

Funding Your Web Site

Getting paid to have fun is certainly a worthwhile goal. But how can you get others to reward you for operating your own website? I have found several methods that seem to be working for me. For them to work for you as well, your website first has to...

Be Worthy of Funding

It should go without saying that your website has to deliver something to your potential funding sources. That "something" is most often a viewer's eyeballs. Or the ability to otherwise dump still warm bods on their doormat. Your site *must* have an obvious point, a clear focus, and a known purpose. It *must* be tightly targeted. And, above all, you'll always have to *give a lot away to sell a little*.

Some key secrets to meeting these goals are to...

Be unique— The three most important things on a website are *content*, *content*, and *content*. Your site should supply *original* information, reference, or entertainment. Exclusive material which is simply not available elsewhere. Such as tutorials, ongoing ezines, and world-class reference stashes. All of which gets carefully grouped into libraries or other well ordered structures. Tightly targeted to special interests. Such as [Bezier curve math](#), [aerial logging tramway history](#), [wavelet applications](#), or [PostScript-as-language utilities](#). And possibly combined with your own collection of products and services that clearly offer distinct price, performance, or quality advantages.

Be definitive— Your website should be a major *gateway* to any and all resources in one or more special interest areas. Well thought out [links](#) are your key resource here. Which should be industry wide and definitely include *all* of your competitors. But massive link lists often end up less than useless. Instead, your links should be usefully annotated, properly organized, thoroughly verified, and carefully thought out. Explaining exactly what each link is and how it fits into a big picture. Besides site links, access to books, newsletters, newsgroups, organizations, magazines, trade journals, and search engines should also be included.

Be accurate— Few things end up more infuriating than a broken link. Worse, any obvious spelling or layout errors clearly label your site as not worthy of support. Thus, *test, test, test!* Do so every time you upload and every time you are online. There are free services such as [Dr. HTML](#) that can find spelling errors, coding problems, and even do live link checking for you. Links internal to a PDF file can be

tested with my [PDFLINK.PDF](#) Always try to have somebody else check your work and give second opinions. On a larger site, offer prizes every now and then for found errors. And always be sure to act on them.

Be fast— A frustrated or a bored viewer is a gone viewer. So, a key rule is to be sure *all* your visitors have something useful to see and act upon *within four seconds* of your page popping up on their screen. Anything longer is absolutely and utterly inexcusable. Some website speedup tricks I've found effective include...

a "retro" look that is free of bells and whistles
extensive delivery of Adobe Acrobat PDF files
byte range retrieval for page-at-a-time delivery
banners and images always forced to load last
few and small images that are click expandable
creative use of tables, especially choice buttons
efficient page coding for both HTML and PDF

Be consistent— Each and every page should have a theme, pattern, and coloring which clearly identifies your website. Visitors should know if they are on or off site. There should be a logical flow between your pages. A minimum of clicks should be needed to get at anything really useful. Referrals or redirects should be long enough to allow back arrows to still work. Colors of links should be expected and legibly identify links new, active, or visited. Only "[web friendly](#)" colors should be used. Those whose red, blue, and green components are hex 00, 33, 66, 99, CC, or FF. No color or pattern should be obnoxious or distracting. Nor difficult to view on a laptop. Be sure to have a good *internal* search engine on your site. One that handles mixed HTML and PDF equally well. A site roadmap is also a must.

Be timely— Try to provide a *daily* reason for your visitors to return. Make daily site mods so auto-reporting avatars will keep returning. Provide [ezines](#) having an expected update frequency. Rotate sample [book chapters](#) on a monthly basis. Make your site so huge and so dynamic that they cannot possibly cover it in a few visits. Keep adding older "classics" to your archive files. Believe in that Japanese concept of *kaizan* or *continuous small improvements*.

Be findable— Do not hide under a rock. Make sure all the major search engines know about you. Do so often, until you are certain they are hitting you. Test with phrases that should be unique to your site. Such as "[tinaja](#)" or "[Graham aerial tramway](#)." Place chosen keywords high on your home

page. Surf likely sites that serve the kind of visitors you want and ask for appropriate links. But return only those links you can heartily endorse. Use the *avalanche effect* to scour the link lists of others. Mine appropriate newsgroups with messages that answer specific questions but leave no doubt who you are. Or prefix your message with the magic "An:" announcement which lets you do *occasional* tasteful, relevant, and short commercial posts.

Be aware—Those funding your site want to know exactly what they are getting for their money. Particularly their cost per thousand page views and their precise price per click-through. So, find out who is reaching you how. Start with your ISP referral logs to extract all the url's from your visitor's previous pages. As well as those query terms they just used on a search engine. Commercial log analysis software such as [Webtrends](#) can be useful. More detailed or highly custom analysis can be done on your own or using the tools in www.tinaja.com/weblib01.html Find out who is linking you with the *links to this URL* in www.hotbot.com or that *link:* prefix in www.altavista.com. Aggressively surf www.dejanews.com/home_ps.shtml to find out what is being said about you in the newsgroups. Finally, punch your own name, site name, and keywords into those major search engines to see how well they can find you.

Be responsive—Make it super easy for your visitors to close the loop. First and foremost, *always* provide both a *full* physical and virtual address prominently on your home page. Give visitors obvious *email links*. Clearly label what you are selling and how much it costs. Use *advetorials* with care and *never* force feed a message at an inappropriate or unexpected time or place. Give them shopping basket and secure transaction features. Keep your customers happy by being honest and accurate in all your descriptions. *Never* allow an inappropriate sale. Give as many ways to *order* as possible. Including, but by no means limited to online, mail, walk-in, fax, and phone. To attract new advertisers, let them know what you offer and how much it costs. Give them instant and honest access to all your site stats, both daily and monthly. Accountability is everything in online advertising and promotion.

Be frugal—There's a useful economic theory that says that a website costing \$19.95 per month will be easier to fund than one that costs \$19,950.00 per month. Because a dollar unspent is several unearned, *keep your costs down!* Stay lean and mean. Avoid associates or employees, excessively compulsive personal time, expensive software, or fancy ISP services. Unless they clearly deliver and repeatedly prove their worth to you and your site.

And finally...

Be useful—The key test for a web site is *if it works for you*. By having or leading to everything you could possibly need or use on the web. Chances are that if it is a good enough personal gateway, others will feel likewise.

Direct Funding

The only tiny thing wrong with direct funding is that it no longer seems to work. Using "conventional" or direct funding, your users pay you a fixed price per download or a flat rate per hour or per month for access. This was the

model of the older online services. It clearly did not work for most of them. Who are now long gone.

Many net users take great pride in stealing things, rather than paying for them. And no convenient "small change" or "microtransaction" payment means has yet evolved.

Nor do I feel it is likely to.

Indeed, many outrageously expensive services have been blown out of the water by free alternatives. Ferinstances: [Oxbridge](#) eliminating [Ulrich's](#). Or [Amazon](#) totally trashing [Books in Print](#). And [Medline](#) now free from several sites.

Instead, successful web funding seems to demand...

Indirect Methods

The indirect funding methods give your basic website info, content, and services away free. Mostly to people who would never stoop to paying you for it anyway. Just like a shopper, a tv show, or a trade journal ad, the presence of the "free" viewer is then used to sell something else. Only in the case of a web site, a free viewer does not really cost you all that much. Just a little more traffic.

Multiple smaller sources of web income often make more sense than one or two majors. Here are some site funding schemes that seem to be working for me...

Three-tier sales—With this method, your basic content is available free. There is a reasonable charge for additional info, and steep fees for ongoing custom services. Larger commercial examples here are the [IBM Patent Server](#) or that [Oxbridge Media Finder](#).

Banners—These are small ads placed in appropriate page positions. Their purpose is to get the viewer to click-thru to another site. **Banners** can be charged by the month, by the page view, by the click-through, the hard response, or as an actual percentage of sales. I now charge around \$10 per thousand page views or five cents per click-through.

Other ads—More conventional ads can be tightly linked to specific files or reprints. [Acrobat PDF](#) makes this very simple to do. Your buyer gains extreme targeting and hard-copy permanence. Payment can be made per attachment or per download. Site sponsors are another possibility. Where fees are paid for an image presence.

Associate programs—These give you a piece of the action in exchange for hard sales. Your highest profile example is [Amazon Books](#). Who pay you from 5 to 15 percent of each sale you nail down for them. Your value added here lies in gathering and critical review of tightly targeted special interest topics. With personal recommendations.

Hard copy and CD's—Here you charge for collections of everything you have on your website. The end user gains some permanence, convenience, and a pride of ownership. **Book sales** can be done on a teaser basis, running a [chapter per month](#). On better selling books, it is probably cheaper to combine the author's royalty with the Amazon associate payment rather than doing your own fulfillment.

Cash and carry consulting—There is often a real need for something less than full-blown consulting. I call my own by-the-hour service [InfoPacks](#). Your website is basically used to demonstrate your expertise and capabilities to a wide but carefully targeted audience. This often leads to ongoing fee-based programs as well.

Consultant referrals – This is simply your [directory page of consultants](#) who provide specialized expertise. While listing charges can be used, the usual deal is a five percent referral fee. Paid when and as the work is actually completed. It is very important here that you only prequalify and list those people you can honestly recommend.

Bargain pages – Everybody likes a [bargain](#), so if you can offer unique stuff cheaper and better than anyone else, do so. [Military surplus electronics](#) seems to work quite well for me here. You typically buy for a penny on the dollar, sell for a dime, and then try to make a nine percent profit in the process. Digital photos and shopping carts are a must.

Community listings – A sure way to build local traffic is by providing [the](#) list of all local events, movies, school menu knockwurst-ala-king, church programs, meetings, hike of the week, co-op news, health tips, favorite rutabaga recipes, and such. Restaurants, theaters, churches, and similar local orgs can be charged for premium positions, direct links, or higher exposures. They in turn can give discount coupons or other incentives to your viewers.

Syndication – We are starting to see [content agglomerators](#) who resell instant pre-packaged website content to larger corporate buyers. They pay you a per-placement royalty on unique content. One example is the content marketplace at [isyndicate.com](#) On the downside, there is one more finger in the pie. I'm not at all convinced just yet.

Site design services – Like this website? Want one just like it? You can help others create their own websites. Often for fees that typically range from \$35 to \$65 per hour. If you are good enough, and if your own site is a sterling example of what you can do. But the competition is fierce.

Interstitials, exchanges, pop-ins, or bulk email – These simply do not work. All they can do is make your potential customers mad and drive them away. Or otherwise degrade the quality of any website. Don't even think of using them, for they are certain to cause you grief.

For More Help

Extensive free additional support on these topics appear on my [Guru's Lair](#) website, found at my [www.tinaja.com](#) Especially our [Web Library](#) at [www.tinaja.com/weblib01.html](#) and our [Acrobat Library](#) at [www.tinaja.com/acrob01.html](#).

Lots of new banner advertising secrets can be grabbed at [www.tinaja.com/advt01.html](#) and as tutorial [BANNYEAR.PDF](#) Surplus sale examples are at [www.tinaja.com/barg01.html](#), with a number of tutorials found in both our [Resource Bin](#) and [Blatant Opportunist](#) online ezines.

My [Infopack](#) and my other [Consulting Services](#) are also available. Let's hear from you. ♦

Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 35 books and countless articles. Don maintains a US technical helpline you'll find at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all his own books, reprints and consulting services.

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