, or the Next Page hotspot. However, they are much more controversial than their tamer cousins because they can be

**Most people do not object to ads, per se. They just prefer that the ads relate to something in which they're interested, usually signaled by the theme of your site.**

**A large number of people badmouthing your site because of your advertising practices is a surefire traffic and revenue killer. Proceed with caution.**

a tremendous distraction. That distraction reached such proportions a few years ago that most browsers now offer automatic pop-up suppression. Spending a lot of time trying to fool them into presenting the ad anyway is usually not a good investment of your scarce resources.

Unless you have a specific purpose that only a pop-up can serve (like offering a prize in a spontaneous contest, for example), it probably won't be worth the effort. Worse still is the potential negative marketing effect they can have.

The worst thing you can do is use code to annoy your visitors. Not only does it send potential customers away, but it encourages them to spread negative word of mouth to potential visitors. A large number of people badmouthing your site because of your advertising practices is a surefire traffic and revenue killer. Proceed with caution.

## 6. Paid Reviews

There are a number of ways you can earn money by creating content on the websites of others. The opposite route, getting paid for people to put content on your site, is less common but still possible. Publishers eager to advertise their site or content on yours may write a review of their product/service, then pay you to post it on your site. More commonly, however, you write the review and receive income from the merchant for doing so.

In essence, you are acting both as an ad copy writer and as an electronic billboard. If you have spare "real estate" and the ability to write, it's not a bad way to generate income. Consider carefully, though, how much you are likely to make this way versus how much time it takes to attract that type of business and gain that revenue.

## 7. Sponsor Content

This somewhat generic category really covers a number of different possibilities, some of which we've already discussed. Here again, you are "renting" a portion of your "real estate" to someone willing to pay you to do so. This is a classic style of paid advertising as has existed in hard-copy magazines for generations. (Remember those?) In this case, you simply place the content, not create it.

## 8. RSS Feed Ads

RSS readers are now part of the mainstream. They may not have reached their once-expected numbers. (New technology is often overhyped with unrealistic projections, right?) Still, they are here and here to stay. Users "subscribe" to a site and, when it gets updated, the new content (or some subset) appears in the RSS reader window.

What's great here is that it can move beyond the standard browser/PC model to encompass Blackberries, mobile phones, and more. It can be a great way to generate revenue for your site and is often well worth the slightly greater technical effort required to implement.

## 9. Ebooks

Ebooks can be a form of revenue, but they can also be an ad — and in two different ways. The ebook itself may be a cleverly disguised form of advertisement for your product or service. Though you always want to provide content that is valuable in itself, an ebook's content can also serve as a way of touting your site and what you sell.

But, in addition, just as was the case with paperback books for generations, an ebook can contain ads for any number of sites possibly having little to do with the content of the ebook itself. They can be ads for your sites, but also ads for other sites (who, naturally, pay you either in cash or with added traffic and word of mouth).

## 10. Widgets

One of the newer forms of monetizing your website is to include widgets on the page. Amazon has many, and they can be used as part of your overall Amazon affiliate marketing efforts. But that mammoth merchant is not the only company to provide them.

They can be part of your interactive marketing push, brand oriented, bring revenue by a cost-per-install contract, lead generation, etc. There are many ways to use widgets, with more being invented all the time.

## 11. Event Sponsor

You can earn ad revenue by offering to sponsor an event, contest, what have you. The difference here is that the ad usually revolves around not a product or service but a onetime (or annual) occurrence. The specific implementation, though, can be any of several of the above — text ad, banner ad, etc.

## 12. Premium Content

There's no doubt this is the holy grail of many website builders. Wouldn't we all like to be able to charge directly for visits to at least some portion of our site? Well, it can be done, and it can be lucrative. But keep in mind, since there is so much free content on the web, people generally expect it to all be free. To make money, your content must be something very special.

What constitutes "special" can run the gamut of human imagination. Let your creativity shine. Just be careful to invest your time wisely. If you spend, say, 90% of your time creating premium content for which no one signs up, you would be better off with PPC or some other form of revenue generation.

**Though you  
always want to  
provide content  
that is valuable  
in itself, an  
ebook's  
content can  
also serve as a  
way of touting  
your site and  
what you sell.**

## **Trial and Error/Measurements**

No matter what type of advertising you execute, there are no guarantees of income, of course. (But then, you knew that already.) That said, any of these methods are invariably a matter of trial and error, to one degree or another.

Reduce the number of errors per trial, and maximize the method that works best for you, by making sure you measure anything and everything.

Monitor page views before and after implementing the campaign. Measure more than just the total dollars you get by looking under the covers at what generated that revenue. Look at page stickiness, placement, type of ad (banner, text, etc), day of week, season of year, etc. — in short, everything. Look for trends.

Good luck, and be persistent!

**Reduce the number of errors per trial, and maximize the method that works best for you, by making sure you measure anything and everything.**

### **About the Author**

David Long is a freelance writer and editor with over 20 years of experience. His PLR articles and eBooks have appeared on hundreds of websites. They cover topics that include Wine & Beer, Travel, Gardening, Health & Fitness, Pets, Stocks & Bonds, and dozens more subjects. He can be contacted for hire at [JDavidLong@gmail.com](mailto:JDavidLong@gmail.com).

# Monetizing a Blog

By Mark Thompson  
<http://www.income-academy.com>



**Blog monetization should be treated as an ongoing project. A simple change in position of an ad can result in a doubling or tripling of your income.**

The most crucial part of any business is the income model they use. This is just as true for a multinational company as it is for you. How you monetize your blogs will decide how successful you are and how much you earn.

Blog monetization should be treated as an ongoing project. A simple change in position of an ad can result in a doubling or tripling of your income. A change from one method to another can be the difference between a blog earning \$10 a month and \$1,000 a month.

In this article, we will look at several blog monetization models. There are hundreds of types of monetization you could choose. To keep things simple, we will focus on the most profitable and mainstream methods. We will also spend some time looking at how to test what's best for your site.

## Contextual Ads

First, let's look at the granddaddy of all blog monetization Contextual ads. Contextual advertising is just another way to say AdSense-style ads. These ads are displayed based on the content in the page on which they are displayed.

While AdSense is the best known, there are several alternatives, including the Yahoo Publisher Network (YPN) and MSN's Microsoft AdCenter. On top of these, there are a whole host of other advertisers offering the same type of ads. While researching this article, I found around 100 alternatives, so you'll never be stuck for choice.

Personally, I would always recommend going with Google AdSense; the payments are usually higher, and you are guaranteed a payment each month if you earn over the minimum amount. I've received a payment from them every month for the past 42 months, and it's always been on time, and it's always been the correct amount.

The key to making the most from your contextual advertising is to test the position of the ads and not to have too many ads displaying on the page.

Too many ads tend to make the reader too aware of them and avoid clicking on them. It also gives them an opportunity to click an ad that will pay you 5 cents, while another ad on the page may pay \$5.

I've found that the best location is usually below an article title and above the content. Sometimes blending the ads in so that the text flows around it can have great results, while at other times having the ads stand boldly on their own gets the desired results.

I frequently used to get click-through rates of 25–30%; but over time, that has dropped considerably so that now I consider anything over 10% to be a success. This drop in click-through rates may be due to visitors being more aware of the ads than they used to be.

One type of contextual ad to which I've paid increasing attention recently is the contextual text link ad, such as those supplied by Kontera and Infolinks. These companies will scan your content and then link various words to ads. Just like AdSense, you will get paid when people click on the links.

Although I started this article with contextual advertising, I actually consider it to be the least profitable type of advertising, and I only ever use it in tandem with other forms of advertising.

A few years ago I ran a series of experiments testing different forms of advertising and noticed that for every 1,000 visitors who clicked on a link that led to a ClickBank product, I earned around \$440. However, for every 1,000 visitors who clicked on AdSense ads that income dropped to below \$60.

A lot of variables are involved in those figures, such as niches and advertising costs, but it does illustrate just how profitable it can be to regularly test different advertising models. I find that the more I test, the higher I can eventually get the income on any of my blogs. An additional \$1 a day may not sound like much, but over several blogs that can soon add up.

## ClickBank

This brings us nicely to one of my favorite forms of blog monetization. I know that some people like to dismiss ClickBank as an income method, but I am definitely not one of them. Yesterday I went to play golf, I got home 4 hours later, and I found that I had made 4 ClickBank sales and my balance had increased by almost \$125. The cost of those sales was \$0, because I only ever use article marketing.

What I like about ClickBank is that I know that if I send 100 people to a ClickBank sales page I will usually make at least one sale, maybe two. To increase my income, I just need to increase my traffic. Once again, just like Google, I have been paid every month for the past three years. What I really like about ClickBank is that they pay me every week directly to my bank account.

ClickBank recently added an option of having AdSense-style ads on your site. These ads, called "hopads," are simple text links to ClickBank products. Over the month I've been testing these, they have proved to be quite successful — not as successful as a review page, but a nice addition nonetheless.

**Although I started this article with contextual advertising, I actually consider it to be the least profitable type of advertising, and I only ever use it in tandem with other forms of advertising.**

**Affiliate networks are also a great way to add physical products to your blog. Commissions are generally 8–12%, and you can find a wide range of products.**

If you are monetizing your blog using ClickBank products, then be sure to use a variety of methods. You can link keywords to products, and the same with images. Short reviews in the sidebar have always worked well for me, as have full-page reviews of products.

## Physical Products

Selling physical products can be a great way to monetize your blog. The great thing about this method is that you have a wide variety of vendors to choose from. The easiest and most simple way is to use Amazon. Although the commissions are generally lower than anywhere else, you do tend to sell more products, and the number of products they sell more than makes up for this.

In addition to Amazon, another big name worth considering is eBay. eBay has its own affiliate network and, once again like Google and ClickBank, pay regularly and on time.

There have been two occasions in which I've had problems with payments; but this was a technical problem, and they rectified it immediately. Once again, the wide range of items available make up for low commission rates, and the signup bonus you get for new members can be very lucrative.

Affiliate networks are also a great way to add physical products to your blog. Commissions are generally 8–12%, and you can find a wide range of products. Most of the big household names now have an affiliate program, so if you can't find what you want with one network, shop around. Don't try to use too many different networks; instead, try to stick to just one or two, as it makes payments and administration much easier.

Sites like Goldencan.com or Datafeedr can be used to create a data-feed of many affiliate products, which you can then place on your site. This is an excellent way to monetize a blog and can lead to some very big profits.

## CPA Ads

One final monetization method worth considering is CPA ads. With Cost Per Action ads, you get paid when a visitor performs an action such as providing a name and address. These usually take the form of a special offer or a free trial.

For example, if you have a site about insurance, you can place a CPA ad on the site that provides a free set of window locks in return for a request for an insurance quote. You then get paid when the person fills out his details. Many people find free offers or free trial irresistible.

CPA offers can be very rewarding. For instance, recent offers for free trials of Acai berry products have been paying up to \$28 per signup. It doesn't take many of those to make a nice payday!

## Conclusion

When it comes down to it, there are hundreds of ways to monetize your blog. The ones we looked at above are just a few of the main ones. Try to avoid add too many types of monetization to your site; with blog monetization, less is usually more.

If you take one thing from this article, it's that you should constantly test different monetization methods to see which ones work best for you.

**If you take one thing from this article, it's that you should constantly test different monetization methods to see which ones work best for you.**

## About the Author

Mark Thompson spent many years working in an IT consultancy in London. Following a re-evaluation of his goals and lifestyle in 2004, he sold everything he couldn't fit into the family car and moved to rural Spain, where he now pursues a variety of online ventures. Visit his website <http://www.income-academy.com> to learn more about the benefits of his low-cost online business coaching.

# Monetizing Blogs and Communities without Alienating Users

By Katalin Torok  
[www.mktg.idared.net](http://www.mktg.idared.net)



Announce your new initiative, and even invite your users to help offset the costs of operating the site by referring new advertisers they know who might be interested.

The decision to monetize your website cannot be taken lightly, no matter the size or type of site. However, if you have already built up a dedicated return visitor base by creating a successful blog or community without monetization, suddenly adding advertising or starting to charge for content can backfire and alienate your most valued users. This article offers tips on how to monetize an existing site without alienating its community of users.

## How to Start Earning Income from an Existing Website

Say you have built a great website a month ago, or two years ago. You suddenly realize it is time to recover the costs of keeping up the site, or you see the potential to earn some income from your efforts. If your site has been a hobby until then, the decision to start making money from your efforts may be a bittersweet one. A little extra income, or a lot of it, sounds tempting; but you are worried some of your users may not like seeing ads on their trusted corner of the web.

To make sure you keep the integrity of your site, and don't lose the trust you have built with your user base, stick to these basic rules:

- Be honest about your efforts.
- Respect your community's activities.
- Don't overwhelm your users.

**Be honest: don't try to sneak in advertising.** If you start monetizing an existing site, be open and honest about it. Announce your new initiative, and even invite your users to help offset the costs of operating the site by referring new advertisers they know who might be interested. Always make it obvious what is paid-for content and what isn't. It is especially important to differentiate between sponsored and editorial content on blogs. Blog readers have a well-trained eye to spot sneaky advertising, and once you have broken the trust, it is hard to build it up again.

**Respect your community's activities: do not interfere with the main activities on your site.** If you run a forum, do not put advertisements in places that make the conversations hard to follow, or you risk turning away even the lurking members who may suddenly find it hard to read replies. If you run a blog, limit the number of sponsored posts, or else your blog will lose its integrity and focus, which will cost you readership sooner or later.

**Don't overwhelm your users: go for quality and diversity over quantity.** When it comes to your choices in which monetization tactics to use, don't rely on just one type of advertisement. Instead, develop multiple streams of income. For example, on a forum, you might run banners on the top of the page, have a pay-for-inclusion directory, and offer premium membership with advanced features. The three income streams will be perceived much less negatively than plastering the site from top to bottom with banner ads. Also, avoid using aggressive and black hat techniques. Pop-unders, cloaked advertising, and in-your-face ads that are impossible to get away from are a big turnoff for visitors who come to a community site to participate.

These tactics will alienate especially your most valued return visitors as they are bombarded with them again and again. Stick to white hat, unobtrusive advertising methods and you will benefit much more in the long term. If you did not have any advertising or paid features on your site, start slowly, and integrate them into the site experience as much as possible. This way you can see how your ads or other monetization efforts are perceived and welcomed by the community. Continuously test and analyze your monetization efforts not only in terms of the income they bring in, but how well they are received and perceived by your community of users.

### **Adding Value by Adding Advertising**

You will have the greatest success if your monetization efforts add value to your site. If the ads or paid features are useful and relevant, your users are more likely to engage with them, click on them, and buy them, creating a win-win scenario for you, for the users, and for the advertisers. Every site is different; there is no magic formula here. Think of ways in which advertising can add value to YOUR users. For example, a niche-specific search engine, a discounts newsletter, or a current deals page have a higher perceived value from your user's viewpoint than a banner ad that takes up their screen space.

### **Start Making Money from Your Successful Community**

If you already run a successful community-based website, whether it takes the form of a forum or a blog, you have many more options to start monetizing it than a web entrepreneur who is just starting to build a site. You can leverage your existing traffic and present your site as a qualified advertising venue to potential advertisers, so that it is much easier to break the ice and sign up the first client. Let's take a look at some of the options to monetize an online community.

**Banner ads and display advertising.** To start with the most obvious, you can add a couple of ad locations to your layout and run PPC ads and/or affiliate banners, or sell your ad inventory on a CPM basis. When putting together your media kit and approaching potential advertisers, you can use your site's existing usage statistics to negotiate deals. If you use affiliate programs, you may introduce your site and your stats to the affiliate manager and negotiate a better deal than their standard affiliate offering.

**When it comes to your choices in which monetization tactics to use, don't rely on just one type of advertisement. Instead, develop multiple streams of income.**

**To minimize the risk of alienating your dedicated users, weigh the benefits and risks and carefully consider your own user base's characteristics before taking this step.**

**Charge advertisers to engage with your audience.** With a substantial registered member base (for forums), or return visitors or RSS subscribers (for blogs) in a given niche, you have attracted a target market and thus already created a marketplace, even if you have not yet monetized it. By attracting a great number of people interested in a given topic, you can start charging businesses for accessing their target market through your website. Set up mini marketplaces (such as a classifieds or auctions section dedicated to your niche), or directories, and charge for inclusions.

**Affiliate ads and links.** You can complement your forum and blog posts with relevant affiliate offers; set up a mini mall, a directory of relevant stores; or a deals page. If you already run a newsletter, include time-sensitive deals and offers in the next issues. Develop buyer's guides to relevant products and services, sprinkled with affiliate links.

**Premium services for your members.** Finally, depending on your niche and user base, you can develop premium services and benefits in addition to your free-to-use website. You can charge fees for certain advanced features, or for greater allowances or better privileges on the forum. Starting to charge fees on an existing community site is the monetization approach most likely to result in some tension between you and your most dedicated users. To minimize the risk of alienating your dedicated users, weigh the benefits and risks and carefully consider your own user base's characteristics before taking this step. And make sure not to restrict non-paying users from enjoying most of your community.

The way your users perceive your site's use of advertising makes a world of a difference in the results you will see. This is especially true with communities and websites with established readership. No matter which route you choose to make money from your site, let your website's vision and mission guide you in your monetization efforts to keep your site's integrity, and your users' trust in you, intact.

### About the Author

Katalin Torok is an independent marketing consultant with a focus on Web 2.0. Her website and blog contains many helpful tips at: <http://mktg.idared.net>.

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