Zero Dollars a Little Talent and Thirty Days

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Following the Lactivist Project

You know, it's more difficult than it looks, this writing lark. It's really easy to sit down with your blog, and splurge your life online. But writing stuff to a plan, to inform, and be coherent - way harder. I found that out until tonight, when Jennifer asked me if I'd write an introduction to the free e-book version of her Zero Dollars series of articles from Search Engine Guide. Oh, sorry, who am I? I'm Jax Blunt, blogger, programmer and all round addict to life online.   I got to know Jennifer as a result of this series of articles, and I'm really glad to be able to introduce them. I just hadn't realized that it was going to be hard work.

Why did I think writing would be so easy? Ignore the fact that I regularly produce hundreds of words about myself. Jennifer's articles are so easy to read that you assume they were dead easy to write, but I've got a sneaky suspicion that an awful lot of thought and planning went into them. As well as that, there's honesty, humor and a whole lot of information. Who could resist a blog containing a post that put the image of breastfeeding on a stage while spinning a tassle from the other nipple in their head?

Why are these articles so captivating? Well, when I first read them, I blogged about them. I blogged that I was jealous, that someone else had got there before me with a great idea. But when it comes down to it, as I quickly realized, Jennifer isn't trying to claim something that no one else can do, she's sharing the hints and tips that she's found out for herself by putting her (lack of) money where her mouth is, and putting her extensive online experience to work starting up a business.

It's a fascinating business at that. She talks about breastfeeding, and has built up a market which allows her to support her interest in milk banks by donating some of her profits to a milk bank. But even if you aren't interested in feeding babies, you can still learn a lot from this series. From the techy side with tool recommendations and jargon free information, the staying up late at night side, bit of self doubt, search engines, moments of inspiration and start up suggestions - it's all in there, I won't say everything you need to get started with an online business, but I would be prepared to say there's probably something that just about anyone could try.

It's inspired me to try. I've been talking about online business for years. I even tried one a couple of years back, and then I went out and got a job again. This series has inspired me to have a go again, and I'm already seeing results from putting Jennifer's tips to work on my own sites. I can't wait to see what Jennifer comes up with next - and I'm loving being involved. I hope you enjoy the read too.

-Jax Blunt
[CodePlacidly]

A Thank You to 30 Day Readers

This e-book is a free resource, offered up in the hopes that it might help other entrepreneurs experience the freedom that I have in being able to work from home. The Lactivist project itself was created as a way to raise awareness and money for breast milk banking. To that end, all I've asked in return for this book is that you consider making a donation to the Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio.

To that end, I'd like to publicly thank the following individuals that have donated $25 or more to the human milk banking cause.

Rob Wilson - Websites in Business   Jesse Mecham – YouNeedABudget.com

Table of Contents

Day 1 – Getting Started

One of the beautiful things about the Internet is that it is supposed to level the playing field between the major corporations and the little guy trying to eek out a living on his own from his basement. Many a netrepreneur has managed to go start a company on a shoe string and turn it into a business that generates a nice profit. The whole point of Search Engine Guide and our sister site, Small Business Brief, is to try and help people learn how to do just that.

So, I've decided to set up a little challenge for myself and to both blog and write articles on it over the next month. The idea is to try to setup some type of business in my free time and see if I can start to turn a profit in a 30 day period. That shouldn't be too hard, since I'm also going to limit myself to spending zero cash out of pocket. That means that any sales at all will be profit.

I plan to outline all of the steps that I take over this 30 day period so that readers can find out what worked, what didn't, and maybe get some ideas to try with their own sites. The point I need to make again is the lack of money involved here. There's a big difference between what someone can do with cash to pay for hosting, for marketing, for web analysis and so on. I'll be working without many of those advantages, using only what I can get for free.

Day One

Trying to come up with an idea to make money online that doesn't require any cash up front is tough. Off the top of my head, I could come up with a couple of different options. Selling on eBay seemed to be the most obvious, with generating profits via AdSense being my second choice. But I decided to bypass both of those and take advantage of [CafePress](). CafePress is a site that allows you to create your own shirts, mugs, bumper stickers and more and put them online. They handle the printing, the shipping, etc. All site owners have to do is come up with the ideas and promote the products. In fact, according to CafePress, some shopkeepers earn six figures a year from their stores.

I had played around a few months ago with their free store and thrown some products online. While checking in earlier this week I noticed that I'd sold four products, despite the fact that I was running a free store and had never done any promotion of it. Those four products generated about $8, which was enough to upgrade me to a premium store for a month. I also realized that I still had a $100 Google AdWords coupon sitting around, so I decided to use that to start promoting the site and thus, the idea was born.

(You can say that I'm cheating by starting off with $108, but the reality is that none of that came from my pocket, so I'm not.)

I knew that any old store was unlikely to have a chance at making a profit without some real marketing dollars behind it, so I decided to focus on a highly niche market that didn't have a lot of competition, but that could attract some viral marketing and attention. As a breast feeding advocate that has exclusively pumped for a full year, I had spent enough time in online message boards and sites to know that there was a solid base of women out there that would have an interest in unique shirts that helped them share their views with the world.

Thus, "The Lactivist" was born.

Day one saw me sitting around trying to come up with unique slogans and ideas for products. I'm not a skilled graphic designer, but I do have a sense of humor. Since I couldn't spend any money on my project, that meant that I was mostly limited to pure text with a few font variations. I came up with about a dozen different slogans, uploaded them to my store and selected the products to go with them.

While I wanted to take the time to really customize my store and get some solid product descriptions written, I was doing this in my spare time and only had an hour or so left to work that evening. The need for traffic was strong and I knew that I could setup a PPC campaign more quickly than I could optimize page content and get it indexed. Thus, the rest of my time was spent setting up a pay-per-click campaign aimed at two different sets of keywords.

I selected about fifty different keywords and set them to exact match to get started with plans to expand the campaign a little further down the road when I saw how traffic started to pan out. I also wrote seven ads for each campaign to get started so that I can test some different messages and start tweaking my copy later this week. Finally, I setup conversion tracking through Google's AdWords interface because I won't have the cash to setup tracking via an analytics program like ClickTracks.

Day 2 - This Business Stuff is Hard!

Yesterday, I wrote about the start of a new project that will see my trying to launch an online business with zero cash out of pocket with a goal of turning a profit by the end of 30 days. (You can learn more about why I'm doing this in the Day 1 article.)

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Day two is when I really started to appreciate the amount of work that goes into starting up a business as a side project. Add in the zero cash bit and you start to see that it takes some true creativity to get something rolling. In the "real world," I'm used to having a budget for things like web analytics, site designers, copywriters and search marketing campaigns. In the life of a shoe-string entrepreneur, those luxuries don't always exist. What's a girl to do?

Add More Products

My first focus of the day was to add more products to the store. While I had about half a dozen or so designs online, I knew that I needed to have more. Most of what I had was designed to do a tongue-in-cheek job of supporting breastfeeding, but based on my target audience, I wanted to add some that focused on child-led weaning and breastfeeding in public. I spent about an hour working on some new ideas, uploading them and getting new sections of the store set up. After all, what good does it do to draw in customers if you don't have a nice variety of products to offer them?

Expand AdWords Options

Next I shifted my focus to the AdWords campaign that I was running from my free $100 coupon. I'd started off day one with only about two dozen phrases because quite honestly, that's all I'd had time to setup. Since I knew that seeing the products that I had to offer was going play a big part in sending visitors to the site, and since I had that $100 burning a hole in my AdWords account, I figured that I'd take advantage of the image ads option.

I hadn't yet run image ads for any clients, preferring to stick with text based search ads. That meant I needed to take the time to read through how the image ad system worked. Once I had a basic grasp on it, I went to work creating some ads to upload. Having limited time, and plenty of other things that I still needed to do that day, I had to settle for a simple banner ad and a simple leaderboard ad. (I'll add skyscrapers and block ads down the road when I get a bit more time.)

I had no budget for a graphic designer, and I'm certainly not one myself, so that meant playing around in Photoshop for a bit and mashing together whatever I could come up with. The results aren't going to win an Addy, but they get the point across.

Next I took the time to search for any breastfeeding related site that offered an image ad option via Google AdWords. I recognized a few, clicked to view a few others and decided on half a dozen or so to start advertising on. By now, I'd spent a good two and a half hours working on the site. Since I was doing this in my free time, I needed to move on.

Learning About Cafe Press

While there are literally thousands of Cafe Press stores in operation, I'd yet to have any experience with one, other than playing around with the free store a few months back. That means that there's quite a bit about the system that I still know nothing about. I wasn't sure how to setup categories for my products (as opposed to listing them all on one page), nor did I know what I could do as far as search engine optimization. Could I edit my title tag? Could I create a feed for Froogle?

Thankfully, Cafe Press has a discussion forum for their community of publishers. I spent a good half hour in there searching, reading and even stopping to answer a few search marketing questions. It was quite handy and it reminded me of just how important it is to stop and listen to what other people have to say about things.

Almost every type of business has discussion forums where experienced individuals are willing to offer up their advice, experiences and insight. It's absolutely essential to take advantage of this type of knowledge when you are trying to build a new business. Why make the same mistakes that everyone else has made before you if a little bit of reading can save you the hassle?

Start Brainstorming Viral Marketing Ideas

I knew from the start that viral marketing was going to be my best shot at spreading the word about this project. I also knew that I'd have two things going for me. First, people in the marketing community might be interested in following the project simply for the sheer curiousness of what would happen with it. (train wreck?) Secondly, the online community of mothers, especially breastfeeding mothers is a pretty strong one. I've been a member of some well-known discussion forums on parenting, childbirth and breastfeeding for well over a year and I knew that this group of people spread the word like wildfire.

I hope that I'd be able to take advantage of that on two fronts. First, I dropped an email to a friend of mine that runs a marketing blog to see if he might be interested in covering the project. I wasn't sure what the response would be, but I hoped it might get the ball rolling. Secondly, I stopped by one of the discussion forums that I frequent to ask the ladies there for feedback on one of the t-shirt slogans that I thought might be a bit too controversial. I didn't post the URL at the forum, just shared some of the slogans and asked for their input.

Day 3 - Spreading the Word and Fixing Mistakes

The third day of my shoe-string entrepreneur project started off fairly calm and wrapped up in a whirlwind of craziness. I'm guessing that's pretty common in the world of building a business. What started off as another day to work on the store with hopes to spend some time on viral marketing resulted in me realizing that I'd already made a massive mistake in one area, and possibly scored a massive coup in another.

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Adding New Products

I started off the morning with plans to expand the product offerings by coming up with some new slogans. Like many entrepreneurs, my brain had been hard at work even while I was trying to sleep, and new slogans were popping into my head left and right. Some of them seemed like sure fire hits with the crowd I was targeting. I added a series of kids products that read "Ain't yet quit the tit" in support of child-led weaning. I also added new products for both children and adults that support breastfeeding in public. ("My baby doesn't like to eat in the bathroom...do you?" for adults and "I don't like to eat in the bathroom...do you?" for the kidlets.)

I also added two new sections to the site. One that will feature shirts for pumping moms, and another that will feature shirts designed to help support human milk banks. The latter one featured some of my more creative moments, featuring shirts that say "Modern Day Wet Nurse" and "These Breasts Save Lives" in big letters with "(Ask me about milk banks)" in smaller text underneath. These were the types of shirts that I would have loved to have worn while I was an active donor, which led me to a great idea on potential viral marketing and public relations. (More on that below.)

Adding new products also saw me coming up with some flops. I wanted to add "got breastmilk?" to the site, but ended up scrapping it for two reasons. One, because one of our guest authors just happened to write an article talking about how many people have stolen from that campaign (which caused me to feel a bit embarrassed) and also because CafePress knocked out that graphic for copyright violations. Not worth fighting. I also had a flop in a milk bank shirt that would have said "You can take *THAT* to the bank?!" when both Robert and my husband responded with "huh?"

Just goes to show that for every brilliant moment you have, you're likely also going to have some that are duller than dirt.

Researched Ebay

From there I decided to try and expand my options as far as driving traffic to the site. I knew it would be awhile before any search engine traffic would kick in and Froogle won't accept a feed from an individual CafePress store. That meant heading over to eBay to check out my options for selling the shirts there. Unfortunately, eBay has a 25 cent listing fee whether you sell the item or not. Since the rules of this game were that I couldn't spend any money out of pocket, that meant that an eBay listing was out of the question until I generated some profits another way.

Viral Marketing and Public Relations

From the start of the project, I knew that viral marketing and that free AdWords coupons were likely to be the two things that would give me a real shot at making this work. I needed to find a way to generate some interest in both the project and the store so that bloggers, discussion boards and eventually, the mainstream press, might pick up the story and run with it. I'd already dropped a note to Jason Dowdell at MarketingShift and was pleased to see that he'd blogged on the lactivist store at his site. It wasn't long after that his wife heard about the project and added it to her own blog as well. Viral marketing was already at work.

At the same time, I started receiving emails from Search Engine Guide readers that were excited about what they'd read so far. Some, like Jaan Kanellis blogged about it because they liked the marketing experiment side of things. Others simply wrote to share their own stories about nursing their children or to comment on the slogans. Taking the time to run a few quick searches on Technorati and Google's Blog search showed me that other links were starting to trickle in from sites like The Internet Income Blog and SearchViews. I'd also had some discussion sparked at a discussion forum that I frequent to discuss children's nutrition, breastfeeding and other issues.

While I was happy to see viral marketing starting to take off, I was struggling to think of an angle that I could use to distribute a press release. I know that if I can manage to get the site into some type of mainstream media, my chances of making it work were going to increase dramatically.

That's where the milk bank awareness shirts caused my second bright idea of the day. That morning, I had frozen the last few ounces of breast milk that I was going to be able to donate to the milk bank. (Once your child turns a year old, you can no longer donate your milk.) I'd been trying to think for months of a way that I could continue to help the milk bank grow and hadn't been able to come up with anything. (They don't have a web site, so I couldn't volunteer to help promote it.) That's when I realized that not only could I create shirts that would help promote awareness of milk banks, but that I could also donate 100% of the proceeds from those shirts to the local bank.

The thing that you need to realize about press releases is that you have to have a reason to send one. Just sending out a release saying that you have a new product or that you landed a new contract isn't going to catch someone's attention. In fact, it's a great way to get put on someone's ignore list. So, if you are going to use a press release as a marketing tool, you have to have a real reason to send one out.

Using these shirts as a way to promote the milk bank and donating 100% of the profits seemed like it just might be a way to spark some interest. However, because some of the products on the site are a little bit irreverent, I knew that I needed to tread carefully. I sent an email to the director of the milk bank to share the idea and ask her if she would be willing to let me send out a press release that prominently mentioned them and that perhaps had some quotes from her in it. She absolutely loved the idea and said that she would be taking it to the hospital board for approval. She also said that she'd be sharing the site with her friends that run the other milk banks throughout the country as well as several lactation consultants that she knows in the area. I'm waiting to hear back to see if we can move forward, but the potential here is looking good.

Paying Attention to Usability

By this point, I'd realized that I was getting too many products online to have them all featured on a single page. That meant spending a good hour learning how to set up categories on CafePress and moving products into them so that they were neatly arranged and easy to get to. It also meant taking the time to create images for each product line and writing copy for each page. It was time well spent as feedback from most of my test market (ok, so my test market is my husband and Robert) was that it is now much easier to navigate through the site.

Landing Pages, Landing Pages, Landing Pages

Anyone that has heard me speak about pay-per-click, or read my articles knows that I'm a big proponent of landing pages. While I understand that most small businesses simply don't have the time or budget to put a lot of effort into creating original landing pages for every PPC campaign, I still believe that every site owner can point a PPC listing at the single most relevant existing page on their site.

Now that I'd taken the time to setup individual product categories, I had "landing pages" ready to go. That meant taking the time to go into my AdWords campaign to direct any phrases I could to a specific landing page. Phrases like "tandem nursing" and "extended breastfeeding" got pointed straight to the child led weaning shirts. Phrases like "nursing in public" now lead straight to the breastfeeding in public shirts. This is one of those quick, small changes that so many site owners don't take the time to make, but that can make a dramatic difference in your conversion rates.

On the down side, I'd still only had about six clicks on my AdWords campaign. Granted, I had only put about three dozen phrases into my campaign and most were highly targeted, so I was still dealing with a 3% click-thru rate, but I realized that as soon as I have time, I'll need to go add some more words to my campaign.

My First Major Mistake

The day seemed to have gone incredibly well, until I discovered that I'd made a potentially huge mistake. Apparently, when you are uploading images for CafePress, you need to make sure that you upload high dpi .png image files. That way they will print without any pixelation on all of the products offered in the store. I realized that I had uploaded .jpg images that were only set to 72 dpi. That meant that I'd have to take the time to redo every image that I'd already uploaded and take the time to change the file for every shirt and product section.

This was a major setback as it took up the rest of my free time that evening (and some of day 4 as well) and meant that I couldn't put any more time into viral marketing or product ideas. It also served to remind me that no matter how much we want to go full speed ahead, we sometimes need to stop and read the directions. A few moments reading through CafePress's image guide would have saved me a few hours worth of work in Photoshop. A lesson learned the hard way.

Day 4 - Life as a Mompreteneur, Blogging, AdSense and the First Sale!

While Day four ended up being my most successful one yet, it also served as yet another reminder of what it's like to be a mom, work a job, live your life and still try to setup a business.

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Stats, I Need Stats!

Going into day 4, I realized that while it was great that all this viral marketing was starting to fall into place, I still had no idea if anyone was actually visiting the site. Thus, I went on a search for a free, javascript based tracking solution that I could put in place. I checked some discussion forums, ran some Google searches and spent some time reading about StatCounter and eXTReMe Tracking. After reviewing the different offerings of each program, I ended up putting eXTReMe tracking into place on the site.

Since this is an open ended learning project, I'll be posting details and insight from the stats program in each of the upcoming articles.

The latest stats:

- Almost 200 unique visitors in the last 24 hours.
- More than 500 page views in the last 24 hours.
- 2 visitors have come in via links in Yahoo! emails
- Only 6 visitors from search engines so far, all from Google. Traffic coming from phrases like "nursing moms," "breastfeeding while pregnant" and "tandem nursing."
- While my articles have been the top referrer, sites like BabyCenter, T-Shirt Countdown and blogs have also sent dozens of visitors.
- I'm actually pulling visitors from CafePress's product search engine.

Now that I had stats in place, albeit limited ones, I felt like I could at least do some tracking of which parts of the viral marketing campaign were working. That meant it was time to move on to other things.

Online Reputation Management

My next step was to check Technorati and Google's Blog Search to find any new sites that might have started linking to the project. I found a handful of new links and took the time to drop emails to each of the posters to say thank you for their

kind words and to encourage them to visit the [forum thread](#) to share their two cents.

I can't stress enough how important it is to do this when you are relying on viral marketing. The people that take the time to blog about your product, or to write reviews or post feedback in forums are "sneezers" for your brand. They play an important role in helping market your product and they do it for free. Treat them well and make sure they know that you appreciate them. Chances are that it will pay you back in spades. Even more importantly, it often sparks interesting conversations and creates new business contacts that you might never have had otherwise.

Doh! Typos!

In my second major mistake, one of our readers wrote to inform me that I had spelled "weaner" wrong. The irony of this was that I'd originally spelled it correctly, but had changed it after reading it spelled "weener" in multiple forums. That meant that I needed to correct every area of the site and every graphic that had the misspelling on it and upload all of that content again.

This is why you should take the time to have someone else review your work, or at least to spell check. (To note, when I used Google to spell check "weener" they asked if I'd actually meant "weenie." Way to go Google!)

Dealing with Distractions

By now, it was getting on late morning and I had my second moment of appreciation for others. This is the area where I need to send a "wow! you amaze me" notice out to every single work at home parent among our readers. The complicated juggling act required to balance everything in life takes a level of skill that I can't even fathom. Here's why I know this...

Around 11am, I was just getting into the swing of things working on The Lactivist. I'd put Elnora down for a nap, had scrubbed the kitchen floor and had baked cakes for a birthday party I was having that evening for Elnora's first birthday and my husband's 33rd. My in-laws (a dozen of them) were arriving around 4pm, so I knew I had a few hours to make frosting, work on the site and still get Search Engine Guide content built.

Or so I thought. A few minutes later, the phone rang. The real estate company wanted to show the house at 12:30. That meant that I needed to go on a frenzied cleaning spree to make sure everything was spotless again. So, the computer got packed up and I went into cleaning mode. The showing was a set-back, but I could still pull everything off. Then the phone rang again. That's right. Another showing, at 5:30. Just when everyone was supposed to arrive. So I packed up

the baby, the dog and the laptop, rescheduled the party for a restaurant and headed out the door.

Life as a momtreprenuer.

Because I Needed ANOTHER Blog...

Work on the project picked back up again around 10pm at night. This is when shoe string entrepreneurs work...when the kids are in bed and the in-laws have gone home.

I'd known from the start that I was going to need to build content into the site in one way or another, but at this point, I was still trying to decide if I should write articles and content for the site, or if I should setup a blog instead. I decided that I'd go with Blogger, so I setup a new blog at http://thelactivist.blogspot.com/. I went through the steps to get a basic template driven blog online, made my first post and moved on. (More on blogging coming up in Day 5.)

AdWords, AdSense and a Little Frustration

Back on day 3, I'd put in an application for an AdSense account so that I could start running the ads on The Lactivist store. I figured that even if visitors didn't want to purchase my products, there was a chance that I could earn some side change via contextual ads. Approval came through for AdSense on day 4 and I spent about an hour setting things up.

It's important to note at this point that my reasons for using AdSense were two-fold. Yes, I was hoping that it would help me turn a profit, but I also realized that I could take advantage of AdSense's channel options to track the page views to different sections of my site. One of the limitations of free stats packages is that you have to work with very limited data. eXTReMe Tracking is a handy way to track overall traffic numbers and referrers, but there's no break down of data that lets you see which areas of your store are drawing the most interest. AdSense channels will show page views for each channel, so I set up different AdSense channels for each product line and put them in place.

At the same time, I was dealing with the frustration of the new "all accounts under one login" policy at Google. I had already setup the AdWords account for The Lactivist under one username. A few days later, I put in my request for AdSense under the same name. The next time that I tried to login, it asked me if I was actually trying to log in to my AdSense account. When I told it that I wasn't and tried to get into AdWords, it pushed me into creating a new account. In other words, Google locked me out of my AdWords account. So, I sent an email off to support services and moved on to the next order of business.

Chitika Mini Malls

I'd avoided even looking into the new [Chitika Mini Malls](#) for the first few days because I so closely associate them with ads for iPods and computer systems. It just didn't seem targeted for my audience, so I couldn't see the sense in running them.

On day 4, I gave it a bit more thought and decided to go run some searches to see what I could find. After all, people buy breast pumps online, along with maternity clothing and nursing tops. As it turns out, many of these products are actually available through Chitika, so I went ahead and put in an application.

My First Sale!

By this time, it was getting close to midnight and it was time to head off to bed. I'd been a little depressed that I hadn't seen any sales activity yet, despite the activity at the site. I realized that it was likely that most of the current traffic was coming from people more interested in the 30 days project than in the products, but I'd still had some hope.

I decided to make one more check before heading to bed and sure enough, there was my first sale! Someone from California purchased the ["Eat at Mom's"](#) [Baseball Jersey](#), which has a $5.00 markup. That means that on day 4 of the project, I'd finally turned a profit. I debated turning around and putting that money into eBay listings, but realized that right now, it would be smarter to leave it in CafePress so that it will cover another month's worth of premium store fees.

Coming up in Day 5

Tomorrow, I'll share some insight on my first full day as a [Lactivist blogger](#), some tips on how I integrated my blog content into the [Lactivist store](#), some further experiences with online reputation management and my second source of income.

Day 5 - Blogs on the Brain, Reputation Management and AdSense Ups and Downs

After the non-stop action of day four, I was hoping that day five would see me getting to take things a little easier. After all, it was a Saturday and I didn't have much scheduled outside of a few house showings and raking leaves. As it turns out, the day saw me putting most of my time toward handling blog issues, another quick round of online reputation management and further experiences with the joy and frustration of AdSense.

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Blogs, Blogs Everywhere...at Least I Hope!

On day four, I'd looked around at a few of the free blogging options and had settled on using Blogger, mostly because it was supposed to have built in support for adding AdSense ads to the mix. I'd gotten the blog setup, along with putting my first post online, but it had gotten late enough that I didn't really have much time to play with the system. I'd used Movable Type before, as it was the blog software powering both About.com and Search Engine Guide, and I had experience with Live Journal, where I host my personal blog, but I'd never done any work with the Blogger interface before.

That was all about to change.

I started off the day by focusing on adding some content to the blog. I'd already planned to write about human donor milk and milk banking as a way to help highlight the Lactivist Milk Bank products and the plans to donate the proceeds of those sales. I'd also spotted a story earlier that day about a four-month old that had been smothered to death when her drunken mother passed out on her. I wanted to blog on this story because almost every headline that I had was along the lines of "Breastfeeding Death" or "Infant Dies While Breastfeeding." I knew that this story was going to get some press, so this seemed like the perfect topic to blog about in order to point out how news outlets sensationalize things like breastfeeding just to sell their product.

Once I'd gotten a few posts online, it was time to figure out how to tie the blog content in with my CafePress store. I knew that I could pull an RSS or Atom feed into another site as filler content, but I'd never actually pulled a feed before. (I'd only ever created them.) We use Feedburner at Search Engine Guide to do much of our feed management and I knew that they offered a free option, so I headed that way to sign up.

FeedBurner's free option doesn't have quite the level of reporting or functionality that the paid version does, but it still had everything that I needed to get going. I not only setup a Feedburner link (which allows readers to add your feed to pretty much any RSS reader), I also setup the BuzzBoost option.

BuzzBoost is Feedburner's quick and easy way to convert your feed into HTML that can be used on another site. Basically, they take the feed and format it into headlines and the first paragraph or so of text. Anyone that wants can then take your feed and put it on their site. Whenever someone clicks on one of the blog posts, it takes them to your blog to read the entire post. You can also use CSS to format the look of the HTML that is generated by BuzzBoost. Most publishers use BuzzBoost as a way to syndicate their content in order to increase their readership. I had a different use in mind.

Basically, by setting up BuzzBoost, I had formatted my blog content in a way that would allow me to pull it into The Lactivist store.

Next, I went to the CafePress control panel. From there, you can add new product sections to your site. When you add a section, you get the option to attach a graphic and description to it to show on the front page. When a user clicks on the graphic, it takes them to that product section. My idea was to use the product section tool to add blog content. I did this by creating a new product section, but leaving it "empty." That meant that the only content on the page came from the "description" field in the store manager. Since the description field will take javascript and HTML code, I simply placed the code from Feedburner into that section. I then added a graphic for the link from the front page that said "Read the Lactivist Blog" and viola! Integrated content!

I still need to work on adjusting the CSS to make the content match up more closely with the look of the site, but since I was short on time, that had to wait for another day.

Online Reputation Management Never Ends

As I've made mention of in each of the past day's articles, online reputation management is essential when you are relying on viral marketing as part of your business plan. Viral marketing does you no good if people aren't saying positive things. So, I made my daily visit to some of the blog search engines to see if anyone new had picked up the story.

It turns out that Anita Campbell over at Small Business Trends had started covering the story. I dropped her a quick note to say thank you and to chat a bit about the project. Next, I found news of the challenge on a blog called Techbeliever. I tried to email Bob the author to touch base, but was unable to find any contact information. (Note: this is why you need to have contact information on your site, someone might want to talk to you!)

Next I responded to an email from Bob Turpin, who runs a blog called HelpYouToSell. Bob had blogged on the project earlier this week and I'd dropped him a note to say thank you. We shared a few emails back and forth and he let me know that he'd posted about the project over at The Warrior Forum. (Viral marketing at work yet again...)

Once I finished searching for posts, I took a look at my referrer stats to see if there was any traffic coming in from someplace I'd missed. That's when I realized that the conversation that I was having over at BabyCenter was generating a fair amount of interest, as was another thread that a mom had started on her own after reading my original post. I also noticed that word had started spreading via email as I'd had four referrals from email programs. Finally, I saw a link coming out of a Yahoo! Group called SOLLL, which I assume has something to do with the La Leche League. It's a private group, so I wasn't able to view the message, but I did drop an email to the moderator to see if I could find out any information.

As my final move of the day, I thought I'd aim high. Since that $100 AdWords coupon was the catalyst that set this whole project in motion, I dropped an email to the folks at the AdWords blog to share some information about The Lactivist and the series of articles. The hope is obviously that the AdWords team would pick up this and report on it in their blog.

Time will tell.

Highs and Lows with AdSense

On day four, I'd decided to add AdSense listings to my CafePress store to help me track which areas of the site were getting the most page views. This turned out to be a great idea because I could quickly see that the milk bank shirts and the irreverent breastfeeding humor shirts were getting the most action. No surprise since those were the two areas generating the most buzz.

The surprise was that I'd managed to generate $6.66 in AdSense profits during the first 24 hours. That meant that despite a day with no sales, I was now up to $11.66 in profits, that was putting me close to being able to have enough money to make some type of investment in the project.

The downside of AdSense was that I'd been trying every hour or two to use the Blogger interface to get AdSense ads showing up on The Lactivist Blog. However, every time to tried to login in to the system, it froze up. By the end of the night I was more than a little frustrated with the supposed ease of Blogger.

I'll also note that when I signed up for my AdSense account, I used the same username that I'd used to sign up for AdWords. I'd read that Google was requiring all users to shift their accounts under a single login, so I figured I might as well sign up for everything under the same account to begin with. The problem

is that Google system got a little bit confused by this and locked me out of my AdWords interface. Every time I tried to login to AdWords I got a notice that said "Are you trying to login to AdSense?" If I said no, it directed me to setup a new AdWords campaign.

My AdWords campaign was still running. I knew this because I could see the ads. I just wasn't able to make changes to it anymore. So, I sent off an email to the AdWords support team and called it a day.

Day Six

In the next article, I'll let you know how I finally got the AdSense issues worked out (after spending all of my free time that day working on it) and will share some insight into how I came up with a few more products to add to the store.

Day 6 - New Products, a Lesson or Two on AdSense and Investing Back in the Biz

Almost a full week into the project, I'd made about $12 and was trying to figure out how best to reinvest it back into the business. Day six was a Sunday, which meant I didn't have but a couple of hours to put toward the site. Those few hours went toward new product development, another blog post and tons of time spent trying to get AdSense to work properly.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Investing in the Business

With the addition of AdSense revenue, I was running a total profit of about $12 by the end of day six, which meant I was reaching the point that I was ready to start putting some money back into the business. I'd thrown around a few different ideas:

1.) Use the money to fund listings on eBay. I could list multiple offerings of the same item under a single listing and buy them from myself at a volume discount. Not being fully convinced that eBay was the best marketplace for this product, I set that idea aside with plans to revisit it later in the month.

2.) Invest in advertising outside of AdWords. T-Shirt Countdown has reasonable advertising rates and the site is certainly the type that's likely to send targeted traffic. I'd been keeping an eye on the site since the beginning of the project, though most of that was to see how many votes my entry of the "milk jugs shirt" had gotten. Since the site is still broadly focused on t-shirt, I still wasn't sure that this was the best investment of my limited funds. Thus, this idea got tossed on the pile with eBay.

3.) Buying a domain name for future development of the site. This one would be pretty affordable as domains can easily be purchased for $5-$10. Locking in www.thelactivist.com seemed like a smart idea simply on the chance that this project could really take off. Since Netfirms was offering domain name registration for $4.95, I decided this was a worthwhile investment. And with that, the full profit from my first t-shirt sale was now reinvested in the business.

4.) Paying to set up hosting. I'd already decided to go ahead and purchase a domain name. That means that I was going to need some hosting to go with it. Once I got a hosting account setup, I planned to integrate both my Blogger content and my CafePress content into it. That way, any future viral marketing or link building that I did could focus on sending all of the traffic directly to thelactivist.com. Time was running out for the day by the time I decided this

though, so searching for a hosting company was going to have to wait for another day.

Expanding AdSense and Monetizing the Blog

Since the Blogger option of adding AdSense through the template panel still wasn't getting me anywhere, I decided to go around the system and plug AdSense in on my own. To do this, I needed to get into the Blogger template and make some changes.

I started off by adding two link units and a skyscraper unit to the sidebar of my blog. Unfortunately, I couldn't get the units to display any text. In fact, I couldn't even get one of the units to show the proper background color. I had turned on the option of showing a solid color background in lieu of PSA ads, but the blank ads continued to show as big, gaping black holes instead of as nice, white, blended blocks. I played around for awhile to make sure I hadn't messed the code up and finally started adding and removing ad units from the template. For some reason, removing the skyscraper ad from the sidebar fixed this problem.

Next I decided to play around with integrating some AdSense units into the main body of the blog. My original plan was to add a big block ad that was aligned right in each of the actual blog posts. The problem with this is that Google AdSense limits you to three standard ad units per page. Since the Blogger template applies your changes to every single post, that meant that I'd have to reduce the number of blog posts that display to three to a page. I tried this, but it just looked to empty, so I scrapped the idea.

Instead, I placed a banner size unit at the top of the blog and a leaderboard sized unit at the base. I also added a search box to the bottom of the page.

My next problem was that AdSense kept trying to serve up public service announcements. The best I could figure was that their crawler was still having a hard time figuring out what the site was about. To give it some help, I added some code to let it know which sections of text it should ignore and which ones it should emphasize.

I placed the following code around areas like my profile and the blog title "The Lactivist."

< !-- google_ad_section_start(weight=ignore) -- > < !-- google_ad_section_end -- >

I then added this code to the areas that I wanted to place emphasis on, like the blog description and the informational block of text at the bottom of the site:

< !-- google_ad_section_start -- > < !-- google_ad_section_end -- >

This started to help, but the ads still weren't matching up as well as they should have been. Part of the problem seemed to be that Blogger doesn't generate page titles. AdSense likes to read things like page titles to help it determine the content of the page. Since I wasn't very familiar with how the Blogger template code worked, I was a bit hesitant to jump in and start messing around. Instead, I turned to Google and ran a few searches.

This led me to SEO-Study, a site that had a section called "how to optimize a Blogger site." This site was a gold mine of information for anyone looking to make some changes to the Blogger template. It helped me setup the blog so that my post titles were now showing up as the content in the title tag. I also found a code snippet that made my post titles into permalinks. Very handy for internal link text control.

Once I'd made a few changes with the help of SEO-Study, I took a few moments to plug my own ads for The Lactivist into the AdSense system so that they would show instead of the public service announcements. While this worked great for the leaderboard at the base, I never did figure out why it won't work for the banner ad at the top of the blog content.

By now, I had reached the point of total frustration with Blogger and AdSense,so I shifted my focus back to The Lactivist store for a bit. It had been handy to have AdSense in place to let me know which categories were getting the most views (milk banks and irreverent were still leading the pack), but I wanted more information. I realized that by setting up additional AdSense channels and plugging new code into the category pages for each of the logos, I could track my views in more detail. It took about 15 minutes to setup an AdSense channel for each of my product lines, though time ran out for the day before I could get the code plugged into the site.

New Products

I ended the day by adding a few more products to the site. I'd been trying to think of a slogan for kids that I could add to the milk bank promotion section and I'd finally come up with one. Now donor mothers have the option of dressing their kids in the cheeky "I Share!" shirts and onsies. Proceeds from these products will also be going toward the milk bank along with those from the "Modern Day Wet Nurse" and "These Breasts Save Lives."

Next I added two more products to the kids's products section. The first one, "boob nosher," was inspired by a conversation I had with some Jewish mothers at one of the parenting boards. The second one, "*bon appetit*" came to me out of the blue. Finally, I added a new slogan for moms that reads "breasts: not just for selling cars anymore."

Day Seven

In the next article, we'll be at the one week point. I'll be starting my search for a good hosting deal and considering adding a new stats system to the mix. I also make my first foray into the world of affiliate marketing and find out that MSN seems to be a fan of my site. Best of all, I get an interesting email from someone special who wants to learn more about the project.

Day 7 - MSN Plays Nice, Hosting is Confusing and an Interesting Email Shows Up...

Day seven wasn't one of my more productive days, mostly because I had to spend about three hours of it driving home to my parent's house so that they could watch my daughter for me while I put on the "Search Engine Marketing Made Simple" seminar with The Karcher Group in Cleveland. That said, I did get to do a little bit of looking into my hosting options, found that traffic was starting to get a little stronger and received a very interesting email.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Hosting...The Bane of My Existence

I've never had to worry about hosting with any of the businesses that I've worked with before. Any marketing firm that I've worked for has had existing relationships with hosts in place, so there was no issue of "picking" someone. This time around, I not only had to select my own hosting company, I had to select one that was cheap, reliable, and that made it easy enough for a non-techie like myself to get things up and running.

I knew that I wanted to be hosted on a Unix/Linux server and I wanted to use PHP as some point. If I was going to figure out a way to integrate the content from my blog and my store into my own domain, I'd need to make sure that my host could speak their language. The need for Unix/Linux was actually a good thing because hosting on Microsoft servers is always more expensive. Also, the majority of free add-on options that I might want to use down the line (forums, shopping carts, ad servers) run on Unix/Linux systems.

Feeling a little overwhelmed at just how it is that small businesses manage to pick a host out of the gazillion options that are out there, I managed to get my choice narrowed down to three different options.

The Karcher Group - The Karcher Group had recently started offering a low-cost hosting plan for $10 a month. They were setting it up so that companies could pay by PayPal (ideal for online businesses that rely heavily on eBay for their sales) and they promised tight integration of WordPress, a popular blogging tool. Another thing they had going for them was that I knew their staff. This meant I'd probably have an easy time getting through to them if I was having problems.

MOR Designs - Robert, my publisher made this suggestion. He uses MOR Designs to host Small Business Brief and told me that he's able to call up John Bates, the owner, whenever he runs into a problem. MOR Designs was also offering hosting at $10 a month and his package also included WordPress

integration, forum software, plenty of email and storage options and automatic backup of my site. The biggest thing they had going for them though was that I knew someone that was familiar with their system, which meant that I could call on a friend, rather than the company, if I ran into problems.

HostDime - This company was suggested to me by Jay Gilmore of SmashingRed Web and Marketing. HostDime was tempting because their monthly hosting plans started at just $6 a month. Even with AdSense, I was still a few dollars short of having the $10 that I needed for other two hosting companies. They also promised c-panel and Fantastico, two offerings that are essential for a non-techie like myself. The down side was that despite the low price, I didn't know anyone at the company and I wasn't sure what type of service or support I was going to end up with.

I decided to wait another day to see if I'd make enough money by Day 8 to be able to afford one of the $10 options.

If You Build it, They Will Come...But Will They Buy?

By day 7, I was a full week into the project and I'd only sold one shirt. This was a little frustrating because I knew that the site was getting traffic. Thanks to the free site stats that I was running through eXTReMe Tracking, I knew that I was averaging almost 200 visitors a day and that that number was going up at a steady pace. The fact that more than a thousand people had found their way to the site and only one of them had purchased anything was really bothering me. That's a conversion rate of less than one tenth of one percent.

I had to remind myself though that the majority of traffic coming to the site was still coming from people that were interested in the 30 day project, not that were really interested in buying pro-breastfeeding shirts. This served as a great reminder of just how important targeted traffic is. I've spoken with a lot of web site owners in the past that were focused on traffic...traffic for the sake of traffic. If this experiment was proving anything so far, it was showing that traffic doesn't really mean anything if it doesn't convert.

That said, I was starting to see some visitors trickle in from sources that looked to be more targeted. My stats showed that a Yahoo! Group for La Leche League leaders had sent some visitors, and the ongoing discussions I was having at BabyCenter were also feeding traffic. Also, it appeared that the site was now being picked up and indexed by MSN because traffic was trickling in from that search engine as well.

Based on my referrer listings I could see that I had gotten traffic from MSN searches for "breastfeeding humor," "breastfeeding weening," and "breastfeeding t-shirts" which I ranked 6th, 2nd and 1st for respectively. I was a little excited when I saw those rankings, but the reality is that I have no idea how many people

search for those phrases. Normally I would go look things up in Wordtracker, but I couldn't use my existing account without breaking the "no money" rules.

Still, word was spreading about the project among the blog world and that made it more likely that it would eventually find its way in front of another lactivist that might spread the word among my target audience. Anita Campbell, who had blogged about the project earlier in the week, submitted the article series to the [Carnival of Capitalists](#). Jay Gilmore, who made some hosting suggestions also covered the article series in [his own blog](#). Finally, I got a good laugh out of a blog post by Enrique Garcia, a [California entrepreneur](#) that decided to follow the story because he thought I was "hot." (Nothing gets you through a long day like someone saying you're hot...)

Viral Marketing Really Does Work

The best surprise of the day came in the manner of viral marketing and gigantic possibilities. When I arrived in Youngstown after a long drive from Columbus, I had an email waiting in my inbox from Marc Cowlin, the PR Manager at CafePress. Apparently the CafePress team has the whole online reputation management thing down pat because they have a team of people that scours blogs and forums looking to see what people are saying about CafePress.

One of his team members spotted my article series and passed it his way. Marc thought the idea was pretty interesting and said he'd been enjoying following along. He also wanted to know if it would break my rules of "spend no cash" to have the CafePress PR department pitch the story to some of the media. I pointed out that if it's CafePress that is spending the money, it's not breaking my rules. In reality, it's serving as a fantastic example of just how powerful viral marketing can be. I hadn't approached CafePress, nor had I even considered approaching it. CafePress has about 1.8 million shops online and about 750,000 shop keepers. I really never dreamed that they would have any interest in talking to the crazy lactivist that was putting it all out there for the world to see.

Apparently I was wrong.

Day Eight

Stay tuned for day eight to find out what comes of the CafePress call and what Grant Hospital had to say about me teaming up with The Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio on another public relations campaign. You'll also see if I managed to not only select a host, but to design and build a web site to get online in time for any news stories that might be coming down the pike.

Day 8 - Viral Marketing Works, A New Site is Born and Sales Pick Up

Day eight was all about progress. Viral marketing finally started to spread into the non-business world, two PR opportunities started to move forward, I got a complete site design put together for the new domain, selected a host, added several new products and had my first day of multiple sales. Overall, it turned out to be the best day of the project thus far.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Disclaimer: I feel like I need to own up to skipping a day in the project. I spent the entire day in Cleveland for the Search Engine Marketing Made Simple seminar and didn't make it online at all the entire day. Since this was a pre-planned event, I felt like it was fair to not count that day in the experiment.

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: Just over 1000 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $84.93
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $20.00
- Total AdSense Revenue: $13.90
- Total Revenue: $33.90
- Total Expenses: $4.96
- Total Profit: $28.94

Settling on a Host

In the day seven article I talked about what a difficult time I had selecting a host. I'd narrowed it down to three great companies, but I was still a few dollars shy of being able to afford either of the two that I liked best. Finally by day eight I'd made enough off of my AdSense ads to be able to pay the $10 fee for hosting from The Karcher Group or Mor Designs.

After quite a bit of debate I decided to go with Mor Designs. Mostly because we were already using them to host Small Business Brief, which meant that I could pester Robert for free advice if I couldn't figure something out about the system, but also because he finally offered me my first month free. To that end I need to note that The Karcher Group offered to barter with me on the first month of hosting in exchange for product. This just goes to show that if you've got something interesting to offer, it never hurts to ask if someone will deal with you a little bit. The barter system is still alive and well in the world of small businesses.

I spent a bit of time that evening setting up FTP access to the site, changing my name servers and setting up an email account. I expect it will be the weekend before the DNS changes have propagated, but hopefully by Monday morning I'll be able to start directing people to www.thelactivist.com.

Putting Together a Site Design

Now that I had a hosting provider selected, I needed to get a web site ready to go online. While I've got passable skills in programs like Photoshop, I'm not a trained designer. That meant that for something quick that looked professional, I was going to need to find a template to work from. I started off my search at the aptly named Free Site Templates because it's run by the folks at Search Engine Forums, a forum that I used to call home. I didn't find anything there that worked for me, so I headed over to Templates Box which had quite a few designs worth downloading.

I spent some time in Photoshop playing around with a few different options and ended up creating my own hybrid by pulling graphics and design elements from a few different templates. The design that I ended up with was based off of this template. While the site won't be live for another day or two, you can still view an image file of the site design for The Lactivist.

Since the template was old-style code built with nested table upon nested table, I needed to have the site coded from scratch. While I could have done it myself, I'm not a very speedy coder. That meant that the barter system needed to come into play. Thankfully I've been blessed with a husband that's incredibly skilled in CSS and table-less design. So in this instance, the barter system meant asking my husband very nicely to stay up late to get the code built for my template. You'll be able to see the results of his hard work in a future article.

Moving Forward with Public Relations Pitches

I'd also heard back from both the Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio and the Public Relations manager at CafePress about the PR angles that we'd been working. The CafePress team was ready to move forward with a pitch of the 30-day business story to some reporters that they know, and Grant Hospital had agreed to partner up with me for a fundraising event for the Milk Bank. I decided to let the CafePress team move forward with their pitch first while I worked with the Milk Bank staff to figure out what types of shirts and products we wanted to put together for them. Once we had some products put together and ordered, we decided that we'd pitch the local news, hoping to use any national coverage that CafePress might score as leverage.

The director of the local milk bank also said that she would get in touch with friends that run the other half dozen milk banks in North America to see if they

would be interested in similar fund raising projects of their own. So far, things are moving along nicely on the public relations front and it has yet to cost a dime.

Viral Marketing Takes Off

On a similar note, the viral marketing online was really starting to take off. I not only found new blog discussions pointing to the project at Bill Harris' blog and Daniel Bergström's Blog, but I also noticed that the posting by the Search View team had been picked up by Moreover. That was all good, but what I was really looking for was for word to spread among people that would actually be interested in buying my product. That's why I was excited to see that I'd gotten a mention in Craigslist that sent nearly 50 visitors and another mention on a discussion forum for Charlotte Mothers that sent about 40 visitors. I was finally starting to see the buzz get picked up on its own within the breastfeeding community.

My blessed rankings on MSN continued as well as I scored two visitors from MSN on a search for "breastfeeding men." I'm not exactly sure what they were looking for, but I did find it interesting that two people in one day not only searched for this phrase, but found my listing all the way down at spot number nine.

New Products Sales Start to Pick Up

I also spent an hour or two working on some new slogans for the site. You can now find shirts designed to help non-donor moms support milk banks along with two more humorous breastfeeding shirts that read "got cookies?" and "fresh milk served here."

But perhaps the biggest surprise of the day came just before I headed to bed. I checked in on my store account for one last time and saw that I'd had not just one, but three new sales come in. One of those orders included three shirts and another included two, which brought my total profit on the shirts to $20. It's interesting to note that of the four people that have ordered so far, three have ordered the Eat at Mom's shirt, making it my most popular product line.

AdSense was still plugging along as well, earning me almost $14 in just a few days time.

Coming Up on Day Nine

Day nine sees me working on building out the content for the new web site while I try to figure out how to pull content into the site from CafePress and Blogger. I'll also be setting up my Chitika MiniMalls ads, figuring out a new way to promote the site and getting yet another barter offer.

Day 9 - Keyword Research, Chitika Mini Malls and Writing Content

After the craziness that was day eight, day nine seemed a bit tamer. I still got plenty done, from integrating Chitika Mini Malls into the Blogger site to writing new content for the soon to be live Lactivist web site. I also answered plenty of email from helpful folks who picked up on my no Wordtracker mention in day eight and spent some time adding my domain name to the majority of the products in The Lactivist store.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1159 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $100.92
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $24.00
- Total AdSense Revenue: $14.86
- Total Revenue: $38.86
- Total Expenses: $4.96
- Total Profit: $33.90

Keyword Research

Back on day eight, I mentioned that I could see traffic coming from MSN and knew that I'd scored some decent rankings so far, but that I wasn't able to log in to Wordtracker to look up data the way that I usually would. While that was true, many readers wrote to point out that there are plenty of alternative tools out there that don't cost anything. They're right, and I should have mentioned that.

Digital Point has a pretty impressive collection of free tools for webmasters, including a keyword suggestion tool and even a backlink tracker. Of course there's also always the Yahoo! Search Term Suggestion tool, but I've never been a fan of it.

What made my choice easy was that David Warmuz of Trellian dropped me an email to offer me a free year's worth of access to their Keyword Discovery tool. This is yet another example of why it's important to put yourself in a position to be able to barter if you aren't able to spend the cash on the things that you need. David likely knew that I'd give him a nice plug in this article, so it was worth it to him to comp me the subscription. I'll talk more about using the tool on day ten.

As far as keywords go though, I noticed another one sending traffic via MSN. This time it was "breastfeeding in public" for which I was now ranking 5th. While MSN still lags behind Yahoo! and Google in terms of popularity, the fact that it's

so easy to rank there means that new sites can still see a nice stream of traffic while they wait for indexing in the other two major engines.

I also found out via an email from someone that had purchased a shirt that I had also received a mention on the [MSNBC Bloggernecking](#) blog. The nice thing about this email was not only getting the chance to hear from someone that liked my shirts enough to buy them, but also that it finally let me track a sale to its source. That tracking ability is one of the things that pushed me toward the investment in my own domain name.

Building Out the New Lactivist Site

I mentioned on day eight that I'd gotten a site design put together and that I'd talked my husband into building it out as a table-less template for me. What I didn't know was that he'd stay up until 3am getting it finished. This makes a good point though. In the world of shoe-string entrepreneurs and momtreprenuers, spouses play an important role. They do things like pick up dinner or put the kids to bed to make sure that you can meet a deadline. They serve as someone to bounce ideas off of, and they serve as cheerleaders when the going gets a little rough. So, here's a shout-out to all the families of people starting up their businesses, you guys rock!

While I entered day nine with a site template, I still needed to get some content put together. That meant that I needed to write an About Us page, a Contact Us page and a page about milk bank donation that explained what this whole project was about. I was able to pull most of the content from [The Lactivist blog](#) to get me started, but I did need to figure out what to put on my Contact Us page.

I decided that it was important to make it clear to people that I was open to selling at quantity discounts in case they wanted to stock my products in their stores. So, I created a special section of the Contact Us page that had information on this project. I created another section that talked about getting in touch with me to setup an affiliate program in case anyone wanted to sell my products via their web site. Finally, I made note that anyone involved in milk bank promotion was welcome to email me to find out how we could setup fund raisers for their local milk bank.

I kept checking in at the domain throughout the day, but the DNS had still not propagated, so everything remained hidden from view. I was feeling pretty anxious to see the site get going because I had been holding off on a link building campaign until I had a proper domain to direct things too.

Chitika MiniMalls

On day nine, I received notice that my application for Chitika MiniMalls had been accepted. I'd been having nothing but problems with AdSense and AdWords and

was nearing my wits end for dealing with them, so having the chance to work with a new contextual ad agency was something I was looking forward to.

I'd written on previous days about the trouble that I had getting AdSense to run properly on my blog and the cafe press store. I'd also written about how after I signed up for my AdSense account, my AdWords account stopped allowing me to login. While that fixed itself after I sent a second email to the AdWords team, it stopped working again the very next day. By now I was about five days into having zero control over my AdWords campaigns and I was feeling pretty frustrated. I did finally get a response back from the team, but their message was infuriating.

They explained that the problem was that I was using the same email address for both logins. Their system couldn't understand that and kept wanting to send me to the newest account, which was AdSense. Their suggestion was to change the email address associated with my AdWords account so that the problem no longer existed. There were just two problems.

1.) I'd signed up with the same account at both places because I'd read repeatedly that Google was in the process of forcing all of their customers to use a single login (their Gmail account) for all programs offered by Google. Since I was starting from scratch this campaign, I figured I'd put everything under the same name. Apparently I'm ahead of the game though, which was kind of annoying.

2.) The obvious problem here is that I can't get into my AdWords account to reset my email address. I resisted the temptation to email them back with "duh" in a large font and instead sent a note to the AdSense team asking them to change my login there. We'll see what happens in a future article.

Chitika on the other hand was pretty easy to run. I simply visited their eMiniMalls Code page, selected the size ad that I wanted, entered some keywords (baby, maternity, nursing and medela) and setup a few channels. I then cut and pasted the content into the code of The Lactivist Blog, The Lactivist Store and a few pages of the soon to exist lactivist web site. Within a few minutes I had highly targeted product ads running on all of the sites.

Promoting Myself Further

I ended the day thinking about the sudden spat of sales I'd had in the last twenty-four hours. I hoped that if people asked my customers about their shirts, that they would tell them where to buy some, but I also knew that few people would take the time to say "go to Cafe Press and search for The Lactivist store." So, I created a new graphic that had the new domain name on it and added it to the back of every breastfeeding advocacy shirt in my store.

Hopefully this will help get viral marketing moving as my products start to show up out there in the community. No sense wasting free advertising space, right?

By then, it was time to call it a day. I hadn't gotten nearly as much accomplished as I would have liked, but I'd spent three hours driving back to Columbus from Youngstown and had hosted a pot-luck for my small group that evening, so time had been limited. Since day eight had been a super productive day, I decided to cut myself some slack and head to bed.

Day Ten

Coming up in day ten, I do a little bit of keyword research, write some more content and find out what it's like to try and put time into your business when both I, and my one year old come down with nasty colds, reminding me of the rule that there are no sick days when you work for yourself.

Day 10 - Search Engine Marketing Goes to Work and Affiliate Sales Pay Off

Day ten was finally the day that I got to put some of my own experience to work on the site. After more than a week of trudging through things like graphics, style sheets and actually running a business, I finally had access to a keyword research tool. That meant that I could focus day ten on finding out what people were actually searching for and doing some fine tuning to the site to make sure that I was there in the search results for them to find.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1610 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $108.91
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $26.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $32.60
- Total AdSense Revenue: $19.94
- Total Revenue: $78.54
- Total Expenses: $4.96
- Total Profit: $73.58

Blogging Keeps Traffic Flowing

From the very beginning I'd intended to use blogging as a major part of my plan for viral marketing. One of the beautiful things about blogging is that it's now become common enough that many people actually use blog search engines and sites like Technorati to run regular searches on their favorite topics. That means that if you are writing about a topic that people are interested in, you'll likely be able to pick up some incremental traffic even before people start to find and subscribe to your blog.

Writing a topical blog that attracts readers and holds their interest means that you need to be generating content on a regular basis. That means that I've made Google news searches and Technorati searches for phrases like "breastfeeding" and "nursing" a regular part of my day. The idea is to find a news story, another blogger's comments, or an interesting factoid that you can turn into a blog post. If there's a way to spin it to point readers to my product line, all the better.

To that end, I made two blog posts on day ten that were designed to draw in my target audience and get them thinking. The first post discussed the current breastfeeding rates in the United States which are improving, but are still far below the national goals. The second was about the closing of Dr. Jack

[Newman's breastfeeding clinic](#) in the North York area of Toronto. Both of these topics appeal to my target audience: nursing mothers that are active in supporting breastfeeding. The beauty of blog posts in a project like this is that it not only provides content for any existing readers but it also draws in new readers from my target audience. This is why blogs can work so well for niche product lines or interesting service offerings.

While we're on the topic of blogging, I was still finding new links from blogs pointing in to the article series and to the sites on day ten. Ken Dyck of [Startup Fever](#) pointed to the series on his blog and included links to the first nine days of the project. I also found another [international post](#) and a great write-up over at [Geeks on Steroids](#).

Search Engine Marketing Does Its Thing

Back on day eight I lamented my lack of access to Wordtracker, the addictive keyword research tool that's a search marketer's best friend. On day nine, I reported that the great guys over at Trellian had graciously offered up a full year's worth of free access to their [Keyword Discovery Tool](#). That meant that I could finally do some digging beyond the free tools offered by Overture and the like.

I'd mentioned before that I'd been racking up some great rankings at MSN and day ten was no different. My first few referrers came in from MSN searches for "cute breastfeeding shirts" which I discovered I was ranking #1 and #2 for. That meant that MSN was still doing a great job of helping me land some rankings and some traffic while I waited for the more lucrative traffic possibilities that could follow once Yahoo! and Google decided to let me into their rankings.

I started off my research by checking to see what traffic levels were on some of the phrases that I was already ranking for. Phrases like "[breastfeeding in public](#)" and "[breastfeeding t-shirts](#)" draw in a decent number of searches, which explained why I'd started to see a nice steam of traffic from them. (Still didn't explain the hits for "breastfeeding men" however...) Once I'd checked on a searches for my existing rankings, I expanded my search to see what else I could come up with.

Phrases like "[pro breastfeeding clothing](#)," "[breastfeeding support shirts](#)" and "[extended breastfeeding](#)" all logged a pretty strong amount of traffic. In fact, "extended breastfeeding" was drawing about 100 times the number of searches per day that "child led weaning" was. This is the perfect example of why keyword research is essential. Based on my experiences online in message boards and chat rooms, I would have thought that child led weaning was the way to go. In fact, I'd rarely heard the term "extended breastfeeding" used. Granted, the two phrases don't mean the exact same thing, but they the intent behind the terms is similar enough that both encompass my target audience.

So, I went through the CafePress site and started making some changes. I edited my tag line to read "Supporting Breastfeeding in Public, Extended Breastfeeding and Milk Bank Donations" rather than the original "Supporting Breastfeeding in Public, Child Led Weaning and Milk Bank Donations." I also edited the child led weaning product lines so that their default name was "extended breastfeeding" instead. Finally, I went in and edited the "tags" on my child led weaning images so that they included the text extended breastfeeding. (This last part was to help draw more traffic from CafePress's internal search engine, which determines results by reading the tags assigned to the images on the shirts.)

I followed up on that change by updating the default product name for the Milk Jugs line to read "pro breastfeeding clothing" and to change the default name of the Milk Maid line to read "breastfeeding support shirts."

Affiliate Sales Can Boost Your Bottom Line

Earlier in the project several of our readers had posted in the forums or emailed me to suggest that I sign up for CafePress's affiliate program. Affiliate programs are an area that I don't have much experience in, but I knew that they could be a great way to not only drive new sales to my own products, but to make a profit off of the great products being sold by other CafePress vendors as well. At this point, I wasn't quite ready to start attracting my own affiliates, so I settled for signing up to promote other vendor's shops.

CafePress's affiliate program pays out 20% commission for product purchases and a 5% commission on the sale of any products from a new shopkeeper that signs up through an affiliate link. They've set things up to make it as easy as possible for affiliate to get links added to their own sites. Affiliates can pull code for banners, skyscrapers or block ads, can add search boxes to their sites and can even pull data from an XML feed to show products based on customized keywords. I opted to pull the code snippet to get one of CafePress's category ads up and running on my sites.

Here's an example:

I honestly didn't expect to see much come of the affiliate link when I posted the out of the box solution from CafePress. I was planning to work on a more customized option down the road that included a search box and played off of the whole "if we don't have it, we'll help you

OVER 615,000 > KEEPSAKES & KIDSTUFF

find it" theme. So, you can imagine how pleased I was to login to my account the next day to find that I'd already earned $32.60. (That's right, in one day I earned more from affiliate sales than I did from more than a week's worth of selling my own products!)

That left me wondering if I should actually devote the time and effort to building a more customized affiliate linking solution or if I should put that time toward another project. After all, why mess with a good thing? On the other hand, if I could make $32.60 in a day with a mass-produced linking option, maybe a customized solution would bring in even more.

Day Eleven

Coming up on day eleven, I finally get my hosting and DNS issues worked out, I share some more interesting emails with Search Engine Guide readers and I find the first major annoyance of CafePress's shop management system.

Day 11 - Google Shares the Love, DNS Issues Resolve and CafePress Lets Me Down

Day eleven was a happy day. Google rankings kicked in, making it clear that Jagger was still a fan of CafePress sites and that you can work around the sandbox if you make use of someone else's domain. I also finally figured out what was going on with the DNS issues that were holding up the launch of www.thelactivist.com and ran into the first real reason to be unhappy with the CafePress system.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1789 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $108.91
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $26.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $32.60
- Total AdSense Revenue: $21.93
- Total Revenue: $80.53.54
- Total Expenses: $4.96
- Total Profit: $75.57

Google Rankings Kick In

For the past few days of the project, I'd started enjoying traffic coming in from the MSN search engine, but hadn't seen much activity from Yahoo! or Google apart from clicks on my AdWords ads. That all changed on day eleven when I saw my first non-AdWords referral come in from Google. Quite honestly, the referral caught me by surprise. I had been working on the project thinking to myself that it was going to take anywhere from a month to a few months to see any Google rankings kick in because the site is so new and the Google aging delay/sandbox issue would likely come into play.

That's because I was thinking about getting rankings for the new Lactivist web site. What I hadn't thought through was the fact that CafePress is already very well established on the major search engines and that engines like Google would simply see my store as new content on an existing site, not as a brand new site. That meant that when Google updated their index of CafePress pages, my products were suddenly showing up. This was exciting, because building rankings off of an existing site is much easier than building rankings off of a brand new site. Now why it never dawned on me that this would happen is a whole other issue, because that's exactly what was happening on MSN and I

should have put two and two together and expected to see my listings pop up on Google.

Now that I knew I was in the index and not just in the AdWords listing, I headed off to Google to see where I was ranking. The results were quite encouraging, especially since I still hadn't put a lot of effort toward organic optimization on the site. (I keep meaning to write product descriptions, but I just haven't had the time to do it yet.)

I had top ten rankings for a variety of good phrases like "breastfeeding children," "child led weaning," "breastfeeding humor" and "milk banks." I even ranked #4 for "extended breastfeeding" and was fluxing between #2 and #5 for the phrase "breastfeeding shirts." I was also pulling some great long tail traffic for niche phrases like "t-shirts for breastfeeding moms" for which I ranked #1.

The real surprise though, was the #2 ranking for the phrase "pumping" which has more than 25 million listings on Google. The lesson here though, is not to get excited about a good ranking for a phrase that isn't targeted. While "pumping" may have many results, it's not very targeted to my ideal customer, so it's unlikely that the ranking will do me much good.

Google also finally shared a little love in the AdWords department. After nearly a week of being completely locked out of my AdWords account, I finally heard back from the AdWords team with a note saying that they were looking into the problem.

Viral Marketing Still on the Move

The Lactivist project was still making the rounds in the search marketing and small business industry on day eleven as well. I noticed a referral from the Geeks on Steroids forum and found that they were discussing the small business article series side of things. I also found quite a few visitors coming in from a forum post that Jill Whalen made over at her HighRankings Search Engine Optimization forum.

The link from Jill's forum was a great help with viral marketing because it sparked off an email conversation with Lisa Stewart of Big Foot Web Marketing about setting up some affiliate links from some of her parenting sites. I'd been thinking about how to go about promoting the affiliate side of CafePress, but just hadn't had a chance to put things in place yet. Day eleven saw me doing a bit of brainstorming with Lisa to prepare for an affiliate launch a few days later.

New Product Time

Day eleven also saw me adding a few new products to the site. As I've written before, I'm working with the Director of the Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio to try and

get some fundraising efforts in place with [milk bank awareness shirts](). They'd asked me if I could try to come up with some options for non-donor moms to wear. This made sense as there is obviously a very limited number of women that can wear the shirts that say "[these breasts save lives]()" or "[modern day wet nurse]()."

I had already managed to come up with a one that says "[with the breast of intentions]()" and decided it was worth posting, but the real gem came on day eleven from a Search Engine Guide reader that suggested "[Express Yourself]()." That same reader came up with another great shirt idea for the "cute" breastfeeding shirt section that reads "[nursing: nature's own breast enhancement]()."

The First Reason Not to Like CafePress

While adding the new shirts to the CafePress site I realized that when I'd added the URLs to the back of the shirts, CafePress had centered them by default. But, I wanted the domain name to run across the shoulders so that it would be a little less conspicuous. I headed into the product management area of CafePress to make the switch and found that there was no way to do a massive switch on all shirts at once. That meant that I had to visit every single product in the store and click through the edit options until I got to the page that let me set the "shoulders" option rather than the "centered" option.

Making these changes took me about four hours. Four hours that I could have spent promoting my site and selling more products. Four hours that could have taken five minutes if CafePress had offered an option to make a mass change to my store. That meant that day eleven became the first day that I found myself truly annoyed with the CafePress system.

DNS Issues Resolve and The Lactivist Site Comes to Life

Although I'd purchased a domain name and setup hosting in the first week of the project, I seemed to be having DNS problems that were keeping my site from showing up. On day eleven, I finally figured out that the email message that I'd received with instructions to setup my name servers had an error in it. So, after flogging Robert via IM for a few minutes, I managed to get the right information from him and made a change to the DNS at my registrar. Within a few hours, the DNS had already started propagating and I found myself happily viewing [The Lactivist site]() before I headed to bed that night.

The point here that needs to be pounded home is that patience doesn't always pay off. Since I knew that it could take up to three days for DNS to propagate, I didn't worry about it until day four. Had I gotten suspicious a little sooner, I likely could have solved the whole thing and saved myself several days of not being able to point people to the domain.

Day Twelve

Coming up on day twelve, I realize the traffic joys that can come with having other people think that your site is worth while and start to see a trickle of traffic from Yahoo!. You can also find out how CafePress and an online voting site racked up a ton of referrals for me and why Thanksgiving turkey is apparently a great way to get your creative juices flowing.

Day 12 - Google Bypasses MSN, CafePress Gives the Site a Boost and Offers of Help From Readers Pour In

Day twelve saw the start of a sudden rush of traffic from a few solid links, gave me a true appreciation for just how generous Search Engine Guide readers can be and showed just how powerful Google rankings are. If I was learning anything from this experience it was the importance of creating a business that sparks people's interest. If I'd started up a business that sold something common like books or scrapbooking equipment, people likely wouldn't have paid much attention other than to say that the experiment was interesting. It's the uniqueness of the product line that has sparked such an interest and such interaction with readers. That's a powerful lesson to learn for people looking to start up a new business online.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the [Small Business Ideas forum](#). You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1844 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $108.91
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $26.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $43.80
- Total AdSense Revenue: $26.88
- Total Chitika Revenue: $1.12
- Total Revenue: $97.80
- Total Expenses: $4.96
- Total Profit: $92.84

Google Rankings Start to Send Serious Traffic

On day eleven, I write about my excitement at being indexed by Google and seeing my first search referrals start to come in from the Google site. By day twelve, Google had already managed to bypass MSN as my biggest source of search engine traffic, showing just how powerful Google is when it comes to search share. The fact that my rankings had shown up in MSN almost a full week prior to showing up in Google but could still be passed in terms of traffic volume in a single day means that Bill Gates and company still have a long way to go before their engine is making a serious threat to Google's title as King of Search.

I've mentioned the "keyword long tail" in articles earlier in the series, but at this point it's probably a good idea to expand on the idea a little bit to help non search geeks understand the importance of ranking for these phrases.

The keyword long tail is the name given to all the keyword phrases that a web site tends to rank for without the owner ever consciously optimizing for them. For example, while I've actively tried to target phrases like "breastfeeding shirts" and "breastfeeding advocacy" I'm also finding that I rank (and get traffic from) other phrases like "breastfeeding advocacy t shirts," "breastfeeding humor" and "breastfeeding bibs." The long tail is named as such because when you look at the log files for a web site, it's fairly common to find that the phrases that each send two or three visitors a month tend to add up and send far more traffic than the top ten, twenty or even thirty phrases combined.

For more on the keyword long tail, check out Matt Bailey's excellent article about incorporating the long tail into your keyword strategy. For a quick example of the impact of the long tail, check out this line from his article:

However, when looking at sales generated by search terms, 18.6% of conversions were from top 10 keywords. Conversely, 81.2% of the conversions were from hundreds of other search terms outside of the top 10.

My experience thus far with The Lactivist has been no different. Yes, there are power phrases like "breastfeeding clothes" and "breastfeeding children" that send strong numbers of traffic, but it's those surprising little phrases like "breastfeeding tote bag" that add up to give me some real solid numbers in the search referral column.

Cafe Press and T-Shirt Countdown Boost Traffic

One of the problems with the focus on link building in the search marketing world is that so much emphasis is put on links for the sake of boosting search engine rankings. What many site owners fail to understand is the power of a link when it comes to sending traffic. It's pretty common for site owners to put all their focus on seeking out high PR sites where they might stake a claim on a link that could give a slight ranking boost, but is unlikely to provide any customers. Instead, site owners need to work on link strategies that seek aim to create links that will send customers to their site.

Much has been made in a couple of discussion forums over the supposed unfairness of The Lactivist project from a linking standpoint. The argument being made is that I'm well known enough to generate tons of links simply on the basis of the articles I'm writing. Critics say that this makes my experiment unrealistic. These critics are missing the boat on two points...

First, the majority of link-love that's being generated from these articles is aimed at the Search Engine Guide site and the Small Business Ideas forum. Thus, my "name" has served me well for generating publicity and interest for the Search Engine Guide brand, but it hasn't done much of anything when it comes to sending customers to The Lactivist Store.

Two, even when you count the incoming links to the The Lactivist Store, it's not the ones from the search and small business marketing blogs that are generating revenue. Traffic yes, but all the traffic in the world doesn't do you a lick of good if no one is buying. It's links from places like The Charlotte Mommies forum, the Just Mommies Board and Craigslist that are sending in my target audience in droves. These links are coming from people that have no idea who I am, proving that the real gems in link building come from the people that choose to evangelize about your products on their own.

It's getting those links in just the right spot that is the true gem in online marketing and that point was driven home on day twelve. All of a sudden I saw a sharp rise in traffic coming from the CafePress Wire. Apparently, the CafePress team had selected The Lactivist Store as one of their Top Ten Shops and listed it on the Wire site. That one link has already sent more than 100 visitors to the site, roughly 5% of my total traffic since stats were put in place.

I had also started to see a huge influx of traffic from T-Shirt Countdown. Back on day one when I was first putting products on the site, Robert suggested that I submit the "milk jugs" shirt to the site for their "Top 100 T-Shirts" countdown. The site works by tabulating reader votes and ranking shirts based on popularity. By day twelve my shirt had risen to #21 on the "Funny T-Shirts" list and to #56 on the overall list. Those two listings had send more than 50 visitors to my site and were likely responsible for some of the posts showing up on discussion sites like Craigslist.

It's links from spots like the CafePress Wire and T-Shirt Countdown that not only send potential customers to your site, but also generate the type of buzz that can lead to even more links from blogs and discussion boards. That's what makes these links valuable, not the slight boost that they may give to a search ranking, but their potential to send actual visitors to your web site. That's an important point to keep in mind when you are working on a linking strategy for a new business.

Thanksgiving Turkey Sparks Inspiration

Another valuable lesson learned on day twelve was the power of group brainstorming. While I'd already been able to put up some excellent shirt ideas for Search Engine Guide readers and can't discount my husband's idea of the "milk jugs" shirt that started it all, it was Thanksgiving that saw tryptophan-induced creativity reining supreme.

My husband pitched in with suggestions for new shirts that say "i suck" and "sucker" for kids and another one for adults that reads "my kid sucks."

I created new ones that read "[Milk Shake](#)" and "[Dairy Diva](#)." The true gem though came when my father handed me a sheet of paper on which he had scrawled "[nip/suck](#)." Genius...sheer genius.

If You Create a Cause, Help Will Come

I've written on previous days about the generous offers of free or discounted services that have come from companies like [Trellian](#) and [MorDesigns](#), not to mention the generous offer of public relations help from Marc Cowlin, the PR Manager for CafePress. Day twelve however, saw me becoming buried in an outpouring of generosity from Search Engine Guide readers inspired by the cause.

The offers started with Dan Mowry, a work-at-home dad that runs [TheTShirtZone](#), a CafePress store that features a wide variety of shirt designs. Dan kindly offered up his graphic design skills in case I was looking to add anything other than text based designs to the site. His email was followed up with one from Mike Chipman, a former Urchin and Google employee that now runs [Xooni Inc.](#) and who offered to help me setup Google Analytics services for The Lactivist site.

Just as I was starting to contemplate how I might take Dan and Mike up on their offers, I noticed that I had messages waiting for me in several forums. In our own Small Business Ideas forums, search engine copywriting guru Karon Thackston dropped me a note offering up a free copywriting review for the project. Since I'm not a copywriter, this offer was like gold. I also had a message from Lisa Stewart, a HighRankings forum member that runs several parenting and home schooling sites and wanted to talk about becoming an affiliate for my store.

Day Thirteen

Coming up on day thirteen, I finally find my way back into Google AdWords to tweak my campaigns, I work on figuring out what to do with all the offers of help and I get back to my roots with even more keyword research and search engine optimization work.

Day 13 - First Sale for the Milk Banks, Set up an Affiliate Program and a Day to Focus on Search Marketing

Almost two full weeks into the project and just after the Thanksgiving holiday, I finally gave myself a chance to relax a little bit with a slow day that focused mostly on search engine marketing. I also had a chance to contemplate where I wanted to start reinvesting the dollars that were finally starting to add up for The Lactivist project.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1976 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $124.89
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $30.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $43.80
- Total AdSense Revenue: $27.76
- Total Chitika Revenue: $1.12
- Total Revenue: $102.68

- Total Donations from Milk Bank Shirts: $4.00
- Total Business Expenses: $4.96

- Total Profit: $93.70

The First Official Sale of a Human Milk Banks Awareness Shirt

Part of my morning routine these days involves clicking through the dozen or so sites stored in my Lactivist bookmarks folder to check on revenue sources, traffic stats and order status. I get a little thrill every time I see a new referrer show up, or a new sale get logged, but two sales that came in on the 13th day that just made my day. A lady from Ohio put in an order for two of the children's "I share!" shirts, marking the first day that I'd earned profit that was specifically ear-marked for the milk bank.

Turns out that she was a referral from the director of the Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio. She'd heard about the shirts from the staff and decided to purchase two of them for the children of a donor mother that she knew.

At the same time, I had put in an order of my own for a "These Breasts Save Lives" shirt and also for a "Milk Jugs" shirt so that I could see how the shirts print up and so that I could wear them around. After all, what's the point of selling breastfeeding advocacy products if I'm not going to make use of them myself?

Setting Up an Affiliate Program

In the day twelve article, I'd mentioned that I'd been exchanging some emails with Lisa Stewart about setting up some affiliate linking options for some of the sites that she runs. Since CafePress already has an excellent affiliate program that anyone can sign up for, I really only had to worry about putting together some images and text options for her so that she could use her own affiliate link to point directly to the Lactivist Store.

My first step was to put together a variety of text links that used different link text and different site descriptions so that she could have her choice of which ones to use. That's an important thing to remember when you are offering up linking options. If you're going to make suggestions to site owners on what text to use for your link, make sure that you are not suggesting the same text every time. It's a good idea to setup a list of dozens of variations on both your link text and your site description so that your incoming links look more natural to the search engines.

So, I offered up the following text based link options to Lisa:

Unique clothing for breastfeeding mothers
Breastfeeding Shirts - Show support for breastfeeding moms with these unique shirts.
Breastfeeding Advocacy - Show off your pro breastfeeding beliefs with unique shirts.
Breastfeeding Clothing - Show your lactivist tendencies with unique shirts and hoodies.
Breastfeeding Clothes - Shirts with an attitude designed to support breastfeeding moms.
Breastfeeding Tops - T-shirts and hoodies with unique pro-breastfeeding slogans.

Since many sites prefer to use graphical links and since the product line I'm pushing very much depends on visuals to attract potential buyers, I also offered Lisa a variety of image options that match up with some of the common sizes through vendors like AdSense so that they would fit in any spots she might already have set aside on her site.

I'm no graphical artist, but I did come up with four variations:

Now that I had the basics ready for my affiliate program, I knew that I'd have to start setting aside some time to actively seek out sites that might want to promote The Lactivist store on their own. (Look for more on this in an upcoming article.)

Search Engine Marketing Grabs My Attention Again

For someone as wrapped up in search engine marketing as me, you'd think that a greater portion of this project would have been devoted to it in the first two weeks. The reality though is that I'd been so busy working on other things that search engine marketing had sort of fallen by the way side. Granted, I'd actively worked to place keyword phrases in areas like category sections and product names, but I still hadn't written optimized page content and I'd yet to put any effort toward link building.

That lack of effort was showing in my referrals which told me that less than 8% of my site traffic was coming from search engines. In fact, at this point, more than half of my incoming traffic to the store was coming from Search Engine Guide. Another 8% was coming in from the Lactivist blog and the Lactivist web site and around 5% was coming in from links in search engine and marketing related blogs. That meant that around 30% of my traffic was coming from naturally gained links from my target audience. Those links were mostly made up of discussion forums links and CafePress referrals.

Since less than half of my traffic was coming from any place that was likely to send an actual customer, and since I'd discovered that Google was already ranking the Lactivist Store, I knew that I needed to put more time and effort toward making sure the store was a bit better optimized.

To that end, I headed back to Trellian's [Keyword Discovery tool](#) to do a bit more digging and to make sure that absolutely every product section was being used to my full advantage. My first stop was to run a search on "milk banks." I was ranking in the top ten on Google for it, but I wasn't sure if anyone was even searching for the term. As it turns out, people were, but they were also searching for the term "human milk banks" just as much. That meant that by tweaking my site to target "human milk banks" I could target both phrases and hope to pick up twice the traffic. I also discovered that five times more people search for "breast milk bank" than the plan "milk bank" option, so I also tweaked a section of the store to target that phrase as well.

Finally I headed over to Google AdWords to login and check and see how the campaign had been going during my lock-out. I'd only spent about $12 of my $100 credit so far and hadn't been able to trace a single sale to the campaign. This was disappointing as I'd always had good luck with AdWords campaigns in the past.

The image ads that I'd set to run via the content network still hadn't shown up on a single site, showing the downfall of this type of targeting for an industry that's highly specific. The performance of my "nursing" related phrases was dismal, with a click-thru rate of less than 1%. I was hoping that I could attribute this to the fact that my average position was 11.4, but I also couldn't deny that it was possible that my ads simply weren't compelling enough to attract clicks.

I went through the campaign and deleted the ad for "nursing bras" which had more than 90 other bidders running ads as well. I then increased my minimum bid for phrases like "nursing clothes" and "clothes for nursing mothers" to try and push my ad a little further up in the listings. Next I looked over the ads that I was running to see if I might be able to make any changes to them to help increase my relevancy and boost my AdWords position. Here's what the ads I was running looked like:

Ads (2 Deleted Ads, 3 Clicks, 0.4% CTR, $0.18 Avg. CPC)   + Create New Ad: Text Ad | Image Ad   Back up to keywords

Nurse Your Child Proudly
Unique pro-breastfeeding shirts and products for nursing moms
www.cafepress.com/thelactivist
5 Clicks | 1.3% CTR | $0.14 CPC
Served - 21.4% [more info]
Edit - Delete

Nurse Your Child Proudly
Promote breastfeeding awareness with unique slogans and shirts
www.cafepress.com/thelactivist
4 Clicks | 1.2% CTR | $0.19 CPC
Served - 19.6% [more info]
Edit - Delete

Promote Breastfeeding
Show off your pro breastfeeding beliefs with unique shirts and bags
www.cafepress.com/thelactivist
2 Clicks | 0.6% CTR | $0.10 CPC
Served - 19.3% [more info]
Edit - Delete

Are you a Lactivist?
Show off your pro breastfeeding beliefs with unique shirts and bags
www.cafepress.com/thelactivist
0 Clicks
Served - 1.3% [more info]
Edit - Delete

Are You a Lactivist?
Unique pro-breastfeeding shirts and products for nursing moms
www.cafepress.com/thelactivist
0 Clicks
Served - 1.1% [more info]
Edit - Delete

I'd added two new ads to the section a few days before, so there wasn't much to look at in terms of impressions or click-thrus on them, but I knew that I could make some updates to the first three that had been running for awhile.

The first thing I realized is that I'd basically used the ads that I had running for breastfeeding related keywords on my nursing phrases. That was going to be a ding against me in terms of CPC and ad placement because Google's AdWords algorithm takes relevancy into consideration. So, I made a few edits to the ads and added a few extra ones to the rotation so that I could track several variations.

With my original set of ads, I had just three ad titles in rotation, so when I wrote the new set of ads, I added another one to kick it up to four. The "Nurse Your Child Proudly" and "Are you a Lactivist?" text was performing well, so I made two ads for each of those titles and wrote different ad text for each of them. That way, I could test to see if the ad text made any difference to the click-thru rate. I also added a new ad with the title "Funny Breastfeeding Shirt" because I had seen a few referrers come in to the site for that text. If people were searching for that phrase, it might mean that they'd be attracted to an ad that used it, so I thought I would give it a try.

I also continued to run a version of ad with the "Promote Breastfeeding" title. The orginal ad hadn't gotten much in the way of click thrus, so I went ahead and changed up the ad text to see if that might make a difference.

The new set of ads looked like this:

Whether or not the edits would make a difference in my click-thru rates remained to be seen, but I'll be sure to cover it in an upcoming article.

Day Fourteen

Coming up on day fourteen, I receive the shirts that I ordered from CafePress and get to experience the CafePress customer service response first hand. I also get a sharp influx of traffic from a slew of new links and work on getting the Lactivist site more properly built out.

Day 14 - Jagger is Not My Friend, CSS Annoys and I Experience CafePress as a Customer

I don't suppose I can really complain. After two solid weeks of surprising productivity, day fourteen actually delivered a fair share of frustration to make up for the supposed ease with which things had launched. That said, I still managed to get quite a bit done and I was encouraged to see that the search marketing world had finally started to buzz about the project as well.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 2252 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $124.89
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $41.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $47.20
- Total AdSense Revenue: $31.93
- Total Chitika Revenue: $1.12
- Total Revenue: $121.25

- Total Donations from Milk Bank Shirts: $4.00
- Total Business Expenses: $4.96

- Total Profit: $112.29

The Search Marketing World Gives a Boost to The Lactivist

I never really expected The Lactivist project to get a lot of buzz within the search marketing industry because search engine optimization and search engine advertising are really such a small part of the project. I'd estimate that I've spent less than 15% of my time so far on anything search related and I was still getting less than 8% of my traffic from search engines. Nonetheless, my article series was finally reaching the point where I had some relevant search issues to cover, so some great links showed up to deliver a nice round of traffic.

I found a link coming in from Loren Baker's excellent Search Engine Journal site. Loren pointed to the project for the blogger perspective that I've provided in the series. Danny Sullivan provided a nice link from Search Engine Watch with a full write-up of the project and an excellent mention of milk banking. He also covered it in his Daily Search cast with Darrin Babbin on Webmaster Radio. You can listen to the show and hear their entertaining discussion of the project about three quarters of the way through. I know for certain that the project had an

impact because it's the first time I've ever heard of Darrin admitting he was speechless about anything.

Also found some nice links coming in from the Website Content Strategies blog, Little Fish Web Design, HelpMeBlog and another foreign blog in a language that I can't understand. The best link of the day though came from a Feminist Parenting forum where one of the forum members gave a nice link to both the blog and the store sending me a nice range of traffic.

It's important to note that the traffic that came from sites like Search Engine Journal and Search Engine Watch really didn't do me much good in terms of sales, but they did produce some great things as far as networking. There's also the obvious chance that some of the links that were showing up in parenting forums were coming from people that originally spotted the site via one of those links. If nothing else, the post from Search Engine Watch probably introduced the idea of human milk banking to tons of people that would never have heard of it otherwise. That's why I'll say yet again that links have value for far more than just the potential search ranking boost.

I also discovered on day fourteen that the rest of the Pimp My Site team from the Search Engine Strategies conference decided to pitch in to help "pimp" The Lactivist site for the show. So, if you're reading this, and you're going to be in Chicago next week for the Search Engine Strategies show, be sure to stop by the Pimp My Site session to see some of the shirts in person (being modeled by Elisabeth Osmeloski, Heather Lloyd-Martin and yours truly) and to share any feedback that you have on the project. I'll be easy to spot as I'll be wearing the "milk jugs" shirt.

My Own Experience with Cafe Press

Because I was going to be wearing one of my shirts for the SES Chicago show, I'd placed an order for "milk jugs" and for "these breasts save lives" so that I could do some promoting of the shirts as I'm out and about town. My shipment arrived on day sixteen and I must admit that it was kind of cool to open up a package and finally be holding my own product. That excitement disappeared fairly quickly though when I realized that both the front and back of one of my shirts said "these breasts save lives." The back of the shirt was supposed to have the URL of the web site printed across the shoulders. I made a quick check of the site to make sure it wasn't my error (it wasn't) and placed a call to customer service.

After a minute or two on hold, I reached a friendly customer service agent. I explained the problem and he quickly apologized and promised to ship a new shirt out immediately. When I asked what I needed to do about returning the misprinted shirt, he asked that I simply donate it somewhere. All of this took about two minutes of my time and was generally one of the most positive

experiences I've ever had with customer service. So, my misprinted shirt turned out to be a good thing, because it gave me a chance to see how customer service would work if any of my buyers ran into problems.

Jagger is Not My Friend, but MSN is

A few days ago, I wrote about the amazing Google rankings that started showing up for The Lactivist store during the flux of the Jagger update. By day fourteen, Jagger had settled into place and many of my rankings had shifted south. Many of my top ten rankings had dropped to top twenty rankings and a few had disappeared altogether. That's not surprising as the site is still quite new and I honestly hadn't expected to see any Google traffic for at least a few more weeks. Since a steady stream of Google traffic was still showing up for non-competitive phrases, I wasn't too concerned.

MSN on the other hand was still showing plenty of love when it came to ranking the CafePress store. On day fourteen I was showing up as the number one listing for "breast milk" which proved what most search marketers already know. MSN isn't the most accurate of engines when it comes to delivering the BEST site in the results. While I was happy to have the listing, even I know that my CafePress store didn't deserve to be the number one listing for a phrase as broad as "breast milk."

Someone at Yahoo! must have been feeling left out while reading the article series because an email showed up in my box on the fourteenth with a coupon for $100 credit in a new [Yahoo! Search Marketing](#) account. (Ok, ok, it was a coincidence...it was actually sent to me because I visited their booth at the eComXpo last month.) With that coupon safely tucked into a folder of my inbox, I made plans to start up a pay-per-click campaign with them later in the week.

CSS, Why Did You Have to Replace HTML

There was a time, back when I first got into online marketing that I could build anything I wanted in HTML. I knew all the code, all the tricks and I could put together a site in an hour. Then a decade went by and I got rusty. Now, trying to figure out which divs point to where and what style sheet reference needs to be tweaked to move this image a pixel or two to the left is enough to drive me insane.

Earlier in the project, my husband had been wonderful enough to put together a template for the front page of the site, but day fourteen saw me trying to edit that template to create an internal page template that could be used for more content. I wanted to create a layout that I could carry over to both Blogger and CafePress so that each of the three sites looked alike and linked to each other. But, before I could work on tieing the design in to the other sites, I had to get it to work on my own.

After an hour or two of fussing, I still had a template that had [plenty of problems](#) and that couldn't be spread to the rest of the site. I'd managed to get a two column layout setup so that I could fill it with products, but getting the left hand navigation column to work was killer. I knew that there was some simple little fix out there, but time ran out for the day before I had a chance to figure it all out.

Still Blogging

I also logged another blog post for the day that talked about recent data that shows [global breastfeeding rates up 15%](#)and that talks about some of the issues contributing to low rates around the world. I used that blog to tie in to the milk banking concept, which in turn tied to the [milk banking products](#).

Day Fifteen

Coming up on day fifteen, I expand my horizons and try to sell on eBay for the first time. I also find out that blogging for other people can work to your advantage and finally get my own blog feed to work properly on [The Lactivist site](#).

Day 15 - Blogging Away, Customer Service Part Two and Giving it a Go on Ebay

Day fifteen saw me putting a lot of focus toward The Lactivist Blog. From adding new entries, to guest blogging on other sites to finally integrating the blog content as a live feed into The Lactivist web site, blogging was the focus of the day. I also ended up having another conversation with CafePress customer service, made some more changes to my AdWords campaign and decided to give eBay a shot.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 2730 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 487 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $253.89
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $52.00
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $53.25
- Total AdSense Revenue: $36.65
- Total Chitika Revenue: $1.57
- Total Revenue: $143.47

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $1.60
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Total Business Expenses: $10.56

- Total Profit: $132.91

Blogging Blogging Everywhere and Plenty of Links to...Click?

From early on in the project I realized that blogging was going to be an integral part of my business plan. The Lactivist sells a specialized product that appeals to the passions of people instead of their needs. I figured that the best way to not only attract those people, but to keep them coming back time and time again was to feed their passion. The best way to do that was with a blog that could be updated continually and that linked in to products only when it was appropriate.

The challenge of doing this for most businesses is that there is a fine line between using a blog to shill your product and using your blog to gently advertise your product. I needed to walk that line carefully. If my blog was nothing but post after post telling people how great my shirts were or how creative the slogans were, people would quickly tire of the blog and wouldn't come back. On top of that, I'd be bored out of my skull with the blog in a matter of weeks.

Since I had created a business based on my own passions, coming up with unique and original content that complemented my product line turned out to be relatively easy. I was already keeping up to date on the latest studies and information about breastfeeding and I was visiting several discussion forums and blogs on a regular basis that talked about the issues facing breastfeeding moms. Making an average of a post a day was pretty simple when I already had that much fodder to work with. (This is part of why it's far easier to start a business based on your passions than on what you think will make you the most money the fastest.)

On day fifteen I wrote two new blog posts. The first built on my own experiences working to wean myself off of the pump after more than a year of pumping four times a day. The second post discussed some of the studies that have been conducted over the past few years to see if there's any tie between extended breastfeeding and reduced risks of breast cancer. I had also been invited to write a guest blog for the Pink Bracelets blog, a breast cancer awareness blog. (Guest blogging, like guest article writing can be a great way to help spread the word about your own site and gain some incoming links in the process.)

All three of those blog posts covered topics of interest to breastfeeding moms and were optimized to show up should someone be searching for related topics. I knew that apart from the immediate traffic that I might draw from links and feed readers, Blogger posts are easily indexed in the search engines and could send long term traffic to each of the individual post pages once they had been indexed in Google, Yahoo! and MSN.

I also spent a decent part of my day working to format the feed that I was using to pull my blog content onto my home page at TheLactivist.com. I was using a free Feedburner account to create a code snippet that I could call from any page (or that other people could use to call my feed into their own sites), but I needed to format my CSS file to make the feed look the way I wanted it to. I had run into some problems with this earlier in the project, but on day 15, I finally figured it all out. Feedburner's help files offered up a link that let me know what the class name was for each field being pulled in on the feed. Once I knew the class name, I was able to add them to my own style sheet and adjust the styles accordingly. Finally, visitors to TheLactivist.com could easily read the first part of each blog post and link to the full post from my home page without my having to cut and paste the content onto the index page myself.

Blogs were working on the incoming link side of things as well. Jim Hedger had given me a nice write up over at the Stepforth SEO Blog. Since Jim's blog is syndicated on quite a few sites, that also created new incoming links from at least a dozen different web sites. Anita Campbell, who had linked to me from her own site earlier in the project added another link to the mix with a write up on the Facteon Blog. I was also glad to see that my experience of having to manually change the domain name image on the back of every single shirt in the store was

serving as a good lesson for someone since [The Best of CafePress blog](#) pointed to my article as a warning to other shop owners that hadn't realized how the system worked. I also found a link coming in from an interesting blog called [Alane by Day](#) where a group of professionals are working to launch a new architecture business in ten weeks.

Finally, I took a few moments to add my blog to Loren Baker's [Blog Search Engine](#).

More Changes to AdWords

At this point, I was more than two weeks into the project and I'd yet to see a single sale that I could attribute to AdWords. This was pretty disappointing as I was running ads on some highly targeted terms and was seeing some click thru rates of 3-5% on a few of them. Still, no one seemed to be buying. I've always been a strong advocate of the idea that when pay-per-click marketing "doesn't work", it's usually because you are doing it wrong. That made my lack of ROI a tough pill to swallow.

It had only been a day or so since I'd made some massive changes to my ad text, so it was still too early to tell if I'd see anything new come from the updated campaign. At the same time, I had to remind myself (or perhaps make an excuse?) that I was working with highly niche terms and still hadn't logged more than one hundred or so visitors. Still, it left me wondering if the ROI tracking option on Google was working right or if my campaign really was setup poorly.

To that end I added a few more phrases to my campaign based on some of the phrases that I'd noticed driving traffic from MSN. New ads went up for phrases like "breastfeeding children," "breastfeeding kids," "breast milk" and "breastmilk." None of these were nearly as targeted as my existing phrases, but I'd only spent $11 of my $100 coupon so far, so I figured I had room to play a little.

More New Shirts

Creativity was still coming in to play when it came to new t-shirt designs, but all of that creativity wasn't coming from me. I did come up with "[that's my baby's lunch your staring at](#)" to add to the site, but I also stumbled across a site that mentioned a group of doctors that referred to extended breastfeeders as "nipple nazis." Seemed like a good term to claim as our own, so I added a new "[Nipple Nazi](#)" shirt to the mix as well.

The Frustration with Bad Analytics

While [eXTReMe Tracking](#) was a serviceable solution when it came to "free" I was really feeling the frustration of not being able to use good analytics for my site. I had tried to sign up for [Google Analytics](#) on the day they launched their free

service, but found that you couldn't sign up for it unless you had your own domain name. That was part of what prompted the rush job on getting TheLactivist.com online. Unfortunately, the day that I finally got the site up, Google shut down new applications for Google Analytics.

I must admit that there were quite a few times that I eyed the ClickTracks icon sitting on my desk with quite a bit of temptation. As any Search Engine Guide reader knows, I'm a big fan of the ClickTracks program and have used it for client work for several years. Unfortunately, using it would have broken the rules of my experiment (and I didn't own a hosted version anyway) so I had to continue to plunk through the limited results given to me by eXTReMe Tracking.

Not only was day fifteen leaving me frustrated with my inability to track my AdWords campaign on my own to see if it really was creating conversions, it also left me with about 30 visitors that I could see coming in via Yahoo!'s email program. That's right, 30 visitors, nearly twenty percent of the day's traffic was coming from an email and I had no idea what that email said. Maddening, simply maddening.

This experience definitely served as a highlight of just how important it is for small businesses to budget for analytics. One of the most important parts of online marketing is spending your money in the place that it will have the most impact. The problem is that without proper analytics, you have no way of knowing what has the most impact.

Another Experience with Customer Service

Earlier in the project I mentioned that I'd ordered one of my own shirts and that it had arrived misprinted. A friendly customer service operator had quickly apologized and promised to ship out a new product immediately. My second shipment arrived just two days later, leaving me pleasantly surprised. Until I opened the package. Unfortunately, in their haste to get the new product out quickly, they'd snagged the wrong size shirt off the shelf. Now I had a perfectly printed large that was unlikely to fit on my "extra-large" frame.

I made a second call to CafePress and ironically, got the exact same operator that I had spoken with the first time. He apologized and promised to give it another shot. When asked what to do with the shirt, he suggested that I simply donate it somewhere. That worked out well because I was actually headed down to the milk bank the next day. I figured that I could take it with me so that they could finally see a sample shirt and that I'd leave it behind for them to pass on to one of the other donors.

Giving it a Go on eBay

On day one of the project I mentioned that I'd considered an eBay shop as one of my business options. The problem with that was that eBay has start-up costs associated with it. However, by day fifteen, I had earned more than enough money to be able to afford the listing fee.

I headed over to eBay to look things over and ran a few sample searches to see if any similar products were being sold. I was able to find a few cute slogan shirts for babies, but didn't see any other pro breastfeeding shirts for adults. That made me a little leery as I would have thought someone else would have tried this type of product out by now. If they had and they weren't still selling, it might mean that there simply wasn't a market for it.

I decided that I could risk the $1.60 that my listing fee would cost me, so I went ahead and listed the Jr. Raglan version of the Eat at Mom's shirt. The "Eat at Mom's shirt" was my best seller, so I figured it was the most likely to attract a buyer on eBay. I went ahead and pulled a graphic and the product description from my CafePress store and put together a listing. I placed the item in Women's Clothing > Maternity > Nursing > Tops and gave it the title "Breastfeeding Clothes - Eat at Mom's Slogan Shirt. I used breastfeeding clothes because it was one of the phrases that received the most searches on traditional engines and I thought there was a good chance that that would carry over to eBay as well. I put my starting list price at $19.99 as that was the minimum amount that I could take and still turn a profit after the cost of my listing fees.

I made sure to include a note in my product description that listed the available colors and sizes and included the size chart from the CafePress store along with a note that said the sizes ran small. I also offered flat rate shipping costs based on what CafePress charges since I wouldn't have to handle the product myself. I set the listing for five days because I needed it to be short enough to be able to share the results in the series, but I also wanted it to be long enough to give people a chance to see it.

Day Sixteen

Coming up on day sixteen I learn that the fundamentals of search marketing are still important, even if you think you know what you are doing. I also set up a campaign with my free coupon for Yahoo! Search Marketing, debate over submitting myself to Fark and Slashdot, work on press releases, set up an account with Amazon's affiliate program, make a controversial blog post and remember that I actually have tracking on my blog as well. (Oh yes, then I collapse from exhaustion...)

Day 16 - Yahoo! Search Marketing Enters the Game, I Debate About Self Promotion and Amazon Gets a Chance

More than two weeks into The Lactivist experiment things were running pretty smoothly. That said, there was still plenty of room for improvement. To that end, I got down to business trying to come up with a plan for a public relations move, launched a new pay-per-click campaign with Yahoo! Search Marketing and decided to give Amazon's notoriously low-paying affiliate program a chance.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 2939 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 568 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $253.89
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $52.00
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $53.25
- Total AdSense Revenue: $40.24
- Total Chitika Revenue: $1.83
- Total Revenue: $147.32

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $1.60
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- Total Business Expenses: $15.56

- Total Profit: $131.76

Adding Yahoo! Search Marketing to the mix for The Lactivist seemed like a no brainier after I found a $100 coupon to get me started. After all, I could fork over the $5 fee required to launch the account knowing that $100 would likely cover me for at least a month or two on the cost per click end of things. Since I wasn't having much luck gaining natural search rankings with Yahoo! (or at least wasn't getting any traffic from them) I figured I might as well try putting my product front and center on their engine to see what happened.

I also wanted to run Yahoo! head to head with Google since I knew that Yahoo! demographics skewed more toward the mom crowd that I was shooting for. As I mentioned on day fifteen, Google had yet to deliver a single buyer to my site, but I wasn't quite ready to give up on pay-per-click advertising for this venture.

I already knew which phrases I wanted to target since I'd done some research and updated my Google AdWords campaign so I simply took my list from Google and added on a few suggestions that Yahoo! made to go with them. I also looked over my existing AdWords ads to see which messages were generating the best click thru rates and carried those themes over to my Yahoo! ads.

One of the great things about a Yahoo! Search Marketing campaign is that you've got a lot more space to work with. Those extra characters can give advertisers a little more freedom to play with their marketing message though I consider it a trade off for the inability to run multiple ad messages for each campaign.

My personal experience with Yahoo! Search Marketing ads is that forming some type of question with your ad title can have significant impacts on click-thru rates. For example, the ad title "Looking to Show Your Support for Breastfeeding?" is likely to draw more clicks than the ad title "Support Breastfeeding." The extra space in the ad description also serves advertisers well, but it's important to use this space wisely. While Yahoo! will display the full ad description for the top few listings on their engine, the lower listings and those that appear on some partner sites cut off after a certain number of characters. That's why it's a good idea to write your ad two different ways.

The first ad should be short enough to get your point across no matter how Yahoo! or its partner sites display your ad. The second version of the ad should include additional text that makes use of those extra characters to add more selling power to your ad. It's important to order your ad description text properly so that you avoid having your ad cut in the middle of your message.

Once I'd submitted all of my keyword phrases and ad text, I settled in to wait on a response. Since Yahoo! Search Marketing ads have to go through an approval process before being listed, I knew that I'd need to wait anywhere from a few hours to a few days to see my ads show up.

Search Engine Basics Bite Me in the Butt

There are some very basic principles in search engine marketing that are among the first things you learn when reading up about optimizing your site. One of these principles is creating a unique title tag for every single page of your site. I know this, I teach this, and yet, I still screwed it up. I built [The Lactivist site](#) as a rush job to try and get it up in time to snag myself a free Google Analytics account and to have someplace to point people to when I started sending out press releases.

I didn't bother to put any title tags on the site at that time because I never dreamed that it would get indexed by Google in less than a week.

It did.

I had planned to go back and properly optimize the site a few days further into the project, but as often happens with small business owners, I got sidetracked doing anything and everything else that had to be taken care of and I completely forgot about it. Needless to say, when I was running some checks on a few keywords that were driving traffic to the [Lactivist Blog](#) and the [Lactivist Store](#), I was surprised to find the actual Lactivist site gathering some rankings of its own. Granted, these rankings were for non-competitive phrases, but considering that I hadn't even added a title tag, that wasn't too shabby.

So, on day sixteen, with a red mark on my forehead and a sore hand, I took five minutes to add unique title tags to each page of the Lactivist site. Five minutes. Five minutes that could have helped produce a nice trickle of traffic if I'd only taken the time to do it when I first built the site. Chalk it up to another lesson learned the hard way.

Back to the Blog

Day sixteen of the project also saw me making my first true rant on the Lactivist Blog. One of my ongoing frustrations, and one of the things that pushed me into breastfeeding advocacy was where so many of my fellow conservatives fell on the issue publicly. My home state of Ohio had just passed a bill through it's legislature to give Ohio mother's the legal right to breastfeed in any public location that they themselves have the right to be. During the debate however, several conservative Republicans made spectacles of themselves by going on tirades about how women needed to cover themselves up and that breastfeeding in public was indecent. One went so far as to claim that it was a health hazard because a nursing mom might leak some of her milk on the floor and cause someone to slip.

I'd also recently run into some Christians in online forums that were vehemently opposed to breastfeeding in public claiming that it was immoral and even a sin. As a charismatic evangelical, that viewpoint frustrated me to no end. Needing a place to go on a rant and knowing that a controversial topic like this one was sure to be a good traffic driver, I headed off to do some research and put together a very lengthy blog post aimed to provoke debate and contemplation about the issue by pointing out why I believe [Christians should support breastfeeding in public](#).

While making the post I realized that it would be awfully nice to be able to know what types of phrases my blog posts were getting traffic from. So, I decided to install eXTReMe Tracker on my blog as well. The problem was, when I went to place the tracking code in my Blogger template I realized that I'd already put tracking in place. I made a mental note that I needed to get more sleep and then celebrated that I already had more than a week's worth of data to look at.

I was surprised to see that traffic to my blog was actually coming more from other blogs than it was from Search Engine Guide or industry links to the project. It seems that many of the women from one of the message boards that I frequent at BabyCenter had taken to reading the blog and several had even added it to their own blog rolls. I was seeing several visitors a day being referred from parenting blogs like Mama C-Ta, Officially a Mom, Bubbie Girl and Zozo's Mama.

Amazon.com Enters the Mix

Although I knew from talking to other search marketers that Amazon.com's affiliate program is notorious for low revenue shares and bad click-thru rates, I hadn't been all that impressed with the first two weeks of running Chitika either. I knew that part of my Chitika problem was that I still needed to do some testing of different ad sizes and different placements, but since I was running with limited time, I wanted to split my tests and add another option into the mix.

Amazon is one of the better known affiliate programs, so it was my logical choice to look into. I decided to leave the Chitika ads on the Lactivist Store and the Lactivist web site, but I switched them out in favor of Amazon's affiliate listings on the Lactivist blog. Why did I make those choices? For one, the only clicks that I'd had so far on Chitika had come from the listing that showed up on the Lactivist store, thus it made sense to leave it in place and think about testing some changes to the ad. Also, I had had little enough traffic to the Lactivist web site that I didn't think it was fair to pull the ads from there quite yet. Since the Lactivist blog was the lowest performing location for Chitika and since it was the most likely to attract the type of visitor that would be unfamiliar with Chitika, I decided to go ahead and try placing an Amazon ad there.

I considered hand-picking a few items to include in my ad, but the reality was that I simply didn't have time to do the testing needed to cycle through multiple products. Since Amazon knows what sells best, I trusted it to deliver a list of best-seller products to include in the skyscraper ad that I was placing into the template of my blog. I selected a generic baby category mostly because my first choice - feeding, simply had too many products designed for formula feeding mothers. Since the majority of my long-term audience is likely going to be breastfeeding advocates, it made sense to avoid those types of product listings.

Creating the code snippet for the Amazon listings and adding them to the blog template turned out to be the easiest integration that I'd had so far. In literally five minutes or less I signed up for Amazon's affiliate program, created a targeted ad, made the change to my template and had the new ad showing up just fine.

A Plan of Attack for Public Relations

Early on in the series, I wrote about how I'd been contact by Marc Cowlin, the PR Director for CafePress. Marc had been following the project and was interested in

working with me to try and promote it from the CafePress angle. His thought was to pitch the story to a news wire or to a few particular reporters from the angle of CafePress as an opportunity for low-cost online entrepreneurship. By day sixteen, I'd heard back from Marc that there were timing issues with trying to do this pitch around the holiday season. Reporters were focused on enough other stories right now that they simply weren't willing to pick up the idea and run with it from that angle. Understandable and an example that even a good idea presented by the right person isn't always going to fly if it's done at the wrong time.

I also mentioned earlier in the series that Karon Thackston, author of the "The Step-byStep Copywriting Course" had contacted me to offer her services with preparing press releases. This was a real boon to the project because as I've mentioned, I'm not a copywriter. I also had no prior experience writing press releases and I wasn't relishing the idea of wading through site after site learning how to do it. (This is why the barter system can be an entrepreneurs best friend...)

Karon and I have always been on the same page when it comes to press releases as part of an online marketing, and more specifically, a search marketing and link building technique. Unfortunately, many other small business owners are not on that page. This is why I need to stress that you can't simply put out a press release and expect it to do something for your business. Send a press release ONLY if you can come up with an angle that makes it newsworthy and interesting. (Note: the fact that you launched a web site is not interesting or newsworthy. The fact that you hired a new CIO is not interesting and newsworthy, unless that CIO is well known and newsworthy in his own right...Newsworthy is the type of thing that makes people go "cool" when they read your release. If you can't get that reaction out of someone, don't send the release.)

I knew that I already had two "newsworthy" directions that I could take this pitch and Karon suggested that we go ahead and run with both of them.

The first pitch was going to be aimed at the business market. The release was going to focus on the 30 day article side of the project and present it as an innovative information series that featured valuable information for anyone interested in learning more about online marketing. Karon set me to task figuring out who I wanted to approach directly with this version of the release. (because as she says..."I just write!"). I knew that my list was going to contain some biggies like Fast Company, Entrepreneur and Business First, but I also needed to find out which blogs and sites were bit hits with work at home moms, small business owners and new business start-ups. Once I had compiled my list, I'd craft a personalized email to every single site listing and send out the press release to them a bit before I put the release on the wires.

The second pitch was going to be aimed at the parenting market and was the one that I wanted to put some real effort into. This was the market that was likely to send customers to the site and it was most definitely the market that I wanted to reach out to with the message of the milk banks. I knew that I'd be targeting big name sites like iVillage and BabyCenter, but I also wanted to approach some of the popular magazines like Fit Pregnancy and Parenting. That left me debating whether or not I needed to invest some dollars into buying a few of my own shirts and putting together some type of media package or if I should do this on the cheap and rely solely on email.

We exchanged our last email of the day with me putting together several quotes on why I was doing this from both the business and personal side of things as well as sending along background information on both topics and some links to popular sites that were already linking in to the project.

I also spent a few minutes of the day pondering the idea of submitting my own site to Slashdot and to Fark, simply because I knew that being picked up by either could send enough traffic to cause my server to come crashing down around me. Both sites allowed users to submit their own sites or stories, but the fact that Slashdot required me to do so by logging in as an "anonymous coward" was enough to make me realize that I only wanted to get those links if they came naturally.

Day Seventeen

Coming up on day seventeen, I celebrate a bid that comes in on my eBay listing, spend some time contemplating the fear that comes into play when starting a business and make a long visit to the milk bank and return home with a heartbreaking, yet inspiring story to add to the Lactivist blog.

Day 17 - A Trip the Milk Bank, An Entrepreneur's Fear and a Renewed Determination

I've always believed that God knows exactly when you've reached your breaking point and will find some way to send someone or something into your life to help you get over that hump and get moving again. Day seventeen of the Lactivist project was the day that saw that belief tested...and proven. While struggling to deal with some fears and frustrations related to the project a simple trip to the milk bank gave me everything I needed to get moving one more time.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the [Small Business Ideas forum](#). You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 3076 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 611 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $253.89
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $52.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $55.70
- Total AdSense Revenue: $40.84
- Total Chitika Revenue: $1.97
- Total Revenue: $150.51

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $1.60
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- Total Business Expenses: $15.56

- Total Profit: $134.95

The Fear of Failure

I've never launched a business before. I've worked at my share of start-ups (eight of them to be exact), but the risk was never really mine. I was there as part of a team and someone else was shouldering the responsibility of being that ultimate decision maker. I also knew from those experiences that the majority of business start-ups never make it past the first year. (Seven of the eight are now closed for business.) As someone with absolutely no experience running a businesses, I was simply hoping to survive through thirty days.

To be honest with you, day seventeen saw me fighting fear from every direction. From the first day I launched the project, I knew that I was taking a big risk on Search Engine Guide's behalf. I was going to be devoting most of my time over

the next month to working on this article series rather than reporting on the industry. That meant that if this series didn't go over well with our readers that I was going to have a lot of making up to do to both our readers and my publisher. As a resource site that people turn to for advice and information about marketing their business online, I was really putting our reputation on the line by opening up and sharing both the successes and the failures of my own marketing abilities. This wasn't going to be a showcase where I shared only the ideas that flew, my work was going to be out there for everyone to pick apart and criticize and even point to if the experiment flopped. That's a big chance for a site like Search Engine Guide to take.

Seventeen days in, I still wasn't quite sure what the ultimate impact would be on our reputation and I was starting to get a little nervous. I was also still more than a little upset at the fact that my pay-per-click campaign appeared to be failing miserably. This was one of the things that I had feared the most when I started the project...that my failures would show up in the area that I was supposed to be an expert on...search marketing.

Finally, I had taken some criticism in the forums and from some blog posters that claimed the project wasn't' legitimate because I had too large of a network and was gaining too many links for it to "count." This was probably the hardest criticism of all to deal with because I'd taken pains to set-up my own rules for this experiment so that I was coming as close as possible to replicating reality. In fact, I'd probably gone overboard in that I only ever asked for a single link from a marketing site and relied on everyone else to pick up the story themselves. If I'd been a regular start up, I would have been selling my story to anyone that would listen.

As I sat at my laptop contemplating the project I realized that I was looking at this all wrong. I realized that every one of those things that I'd been letting drag me down was actually a boon to the project. Why? Because I was facing the exact same thing that every entrepreneur faced: fear. Launching a business is not without risk, there's simply no way around it. That meant that pretty much anyone reading my site and trying to learn something to improve their own business had (or would) at some point dealt with the exact same fears I was dealing with.

People setup pay-per-click campaigns that fail. It happens all the time. People have to listen to criticism from other people about the ways that they run their businesses. People have to face the fact that they could fall flat on their faces and make a fool of themselves. They have to face failure...and then they have to move on. I knew that I was capable of running successful pay-per-click campaigns, I knew that my experiment was legitimate and I knew from the emails that were pouring into my inbox that Search Engine Guide readers were thrilled with the series.

In fact, day seventeen saw the delivery of an email that included this snippet:

Oh, and you may be pleased to hear that virtually the first thing my colleague says to me when he comes into the office is 'is the next one up yet?', asking about your blog. Recently, when you had a few days gap with no blog, he was thoroughly convinced you'd been kidnapped and that we'd have to mount a heroic rescue. I was quite looking forward to it, but reading your blog made up for the disappointment when you reappeared. :D

That email gave me an enormous boost. It sort of gave me a Sally-Fields-at-the-Oscar's-moment as I realized that people were enjoying the series and that what I was doing was working on at least some level. That's when I realized that it was just important to share the issue of fear with readers as it was to share tips on blogging, viral marketing and organic search.

Despite that renewed vigor, I was still upset with the fact that I'd sold just two milk banking shirts, which meant just $4.00 had been logged for the milk bank. Since the milk bank was pretty much what sparked the whole project, I felt like I needed to be doing something more.

A Trip to the Milk Bank

Elnora had turned a year old a few weeks prior to day seventeen, which meant that I could no longer donate any milk that I pumped. I'd decided that it was time to wean myself from the pump anyway, so that was ok with me. I still had about 200 ounces of milk for the bank in my freezer though, so I thought it was as good a day as any to make a trip down to the milk bank to drop the milk off.

If I needed any reassurance about what I was doing, that trip provided it. The ladies at the bank made me feel like a movie star when I stopped down. They raved over the shirts, they loved the project idea and they were bubbling over with excitement at the possibilities. From their perspective, whether the project raised money or not, I was helping spread awareness and I was giving them the chance to have someone else create products that they could buy and use for their own fundraising.

It turns out that they had already been talking to lactation consultants, La Leche League leaders and even the other milk banks to see who else might be interested in working with me. I had told them that I was more than happy to sell, at cost, to any other milk bank and would happily customize products with their own names and logos as well. As it turns out, there was lots of interest. I spent more than an hour talking to them about the project, brainstorming new ideas and figuring out how we might approach the milk banking association in the UK to see if they would also be interested in fundraising shirts.

I toured the bank again and was absolutely floored to see that the walk-in-freezers that were almost empty when the bank first opened were now lined floor to ceiling with processed milk ready for shipping. Neatly labeled shelves showed

which bottles of milk were 20 calorie milk, which were 29 calorie and every level in between. (Donor milk is tested for calorie and nutrition count and separated so that babies can receive the milk best suited for them...formula has 20 calories an ounce, but some breast milk has up to 29 calories which means fragile babies can get so much more nutrition from the same amount of feeding if they are on high-calorie donor milk.)

I also spent quite a bit of time listening to stories about donor mothers and the babies that were receiving the milk from the bank. Truth be told, this is the real reason that I can't drag myself away from the milk bank when I go to visit. I am simply fascinated by these stories. From the two year old girl suffering from a rare degenerative disease that had her down to just 16 pounds (but who suddenly started gaining when they put her on donor milk) to the tiniest NICU babies that receive donor milk to help protect them from NEC, these stories bring tears to my eyes. This was what my business was all about, this was what made me realize that the Lactivist project went beyond an article series.

I returned home with a story from one of the early donor moms to post on my blog. That story drew more visitors than any other post I've made to this day. It's well worth taking a few minutes to read. Check out: "A Donor Mom's Story from the Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio."

Getting Back to Work

Apart from answering some emails, checking in at each of the sites and making a blog post, I hadn't gotten much done on day seventeen. I realized later that there may have been a reason for that. It's fine and dandy to run an article series that shares tips and ideas about marketing your business, but maybe there was a reason to take a day from the project and write an article about **facing** your business.

Don't let the naysayers get you down. Don't let fear of failure get you down. Everyone falls, everyone fails. It's what you take away from the experience and how quickly you get back on the horse that determines whether or not you'll eventually make a go of it.

Day Eighteen

Coming up on day eighteen, I get back to work with a slew of new shirt ideas, some community marketing and a very exciting email that could pave the way toward enormous success with the upcoming public relations campaign.

Day 18 - Another Round of Shirt Ideas, Building Credibility in the Community and a Reader Lends a Hand

While I didn't have a lot of free time to spend on The Lactivist project on day eighteen, I was still running on some adrenaline from my visit to the milk bank the day before. That seemed to be just what I needed to spark some creativity for new shirt ideas. It also gave me cause to spend some time networking on one of the popular parenting sites. The biggest boon on day eighteen though came from a note from a Search Engine Guide reader.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 3241 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 663 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $253.89
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $52.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $53.70
- Total AdSense Revenue: $41.29
- Total Chitika Revenue: $2.04
- Total Revenue: $149.03

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $1.60
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- Total Business Expenses: $15.56

- Total Profit: $133.47

Shirt Ideas Come From Everywhere

Day eighteen saw me adding five new shirts to The Lactivist web site. I was still finding myself brainstorming about shirt ideas almost non-stop and it seemed that some of my readers were running into the same problem.

An email came in from Danny Sullivan with some ideas based on Little Britain, a popular sketch comedy show in the UK. Apparently one of the better-known sketches revolves around a man and his girlfriend and the man's relationship with his mother. During the girlfriend's first trip home to meet his family, he ends up asking his mother for "bitty." After awhile, she finally gives in and starts to nurse him right there in the living room. The sketch is hysterical in that odd, British sort of way, and apparently the British get a big kick out of "bitty."

So, I added "[Get Your Bitty!](#) for adults and "[Not Bitty Later, Bitty Now](#)" shirts for kids.

The news that The Lactivist was going to be featured in the Pimp My Site panel at SES also inspired a little creativity, so I added a shirt that reads "[Pump Juice](#)" to the pumping moms category. Since my mind was already thinking in that light, I went ahead and threw up a shirt that would let me start targeting moms that tandem nurse as well. Thus, "[My Milkshake Feeds All the Kids in the Yard](#)" was added to the mix. Finally, one of the women in a parenting forum that I belong to asked if I'd create a shirt that said "[My baby thinks I'm Boobylicious](#)." Who am I to disappoint?

Becoming Part of the Community

I've written a lot during this series about the importance of viral marketing when you are trying to market something on a budget. The problem that most companies have is figuring out how to get a viral marketing campaign going. After all, just sitting around waiting for someone to talk about your product, no matter how cool it is, isn't the best marketing plan. Chances are that you'll need to do something to try and spark a viral marketing campaign.

That's where building credibility through community involvement is essential. There are discussion forums out there for almost any topic imaginable. From parenting to search marketing to muscle cars, chances are high that if there's more than a few people interested in it, they've managed to find each other online to spark up a conversation. Getting involved in these communities is a great way to not only keep tabs on the interests of your target audience, but to help them find out that you, and your products exist.

The key here is credibility. That can't be stressed enough. As someone that administrated an enormous discussion forum for several years I can tell you that there is no end of companies seeking to register at every forum on the planet to tout their products. This simply doesn't fly. In fact, it's a great way to generate negative publicity among your target audience. Instead, you need to take the time to read forum rules, familiarize yourself with the tone and conversation styles of the forum and slowly ease in to making posts.

Making use of signature files once you've become a recognized member of a forum is one way to spread the word, but even just plugging your site into your user profile can result in quite a bit of interest if you are making posts that catch people's eye. An example of this is my participation at BabyCenter. I'd spent more than a year participating on a regular basis in their "feeding choices" and "childbirth choices" debate board and most of the regular posters knew me fairly well. They were familiar with my involvement as a milk donor and knew about my experiences exclusively pumping. I'd spent a year helping answer questions from

new posters and taking part in conversations and debates about a variety of topics.

In other words, I'd invested a great deal of time and effort into building credibility. That's why I was able to make a post asking for some feedback about my product line without being tagged as a spammer. That first post, which looked for feedback about a potential shirt idea drove quite a bit of traffic to The Lactivist Store. A second thread, just this past week also ended up driving traffic to the site when another poster pointed to my blog.

The beauty of this community was that I wasn't just driving traffic to my site. I was participating in conversation with other forum members because I enjoyed the community and because I enjoyed sharing stories and experiences with them. The traffic and interest in the products was a side benefit. Customers are not stupid...they know when they are being played. Taking advantage of communities as a marketing and public relations move is an important part of any campaign, but you have to devote considerable time and effort to doing it right.

Hoping for a Miracle

The biggest news of day eighteen came when Vacation Mamma, a member of the Small Business Brief forums wrote to tell me that Dr. Sears's son was her children's pediatrician. (For those not into the natural parenting world, Dr. Sears is sort of the Danny Sullivan of pediatrics.) She had told Dr. Sears about the project while in the office with one of her children and he was interested in learning more. He gave her his email address to pass on to me and asked me to get in touch with him with more information about the project. I fired off an email and said a prayer.

Day Nineteen

Coming up on day nineteen I get a chance to look over the first drafts for the two press releases that we're working on and find out that there's a third party program that lets you integrate CafePress store content directly into your own domain. I also get an email from my favorite public relations guru with offers of help on a couple different levels.

Day 19 - Moms Add the Lactivist to Their Christmas Lists, Press Releases Take Work and I Discover a Solution to My Top Problem

After the emotional ups and downs of day eighteen, it was great to get back to doing actual work on The Lactivist project. I was still finding some great incoming links as moms started spreading the word about my shirts and I had some great news come in regarding my press releases, my analytics program and my ongoing frustration with integrating my CafePress content into the Lactivist web site.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 3568 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 740 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $253.89
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $52.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $55.70
- Total AdSense Revenue: $46.19
- Total Chitika Revenue: $2.69
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $152.03

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- Total Business Expenses: $17.13

- Total Profit: $114.96

Search Engine Guide Readers Give Me a Boost

Apparently my heart-on-my-sleeve article for day eighteen got some Search Engine Guide readers a little concerned about me because on day nineteen my inbox was overflowing with messages of encouragement from readers. Unfortunately, I was quickly finding myself with so much email that it was getting difficult to respond to them all. As I'd noted in my earlier articles, my belief in online reputation management has always led me to live by the mantra that every email deserves a response, even if it takes a few days, but I was finding it hard to live by those words.

That said, getting notes that said things like "Your series and efforts are the best I've seen for educating small businesses and some computer techies on what it is all about in starting a business and working to use the web in doing so. It takes guts and effort, but have fun" and "I just wanted to let you know – I have been following the articles about Jennifer's site and I think it is great. I passed it around to a lot of people I know" were enough to give me yet another boost of energy. It would take time, but one way or another I'd find a way to get an email back to each of those readers.

That's an essential point to remember...your customers are contacting you for a reason. Whether it's to pay a compliment or to take you to task, you need to make sure that someone is responding to them. If you're overwhelmed with feedback then you are either doing something very wrong and need to correct it, or you are doing something very right and it's time to hire some help.

Targeted Incoming Links are Great!

I was stilling seeing plenty of new sites showing up in my referrer logs and was exciting to see that many were still starting to pile up from sites outside of the industry. I saw several visitors come in from the [Making it up blog](#) after a reader noted that I'd spotted her post on a feminist forum. I was also glad to see traffic coming in from a bit of Lactivist love on the birth boards over at [PregnancyWeekly](#). As a regular visitor to parenting sites I knew how much potential there was for traffic from a good mention on a birth board. In fact, that type of link was the exact kind that I was hoping for when I started pushing for viral marketing.

Reviewing Press Releases

On day nineteen I had an email come in from Karon Thackston that had the first drafts of the press releases that we were going to be distributing online via some of the wire services. Karon was working on helping me craft optimized press releases that would not only get our message across, but that would also rank well for some of my most important keyword phrases. We'd been waiting on some quotes to come in from the director of the Mothers Milk Bank of Ohio and from the email I'd sent to Dr. Sears so that we could finish the releases off.

Unfortunately I'd never heard back from Dr. Sears, so we decided that we needed to move forward with what we did have to work with. I spent some time reading through the releases and making some notes about wording and the message so that I could make some edits and send them back to Karon for her review. I'd also found out that in return for using The Lactivist as a case study at the Pimp My Site panel at Search Engine Strategies Chicago, PRWeb was going to be donating their services to send our releases out across their wire. This would take care of online press release tracking, but I still needed to come up with a plan of action for my offline push.

That's when an email arrived from Amy Hooker, the PR genius behind [maven communications](). Those outside of the industry might not be familiar with Amy's skills as public relations guru, but those within the industry recognize her from the work she's done to get ClickTracks front and center in the minds of industry writers. (We're talking about someone that got ClickTracks 4 in front of [2 million potential buyers]() without spending a cent on print advertising.) Amy, a work at home mom herself, offered to help me put together a pitch of The Lactivist project to pregnancy and parenting sites. Needless to say, I jumped at the chance and thanked my lucky stars that there are people out there that believe in this project and wanted to help.

eBay Disappoints

Earlier in the project I'd listed "Eat at Mom's" on eBay with the hopes that I might discover a new outlet for sales. My auction closed on day nineteen and though I was initially thrilled to find that I'd received three bids, the math quickly showed that my experiment was a failure. While I'd calculated the cost of a listing fee and the percentage of sale on my item into the margins, I'd failed to figure out what PayPal would charge me to handle the transaction. Thus, when I added up the $2.15 spend on my eBay listing and the $1.02 charged by PayPal for accepting payment, I realized that I'd spent $3.17 to make a $3.00 profit on my shirt. That left me in the hole by seventeen cents.

I realized that I could try selling a product that had a higher margin, or increasing my starting price, but the reality was that when I factored in listing fees and PayPal fees, I would end up having to charge as much, or more, as I did on my actual store to turn a profit. It was unlikely that someone would pay more for the shirt on eBay than they would at my store, so I chalked it up to a lesson learned and discontinued plans to become an eBay power seller.

A Solution Presents Itself

One of the problems that I was quickly running into was the management of links, referrers and analytics for three separate domains. While setting up my blog and store on existing domains was proving to be beneficial when it came to quick search rankings and traffic, it was a bit of a nightmare to manage. I knew that at some point, I was going to have to figure out a solution that would bring everything in under one umbrella domain, but I hadn't figured out how to do this yet.

I was also realizing that as incoming links got built to the sites, I was missing opportunities to have those links pointing to thelactivist.com because the blog content and store content simply couldn't be found there. I knew how to integrate my Blogger content, though I hadn't had time to do it, but integrating my CafePress content had been an ongoing brain bender for me.

Until Dan Mowry stepped up to the plate. Dan had emailed me earlier in the project to offer up his services as a graphic designer but due to time constraints on both sides we really hadn't had much chance to come up with a plan of action yet. In the meantime, I'd visited Dan's site, TheTShirtZone to look at his designs and noticed that I could shop his store from his domain name. I dropped him an email and asked if he had any input on how he got that setup.

His response was that there is a third-party solution called cpshop that allows you to fully integrate CafePress content into your own domain. This was news to me. What made it even better news was the fact that it cost just $19.77! The perfect price for a shoe-string entrepreneur like myself. The developer of cpshop also does some work for the CafePress site itself and puts out updates to cpshop whenever there's a chance in the CafePress system that it needs to accommodate.

The program simply required a server that had both Perl and CGI capabilities and would run on Linux/Unix/Windows or even MacOS servers. Installation was available for another $13.00 if I couldn't figure it out myself, so I figured it was probably a pretty fail safe investment. Thus, day nineteen saw me making my biggest investment in the business to date. I filled out the form to purchase online and sat back to await the email that would give me the address that I could download it from. Unfortunately, I made the purchase after-hours and the email never did show up that day.

Day Twenty

Coming up on day twenty, I receive the code that lets me get started with cpshop integration, I get inundated with blog comments and the good folks over at ClickTracks offer up a solution to my analytics problems.

Day 20 - Blog Comments Roll in, New Milk Bank Shirts and Analytics Get Fun

Day twenty saw a rush of activity on the Lactivist Blog; comments from readers simply poured in. At the same time, I put up two new milk bank shirts and received not only a generous offer to solve my site analytics problem, but also personalized help getting the solution in place.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 3746 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 781 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $296.86
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $62.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $57.59
- Total AdSense Revenue: $47.24
- Total Chitika Revenue: $2.69
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $172.52

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- Total Business Expenses: $36.90

- Total Profit: $135.62

Blog Comments

Day twenty must have been the day that the Lactivist blog caught some folks attention because all of a sudden, I found myself buried in reader comments awaiting approval. I'd had comments come in since the site went live, but usually I saw one come in every day or so. Day twenty saw my inbox flooded with more than a dozen comments awaiting my approval.

It's important to note that the comments for my blog are all set to pre-moderation. While that means that people might need to wait a bit to see their comments added to the site, it also helps take care of blog spam issues. Blog spam basically shows up when humans or computer programs visit blogs and leave

comments with a URL in them for the sole purpose of gaining a new incoming link to a site and increasing search rankings. These comments and links are seldom on topic and usually do nothing more for a blog owner than clutter up their content.

Most blog programs, Blogger included, allow authors to set their blog comments to pre-moderation. That means that no blog comments will be posted without being approved by the blog owner. This might take a bit more time in terms of getting content up, but it saves plenty of time in cleaning out junk.

The interaction going on at the Lactivist blog was encouraging because part of my online marketing plan relied heavily on building a community atmosphere that encouraged repeat visitors. The fact that my readers were taking the time to respond to my posts showed that they were becoming vested in the site, which made them more likely to return down the line. Since the blog is occasionally used to to plug new products or to promote existing products, repeat visits will be vital to my long-term marketing goals.

Viral Marketing Still at Work

Day twenty was also a good day for finding new links coming in to the site. The thirty day project got picked up on [Online Marketing Focus by Webdepart](#), [Not Just Code](#), [FreshYields](#) and [The Obligatory Blog](#). I also came across some older blog posts by [Rob Syvertsen](#), [The Emerging Standard blog](#), and [The Rabbit House](#). The most entertaining blog post of the entire series though came from Canadian Andrew Goodman whose timing was off, but whose [choice of photos was hysterical](#).

New Milk Bank Shirts

Day twenty also saw me adding a few more shirts to the [Milk Bank collection](#). I'd had repeated requests for more shirts that got the human milk bank advocacy message across with humor, but that could be worn by non-donors. On my own, I came up with a new one that reads "[Does your cup runneth over?](#)" and got that one online. Then I read a blog comment from a reader that suggested I add "[Take These to the Bank!](#)." That one struck me as funny because I had proposed that exact shirt to some friends during the first week of the campaign and they all looked at me like I was nuts.

When a reader suggested it, I had to laugh and pointed out to Robert that I wasn't the only one with a strange sense of humor. The kicker was that when I told him the shirt idea this time, he thought it was funny. (Just like a man. Not funny when you come up with it the first time, but let someone else suggest it and suddenly they're a genius.) Since the shirt idea was getting laughs this time around, I went ahead and added it as well.

On another level, I was still working with Dan Mowry of TheTShirtZone on some design ideas for milk bank shirts. There had been some interest from the milk banks in developing a shirt that could be used to promote all of the North American milk banks. My idea was to create a concert style tee that had a design on the front that featured a drop of milk with a baby cradled inside and the text "The Saving Lives One Drop at a Time Tour." I then planned to setup the back of the shirt for a "North American Tour" where I could list all of the cities that had milk banks on the left and the date they were opened on the right.

Analytics Finally Get Fun!

A few days back I commented in one of my articles about my frustration with the limited analytics that I'd been stuck with. I was waiting for Google Analytics to open up their free accounts again, but in the meantime, I didn't have a lot to work with. The good folks over at ClickTracks saw my article and contacted me to offer up their services to help me get The Lactivist in better shape to analyze.

The timing on this was perfect as I was already at the Search Engine Strategies show in Chicago. Since ClickTracks was exhibiting there, CEO John Marshall spent some time with me getting ClickTracks Pro Hosted set up. The beautiful thing about using the hosted version was that ClickTracks would be able to track my traffic across all three sites.

With cheap analytics like I had been using, I was losing referral information as people crossed sites. For instance, I could tell that someone came into the Lactivist blog by typing "breastfeeding in public" into Google, but if they linked from the blog to the store, I lost that referrer information and had no way of knowing if they ended up looking at, or purchasing products. With ClickTracks, I could setup one set of data that tracked all three domain names as if they were part of the same site. This was going to open up worlds of new data for me.

Admittedly, the free use of the ClickTracks Pro Hosted service booted me out of the whole "shoestring entrepreneur package" as the service starts at about $180 a month. That said, ClickTracks also offers small business level analytics at more affordable prices (about $50 a month) and gives a credit to businesses that wish to upgrade their service over time. That means that even small businesses should be able to afford ClickTracks once they start to become profitable.

By the end of the day, I already had some data showing up in my ClickTracks account. A great example of that was when I noticed in the "What's Changed" report that traffic from the Making it up blog had suddenly increased dramatically. I followed the link and found that my new Little Britain inspired "bitty shirts" were causing a bit of a stir. Since keeping tabs on what folks say about your company is a vital part of online reputation management, I responded and bookmarked the page to keep tabs on what public opinion is.

My new analytics were working. Finally, I had enough data to be dangerous. ;)

Day Twenty-One

Coming up on day twenty one, I get a chance to not only read over more press release information but also to start talking strategy in terms of when and where to pitch the story. I also get half a dozen new shirts posted and talk Robert into helping me get cpshop set up on the server and then spend ages getting it to look good.

Day 21 - Getting CafePress Integrated with My Site, Reviewing Media Lists and Loads of New Shirts

The bulk of day twenty-one was spent looking at code and admin pages and trying to get my CafePress content to look just right on the Lactivist web site. Along with that, I spent some time reviewing media lists for our upcoming public relations blitz, did a little more work with ClickTracks and uploaded half a dozen new shirts.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 4208 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 956 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $296.86
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $71.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $69.89
- Total AdSense Revenue: $54.72
- Total Chitika Revenue: $2.69
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $201.30

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- Total Business Expenses: $36.90

- Total Profit: $164.40

Chicago Spans Creativity

There must be something about Chicago that inspires creativity because day twenty-one saw me coming up with six new shirts in a matter of about ten minutes. I literally had to grab a post-it note while blow-drying my hair to get them all jotted down before they flew right back out of my head. The best part of this spark was that it led the creation of two new product lines; one for tandem nursing moms and one for breastfeeding on demand.

Both of these topics are popular among moms that spend time discussing breastfeeding in online forums, so I knew that there would be some interest in

them. For tandem nursing I added an "[i share!]" shirt with the milk bank text removed, a "[two breasts, no waiting]" shirt for moms and a "[mommy has two for a reason]" shirt for children. For breastfeeding on demand I added "[my baby gets it fresh]" and "[self-serve]." Finally, I added another shirt to the breastfeeding in public section that reads "[I'm not playing peek-a-boob, I'm just trying to feed my child]."

Preparing for our Public Relations Blitz

By day twenty-one, I'd received the first press releases from Karon Thackston of [Marketing Words]. I'd read them over and could tell that they would work really well for online news releases as Karon's specialty is SEO copywriting. That means that the releases were well optimized for my targeted keywords and were likely to show up really well in the search results.

For online press releases that you plan to submit to news engines as a traffic source, it's essential to use good solid keyword phrases to help releases rank well in the search results and to get them to show up in the news alerts that journalists set up. For example, I have Google news alerts setup for a variety of search terms so that breaking search news gets delivered right to my inbox. Karon's releases made use of my keywords by using them in the title:

A Passion for Human Milk Banks Spawns Fundraising Site - Raising National Awareness of Human Milk Banks is Driving Force

The content of the release was also optimized for the keyword phrases that I was planning to target. For example, Karon wove all three of my target phrases into a paragraph that promoted the unique slogans of the shirts:

"Some of the slogans printed on the t-shirts include, "Modern Day Wet Nurse," "I Share," "Express Yourself" and "My Kid's No Weaner." The slogans are designed to increase awareness of extended breastfeeding, breastfeeding in public and human milk banks."

On the offline side of things, Amy Hooker from maven communications had also sent me over a starting list of magazines, newspapers, web sites and blogs that we would want to consider pitching to. My job was to go through the list, review each site or magazine and then rank them according to how much of a fit they were for our pitch. For instance, sites like [American Baby], [Blogging Baby] and [Mothering] were obvious fits for the upcoming pitch, while publications like [College Parent Magazine] and [Parents News UK] weren't. Finding fits isn't always on the PR exec either, Amy suggested that I go out and do my own digging to make sure there weren't some essential sites that hadn't made it on to her initial list.

Since I already keep pretty good tab on the sites that talk about breastfeeding, I was able to add several sites to the list including [KellyMom](#) and [Breastfeeding.com](#). It took several hours, but I finally made it through all of the sites on Amy's list along with my own research. I ranked each site from 1 to 10 with 10 being the most important to target and sent it back to Amy so that we could make further plans.

Getting CafePress Integrated with TheLactivist.com

On day nineteen I'd discovered that a third party program named [cpshop](#) had been created by a fellow named [Marty McClowsky](#) that allowed CafePress shop owners to fully integrate their store content with their own URL. All I needed to do was install a PERL and CGI script onto my server and then properly call the content into a template using some special tags. I had figured that it couldn't be very difficult to install because Marty was charging just $13 to do the installation himself.

The lesson that I learned here is that just because someone that created a script can install it quickly doesn't mean that everyone else can. Despite my best efforts, I simply could not do anything more than simply upload the scripts and watch my template page break time and time again.

This is why the ability to sweet talk (ok, beg) your more tech savvy friends into helping you out is a vital part of running an online business. As I've noted before, I struggle quite a bit with hosting and tech issues, I'm really more of a marketing type. I know my strengths, I work on my weaknesses, but ultimately, I sometimes have to ask for help. (Remember, no one starts and runs a business entirely on their own, everyone gets a little help from somewhere, even if it's just having someone to bounce ideas off of.) That's why I asked Robert to see if he could help me figure out the problem.

Of course Robert, the wonder-geek had the script up and running in about ten minutes. As it turns out, getting the script installed wasn't the hardest part of the integration, it was getting the template up and running. It's not so much that creating a template was difficult, it was more the fact that the software was designed for old-school table driven designs and I was running an XHTML search engine friendly tableless design. That meant that I needed to make some changes to the way Marty had the starter template coded, but eventually I figured out that simply changing the DOCTYPE statement at the start of the code would make things work.

Once I got that figured out, it was mostly a matter of putting shopping cart links and bread crumb trails in the right places and testing to make sure products could actually be added to shopper's carts. Finally, after a couple hours worth of uploading, previewing, code changing and starting over again, I could see my entire CafePress store contents on [TheLactivist.com](#) site.

Tracking More Referrals

Tracking my incoming traffic with ClickTracks was making things a bit more fun. I saw new links coming in from blogs like [Pixel Meadow](), [Jon Payne](), [Oren Media](), [Spear's Grotto]() and another post from a [foreign blog]().

Day Twenty-Two

Coming up on day twenty-two, I don't get much work done but I do get quite a bit of feedback from readers. Some of it good, some of it bad, all of it highlighting just how important it is to constantly think about building your personal network.

Day 22 - It's All About the Networking, but Not The Way You Think...

While day twenty-two didn't involve a lot of actual work on The Lactivist site, it did keep me hopping with discussions via forums, email and blogs. I'd been trying to stay on top of things for online reputation management purposes, but on day twenty-two, I realized that things might be going a bit further than that.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 4512 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 956 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $338.74
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $74.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $72.34
- Total AdSense Revenue: $59.26
- Total Chitika Revenue: $3.23
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $211.83

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $4.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- Total Business Expenses: $36.90

- Total Profit: $174.93

Online Reputation Management

I've written in past articles about how important it is to have a plan for online reputation management. Companies need to be aware of what bloggers, journalists and the public are saying about them so that they can address both positive and negative feelings about their products, services or staff. That may mean issuing a statement to correct a misconception, it may mean participating in a discussion to share their side of the story, or it may mean getting a legal team involved for big issues.

On the other hand, the feedback and comments could be positive, making the task a lot more pleasant. Finding someone that has written a glowing review

about your company can be a real morale booster and can serve to help lessen the impact of the critics that show up now and then. Taking the time to get in touch with these folks to say thank you not only serves you well in the good-karma department, it also encourages them to continue to say good things about you.

It's those exact reasons that made me decide early on in the project that I needed to spend a great deal of my time finding out exactly who was talking about the project and then responding to them appropriately. In many cases, that has meant dropping an email or leaving a comment on someone's site to say thank you. In other cases, it has meant addressing a critic or responding to an email from an unhappy reader. Sometimes it simply means joining up at a new forum to take a look at what folks are saying about things and then going on my merry way.

What I didn't expect was how much of a personal impact tracking this information would have on me. I suppose that's why I think it's essential to let people know that once they delve into online reputation management they'll not only find themselves addicted to it, but they'll also find themselves taking to heart what people say about them.

Luckily for me, the 95% of what I was hearing about the project was positive. Bloggers, discussion boards and emails had flooded me with comments about how many people were finding the series to be educational, entertaining and even inspiring. The other 5% was sometimes a little bit draining though. Some critics in discussion forums were repeatedly harping on the idea that the project wasn't' legitimate because I already knew too much about marketing and had too large of a personal network to be able to replicate what someone would really go through. I'd also received an email or two from people that were either offended by the content of the site, or by my sharing information about my personal beliefs.

In fact, on day twenty-two I received a pretty strongly worded email from a Search Engine Guide reader that was extremely upset over the fact that I'd admitted to being "conservative and god-believing". I was a little bummed to get the email because I'd never even dreamed of the fact that my readers might think less of me if I shared my own personal beliefs with them. I sat down to put together an email to send back to her explaining that I was sorry if she was offended by my personal beliefs but that I hoped she would still be able to learn something from the article series.

The amazing thing about the email was that despite the negativity about the project, it made an excellent point. What I really took away from the email was how frustrated the writer was about the trouble they were having promoting their own company. They pointed out that they'd had no help from any "good old boy network" or from companies offering free tools. They made it very clear that I

should appreciate all the help that other people were giving me because I clearly wouldn't be where I was without all that help.

In a lot of ways, that reader was right. But in a lot of other ways, they sort of missed the point.

Why Networking is Absolutely Essential to Building a Business

There's no arguing that I have an extensive network of contacts within the Search Marketing world. I have great contacts at companies like ClickTracks, Trellian, Wordtracker, Yahoo! and more. I know skilled copywriters, programmers, graphic designers and public relations execs. I can't deny that. But what I think some people fail to realize is that I wasn't born knowing those people. I had to build those relationships.

While I've been in the online marketing world for almost a decade now, I've only been involved in search marketing since about 2001. Like most of the people in this industry, I got started reading message boards and digesting every bit of information I could find. I became a regular poster at SearchEngineForums.com and was eventually asked to be a moderator. In time, I became the forum administrator and ended up applying for, and getting, the job of Web Search Guide at About.com. Because of those two positions, I was able to get press passes to the Search Engine Strategies shows and eventually landed a spot as a speaker.

In 2004, Robert recruited me to be the editor-in-chief of Search Engine Guide and early this past year I left my day job as an online marketing consultant to focus on Search Engine Guide full time.

Why the history? Because I think it's important for people to understand that people that have good networks get them because they put time and effort into developing those networks. Danny Sullivan, Seth Godin and the late Cory Rudl were all once complete unknowns. They got to where they are because they worked hard and they put time and effort into networking with people. They treated people with respect, they shared their knowledge with people that wanted to learn and they built up a reputation in their respective business communities.

I'm no different. I sit here in my living room, hacking away on my laptop while corralling a dog and a 13 month old and I marvel at the fact that people think I know anything, let alone that I somehow have this huge leg up on anyone else looking to start a business. There's no doubt that it takes work and sure, many people will spend years building their business network, but that's no excuse for not trying at all.

The best example of this is the number of new contacts that I've made since this series began. Sure, I knew plenty of folks in the search industry, but it's been the

expansion into the world of "mommy-marketing" and small business marketing that has been fascinating.

Before I started The Lactivist, I had never heard of Marc Cowlin. Marc is the [PR Director of CafePress](#) and he's a heck of a guy. Marc has a real passion for CafePress and the beautiful thing about him is that he's not just focused on making CafePress successful. Sure, Marc looks for stories that can help get CafePress positive press, but it's very clear within the CafePress shopkeeper community that Marc is interested in helping the shopkeepers succeed. He's known for rallying the troops to help each other out. Marc is networking as he goes and is leaving a wake of people behind him that feel like they are more than just a dollar sign on CafePress's bottom line. Because of this project, I can now count on Marc as part of my network.

Before I started this project, I'd never heard of Dan Mowry. Dan Mowry is a successful CafePress shopkeeper that runs [TheTShirtZone](#). He's also a talented graphic designer. Dan wrote to me because he was interested in the project and wanted to know if he could help out. He offered up both graphic design services and his knowledge of cpshop, the module that let me put my store offerings on my own domain. In exchange, I offered to help him out with search marketing for his site. Because of this project, I can now count on Dan as part of my network.

Before I started this project, I'd never heard of Melinda DiPerna who runs a [vacation rental web site](#). Melinda wrote in because she was interested in the project and really liked my shirts. We emailed back and forth quite a bit to talk about our respective businesses, to share experiences about breastfeeding and parenting and in general, to have some nice conversation. Melinda, as it turns out, takes her children to Dr. Sears, a very well-respected pediatrician and suggested that I contact him to see about his help in promoting the shirts and the milk bank fundraiser. Because of this project, I can now count on Melinda as part of my network.

Before I started this project, I'd never heard of Janell Vasquez of [AccuServ, Inc.](#) Janell wrote to me early in the series to share her own experience breastfeeding her two children. As an editor, she also wrote to point out that I had a typo on one of my products. ;) Janell works on web sites at her day job, but is also working on her own business on the side. Janell is now working with a local grief counseling center that serves children to do some fundraising through her own side-business. That first email sparked an ongoing email exchange that continues to this day. Because of this project, I can now count on Janell as part of my network.

Before I started this project, I'd never heard of Lisa Stewart or [BigFoot Web Marketing](#). Lisa sent me a private message on the [High Rankings forum](#) to offer to put links to my site on a few of her own parenting related web sites. That sparked dozens of emails back and forth where I learned that Lisa's son was

born early and spent time in the NICU and that Lisa was a work at home mom that took on search marketing projects from larger firms that wanted to outsource some of their work. I'm now busy convincing Lisa to become a new guest author for Search Engine Guide and hope to send her to SES Toronto (since she lives there) as a reporter for Search Engine Guide. Because of this project, I can now count on Lisa as part of my network.

Before I started this project, I'd never heard of Cara Schrock, the blogger behind [Mama C-Ta](#). I actually emailed Cara because I found a link coming in to The Lactivist from her site and found that she'd added it to her blog roll. We exchanged a few emails back and forth and Cara became my first Lactivist Store affiliate. Cara and I have now had a couple of chances to cross-link to each other's blogs to share some traffic. Because of this project, I can now count on Cara as part of my network.

The point here isn't that I magically increased my network by writing a new series for Search Engine Guide. The point is that other people also increased their own network by taking the time to write to me and to develop a relationship. I can hope that I'll be able to help Lisa gain a better reputation in the search marketing community by providing her a publishing outlet for her articles. I can hope that I'll be able to help Dan increase his own sales by giving him some tips on search marketing. I can hope that there will come a time that I'll be able to help Janell or Melinda with their own businesses by putting them in touch with someone from my own network. This is how it works.

Don't be afraid to network. Don't be afraid to write an email, make a phone call or go to an event to introduce yourself to folks. Everyone started off not knowing other people. Everyone remembers what that's like and almost everyone is usually just as thrilled to add you to their network as you might be to add them. Treat people with respect, share what you can and take less than you offer in return. Your network will grow and your business will prosper.

Day Twenty-Three

Coming up on day twenty-three, I dig out a book on web analytics, play around with ClickTracks and catch up with my email. I also throw my hands up in frustration at Yahoo! and do the dance of joy when someone points me to a certain well-known newspaper.

Day 23 - Stats and Research, Yahoo! Ads Start Running and a Big Press Mention

Day twenty-three was full of a little bit of action on a lot of different levels. From digging through my stats to doing another round of keyword research to finally getting my Yahoo! ads online I stayed busy on the search marketing front. At the same time, I uploaded another new shirt, brainstormed PR moves and stood amazed that public relations was working even without me!

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 4901 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1210 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 321 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $472.65
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $103.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $110.63
- Total AdSense Revenue: $63.70
- Total Chitika Revenue: $3.53
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $283.86

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- Total Business Expenses: $46.90

- Total Profit: $236.96

ClickTracks Stats Continue to Deliver

By day twenty-three I'd been able to spend a bit more time digging around in ClickTracks to see what type of data I could find. I'd used the tagging feature to segment my stats by not only which of the three sites (blog, store, or thelactivist.com) a user had entered through, but also to segment users that placed a product in their cart and that actually made a purchase. Thus, I was able to tell how much time each type of user spent on the site.

For example, the average time spent on site:

All Visitors: 61 seconds
Blog Traffic: 52 seconds
Shop Traffic: 62 seconds
TheLactivist.com: 68 seconds
Item in Cart: 418 seconds
Made a Purchase: 1136 seconds

That information was interesting not only because it showed that visitors to the actual TheLactivist.com site were spending the most time, but also that visitors that entered via my blog were spending the least amount of time on the sites. That surprised me as my blog was my primary source of content and had the most information on it. After all, it only takes so much time to click through and view a bunch of shirts. That either meant that my blog was doing a great job of feeding people in to the store, or that my blog content didn't do a very good job of holding people's attention.

That made me realize that I needed to go take a look at my exit rates to see if time spent on the site was the best indicator of the quality of those entry points. So, I went and looked at the blog traffic, which spent the least amount of time on the site and at TheLactivist.com traffic, which spent the most amount of time on the site. As it turns out, of all the traffic that entered via TheLactivist.com, 56.9% of it exited without having viewed more than one page. On the other hand, only 17.6% of visitors that entered via the Lactivist Blog exited after a single page. That made me rethink my assumption about the quality of traffic coming in from my blog. Apparently, my visitors were just speed readers and found their way to the information they wanted more quickly.

It was also interesting to note that as much as I enjoyed ClickTracks, I was still stopping by eXTReMe Tracker to see the "last twenty referrers" stat. I was finding that this was the quickest way to spot a new incoming link, especially one from a message board. I could sort through all of my referrers on ClickTracks and even see a new jump by using the What's Changed report, but there was something about the one-click access of getting it on eXTReMe tracking that made me glad I'd kept it in place.

All of this digging reminded me of how fun it can be to dig through the stats for a site in order to learn more about what's working and what isn't. I've never been an analytics expert though, so I headed to my bookshelf and pulled out "[Web Analytics Demystified: A Marketer's Guide to Understanding How Your Web Site Affects Your Business](#)" by Eric Peterson. Eric had sent me a copy a few months back to review but I'd been so buried that I hadn't had a chance to read it yet. Now seemed like the perfect opportunity so I cracked it open and read the first chapter. It looks to be an interesting read. Instead of simply telling you why you should be tracking your traffic, it goes into great detail about HOW to track your traffic and what to do with the information. At less than $40, that makes this a

great investment for small business owners looking to learn more about web analytics.

Problems with Yahoo! Search Marketing

Day twenty-three also saw my Yahoo! Search Marketing campaign FINALLY going live. While I'd setup the campaign just a week into the project, YSM had sent me an email saying that I needed to call in with my account number and credit card data in order to activate the account. I'd never had to do this for any other account that I'd setup with them, so I wrote the email off as a phishing attempt and ignored it.

A few days later however, I noticed that my campaigns were not yet running on Yahoo!. That's when a second email came in telling me that I needed to call to activate the campaign. The problem was that it asked for my Yahoo! account number and for credit card data, neither of which I had in an easily accessible spot. I decided that I'd call in on another day when I had time to look things up and promptly forgot about it until a week or so later when I had my first voice mail message from a Yahoo! Search Marketing account rep that wanted to help me get things up and running.

Once again, I was simply too busy to call back, so I put it off until I had more free time. I started to wonder if I'd ever get my campaign online when I received a second call from the Yahoo! Search Marketing team one afternoon while working. I finally managed to get them the information so that my campaigns could get up and running the next day.

The problem was, when I went to look for my accounts the next day, I couldn't find any of my ads. I logged in to the admin panel to review the terms that I was bidding on and I saw that the Yahoo! Search Marketing editor had taken it upon themselves to change all of my phrases that contained "breastfeeding" to "breast feeding." Since I (and everyone else on God's green earth) was searching for "breastfeeding" related phrases, my ads weren't appearing. I called up Yahoo! and spoke with an editor who apologized and promised to fix the problem immediately.

Either way, I was going through an awful lot of trouble to get a pay-per-click account up and running when my existing pay-per-click account at AdWords still wasn't sending me much in the way of buyers so I decided not to worry about it and moved on.

Uploading New Content

I've found inspiration in some of the strangest places for Lactivist shirts but the inspiration today came from a fairly logical place; a breastfeeding mother's blog. I'd made it a habit to start surfing around parenting and mothering blogs to keep

tabs on what breastfeeding mothers are talking about and what issues would make good fodder for the Lactivist Blog. On day twenty-three I stumbled across a blog that talked about a fear of breastfeeding in public and the appearance that she was playing "peek-a-boob." I laughed out loud at that phrase and realized that it would make a good shirt.

Thus, the "I'm not playing peek-a-boob I'm just trying to feed my child" shirt was born.

I also stumbled across an interesting study that showed that a hormone that is released while nursing called oxytocin has been scientifically proven to make people less fearful. Sounded like great blog content to me, so I put together a new post for the Lactivist Blog.

Public Relations Moves With or Without Me

By this point, Amy Hooker and I were working on fleshing out our media list so that once she was done with the second version of my press release, we could start spreading the word and looking for some press for the shirts. The surprise was that when viral marketing takes hold, public relations sometimes happens without any extra effort at all.

On day twenty three I received an interesting bits of news. Apparently, The New York Times had run an article about CafePress and mentioned The Lactivist Store. The article was about the use of CafePress as a way to create personalized products and the author picked up a link to The Lactivist because it is listed as a top ten store on the CafePress Wire.

A snippet from the article:

The variety of products offered is sprawling, and aside from serving as a way for the consumer to make things, CafePress is often used is as a virtual gift shop for other Web sites. One top CafePress "shop" is connected to "This Old House," the television show. But most are not so well known. Another top shop is the Lactivist, a pro-breastfeeding Web site.

This was good news. If The New York Times was picking up the store before we even did a public relations push, then there was a chance that we might really be able to see some progress once we put some serious effort toward it.

Day Twenty-four

Coming up on day twenty-four, public relations continues to take on a mind of its own, but I find that having a plan of your own can make a big difference as well. I also realize that with all the loving that the Lactivist project is getting, it's time to start spreading it around...

Day 24 - Public Relations Continues to Go Well and The Lactivist Project Decides to Share the Love

On day twenty-four my public relations campaign was still going full steam ahead, even though we technically hadn't made any pitches or released the story on the wire. It was also the day that it dawned on me that this project had the potential to be greater than just a site to promote breastfeeding or even a project to help people learn about marketing.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 5007 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1284 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 406 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $472.65
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $103.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $114.06
- Total AdSense Revenue: $64.74
- Total Chitika Revenue: $3.96
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $288.76

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- Total Business Expenses: $46.90

- Total Profit: $241.86

Public Relations Plans Steam Ahead

On day twenty-three I'd rejoiced at the news that The New York Times had made mention of the Lactivist Store in an article that they ran about CafePress. The good news continued to pour in on day twenty-four when Marc Cowlin, the PR Director for CafePress called to tell me that Carrie Kirby of the San Francisco Chronicle was interested in speaking with me about the Lactivist project for an article she was writing about how people monetize their blogs. This wasn't really the best day for me to talk as I was in between house closings and my husband

had spent some time in the hospital that morning, but I knew this was a chance that wouldn't come often so I gave Carrie a quick call.

We had a nice chat about the project and how it came about. We talked a bit about milk banks and small businesses and I explained what Search Engine Guide was and why I was writing this article series. We hung up after about a ten minute chat and I said a quick prayer before dashing off to buy our new house.

In the meantime I'd also had an email from Amy Hooker of [maven communications](#) with the first draft of the press release we were going to use to pitch some magazines and newspapers. I'd written earlier in this series about the optimized release that I planned to use for the online wire services, but this release needed to be written in a different way. The idea with this release was to put together something that was short and sweet and that quickly caught the eye of jaded editors that have to sort through tons of releases each day.

When magazine and newspaper editors are already getting inundated with tons of pitches from companies that want to see their products and services pushed, it's essential to find that quick hook to catch their eye. The world of traditional public relations executives consists of finding a brand new way to say the same old thing. There was no need to get my keywords into the title or text here, instead, we needed to aim for the wording that would catch someone's eye and make them want to read more.

Thus, our offline press release had a quick and catchy title:

MY MILKSHAKE FEEDS ALL THE KIDS IN THE YARD:
Irreverent Slogans Highlight Serious Subject, Raise Awareness and Money for Human Milk Banks

I read over the release and dashed off a quick note to Amy with a bit of feedback so that we could get a final release ready to go sometime in the next week or two.

Catching up on Email

On day twenty-two, I wrote about the concept of networking and that it can work for anyone. While there's no doubt that networking gets easier the longer that you've been doing it, its still the type of thing that anyone can do. I've also written about my belief in online reputation management and the need to devote serious time to keeping up with people that write both to and about you and your company.

Throughout this series, I've had email flowing in on a regular basis from readers with positive and negative feedback. I've done my best to keep up with the email and to respond to each and every note, even if it takes a week or two. On day

twenty-two, I shared the stories of several new contacts that I've made by doing this.

On day twenty-four, I received yet another amazing email from someone that was following the series. The email came in from a Search Engine Guide reader named Brad. Brad served in the U.S. Navy up until this past July when he was injured during a training exercise. Unable to return to either the Navy, or his previous career as a police officer, Brad began looking for a new way to earn money to help support his wife and kids.

Brad is a talented graphic artist that has created a line of art work based off of the popular [WWII era pin-ups](). Brad showcases his work via CafePress at a shop called [Darby Doll Co.]() (Warning: Link features mild artistic nudity, may not be child-friendly) and was having trouble finding the right traffic for his site. Brad is a great example of someone that has an excellent product (his artwork is beautiful) to offer, but that can't seem to draw traffic from search engines or from the right blogs to create conversions. Brad and I exchanged several emails to try and help get him pointed in the right direction and the folks at Yahoo! Search Marketing generously donated a $100 advertising credit to help him get started with a campaign there.

The whole process of exchanging emails made me realize that much of what people were saying about The Lactivist project was true... The information in the article series is useful and helpful on many levels, but folks like Brad that aren't familiar with online marketing still often have a hard time putting everything in place just the right way. That's part of why I want to harp on the idea of visiting discussion forums not only to network, but to learn. There are great discussion forums out there that range from [high-end industry talk]() to [advice about making your sites usable]() to [common sense small business marketing]() and most are chalk full of folks willing to offer you free advice.

Once Brad had a chance to get some of the changes I suggested in place, I realized that he still needed to figure out a way to get some links coming into his site. I couldn't find it showing up in Google, so the changes that he'd made were unlikely to impact his search rankings until Google finally found him and spidered him. That sparked another idea.

Perhaps it was true that [The Lactivist]() enjoyed a natural advantage in the search engines and even in getting traffic started simply because I had a great starting audience to get the product in front of. While Search Engine Guide readers as a whole aren't super likely to be breastfeeding moms, the project had shown that there were certainly enough of them out there to help get things going. It only seemed logical that the Search Engine Guide network could also act as a platform for launching some other business ideas.

Search Engine Guide's sister site, Small Business Brief, is focused on helping Small Business owners figure out how to both market and run their companies. That means that every now and then, we run articles on it that talk about what has worked (or hasn't worked) for a small business. Since this series seems to have sparked a lot of new ideas out there, and since so many of you hard-working small business owners just need a little push to get things going, we've decided to leverage our network to help them out.

We're going to be inviting the people that are using this article series to spark ideas for their own small businesses to write us with their story. Tell us what you've tried from the series, or how the series made you decide to try things for yourself. Let us know what has worked, what hasn't worked and what you've come up with on your own. We'll be working through the submissions to find some to feature on Small Business Brief (and in the Search Engine Guide blog). We'll also be looking for stories like Brad's where there is a chance that we can pitch in some help (like the Yahoo! credit or some SEM advice) to help get things going.

Basically, we're looking to give people a nice starting launch to take what they've learned from this series and to make it work for their own ideas.

Interested? Send me your story (email jennifer at search engine guide dot com) and let's see what you can do with your own jump start from a well-read site.

Day Twenty-Five

Coming up on day twenty-five, I spot some buzz going on in some more mothering forums, start working on a plan to share my stats data with readers and welcome my first affiliates to the mix.

Day 25 - Stats Confusion is Worked Out, Great Blog Discussions and MSN AdCenter Gets a Look

By day twenty-five I was well on my way to sliding out of start-up mode and into maintenance and growth mode for the Lactivist project. I spent some more time digging around in ClickTracks and made a realization about why I seemed to be losing traffic at the CafePress Store. I also spent some more time finding out what bloggers were saying about the project and looked into MSN's new adCenter program.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 5070 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1317 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 440 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $489.64
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $106.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $117.43
- Total AdSense Revenue: $64.93
- Total Chitika Revenue: $3.96
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $295.32

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- MSN adCenter Sign up: $5.00
- Total Business Expenses: $51.90

- Total Profit: $243.42

ClickTracks Helps Me Find Lost Traffic

As much as I was enjoying having ClickTracks to track the traffic to the Lactivist project, I was starting to get concerned that traffic to the CafePress shop seemed to be slowing down. Early on in the series I was seeing two and three hundred visitors a day to the shop. By day twenty-five that number was often closer to one hundred or one hundred and fifty visitors. Since incoming links were still being

added on a regular basis and sales were still steady, I was at a loss for what might explain this conundrum.

That's when it dawned on me that about the same time I saw traffic to the CafePress store drop I saw an increase in traffic to TheLactivist.com site. That's because I'd finally integrated my CafePress content with TheLactivist.com and people could browse my products without ever linking into the CafePress store. In fact, unless someone added a product to their cart, they never even needed to leave TheLactivist.com web site. Suddenly all was well with the world again and I realized that I was still getting the same amount of traffic, it was just showing up in a different place.

Day twenty-five also saw me dropping an email to the ClickTracks team to see about getting the software setup to open up access to all Search Engine Guide readers. ClickTracks Pro Hosted, which is what I was using for the Lactivist program, allows site owners to open up their stats for third party viewing which makes it a great tool for marketing companies or even businesses that want to let the big bosses look, but not touch. Unfortunately, I needed to have ClickTracks Pro Processor running on a server that could be accessed by users. Since I currently had it running on my laptop, sharing my stats simply wasn't going to happen.

So, I fired off an email to a friend that does some hosting to see if he'd consider housing things for me so that readers could have a chance to dip into my stats. In the meantime, I tried to export some PDF files so that I could upload those and share access but the PDFs seemed to disappear in a void. Not quite sure what to make of that, I headed off to work on other things and hoped to be able to share some hard-core stats with readers before the project ended.

More Online Reputation Management

On day twenty-five I realized that I hadn't done any searching for new blog posts for a few days, so I headed off to Technorati and Google's Blog search to see what I could find. As it turns out, there was still quite a bit of chatter going on out there about the project. There was a nice write-up about the project at RedLobo and the overview of the project from the Dread Pirate Robert made me chuckle. (Not just because of the awesome name of his blog which made me say "no one would be afraid of the dread pirate Wesley" but also because he's clearly got some skill as a blogger.)

From there it was back to the Making it Up Blog which I seemed to be playing link-tag with. Blog owner Jax Blunt hit the nail on the head with her post titled "Watching You Watching Us." By now, The Lactivist project and the Making it Up Blog were doing a nice job of feeding traffic back and forth to each other and I'd exchanged some emails with Jax to talk her into becoming a member of the Small Business Ideas forum. (Once again demonstrating the importance of online

reputation management and networking...you just never know where or when you'll make a new contact.)

Finally I stumbled across a thread at the [Cre8asite Forums](#) that had managed to escape my attention for several weeks. It turns out that there was quite an interesting discussion going on over there about the project with some compliments and some criticism for the project. It was excellent reading, even if one of [my old forum buddies](#) was giving me a hard time about the project.

Checking Out MSN's adCenter Interface

Happy to know that the project was still generating interest from readers, I shifted my focus back toward drawing in new visitors and new buyers through a third advertising source: MSN's adCenter.

A few days prior I'd received an email to let me know that I'd been accepted as part of the latest round of beta testers and that I could access the adCenter interface to setup my account. I clicked on the link in the email and ended up on a page with about half a dozen questions about who I was, what I wanted to advertise and so on. I filled those out and ended up with a note that said an adCenter Marketing Analyst would contact me shortly to see about setting up my campaign.

Not being the patient type, I headed back to the email, scrolled down and noticed a second link that allowed for quick access to getting an account up and running. I clicked on that link and was immediately taken to a sign-up page that asked for my contact and billing information. The problem with this was that they wanted my credit card number so that they could charge me the "sign-up fee." That wasn't so much the problem. The problem was that they didn't bother to tell me what the sign-up fee was. A little reluctant to give up my credit card info so that I could be charged a non-disclosed sum of money I went on a Google hunt for information about just how much adCenter's sign-up fee was.

It turns out it was only $5.00. Not bad, but it sure would have been nice for MSN to have let me know what the charge would have been without my having to dig for it. At this point, I decided to try a little keyword research to see how their interface worked, but the research tool threw an error and asked me to come back later. In fact, when I went in to try and setup a campaign the interface threw another error that asked me to come back later. Not looking for a third strike and still needing to get quite a bit of work done that day, I chalked it up for loss and figured I'd try again another day.

I was hoping to get a chance to play around in the system before the project ended however, because the MSN adCenter approach is supposed to allow you to adjust your bids based on who is doing the search. For instance, I could bid twenty cents on the phrase "breastfeeding clothes" but specify that I would pay

an extra nickle if the searcher is a woman and maybe an extra ten cents if the searcher is a woman between the ages of 25 and 35. Basically, you can setup a sliding scale of bid prices based on the demographics of a searcher. That makes adCenter an attractive environment for businesses selling products that are highly skewed toward a certain type of buyer.

Day Twenty-Six

Coming up on day twenty-six I try to figure out how to come up with some information that we need for our media push, spend time exploring some parenting forums and land my first two affiliates for the [Lactivist Store](#).

Day 26 - Planning a Media Push, More Forums and I Start Recruiting Affiliates

On day twenty-six with just a few days left to go I was focused on wrapping up plans for some of the marketing methods I'd been working on throughout the project. I needed to finalize plans for our media push, start working out how to recruit some affiliates for The Lactivist store and dive back into the world of online parenting discussion forums.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 5158 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1346 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 461 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $489.64
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $106.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $120.93
- Total AdSense Revenue: $65.43
- Total Chitika Revenue: $3.96
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $299.32
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- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- MSN adCenter Sign up: $5.00
- Total Business Expenses: $51.90
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- Total Profit: $247.42

Planning a Media Push

One of the most complicated plans I've had to work on throughout The Lactivist project has been getting a press release ready and planning a media push. Public relations, even online public relations doesn't work the same way that link building or organic optimization does. If you make a mistake with your optimization, nine times out of ten, you simply have to make a change to your HTML and everything's good. If you make a mistake with your public relations, you may never have a chance to fix it.

That's why planning for the public relations push had taken almost the full thirty days of the project. From figuring out what the pitch was going to be to finding someone to help me write the release to deciding who, where and when to send it, it wasn't an easy process.

I had two excellent writers (Karon Thackston and Amy Hooker) helping me out with the release writing, but that didn't mean that I didn't need to do any work. I had to sit down and come up with quotes that could be used for the releases, I had to get in touch with other people and get quotes from them and I had to do some research to find relevant links and information that might be useful in putting the pitch together.

By this point in time, we had a press release put together and ready to go, and Greg Jarboe and the team at [SEO-PR](#) were ready to release it for us through [PR Web](#), but we still had to come up with a list of media outlets and contact information for a direct pitch. I'd been working with Amy Hooker to narrow down a list of publications and blogs that we wanted to target, but we were running into some trouble finding the contact information for some of the publications.

The problem here was that the database that housed that information was the type of thing that only very high-end PR firms had access too. That put it out of reach for most people, myself included. This is where creativity comes into play. Since I was running my site on CafePress, I knew that any press that I picked up would also be good press for CafePress, so it was in their best interest to help me get this story picked up. I contacted Marc Cowlin, the PR Director of CafePress and asked if he could help me secure a media list. Sure enough, he was able to put something together for me and send it back.

Now, you can scoff and say that I got the help because I'm Jennifer Laycock. Or, you could think it through and realize that in the world of CafePress, no one even knows who Jennifer Laycock is. I put together a public relations pitch that had value to people other than me and I used that to my advantage. There's no reason that anyone reading this can't do the exact same thing. Any other CafePress shop keeper with a compelling story to tell could have gotten the exact same help that I did. Most people just don't take the time to ask.

Now that we had our media list, it was back to the planning stages to figure out what the pitch would be and when we would send it, but that was going to have to wait until another day.

KeywordDiscovery.com Suddenly Becomes More Useful

Earlier in the series I mentioned that the great guys at Trellian had read my articles and offered up use of their [Keyword Discovery tool](#) for the project. Up until the Lactivist project, I'd never had a chance to use the tool, even though I'd heard good things about it. In fact, I was noticing that many people within the

industry were starting to show a preference for the Keyword Discovery tool instead of Wordtracker.

As a hard core Wordtracker fan, I couldn't quite understand this. While I was finding the tool to be useful as far as figuring out what phrases received a lot of searches, I was still frustrated by not knowing which phrases were also competitive. With Wordtracker, I could look to see how many web sites on a certain engine included the keyword phrase on their site. That information gave me some level of confidence on whether or not I could easily rank for the phrase. With the Keyword Discovery tool, I hadn't been able to get that data.

Until day twenty-five when I stopped being a dork and realized that at the bottom of the results list was a link that said "analyze." All of a sudden I found that I could enter my Google API code and the tool would spit back data about the number of pages that exist on the web with that phrase and how many times it's estimated that a phrase is searched for each day. Suddenly, I was looking at all the data that I'd been grumbling for since week one.

It was a major "duh" moment and the point at which I realized I should take my own advice. After all, for years I'd been telling people that search engine optimization tools were only as good as the person using them.

The incident made me wonder what other things I was missing from the tool and I vowed to dig into it more thoroughly in the future to see if there were some other great features that would turn me into a die-hard Keyword Discovery fan.

Recruiting Affiliates

Back on day thirteen I talked about setting up specialized links to the Lactivist store so that I could start recruiting affiliates and getting them set. I'd already noticed that the Lactivist Blog had been added to several blog rolls, so it made sense to think that some of those bloggers might be interested in earning a buck or two off of their links as well.

Sadly, I'd never really gotten around to sending much in the way of emails to try and promote my affiliate program. It was one of those areas where I really dropped the ball. I knew that affiliate sales could be a big boom to my bottom line because I was already seeing nice income levels from both my own affiliate links and from referral revenue from shopkeepers that had started stores after reading this series.

On day twenty-five however I scored a double-whammy when two of my fellow mommy-bloggers decided to join up as my first ever affiliates.

The MamaC-Ta blog had already linked in to The Lactivist from her blog roll and had made a few comments on my own blog. We'd also swapped a few emails

about the site, her blog and some discussion forums that we frequent. I asked her if she'd be interested in becoming my first affiliate and she said "sure" so I went ahead and setup some code to send her way. A quick sign up at CafePress and a few links later, the Lactivist banner was flying high at MamaC-Ta's Baby Links page.

My next stop was to email Jax Blunt, the blogger behind Making it Up. Jax and I had been swapping links between our blogs for a week or two and she'd become a regular commenter at the Lactivist Blog. We'd also swapped a few emails and when I asked her if she'd like to become an affiliate as well, she also said yes. So she picked out a banner and I set her up with some code as well. The Lactivist ad is now running in the "shopping" section on every page of Jax's blog.

I knew that I shouldn't stop there, but I decided to call it a day and pledged to actually spend time trying to recruit affiliates somewhere down the road.

Discussion Forums Are My Friend

I've already written about the great luck I'd had with viral marketing when it came to discussion forums. It seemed that I had found a niche where buzz worthy products got passed along from one mom to another via birth boards, email groups and local parenting forums. The problem was that tracking what they were saying about the Lactivist was difficult.

Many of the discussion forums that I would see incoming links from required a membership to be able to view posts. This wouldn't be a problem except many of the forums had strict membership policies. I'd had dozens of incoming links from a parenting forum in Charlotte, but I wasn't allowed to join because I lived in Ohio. I'd also noticed links coming in from a Yahoo! Group for former La Leche League leaders but again, I wasn't allowed to join.

On day twenty-five I found incoming links from one of the birth boards at PregnancyWeekly, from The Married Woman forums and from a tiny little forum called TTC, PG & Beyond. As usual I took the time to apply for a membership with each forum so that I could try to find out what people were saying about my site.

The PregnancyWeekly forums were easy enough to get into and I quickly found that one of the mothers there had added a few of my shirts to her Christmas wish list. The Married Woman forums were more difficult. Despite filling out a registration and sending it off, I never did hear back, nor was I ever able to use the username and password I'd requested. To this day I have no idea what they were saying about my products, I only know that it was enough to get folks to click through and visit the site.

The final forum, TTC, PG & Beyond was the most interesting. I filled out the registration form and quickly received an email back from the administrator telling me that I wasn't welcome aboard if I planned on hocking my wares. She'd apparently visited the site in my profile and assumed that I was joining up to promote my products. As a former forum administrator I must say that I could certainly understand her suspicion. We exchanged a few emails back and forth while I explained that I didn't want to market to her members, I simply wanted to find out what they were saying and do some reading. She finally agreed to let me join and I was able to find out that another mom had listed my shirts as something she'd like to have for Christmas.

That experience brings up a point worth mentioning though. There's a lot of talk when it comes to networking about joining discussion forums and getting involved to help spread your name around. That's fine and dandy advice, so long as you understand that you have to join forums with the attitude of giving, not of getting. Joining a discussion forum is an investment, just like anything else that you do for your business. You can't simply join a forum and then go post about how great your product is. In fact, you shouldn't even be posting if you plan to mention your product at all.

If you plan to use forums as part of your marketing strategy you need to view them the same way that you'd view any other networking even. You need to go prepared to share your ideas, your advice, your feedback and your support with other members. You need to ask interesting questions offer up thoughtful feedback and become a member of the community. Most importantly, you need to spend a few weeks reading the forum and the forums terms of service before you ever even think about making a post. If you do all of those things, you'll find people seeking out your products and services without you ever saying a single thing to promote yourself.

Day Twenty-Seven

Coming up on day twenty-seven I spent more time traveling through the blogosphere to catch up on Lactivist talk. I also exchange some interesting emails with a friend about ways to increase revenues for the Lactivist blog and web site and I think over a few investments toward the future of the project.

Day 27 - Buzzing and Building the Blogosphere and a Plan for Long-Term Revenue Success

With just a few days left to go in the Lactivist project and my media plan shaping up nicely, I spent day twenty-seven catching up on blog posts that I'd missed, making a few of my own and exchanging some emails with a friend that had a suggestion for long-term revenue generation with The Lactivist.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 5362 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1448 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic: 1183 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $570.57
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $123.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $136.76
- Total AdSense Revenue: $67.03
- Total Chitika Revenue: $3.96
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $333.75

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- MSN adCenter Sign up: $5.00
- Total Business Expenses: $51.90

- Total Profit: $281.85

A Blogging I Will Go

It's funny when I think about it because the Lactivist isn't my first foray into the world of blogging. We've been running a blog here at Search Engine Guide since this past summer and I've had my own personal blog since early in the year. Blogging for the Lactivist was a totally different experience though. With my personal blog, I knew that only about six people (all friends) were reading it and I could say whatever, whenever I wanted. With the Search Engine Guide blog, it just became a new way to publish content since it was reaching the point that I couldn't write articles about everything.

The Lactivist Blog was a whole other animal. Using a blog as a marketing tool instead of as an online diary or a publishing tool was a new challenge. I needed to figure things like how often to publish, how often to write my own content, how often to link to other people's content, how to establish relationship with other bloggers, what type of content to cover and more.

I was trying to blog once a day, because the freshness of content is important for both readers and search engines, but I also knew that I couldn't publish unless I had interesting content. That meant that sometimes I had a couple posts in a day and some days I had none.

I was trying to link to other bloggers, but it was tough to add another round of feeds to my daily reading, so I was mostly relying on Google News Alerts and my own brain to come up with ideas.

I was trying to restrict my content to breastfeeding issues and news, but I wondered if I needed to allow more personality and personal experience to creep in. Could I post the occasional picture of Nora or talk about things happening in my own life? I wasn't a breastfeeding mom anymore, so were my thoughts and comments even relevant?

Blogging was tough business. I was realizing though that like any other part of a marketing program, you have to grow through experience as you go. Blogs are handy in that you have direct feedback. You can see what types of posts draw comments, you can track which posts get the most views, which posts people link in to and so on. Using that data works the same way that any other type of web tracking works. You find out what's having an impact and you figure out how to reproduce it.

Even apart from my own blogging efforts, I was finding plenty of Lactivist talk from other posters as well. The no more commas blog featured the San Francisco Chronicle article and created another link in to the article series. I also found a great write up on the project at Pete Wailes "Ramblings of a Businessman" blog. The most entertaining post of the day came from BotSpider who did an excellent job of pointing out the potential for business start-ups with limited funds. (ok, ok, they also said nice things about me and that never hurts either!)

Future Plans for Making Money

While I knew that blogging was going to be a great way to keep interest going in the Lactivist project down the road, I also knew that I needed to start coming up with a plan to build out the Lactivist site itself. That meant finding a balance between traditional content and blogging.

I'd written in the past about the possibility of bringing my blog into my own domain rather than leaving it on the Blogger network, but I was thinking more and more that it was probably a good idea to leave it where it was. With my content on the Blogger network I was generating some traffic from Blogger itself and was picking up the same type of search engine benefit that I was getting with my shop pages in the CafePress store. Shutting that traffic stream off and trying to rebuild it in a new location didn't seem like the best of plans.

At the same time, I needed to build out TheLactivist.com with good quality content to start driving more links to it. That meant that I needed to make it a resource site. Just as I was sitting at my laptop pondering that thought, I had an email come in from my friend Chris Logan of Beyond Web Services.

Chris is an experienced AdSense partner that's done quite a bit of testing as far as maximizing the AdSense potential of a content page. Chris pointed out that I could spend some time researching some niche topics related to breastfeeding and write some good, quality articles to cover those topics. With those pages drawing traffic from search engines, I could work on optimizing the placement of my AdSense ads to increase my advertising revenue.

I should have thought of this on my own, but since Robert's the one that worries about advertising at Search Engine Guide, I've never much had to consider it. In fact, I hadn't made a single change to my AdSense placements since I first set them up during the first week. I hung my head in shame at my failure to test and test again and headed over to the AdSense site to take a view of the AdSense heat map. I also realized that I could write articles for TheLactivist.com site and use the blog as a feeder to point to them rather than keeping all of my content on the blog.

Taking Chris's advice on content creation to heart, I headed over to Trellian's Keyword Discovery tool to do a little research and found that the phrase "Zoloft and breastfeeding gets more than one hundred searches a day. This really didn't surprise me as I'd seen the topic pop up quite a few times on one of the debate boards that I frequent. Figuring that there might be something to Chris's suggestion I did some research and put together a blog post titled Zoloft and Breastfeeding - Is it Safe?.

While it would take awhile to see if I'd actually rank for the post it was quickly clear that this was the type of content that my readers found useful. I ended up with half a dozen comments on the post by the end of the day. Either way, I realized that if I wanted to turn my site into a true resource I was going to need to rely on more than just my personal experience and stellar wit. I was going to have to start spending some time doing research.

I headed over to Amazon to look up Dr. Thomas Hale's Medications and Mother's Milk thinking that it might be a good idea to order it. I'd always been interested in

owning it but had been under the impression that it was expensive. As it turns out, it was just $30. I knew that it would be chalk full of interesting content fodder, so I put it on my shopping list for later in the week.

About that same time, I had an email show up from Eric Peterson, the author of [Web Analytics Demystified](). According to Eric, his sales had shot up on the day that I mentioned his book in the article series. He thought he saw an extra twenty or thirty sales that could be linked back to my post. I hadn't paid much attention to Amazon's affiliate program beyond my initial test run of baby products on the blog but his email got me thinking about revenue sources as well. It looked like it might be possible that I could write some book reviews for breastfeeding related books and link in to Amazon to earn some affiliate commission.

Armed with some new plans of action and a better understanding of what direction I was headed with my blog, I called it a day and got back to work figuring out what to get my in-laws for Christmas.

Day Twenty-Eight

Coming up on day twenty-eight I work with Greg Jarboe and Amy Hooker on finalizing my press release text, I find myself showing up in Froogle and a reader writes in to suggest a new outlet for both content and driving links to my site.

Day 28 - Finishing up the Press Release, Making My Mark in Froogle and Learning to Squidoo

The last few days of the Lactivist project were going to be all about wrapping up plans for my press release and solidifying my ongoing marketing plans. That meant day twenty-eight was spent reviewing the final press release copy, making plans for distribution, and exploring a new marketing outlet that might have potential.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 5556 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1502 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic: 1340 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $570.57
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $123.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $141.05
- Total AdSense Revenue: $68.98
- Total Chitika Revenue: $4.89
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $340.92

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- MSN adCenter Sign up: $5.00
- Total Business Expenses: $51.90

- Total Profit: $289.02

Finishing Up Plans for the Press Release

Copywriter Karon Thackston and PR Guru Amy Hooker had been working on my press release for about two weeks by this point and after a few rounds of edits and input from me, we finally had something ready to go. As I'd discussed earlier in the series, the plan of action was for the press release to focus on the humorous side of the shirts and their ability to be used to spark discussion about a controversial topic: breastfeeding in public. The release featured quotes from myself as well as from the director of the Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio.

It reads as follows:

New Web Site Launched to Raise Breastfeeding and Milk Bank Awareness
Irreverent slogans highlight serious subject, raise awareness and funding for breast milk banking and breastfeeding issues.

Columbus, OH (PRWEB) December 28, 2005 -– Writer and breastfeeding mother Jennifer Laycock today announced the launch of The Lactivist, a new web site aimed at raising both funds and awareness for breast milk banking and breastfeeding advocacy. Selling t-shirts with witty slogans like "nip/suck," "That's my baby's lunch you're staring at," and "My baby thinks I'm boobylicious!", The Lactivist store takes a humorous and oftentimes irreverent approach to a subject that is still a source of great controversy in the US.

"In my own situation, my mind was set on breastfeeding, but nobody told me how difficult it would be," admitted Jennifer. "I did a lot of reading and decided even before Nora (Jennifer's daughter) was born that I wanted her to get the full benefits of my breast milk. I got involved with my local breast milk bank when I realized I had extra milk that I'd pumped—and that my milk could actually help others who were unable to produce milk for their babies."

Jennifer, who has already donated more than 27 gallons of her breast milk, is now looking to put her money where her milk is. She's designating a portion of the profits from The Lactivist directly to her local breast milk bank.

"The benefits of breast milk are so numerous that when a mother's own milk is not available, the next best option is pasteurized human donor milk," explains Georgia Morrow, Director of Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio. "And we rely on donations of both milk and money, which is why we're so excited about Jennifer's involvement. One of our primary goals is to spread awareness of how important breast milk is for babies, and items on Jennifer's web site go a long way toward that goal."

The Lactivist web site was quietly launched on November 9, 2005, but has already received a great deal of recognition for promoting breastfeeding awareness and breast milk bank advocacy. In addition, the site has been the focus of a series of articles on The Lactivist blog authored by Laycock entitled, "Zero Cash, A Little Talent and 30 Days" (http://www.searchengineguide.com/laycock/) which tracks the development of her site and its journey to success over a month's time.

A few things to note about the press release...

- **It's short.** Press releases are not articles, they need to be long enough to cover the subject matter and short enough to stay interesting. Save your novels for your web site.

- **It quickly gets to the hook.** The Lactivist is about breastfeeding advocacy through humor. The 30 second pitch for the site shows up in the second sentence of the release.

- **It has quotes.** Quotes add a touch of personality to a press release. Note that we've included not only my own experience, but also a quote from someone that could be considered an authority.

- **It subtly offers a few angles.** Not everyone is going to be interested in the same things. By adding a few different angles (milk banks, breastfeeding advocacy, humorous shirts, the article series) we've opened up the release to a wider audience and have a better chance of being picked up.

- **It features keywords.** You'll notice some of my keyword phrases sprinkled throughout the release. Breast milk, breastfeeding, milk bank and so on.

Now that the release was done, my next step was to contact Greg Jarboe of SEO-PR to see about setting up a distribution date. SEO-PR is a company that does optimization of press releases, submits them and then tracks their ranking in news search engines and their pick-up on other web sites. Greg was handling the distribution of my press release in return for my having offered it up as a case study for the Pimp My Site panel at the Chicago Search Engine Strategies conference. I dropped Greg an email and we set-up the release to send the following day so that I'd have the first bit of data to share by the final article on day thirty.

Do You Squidoo?

Last fall I wrote about the launch of Seth Godin's new community-generated content site dubbed "Squidoo" and then mostly forgot about it. Until one of my readers posted in the Small Business Ideas forum with the suggestion that I might launch a lens as another way to drive traffic to the Lactivist Blog and the Lactivist Store. While Squidoo didn't seem to be generating a lot of talk beyond the initial announcement, I figured it couldn't hurt to check it out.

The idea behind Squidoo is to let anyone that wishes set up their own portal page to the topic of their choice. Think of Squidoo as a combination of Wikipedia and About.com and you've pretty much got it down. The pages that users set up are known as a "lens" since it represents their own view of the Web. While I'm not sure how many people are actively using Squidoo right now, I thought it might not be a bad idea to spend a few minutes setting up a breastfeeding advocacy lens for The Lactivist. I wasn't missing the irony that I was setting up a lens to do exactly what I suggested might be Squidoo's biggest problem in my Squidoo article.

...there's the ginormous potential for spammers to come in and take over the place. If anyone can create a lens and people are actually encouraged to create lenses about their own sites and blogs, what's the motivation to create a great resource rather than just a landing page that feeds people through to your own site?

Either way, it only took me about ten minutes to have a [Lactivist lens](#) set up that featured the RSS feed from my blog, a handful of good links and a list of links to some great resource books from Amazon. I left Squidoo feeling that I was probably missing something about the way the site was supposed to work, but not quite knowing what it was. As far as I could tell, there wasn't any more reason for someone to search Squidoo than there was for them to search Google or Yahoo! Perhaps time will prove me wrong.

Seeing Results from Froogle

I hadn't given much thought to Froogle, or any of the shopping search engines for that matter before day twenty-eight. Most shopping search engines have listing fees and Froogle, while free, did not accept feeds from individual CafePress stores. That meant that I was at the mercy of the CafePress feed to decide whether or not I made it into Froogle. Apparently the CafePress feed decided to include me because on day twenty-eight I started seeing referrals come in from the Froogle site.

A quick search for a few of my targeted keywords showed good news. I dominated the results for "[breastfeeding shirt](#)" and had a strong presence for "[breastfeeding clothes](#)" as well.

Pleased to see some progress being made on that front, I moved on to my final project for the day.

Setting Up a Blog Roll

One of the things that I'd been neglecting ever since I setup the Lactivist Blog was putting together a blogroll. I'd noticed incoming traffic from several other parenting blogs that had added the Lactivist to their blogrolls and I had several other blogs that I kept making note of in my mind, but I wasn't sure how to setup a blogroll in Blogger. By day twenty-eight I realized that I couldn't put it off any longer and went in search of a third party solution that would let me get a blogroll up and running on my site.

While I could have manually added the sites into my Blogger template, I figured it might be easier to set them up using a third party link manager. I'd seen mention of [BlogRolling](#) a few times and decided to check it out. The premise was pretty simple...setup a simple piece of Javascript in your page template and then allow BlogRolling.com to do all of the updating based on the sites that you add using

their interface. While I didn't see a ton of benefit for myself, I could understand how someone that wasn't familiar with HTML could find this type of tool to be handy.

On top of the ability to manage your blogroll, BlogRolling also had a few other nifty features. The "1-click BlogRolling" feature allows a users to add a link to their favorites and then click on that link whenever they are visiting a site that they'd like to add to their blogroll. The BlogRolling links also show when each of the sites were last updated, allows you to find out who else has you on their blogroll and offers up a whole host of other features for users that pay the $19.95 a year fee to upgrade to [BlogRolling Gold](#).

I debated over spending the $20 to upgrade to BlogRolling Gold, just to play around with some of the features but realized that I could instead spend that money on some reference books that I'd had my eye on over at Amazon to help provide more blog fodder.

Day Twenty-Nine

Coming up on day twenty-nine, with just two days left to go on The Lactivist project, I review the pitch ideas for the upcoming media push, work with one of the sites on my blogroll to get some feedback about UK publications, offer up a new line of products for political lactivists and do a bit more experimenting with Amazon's affiliate program.

Day 29 - Preparing for the Pitch, Spreading Goodwill and Earning from Amazon

On the second to the last day of the project I found myself buried in quite a few different projects. From reviewing pitch ideas to offering up advocacy help to sending the press release, I was still focusing on the public relations angle. I was also surprised to see a sudden flux of affiliate income from an unlikely source.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the [Small Business Ideas forum](). You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 5667 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1553 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic: 1417 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $570.57
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $123.00
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $147.17
- Total AdSense Revenue: $72.14
- Total Chitika Revenue: $4.89
- Total Amazon Affiliate Revenue: $44.00
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $394.23

- Donations to Milk Bank: $4.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- MSN adCenter Sign up: $5.00
- Shirt Giveaways: $23.99
- Total Business Expenses: $75.89

- Total Profit: $318.34

Reviewing the PR Pitch

Now that we had a press release and plans to launch it early on day thirty, Amy Hooker and I started exchanging some emails to go over the pitches that she planned to use when she approached some of the publications that we'd selected from our media list. Amy explained to me that it's important to go above and beyond simply issuing a press release and expecting people to pick it up and

write a story about it. Journalists and editors are busy people and they're quite often to buried in story pitches to go out looking for press releases to write about.

That means that it's important to put together a "pitch" to send along with your press release to the journalist that you are targeting. A pitch is a brief note or letter that is designed to pique a journalist's interest in the press release that you are sending them. Think of a "pitch" as a movie trailer that is designed to get someone to commit a bit more time to seeing the whole show.

There is no one size fits all pitch. Different pitches will appeal to different writers and different publications, so you need to come up with a variety of them and send them out accordingly. Among the many pitches that we worked on putting together were one targeting the milk bank angle and one targeting the work at home mom angle.

Human Milk Bank Angle:

> Sure, breast milk is best. But what if--due to illness, a premature delivery or other factors--you can't produce breast milk for your baby when she needs it the most? If you're fortunate, you'll be able to turn to a human milk bank in your area. Human milk banks rely on donations of milk from healthy, breastfeeding moms. One of those healthy moms, writer and entrepreneur Jennifer Laycock, is donating not only gallons of her own breast milk to her local human breast milk bank--she's also donating a portion of the proceeds from The Lactivist, a web site that sells irreverent pro-breastfeeding T-shirts. With slogans like 'nip/suck' and 'that's my baby's lunch you're staring at' Jennifer hopes to promote breast feeding and human milk banking one blog entry and shirt sale at a time...

Work at Home Angle:

> If you're a SAHM looking for a way to make a little extra money, "follow your passion and take a look at the Web" advises writer and entrepreneur Jennifer Laycock, who's web site TheLactivist.com sells t-shirts promoting breastfeeding and human milk banking. At the end of November, Jen set up a goal for herself--spending no money of her own, could she set up an actual viable business within thirty days? Twenty-six days into it, she's up $247.42, and has already been mentioned in the New York Times and the San Francisco Chronicle. How'd she do it? She'd be delighted to share what she's learned with your readers.

With several pitches in our pocket and a completed press release, I finally checked off a major item on my to-do list and moved on to other projects for the day.

Getting Involved in Advocacy

Since the Lactivist project clearly plays on the heartstrings of advocates, I knew that I was going to have to start keeping an eye on advocacy issues and figuring out how to offer my help to the greater lactivist community.

My first shot at this came when Lactivist reader (and blog-tag player) Jax Blunt dropped me a note to let me know about a UK movement to pass [new legislation that would give breastfeeding moms more protection](#) when in public. This news obviously made for great blog fodder, but it also made me realize that I needed to move beyond shirts and add some other products that might work well for rallies and letter-writing campaigns.

That's why I took some time and added [breastfeeding advocacy postage pals](#), [breastfeeding advocacy buttons](#), [breastfeeding advocacy bumper stickers](#) and more. I also made note in my blog that I would start selling advocacy items at cost for anyone taking part in a lacativist campaign.

I also decided that since I already had Jax on the line via email that it might be a good idea to pick her brain about some of the publications that I might want to target in the UK. She wrote back with some great feedback that I was able to pass on to Amy to help shape our plans for international pitches. This was also the point at which I realized Jax had been a great online contact almost since the start of the Lactivist project. As I've written time and time again, an essential part of networking is letting people know that they are appreciated, especially when they go out of their way to help you out. So I emailed Jax to see if she'd be interesting in having me send her a shirt. She was, so I did. It cost me $23, but there's no doubt in my mind that the input she's given me throughout the project was well worth the expense. Besides, a walking billboard in the UK couldn't be bad for business.

Affiliate Income Picks Up

Many of the people that are reading the series have sent me emails or posted in the Small Business Idea forums asking why my affiliate revenue has consistently outpaced my revenue from sales of my own products. Others have written asking for more insight into how I've driven those affiliate sales and a few have asked for specific breakdowns of where those dollars are coming from.

The honest truth of things is that I've not done anything at all outside of what I've written in these articles. When it comes to the affiliate income from CafePress, the money comes from two sources. The first, is the actual affiliate banners that I run on my sites. These banners are simply pre-fabricated code from CafePress designed to feed people into the entire collection of baby-related products from all shop owners. The second is really from what CafePress calls 'referrals' which

is the money that you earn when someone sets up a shop via your link and then starts to sell their own products.

As of day twenty-nine, the breakdown of my CafePress affiliate income saw about $55 coming from referral sales and about $95 coming from people following the affiliate links I had setup. It was the $55 amount that captured my attention because CafePress pays 5% on referrals. That means that for me to have earned $55, Search Engine Guide readers had to have setup shop and sold more than $1000 worth of their own shirts, mugs and stickers. Pretty exciting stuff!

Even more exciting was the number that was waiting for me when I logged into the Amazon Associates Central to see if I'd earned any affiliate sales from them yet. Despite running a variety of different types of affiliate links in the article series, on the Lactivist blog and on the Lactivist site itself, I'd yet to see any income at all up to day twenty-eight. All that changed on day twenty-nine when I logged in and saw that I'd earned $44 in a single day.

In shock, I clicked through to my earning reports to find out what could possibly account for that much of a jump in a single day. (Amazon pays 4%-6%) Apparently, someone had followed one of my links to Amazon, spent a little time shopping and picked up a [Nikon digital camera](#) that goes for more than $1000. The affiliate share of that sale was a whopping $44, giving me more income in a single day than I'd had through the entire project.

All of that is to say that some of my affiliate income, like that generated by linking in to relevant items, has come by skill, but some of it, like the camera money, have come through sheer dumb luck. Isn't that sort of what business is all about though? A little bit of skill and a hefty dose of luck?

Day Thirty

Coming up on the final day of the Lactivist project, I see the press release make a great splash on the news search engines, tally up the final numbers and share a variety of offerings designed to satisfy those that just can't get enough of the project.

Day 30 - Launching the Press Release, Adding Up the Till and Offering Up a Little More...

As day thirty hit I spent some time wavering between relief and sadness. The relief at finally being finished with such an enormous task was fairly overwhelming. At the same time, the sadness that I felt bringing the project to a close was a bit more palpable than I would have expected. The good news, that day thirty wasn't really an ending, it was more of a milestone.

(If you're just catching up with this series of articles, be sure to swing into the ongoing discussion thread at the Small Business Ideas forum. You'll be able to link to each day's article and participate in the discussion going along with it.)

Stats:

- Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 5667 unique visitors
- Blog Traffic Since Stats Put in Place: 1720 unique visitors
- TheLactivist.com Traffic: 2734 unique visitors
- Total Shirt Sales: $578.56
- Profit from Shirt Sales: $124.60
- Profit from Affiliate Sales: $151.68
- Total AdSense Revenue: $75.08
- Total Chitika Revenue: $5.50
- Total Amazon Affiliate Revenue: $50.81
- Ebay Sales Profit: $3.00
- Total Revenue: $410.67

- Donations to Milk Bank: $12.00
- Ebay Listing Fee: $2.15
- PayPal Fees: $1.02
- Hosting Expenses: $14.96
- Yahoo! Search Marketing Fee: $5.00
- cpshop Purchase: $19.77
- MSN adCenter Sign up: $5.00
- Shirt Giveaways: $23.99
- Total Business Expenses: $83.89

- Total Profit: $326.78

The Press Release Hits

The last day of the project saw us finally sending out the press release via PR Web. The great thing about PRWeb is that they offer a free press release distribution option that's pretty handy for new businesses. It doesn't have quite the reach that a paid distribution is going to have, but it's still a great starting point when you have zero dollars and a little talent.

The release hit well, snagging #1 spots for all six of our targeted terms (breastfeeding, breast milk, breastfeeding awareness, new web site, breast milk bank and milk bank) on Google news and Yahoo! news. (You can download the complete Power Point report from SEO-PR for more information.)

According to PRWeb's tracking, it was read more than 15,000 times that first day and was picked up by 370 sites. The stat that I found most interesting however, was that Yahoo! News accounted for 75% of the search related reads. Personally, I would have expected more traffic to come from Google. (You can download the full traffic report in Power Point as well.)

While I was happy to see the initial impact of the release, it was going to take weeks to really find out what the release would accomplish.

Tallying it All Up

More than 55,000 words, 10,121 site visitors, hundreds of emails, 49 shirt ideas, 48 shirts sold, 46 blog posts, 30 articles, three web sites and two ebooks later, the 30 day Lactivist project was finally coming to a close. When I first came up with the idea for the series, I said to Robert that there was a pretty good chance that I was going to regret it. There were days that I did, but mostly because those days found me still working on an article at 11:30 or midnight.

When all was said and done, the Lactivist project had earned more than $400, spent less than $100 and ended up in the black at $326.78. From an hourly wage perspective, it wasn't much to be happy about, but considering the overall goal of the project, I was pleased.

While I was a little disappointed that the site had only earned $12 so far for the milk bank, I realized that the milk banking advocacy was going to take quite a bit more time to build up than the other side of the business. Things looked good for the future, however. I'd exchanged a few emails with some people that were very active in the Lactation Consultant community and the Mother's Milk Bank of Columbus was still working with me to come up with some additional fund raisers.

That said, I decided that it would be most appropriate to donate the entire profit from the series to the milk bank. I'm going to round up a little bit to make it even and will be dropping off a check for $350 as soon some of the payments get mailed to me from CafePress and Google.

Now, this is the point at which I turn around and challenge you, the readers. If you've gained something from this series...inspiration, a new technique, anything at all...I challenge you to add to that $350 by making a donation to the milk bank as well. Even if it's only a dollar, every little bit helps. In an ideal world, I'd love to be able to double my donation and tell the staff that Search Engine Guide

readers chipped in their own coin. The Mother's Milk Bank of Columbus is funded entirely by donations and this is your chance to say "thanks" for the series by helping to fund an essential organization. If you'd like to help out, you can add your donation to mine by sending you it to my PayPal account. Just send your payment to thejenn@bigbluelobsters.com. (You don't have to have a PayPal account, you can use your credit card) I will add any donations to my own and take them down to the milk bank in a few weeks. Donate at least $25 and I'll list your company name and link on a thank you page in the free 30 Day ebook.

But Wait, There's More!

One of the common email messages that started to pop up in my in box during the last half of the project was a request for more. More information, more data, more of the series. While it's simply not feasible for me to continue putting a ton of effort into both the Lactivist project and Search Engine Guide, there are going to be plenty of options for readers that just can't get enough.

First, I'll be doing a once a week article update for at least the next month or so. With the press release just having gone out and plans for content building, link building and AdSense tweaking on the horizon, there's still plenty to cover. Once things settle down a bit more, I'll go to once a month updates. After all, the first thirty days may be the most exciting part of starting a business, but they are far from complete when it comes to learning what to do.

Second, I've compiled all thirty articles into a free e-book to satisfy all the folks that write to tell me they've been printing out the articles and archiving them for reference. The e-book includes a full glossary at the end and a nice table of contents that lets you jump quickly to the article you're looking for.

Third, I'm officially launching my first search engine marketing e-book this week. The book is designed as a comprehensive, but digestible intro to all things search marketing related and is written in the same down-to-earth style that the thirty-day article series has been. Along with providing some great teaching on search marketing it also points you toward other e-books and articles that dig a little deeper on specific topics and techniques. Purchasing the book also gives you access to a new private discussion forum that allows you to directly ask me questions about the topics covered in the book. If you've been looking for a single starting point for learning more about search engine marketing, this is the book for you.

Finally, if you just can't get enough of me (give it time!), you can catch me at two upcoming seminars that cover the full gamut of online marketing. First, I'll be appearing next month alongside Matt Bailey of The Karcher Group in the two-day "Web Marketing Made Simple" seminar in Columbus, Ohio. Matt and I will hit everything from link building and organic optimization to viral marketing, monetizing your blog and online public relations. At just $250 for both days, it's

one of the most affordable seminars of its kind. (Priced that way so that you can afford airfare and a hotel without breaking your budget.)

You can also catch me at the upcoming granddaddy of search seminars; Search Engine Strategies New York. Scheduled for February 27-March 2, this show covers any search related topic imaginable and features some of the best and brightest minds in the industry. I'll be moderating a few sessions and presenting an update on the Lactivist during the Pimp My Site panel. You can register online, but make note that hotel rooms sell out quickly.

Thank You

That's all for now folks. Thanks for coming along for the ride, it's been a blast. Keep an eye out for the upcoming weekly updates and for some of the "inspired by" stories that will start showing up on our sister site, Small Business Brief.

Appendix
SEM Glossary of Terms

Adult words
Definition: Certain words of an adult nature that are censored by some search engines. These phrases often cause a search engine to limit the inclusion of a web page to the adult area of the search engine. These pages are then excluded from the general search.

Agent
Definition: A piece of software, such as a browser or spider that interprets the content on a web server and presents it to the user as a web page. Examples include Internet Explorer, Opera, Netscape and various search engine spiders.

Examples: MS Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, Googlebot, Slurp, T-Rex

Agent name delivery
Definition: The act of presenting one set of content to search engine spiders based on the name of that spider and another set of content to human web users. This is done to present content that has been specifically optimized to rank well at each search engine while still presenting the same content to each human visitor to the web site.

This technology is easily detected as web surfers are able to use an agent name faking program to appear as if they are the named spider and view the cloaked content.

Algorithm
Definition: The defined sets of rules put in place by a search engine to measure and sort the web page listings that will be displayed in response to a search query.

Backlink
Definition: A hypertext link on a web site other than your own that points to your web site. Inbound links are an important part of web site marketing as they can deliver targeted visitors directly from another web site, and can help to improve the ranking position of your web site on engines that use link popularity as a part of their algorithm. (also known as inbound link.)

Blog
Definition: A style of Internet publishing that uses content management software to allow for quick and easy posting of articles, personal journals and news stories. Also known as "web log."

Bookmark
Definition: A method of saving a link with a personal notation for a web site that

you wish to visit again. Most browsers have some form of storage system that allows for sites to be catalogued in folders. Also known as "favorites."

Boolean search
Definition: A search function that allows a user to include or exclude documents containing certain words by using the words "AND," "NOT," and "OR."

Pronunciation: boo-leen search (noun)

CGI
Definition: The standard interface between software on a web server and any other programs running on the same machine.

Also Known As: Common Gateway Interface

CGI Program
Definition: A program that handles data input or output according to CGI standards. These types of programs are used to handle database queries, forms and dynamic web content.

CPA
Definition: An advertising deal in which the purchaser agrees to pay a set price for each action that is taken by the viewer of the advertisement.

Also Known As: Cost Per Action

Examples: An advertising deal that has a newsletter signup of $0.25 CPA would cost the site owner $0.25 for every user that signed up for the newsletter though that program.

CPC
Definition: An advertising deal in which the purchaser agrees to pay a set price for each click thru that results from the advertisement.

Also Known As: Cost Per Click

Examples: An advertising deal that has a $0.25 CPC would cost the site owner $1.00 for every four clicks that their site receives.

CPM
Definition: An advertising deal in which the purchaser agrees to pay a set price to purchase blocks of 1000 page views.

Also Known As: Cost Per Thousand (think M=1000 in Roman Numerals)

Examples: An advertising deal that has a $5.00 CPM and received 6000 views would cost the site owner $30.00.

CSS
Definition: Coding option that allows webmasters to apply simple display styles to each page of a web site by setting up templates.

Also Known As: Cascading Style Sheets

Examples: CSS can be used to redefine the look of standard HTML tags. For instance, search engines place higher value on text contained within the tags, but the default size for these tags is generally too large for modern web design. CSS can be used to redefine the size, color, font and emphasis of these tags so that webmasters can properly utilize them in search engine optimization.

Cache
Definition: The act of storing of a web site on either a computer's hard drive, or in a search engine's index. On personal computers, cache is used to save a copy of web sites images, text and code to help speed up download upon future visits to the site. On search engines, cache serves as a record of the content of a web page when a search engine last visited and indexed it.

Click thru
Definition: The act of a visitor clicking on a link displayed within a set of search engine results in order to reach the web page represented by that link. Click thru amounts related to each keyword search can be tracked as a method of determining if a particular keyword will entice visitors to a web site.

Cloaking
Definition: The act of hiding true page content from either a human or robot visitor. This technique is used both to camouflage actual page content from page thieves and to artificially present a more search engine friendly web site to visiting spiders.

Clustering
Definition: The process of listing a single page from a web site within a search engine or directory's search results. This is a common practice in order to provide a wider variety of relevant results and is aimed to keep one company from occupying all of the top positions.

Comment tag
Definition: HTML tag that is used to hide text from browsers. Often used to hide java script code from browsers that are unable to accommodate it. Although some engines will read and index the content contained within these tags, most engines ignore it.

Conceptual Search
Definition: The act of searching for a document based on words that are related to a concept rather than a document that contains the actual search word or phrase.

Content rich
Definition: Refers to a web page that contains relevant content to the topic at hand. Usually used to refer to the need to repeat keyword phrases within the body copy of a web site. Search engine algorithms give higher ranking to a site that contains the keyword phrases that a user is searching for.

Conversion rate
Definition: The mathematical equation that determines what percentage of visitors to a site completes a specified action.

Examples: If 4 out of 100 individuals signs up for an online newsletter, the conversion rate for that site is 4%.

Crawler
Definition: An automated robot program that follows links to visit web sites on behalf of search engines or directories. Crawlers then process and index the code and content of a web page to be stored in the search engine's database.

Examples: Googlebot is the crawler that travels the web finding and indexing pages for the Google search engine.

Cross browser
Definition: A reference to the need to test and adjust web site code, java script and CSS so that it displays properly on multiple browsers.

Examples: Some CSS will not display properly on both Internet Explorer and Netscape. In order to be cross browser compatible, a webmaster must design a work around that is tailored to each browser so that the site always displays properly.

Cross linking
Definition: The act of linking to content contained on a web site from elsewhere in that web site.

Examples: Linking each page of your web site back to the home page is an example of cross linking.

De-listing
Definition: The removal of a web page from a search engine or directory's index. Removal can occur as a result of a cleanup of dead links, as a penalty for spamming, or because of server issues at a site's host.

Dead link
Definition: The name given to a link that leads to a web page or site that has either moved or no longer exists. Search engines are directories continually work to remove dead links from their indexes in order to improve the overall quality of search results.

Examples: When a web site is redesigned to include new pages and remove old pages, the old pages that remain in search engine listings lead no where and are referred to as "dead links."

Deep link
Definition: The act of linking to a page (deep) within a web site rather than linking to the main URL. Directories discourage the submission of deep links as a way to keep their indexes clean and organized.

Description
Definition: The descriptive text associated with a web site or page's listing on a search engine results page.

Examples: Descriptions that appear in results pages from search engines usually consist of the text of the Meta Description tag, or a snippet of relevant text taken from the web page.

Descriptions that appear in results pages from directories usually consist of an assigned snippet of text created by the editor who has reviewed the web site or page in question.

Directory
Definition: Searchable subject guide organized by topical subject or geographical region and consisting of web sites that have been reviewed and compiled by human editors. Directories are often provided as a browsable alternative to the searchable indexes of search engines.

Examples: Yahoo!, The Open Directory Project and Looksmart are some of the most popular directories on the web.

Dns lookup
Definition: A process which converts a unique IP address into a domain name. Often used by webmasters to research listings contained in server log files.

Domain
Definition: The name given to the address of a web site. Domains are written in a hierarchical manner with lower-level domains referring to sub-sections of the base web site. Domains are available with a variety of extensions, the most popular of which are .com, .edu, .gov, and .org. Domains are unique and must be registered and assigned to a web host to become effective.

Example: http://www.searchengineguide.com is the domain of the Search Engine Guide web site.

Domain name registration
Definition: The act of registering a domain name with an approved registrar.

Doorway domain
Definition: A domain that has been specifically created to be highly ranked for particular keywords in search engine results pages, but that directs visitors toward the actual domain of a web site.

Doorway page
Definition: A specially created web page that is designed to rank highly on a particular search engine by utilizing the methods that are known to produce the best results on that engine. These pages are most often designed to be visible to a search engine spider, but to be hidden from a human visitor. Doorway pages are currently considered a recognized spam tactic and are banned by most of the major engines and directories.

Dynamic IP address
Definition: An IP address that changes with each connection to the Internet.

Dynamic content
Definition: Web content that is generated out of a database to create dynamic web pages.

FFA link pages
Definition: Web pages specifically designed to allow anyone to submit a link to their site. FFA sites tend to rotate new links in and old links out. They have little use in search engine optimization and provide minimal traffic.

Also Known As: Free For All Link Pages

FTP
Definition: The protocol used to upload and download content from web servers.

Also Known As: File Transfer Protocol

Favorites
Definition: A method of saving a link with a personal notation for a web site that you wish to visit again. Most browsers have some form of storage system that allows for sites to be catalogued in folders. Also known as "bookmarks."

Fields
Definition: The act of specifying which location of a page a search term should

appear on. For example, users can specify that the search term should appear in the URL or in the incoming link text.

Filter words
Definition: Common words such that search engines remove from web pages before they add them to their index in order to save space. These words tend to have very little impact on search engine ranking and are usually discounted from search phrases as well.

Examples: of, is, the, and, for, it

Frames
Definition: A coding style that is used to combine multiple HTML documents into a single web page. Frames are often used to allow certain areas of a web site to remain in place (i.e. navigation, header graphic) while other areas of the site are scrollable.

Framed web sites are more difficult to optimize for high search engine rankings because most spiders are unable to read and index the content within a < FRAMESET > tag. Sites that are designed using frames need to place optimized content in the < NOFRAMES > in order to provide the search engine spiders with something to index.

Gateway domain
Definition: A domain that has been specifically created to be highly ranked for particular keywords in search engine results pages, but that directs visitors toward the actual domain of a web site.

Gateway page
Definition: A specially created web page that is designed to rank highly on a particular search engine by utilizing the methods that are known to produce the best results on that engine. These pages are most often designed to be visible to a search engine spider, but to be hidden from a human visitor. Doorway pages are currently considered a recognized spam tactic and are banned by most of the major engines and directories.

HTML
Definition: The scripting language used to define the content and appearance of a web page.

Also Known As: Hypertext Markup Language

HTTP
Definition: The main protocol used to communicate between web servers and Internet browsers.

Also Known As: HyperText Transfer Protocol

Heading tag
Definition: An HTML tag that designates headlines in the body copy of a website. These tags use the format and are designated in importance by the numbers 1 through 6. (1 being the largest headline.) Heading tags are important to SEO efforts because most engines will give extra weight to keywords contained within these tags.

Hidden text
Definition: Content on a web site that is coded in a manner that makes it invisible to human visitors, but readable by search engine spiders. This is done in order to artificially inflate the keyword density of a web site without affecting the visual appearance of it. Hidden text is a recognized spam tactic and nearly all of the major search engines recognize and penalize sites that use this tactic.

IP address
Definition: Unique numerical identifier given to each Internet connection. The IP address is how data finds its way from a web site back to your computer.

IP addresses that are attached to dialup ISP accounts usually dynamic and change with each connection.

IP addresses that are attached to a permanent Internet connection like a T1 line or a cable modem are static and stay the same all the time.

IP delivery
Definition: The act of presenting one set of content to search engine spiders and another set of content to human web users. This is accomplished by presenting different sets of content based on the IP address of a visitor. IP Delivery is a form of cloaking that is used to present content that has been specifically optimized to rank well at each search engine while still presenting the same content to each human visitor to the web site.

This technology is difficult to detect, as it requires that a user present the IP address of a search engine spider in order to view the hidden web site content. (see also: agent name delivery, cloaking.)

IP spoofing
Definition: A method of connecting to the Internet or a particular web site and reporting a different IP Address than your assigned one. IP Spoofing is used in SEO in order to trick a spider into indexing one site, while actually presenting another site to the end user. This tactic can also be used to redirect a user to a site other than the one they have clicked on.

This tactic is considered highly unethical and is illegal in some areas.

ISP
Definition: The designation given to companies that provide access to the Internet.

Also Known As: Internet Service Provider

Examples: AOL, Earthlink, Juno

Inbound link
Definition: A hypertext link on a web site other than your own that points to your web site. Inbound links are an important part of web site marketing as they can deliver targeted visitors directly from another web site, and can help to improve the ranking position of your web site on engines that use link popularity as a part of their algorithm. (also known as a backlink)

Index
Definition: The database of web pages that is maintained by a search engine or directory.

This phrase can also refer to the main page (the index page) of a web site.

Indexed
Definition: The act of being reviewed and stored in a database by a visiting spider from a search engine.

Invisible text
Definition: Content on a web site that is coded in a manner that makes it invisible to human visitors, but readable by search engine spiders. This is done in order to artificially inflate the keyword density of a web site without affecting the visual appearance of it. Hidden text is a recognized spam tactic and nearly all of the major search engines recognize and penalize sites that use this tactic.

Invisible web
Definition: The name given to the content of dynamic or database driven sites that are unable to be indexed by search engines.

Keyword
Definition: A word or phrase that is used in a search engine query. Optimizing a site entails researching the keyword or keyword phrases that users enter in order to find web sites, and optimizing a web site around those terms.

Keyword buys
Definition: A type of advertising that entails paying for high placement in search engine results for pre-selected keywords and keyword phrases.

Keyword density
Definition: Refers to a web page that contains relevant content to the topic at hand. Usually used to refer to the need to repeat keyword phrases within the body copy of a web site. Search engine algorithms give higher ranking to a site that contains the keyword phrases that a user is searching for.

Also Known As: keyword rich, keyword dense

Keyword domain name
Definition: The act of purchasing a domain name that contains the main keyword or keyword phrase that a site is being optimized for. Traditionally this entails placing a hyphen between each word in the domain. This is done because most search engines read hyphens as a space, thus allowing the domain to contribute to increased positioning for that keyword.

Examples: If the main keyword for your web site was "blue widgets," and keyword domain name would be www.blue-widgets.com.

Keyword research
Definition: The act of researching what particular words and phrases are used to search for web sites. This is one of the most important aspects of SEO as it allows a webmaster to write the content of their site in a manner that will help them rank highly on these particular phrases.

Keyword stuffing
Definition: The act of repeating keywords or keyword phrases excessively in body copy, hidden text, meta tags, or any other code on the site. Originally done in order to increase rankings in search engines, this tactic is now recognized and penalized by most of the major search engines.

Link farm
Definition: A set of web pages that have been built for the sole purpose of increasing the number of incoming links to a web site. This is done in order to increase link popularity and search engine rankings. Link farms usually require a reciprocal link from sites seeking listings.

Link farms are a known spam tactic and sites that participate in them are likely to be penalized or banned from the major search engines.

Link popularity
Definition: The act of a search engine counting the number of inbound links to a web site. Many search engines now use this information as part of their ranking

system.

Link Popularity is measured by a combination of factors that are designed to weigh the importance of each incoming link. Links from sites with high link popularity will have more weight in a search engine algorithm than links from unpopular sites. In addition, links from sites with complimentary content count as more than links from sites that have no relevance.

Link rot
Definition: The name given to a link that leads to a web page or site that has either moved or no longer exists. Search engines are directories continually work to remove dead links from their indexes in order to improve the overall quality of search results.

Meta data
Definition: The information that is contained within the meta tags of a web site.

Meta search engine
Definition: A search engine that collects results from other search engines and directories and then presents a summary of that information as the results of a search.

Examples: Dogpile, Metacrawler

Meta tag
Definition: An HTML tag placed within the header area of code for a web site. This information is visible only to spiders and does not appear as a visual part of the web site. These tags were originally used be webmasters to provide information about the content of a web site in order to assist search engines in indexing the content. Because these tags were so easy to abuse, few search engines still read the content within these tags.

Mirror sites
Definition: Sites that are designed to be duplicates of an original site, but are hosted at a separate domain. Mirror sites are often used in SEO to allow for the use of keyword rich domain names. This is a recognized spam tactic and is penalized by many of the major search engines.

Optimization
Definition: The changes that are made to the content and code of a web site in order to increase it's rankings in the results pages of search engines and directories.

Examples: These changes may involve rewriting body copy, altering Title or Meta tags, removal of Frames or Flash content, and the seeking of incoming links.

Outbound link
Definition: A link from a web site that leads the user to a page on another web site.

PFI
Definition: The act of paying a search engine or directory to include your web site in their index. Paying this fee does not affect the placement of a web site in search results, it simply assures that the web site will be visited and indexed within a specified time frame.

Also Known As: Pay for Inclusion

PPC engine
Definition: A search engine that allows webmasters to purchase their positions within the search results based on the amount of money they are willing to pay for each click thru their site's listing receives.

Also Known As: Pay Per Click Engine

PR
Definition: The name given to Google's link popularity measuring system. PR is determined by measuring both the quantity and quality of incoming links to a web site and is a major factor in the Google ranking algorithm.

Also Known As: Page Rank

PR0
Definition: A site that has been penalized for spamming Google will be given a Page Rank of 0. The PR0 acts to lower the placement of a web site or page in Google's search results pages.

Page jacking
Definition: The act of stealing content, code or images from a web site to place on your own.

Page popularity
Definition: Determined by measuring the quality and amount of incoming links to a specific web site or web page. This information is often used by search engines to help determine the proper placement for a web site in its search engine results.

Precision
Definition: How well a search engine is able to list documents that match a specific keyword or phrase query. Precision is calculated by dividing the number of returned documents that contain the search words by the number of documents returned.

Proximity search
Definition: A type of search in which the user specifies which words should be near each other on the pages that are returned in the search results.

Qualified traffic
Definition: This term describes traffic that is produced by users that find a web site by searching for a product of concept that is offered on that web site. These visitors are thought to be more likely to interact with or purchase from your web site and are therefore of higher quality than other visitors.

Query
Definition: A word, a phrase or a group of words, possibly combined with other syntax used to pass instructions to a search engine or a directory in order to locate web pages.

Ranking
Definition: The placement of a web site within a particular search engines results pages.

Examples: A ranking within the top 20 listings is generally considered to be a strong ranking.

Re-submission
Definition: The repeated submission of a web site to search engines or directories.

Recall
Definition: The degree to which a search engine is able to return all possible matching documents in their index.

Examples: If a search engine has 1000 pages indexed that contain the phrase "car sales" and it produces 8500 of them in response to a search for that phrase, it is said to have 85% recall.

Reciprocal link
Definition: An exchange where two sites agree to link to each other.

Referrer
Definition: The URL of the web site that a visitor has come from. This information is stored in the server's referrer log file and can be used to discover which search engines or web sites are delivery traffic to your web site.

Registration
Definition: The process of selecting and reserving a domain name.

or

The process of submitting your web site to a search engine or directory in order for it to be indexed.

Relevancy
Definition: How well a search engine result matches the intention of the searcher.

Robot
Definition: An automated program that follows links to visit web sites on behalf of search engines or directories. Robots then process and index the code and content of a web page to be stored in the search engine's database.

Examples: Googlebot, Slurp, T-Rex

Robots.txt
Definition: A text file that is stored in the top-level directory of a web site to be accessed by robots or spiders that might visit the site. Robots that comply with the "Robots Exclusion Standard" will read the commands in this file and will obey them.

The primary purpose of the robots.txt file is to direct spiders to ignore directories that may contain private or unnecessary information.

Examples: The example below attempts to prevent all robots from visiting the /test files directory:

User-agent: *
Disallow: /testfiles

SEM
Definition: The changes that are made to the content and code of a web site in order to increase its rankings in the results pages of search engines and directories. These changes may involve rewriting body copy, altering Title or Meta tags, removal of Frames or Flash content, and the seeking of incoming links.

Search Engine Marketing also entails non-optimization methods of drawing traffic through search engines, including management of paid advertising listings on search engines.

Also Known As: search engine marketing

SEMPO
Definition: Acronym for the Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization, an international industry group.

SEO
Definition: The changes that are made to the content and code of a web site in order to increase its rankings in the results pages of search engines and directories. These changes may involve rewriting body copy, altering Title or Meta tags, removal of Frames or Flash content, and the seeking of incoming links.

Also Known As: search engine optimization

SEP
Definition: The changes that are made to the content and code of a web site in order to increase its rankings in the results pages of search engines and directories. These changes may involve rewriting body copy, altering Title or Meta tags, removal of Frames or Flash content, and the seeking of incoming links.

Also Known As: search engine placement

SERP
Definition: The list of search results that are returned by a search engine or directory in response to a search query.

Also Known As: Search Engine Results Page

Scooter
Definition: Alta Vista's search engine spider.

Search
Definition: The act of using an online directory or database of web sites to locate a web page on a specific topic.

Search Term
Definition: The word or words that a search engine user types into the search box in order to find web page results. Also known as a query.

Search engines
Definition: A searchable index of web sites that is traditionally compiled by a spider that visits web pages and stores the information from each page in a database.

Examples: Google, Inktomi, Alta Vista

Siphoning
Definition: The act of "stealing" another site's traffic by copying content, tags or trademarked names and phrases.

Slurp
Definition: Inktomi's search engine spider.

Spam
Definition: The act of using optimization techniques that are designed to artificially increase the rank of a web site or web page.

Spider
Definition: An automated program that follows links to visit web sites on behalf of search engines or directories. Robots then process and index the code and content of a web page to be stored in the search engine's database.

Examples: Googlebot, Slurp, T-Rex

Stemming
Definition: The ability of a search engine to recognize word roots and match them with multiple endings. (i.e. run, running, runs) Also known as "truncation."

Stop word
Definition: Words that are so commonly used that they have no impact on the relevancy of a search query. These words are rarely indexed by search engines and are often ignored in query strings.

Examples: the, of, is, an, a, and, if

Submission
Definition: The process of submitting your web site to a search engine or directory in order for it to be indexed.

Submit
Definition: The process of submitting your web site to a search engine or directory in order for it to be indexed.

Truncation
Definition: The ability of a search engine to recognize word roots and match them with multiple endings. (i.e. run, running, runs) Also known as "stemming."

Web Log
Definition: A style of Internet publishing that uses content management software to allow for quick and easy posting of articles, personal journals and news stories. Also known as "blog."

WYSIWYG
Definition: An acronym meaning "what you see is what you get." Refers to programs that allow a user to drag and drop content like page copy and images without having to write or edit code.