

How To Monetize Your Site

Learn about various strategies that will help you generate more income from your Web site.

by Jason Teichman

Summary: Many small businesses have already set up Web sites, but still aren't quite sure how to use these sites to make money. In this article Register.com shares concrete strategies for the many ways a small business owner (even a services-based business owner) can generate additional income from their site. The key to a successful approach is building off of your core business and engaging your customers. Then, find ways that you can expand these strategies to different audiences.

Keywords: monetization, online strategy, website design, information architecture, web advertising, affiliate marketing, customer segments

One of the most popular questions new Web site owners ask is how they can use their site to make money. As it happens, I've been having this conversation in my own family recently - my mother-in-law is a former plant-care business owner and now has a Web site about plant care. The advice I've given her serves as a road map for the many ways a small-business owner can realistically generate additional income from their site.

To begin, ask yourself what your core business is. What is the main objective of your site? Who is your core audience? You'll want to monetize your site in ways that don't turn off your core constituency.

If you have more than one target audience - say consumers and interior designers, in my MIL's case - consider architecting your site so that these two customers enter into different parts of your site and don't see each others' content. That'll allow you to design monetizing strategies customized to each customer type.

- **Use good design to drive sales.** Site design is important in converting visitors to buyers. A lot of new Web site owners rush to hire a designer for their site before they think about how the site needs to work. Try creating a "wireframe" chart of what you want the site to do and then build the site around those goals.

Customers and prospects aren't primarily interested in why you decided to quit your job and start your business. Put that kind of information off the home page, in your "about" page. The content on your home page should be about what you sell, and links for buying it should be easy to find.

- **Advertising.** Whether it's banner ads or [Google adwords](#) running down the side of your page, many small businesses try including ads on their Web sites. Most end up disappointed.

To make a substantial income from ads, you need massive traffic. Customers need to have a reason to come back to the site frequently and stay on the site. That usually requires a lot of content. Do you have someone at your company who could blog daily, for instance? That would provide more pages against which to place ads and more content to keep customers on the site.

If you don't have high traffic or the content to create it, advertising probably won't be worthwhile. Customers also may be turned off by the presence of ads, so factor that into your thinking about whether they're for your site.

- **Affiliate deals.** One of the most common examples of affiliate deals is small businesses that set up bookshelves on their site. If visitors click on the books, they're taken to [Amazon](#) or another book portal where they can purchase the book, generating a commission for the business. Commissions for these affiliate or associate arrangements may vary - Amazon offers up to 15%.

For instance, my MIL could add gardening books and nurseries to her site and possibly reap a side income from her customers' purchases. To be a successful affiliate, you'll need to optimize your site so that it comes up high in results when customers search major portals on key phrases for your industry.

- **Create additional products or services.** If you have a base of knowledge, or a single product you're selling, you could get customers to pay for other versions of your information. My MIL has a huge database of plant-care information. She could create downloadable or physical brochures, paid-

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subscriber newsletters, e-books, online classes or in-person training. She could offer a monthly access service to use the database. Each of these new products may bring in new customers who might not have spent a larger amount to buy the full database outright. The wider array of products also makes your site look more professional and comprehensive.

- **Write apps.** Applications are the pot of gold. You invest the time and expense to create them once, they cost pennies to reproduce - or nearly nothing if they're a download - and you can sell them over and over again. My MIL created an iPhone application that enables interior designers to access her plant-care information on their iPhones while they stroll down nursery aisles looking for indoor plants for their customers. She's sold several thousand copies of the app in a short time, creating a great additional income.
- **Find additional customer segments.** Once you have some products or services on your site, grow your sales by adding new content with key words that appeal to new types of customers. For instance, my MIL is currently selling her plant information to interior designers. She might branch out and offer to license her application to florists or nurseries. The store could make the app-loaded iPhone available to customers to use while they browse their store.

Experiment with several methods of generating revenue to find the ones that engage your customers and don't turn them off to your site. If something's not working, try another approach until you have developed several money-generating methods.

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