How They Did It:

Successful Bloggers Tell How They

Came to Make Their Income Doing What They Love

by Evan Hadkins

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INTRODUCTION

THANKS

Firstly thanks to those who have been very generous with their time and energy by being willing to be interviewed. This, after all, was my project and my idea – and these people have willingly given of themselves and their time to my project.

WHAT I AM TRYING TO DO

The amount of information on how to be successful as a blogger is overwhelming. I don't doubt that it is usually offered in good faith. It is people talking about what worked for them, it is grounded in their experience and so they 'know it works'.

The problem for someone wanting to be successful as a blogger is that there is a lot of this advice, and there is a lot of different advice. Without trying out all the different ideas on offer, what is someone to do?

My answer is: talk to those who have been successful and learn from them.

My hope was to listen and learn from those interviewed and then analyse and synthesise what they have to say. I have attempted to listen to those who are successful, to present their journeys and what they have learned. To present another collection of interviews would have just added to all the advice already out there.

I plan to interview many more people (eventual target of 100: which should be enough to draw some firm conclusions about how people make their living by doing what they love online). If you are making your living online by doing what you love I would like to hear from you; if you know someone else doing this I would be grateful if you would ask them to get in touch with me.

WHAT I DID

This eBook is based on interviews with bloggers who are making their living doing what they love. The selection doesn't pretend to be objective – I asked those bloggers who I had some contact with, or who others I knew had some contact with. The interviews were conducted

by Skype (with me taking notes) or by email. I then read over all the interviews looking for themes that emerged. These themes became the headings of the sections of this eBook. This has the drawback of not being as objective as a survey. It has the advantage of finding out these bloggers experiences more directly – without them having to respond to the categories of a survey which I had made up. Ideally these kinds of interviews would be followed up by a mass survey; this may be possible later on after many more interviews have been done.

Each of the five sections of this ebook is divided into three parts. The first, and longest part, presents what the successful bloggers had to say on a particular topic. The second part is a brief reflection on this theme. The third part is questions for you to consider about how this section may apply to you, in your quest to make your income doing what you love.

MY DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

My desire is to make my living doing what I love; finding out how others have done this is the drive behind this eBook. There is lots of advice in the Make Money Online world about how to make a lot of money from websites and blogs. For me the money is not enough, so I set out to interview those who are not just making money - but making money doing what they love to do. For me this is real success.

MY MISTAKES (SO FAR)

Already I have learned about some mistakes I have made. Firstly, I think my approach was too analytical. Instead of asking for an interview I should have said something like: I'd like to do an interview but with the feeling of having a conversation over a good lunch or dinner. I also want to find out more about the role of 'vision' – if the business is part of a bigger picture or a desire to change the world; and if so does this make a difference. I expect to make lots more mistakes and learn lots from them in the future.

LEARNING

This eBook is a sample of the possibilities available – with quite frank discussion of mistakes made and lessons learned. I have only interviewed a few people so far - it is too early to generalise. However, it is not too early to learn: there is a wealth of wisdom that these people have generously shared.

THOSE INTERVIEWED

CAROL KING

Carol King, after a fulfilling career as a chef wanted to put together her two great passions – writing and computers. While she was doing this she came across The Secret and immediately changed the focus of her blogging to creating the life you want to live. Her blog is Positive Thinking 4 Life and she also has coaching sessions tailored individually to her clients.

COREY FREEMAN

Corey is a 17-year-old female freelance entrepreneur who started working online when she was 12. Corey started her own web design business at 15. Her dream is to own her own publishing company that creates websites and products focused on teaching others.

She currently run the blog Headway Hacks and plan on re-launching her blog Writer Seven in 2010. Corey has a personal blog, corey-freeman.com, where you can read all about her journey as a young entrepreneur.

ZUBIN KUTAR

Zubin lives in Canada. On his blog, webtrafficroi, he shares what he has personally learned and experienced to make internet work for me. His blog is dedicated to helping bloggers, entrepreneurs, small business owners and companies make their businesses better. From his blog you can also download Zubin's free report, The 10 Point Site Optimization Checklist.

CHRIS GARRETT

Chris, along with Darren Rowse, wrote, Problogger: secrets for blogging your way to a six-figure income, one of the definitive guides to blogging. Chris has several blogs on niche topics, as well as one, chrisg.com, where he shares his wisdom on blogging and new media. He also has a forum, authorityblogger.com, about his own approach to blogging called Authority Blogging – developing a position of authority on your chosen topic.

ROBB SUTTON

After a very successful business career with major companies Robb left the corporate world to start a blog. In the first year he received over $70, 000 worth of product to review. Robb's blog is robbsutton.com – where he shares how to make firing your boss a reality. He

has a free 7 week course on how to have a successful blog, Ramped Blogging, and free downloads where he shares the story of his success, Ramped Blogging and Ramped Mindset. You can hire Robb as a consultant to get personal guidance on how to make firing your boss a reality for you too.

MARK SILVER

Mark has an unapologetically spiritual approach to his business – called Heart of Business. He has an eBook, called Heart of Business, that guides you through the whole process of developing a business that is an expression of spirit. Mark's message is that, You **can** make a profit while making a difference. Mark has a wide variety of courses and products, and many free resources too, available from heartofbusiness.com.

SECTION ONE: DIFFERENT WAYS TO GET THERE

Making a living online or through blogging means discovering the possibilities of blogging. While all the people interviewed have discovered this, the way they made the discovery is remarkably diverse.

People come to blogging in very different ways. Some people discovered blogs early and enjoyed them and decided to approach blogging in a more businesslike way. Others had not considered blogging or even been interested in the internet. Some people discover the online world or blogging and are then quite focused in using it; others' paths are more meandering.

The Direct Route

Zubin Kutar found a gap in the knowledge of those blogging on a subject he knew about:

> I started blogging in mid 2008 basically to share my web experience online, I found that people who blogged in my domain did not have practical knowledge about the subject ... I knew that these blogs would not last for long and would run out of content ideas.

This is very close to the common marketing advice of 'find a need and fill it".

Robb Sutton also speaks of his experience as being fairly direct. After his blog took over the website he had started, Robb says, "From that point forward, it was off to the races".

Meandering paths

Carol King had been a chef and loved it but decided to turn to her first love (writing) and her second love (computers), and looked for a way to combine them. After signing up for an online business system she had a successful business selling eBooks. At this point a friend sent her Rhonda Byrne's book The Secret. This led to her closing her existing websites and starting completely afresh.

Carol's journey was an inner-directed one, focused on what had meaning for her.

Chris Garrett:

The journey of Chris Garrett with blogging began around 1993 when he was selected

> to handle setting up the college where I worked onto the internet and making it into an internet service provider for the local area schools, education staff and libraries.

He then moved from an IT to an internet specific focus. He now has a forum about blogging and several niche blogs of his own. The progression was quite natural, but it didn't start from analysing a market and building something around this.

Chris's path has more focus on the external that Carol's in some ways. He says unapologetically, "This is a key part of success, who are you serving and why?"

And people can come to blogging early or late (in their lives or in the life of their business). Corey Freeman began blogging at 12 years of age. Mark Silver already had a successful business before he started blogging. To this he added an email newsletter, but it wasn't for several years after this that he discovered social media and the possibilities of blogging.

It's probable that every blogger who has been around for a while adapts and evolves. What makes social media (web 2.0) different is the ability for the writers and readers to interact and respond to each other. Some bloggers have turned off the comment option on their posts, but this is rare.

DIFFERENT FOCUSES, DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

All of these people are focused. There are however differences between an exterior and inner focus.

This distinction is a little false. Those who write authority blogs often include personal updates; those who are inner focused usually have a particular topic they write about (such as personal development). There are slightly different challenges however.

For those who are creating authority blogs there is the need to provide quality information: making a basic blunder can destroy any authority you have built - and rapidly.

> Q: What is the difference between a hare-brained scheme and an overlooked opportunity?
>
> A: Knowing the field.

Bloggers whose focus is more inner-directed still need to connect with their audience. This may be through their personality (gracious or gushy, heady or heartfelt, aggressive or analytical, the range of possibilities is vast) or their style of writing (humorous, tips and tricks, analysis and deep exploration, or how-to's to name a few). This connection is more personal – in a sense more purely "bloggish" (exploiting social media's ability for exchange).

It also means that the blogger is more 'exposed' – if someone doesn't like them or how they write there is no external focus.

When a blog is first established there is usually little or no audience. For those who wish to write an authority blog there are topics to be dealt with. For those who are more inner focused there are things they want to say. In either case there is some kind of agenda to be worked through. However, when the blogger runs out of ideas or motivation to write, the situation is a little different. The authority blogger has an external reference point or points to draw on (aspects of their topic, news and events, other blogs and so on) while the person who is more inner-directed needs other ways of responding to this situation. This problem may be especially acute before a blog has much of an audience – it can feel like speaking into a void. How can the blogger know how to write for their audience before they have one?

Inner-directed blogs – being more bloggish, have fewer rules and constraints. Outer-directed blogs can model themselves more readily on other forms of writing (books, articles, newspaper columns). Inner-directed blogs may need to focus far more on audience response in the comments.

FOCUS AND OPPORTUNITY: looking for it, creating it, taking advantage of it.

Through all their different styles and paths these people have some things in common. One of them is focus: these people are not wandering around just looking (even if they found what they wanted to do this way).

For each of these people there came a time of 'getting serious' or deciding what they wanted to do. Another way of saying this is that they found an opportunity (outer focus) or their passion (inner focus).

Carol deliberately searched for opportunity in line with her passion, Zubin saw an opportunity in the field he knew well (an existing passion perhaps), Corey seems to have come to a point of decision to apply everything he'd learnt (he created his opportunity) and Chris in some ways had opportunity thrust upon him – he quite openly says that he could have taken much greater advantage of the opportunity much sooner.

The next section of this eBook explores the topic of passion in detail.

TO CONSIDER: finding your focus

Have you reached the point of seriousness/commitment? If not it may be that you are still wandering.

What just grabs your attention?

What do you find it easy to talk about enthusiastically?

What do you love to do in your spare time?

If you have several interests: is there an aspect that they share?

SECTION TWO: DIRECTIONS, GOALS AND PLANS

There is always more that any blogger could do: more writing, more marketing, more other bloggers to know, more comments to leave. It is also likely that there is a desired lifestyle or level of income – and to know that there is movement towards it.

People usually respond to this situation by planning and goal setting (prioritising, timetabling and so on). This may be a person's preferred mode or not. However all these successful people had ways of working to achieve what they wanted.

Corey Freeman said honestly, "I am the most unorganized person ever, which is why creating a plan was so hard for me. . . . Having plans keeps my otherwise chaotic process on track and helps me to sustain myself." While for Robb Sutton making plans and setting goals seems to come quite naturally, "Once I had my mind set on where I wanted to go, it was off to the races at that point. You really have to have goals to hit and achieve...both large, long term and small, short term. It keeps the progression going."

The people interviewed had a number of quite surprising things to say about goals and plans. The idea of setting the goal and progressing step by step towards it had quite a few wrinkles.

Firstly Carol King raised a point about being relaxed about the goals we set.

"Yes I have goals but I am not nearly as rigid about them as I was when I was teaching full time. I am more relaxed about my work now and I do not feel that it is the end of the world if I do not achieve my goals in the time I have specified. Having said that I find that by adopting the more relaxed approach I actually achieve far more."

The usual advice about goal setting doesn't include much talk about relaxation – yet, Carol found that this made her **more** productive. A comment by Corey Freeman extends this in a way I found unexpected.

"I'm a huge proponent of learning from every experience, and so I took all of my past experiences and built a business plan around how my content would be, how the design would impact the content, how promotion would be handled, and how to space out tasks so I didn't fall into the rut of "doing too much" as I usually do."

Secondly there is the question of the scale of our goals and plans. Goals can be used to keep track of both the long and short-term. For Robb Sutton it serves to have goals at every scale:

"I try to keep goals separated into sections. Weekly, Monthly, Yearly and 5 Years. This way...I can setup the shorter term goals to reflect what I want to accomplish years down the road. It makes it a lot easier to chop off things that way and actually see the success of long

term planning. The day to day will frustrate you too much if you are not looking at the big picture."

Corey Freeman, though phrasing it very differently, makes the same point,

"I think, "my next step is to get one comment for each post," or "my next goal is to sell at least one eBook to somebody I don't know." I still imagine the big picture, but now I also imagine the steps taken to get me there."

In these comments goal-setting is valued not only for achieving an outcome but is also as a way to keep track of progress. Both Robb and Corey are making the point that you can get lost in the details.

Then there is planning and time-tabling. Corey Freeman advises us: "instead of having a routine for an entire day, you want to have a routine for a specific task." She goes on to say, "You should develop routines for specific tasks, and then use them interchangeably to fit your day and your needs for the day." Corey gave a couple of examples of her routines,

"When I'm writing a press release, I ask about all of the details, feed them into the template, do a little bit more research, then write the draft. That's my "routine" for press release writing."

Likewise with writing posts,

"my process for writing a post is to come up with a title, create a mini-outline, find a cool image, and then write, and then revise, and then schedule it.

A third point is that goals may mean different things to different people. That so many people are in favour of goals may be because the word means different things to different people. This point is raised by a comment from Corey Freeman,

"You know, someone once asked me what my goals were. I told them that I don't set goals, which, to an extent, is true. Goals are time-oriented ideas. They put constraints on your production time. So when I say that I set goals, they're really more like...challenges."

Leaving time-tabling out of goal-setting would be regarded as heresy by many. What is Corey using goals (challenges) for?

"Challenges imply that you can use whatever method you want to achieve the ends, as long as you get there. It's all about mindset. If you don't meet your goal, you feel disappointed. If you fail a challenge, you can always try again until you conquer it. And who doesn't like to conquer stuff?"

Goals, or challenges as Corey prefers to call them, are being used as a mental discipline. To use the mind in a particular way – to know what you want and to keep you moving towards it, even though may not get there the first time.

Fourthly is a subtle point raised by Mark Silver. He said, "It is important to know where you think you are going" and went on to point out that this is "not always the same as where you are going". Mark is making the point that while goals may help us to achieve external goals, we also use them for psychological benefits. We like to have the sense that we know what we are doing: and goal setting can help us have this sense. It will also be of benefit if we don't think we are achieving what we wish to – we will have a record of what we have been doing which may provide us helpful information to know what needs changing.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that goal setting is usually quite a cerebral process. But Mark Silver uses a heart-centred process to make goals and plans. The details are laid out in the Heart of Business book but briefly this means, "looking at the relationship that you have to the goal rather than just the goal itself. For instance, if your goal is revenue: What is my relationship to revenue? How can I relate to revenue in a way that I feel nourished? What does a healthy relationship to revenue look like? Then it is possible to know what will be the fruits of the relationship – what degree of revenue will be nourishing. It is then possible to take actions to support this relationship."

This is the first time that I have come across a goal setting process that is both heart-centred and arrives at specific actions to take. It is certainly worth considering for those of us with a holistic approach.

PRACTICES

The focus of these successful bloggers is made real through some kind of practice. This is usually talked about as a process of planning and goal-setting.

Goals and plans turn out to function in a surprising number of ways. All these successful bloggers want to get somewhere and they have a system to know whether they are getting there or not: "flaky" is not a word that I could see being applied to any of them.

Plans and goals function as a feedback mechanism: they let us know in detail if we are getting where we want to go. They also give structure to particular tasks by establishing routines. This is directly in line with the usual advice about planning and goal setting – though no less important because it is common.

Planning and goal setting are used in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. There is the psychological aspect ("mind-set"). This includes motivation and persistence (not being discouraged by 'failure'), keeping perspective (keeping track of both the big and small scale), avoiding overwhelm by managing the details (not losing the big picture), and giving us a sense that we know what we are doing. Perhaps most surprisingly goals can have an interesting relationship with relaxation: they may be more easily achieved when we are more relaxed about them, and they can help us to stay relaxed in at least two ways: helping us to not be overwhelmed by the details, and avoiding doing too much.

TO CONSIDER: making the focus real, dealing with the details

Are you a big picture or details person? How can you keep track of both the big picture and the details?

What routines do you need for tasks you do frequently?

Allow yourself to be challenged by Mark Silver: Do you include your heart in the planning process? If not is this okay by you?

Do you have goals for all the different timescales involved? How could you fill in any gaps?

What function do goals have for you? Would it be more helpful to have challenges?

Do you find it important to have specific times to achieve your goals by? Would it be helpful to loosen up or tighten up your time-tabling?

Would being more relaxed with your goals help you to achieve more?

SECTION THREE: PASSION AND THE AUDIENCE

PASSION

Especially in the early days, blogging can be a lonely business. When a blogger starts out they are unlikely to have an audience and so are likely to get little encouragement. They will need to find the energy to keep writing. What bloggers rely on to provide this energy is usually called "passion" – that is, their love for the subject they are writing about.

My definition of success (making your income doing what you love) includes passion. It is possible, within this definition of success, that the passion would be business itself – people could love building successful blogs as other people love building other businesses (Richard Branson is probably the most famous example – his businesses aren't in any particular industry: his passion is building businesses).

Corey Freeman came closest to the entrepreneurs position when she said, "I firmly believe that I could write about anything (as a freelance writer, it's kind of a must)" but then went on to say, "but what's the point? If you can't put some of yourself into your topic, then you're not going to make any money, because you aren't going to move anybody. You have to write to move someone, and to make a statement. That can't be done if your only motivation is money. "

"I love writing because it's the only real way I can communicate my exact thoughts and feelings, and it's that passion that keeps me going."

Robb Sutton:

> Start with what you can write about for a year. If you do not know the subject intimately...you are going to run out of content very quickly. 99% of start-up blogs are going to be writing their own content for a pretty long time before they get the opportunity to hire writers and accept free guest posts. During that time, you better be able to churn out some great content or everything is just going to fade away.
>
> Most successful blogs started out of some sort of passion. It is a lot easier to write on a daily basis if you actually enjoy the subject matter....that is what I normally ask new bloggers. What would you write about for free? Normally, if you can answer that question...you can make it work.

But is passion always required? After all many people do a perfectly adequate job without being fully engaged (or even slightly turned on) by it. Why shouldn't this also be possible with blogging?

Chris Garrett's experience, in his early days, was along these lines:

> Passion can translate to a lot of things. There is passion and there is motivation, two separate but connected things.
>
> My motivation in the early days was to progress, grow, and pay my bills. We [Chris and his collaborator] built small five page websites for small businesses. . . . I wasn't passionate about trailer hire, hiking clothing, or any of the subjects I was building sites about, but I had a motivation to escape my job, make money, and I enjoyed developing my skills with the experience.

None of those I interviewed fitted the stereotype of the entrepreneur: someone whose passion is business itself. All these successful bloggers care about their subject: from mountain biking to writing to blogging – they are engaged with the details of their subject. That their passion could be business success alone was never once mentioned in any of the interviews.

AND THE AUDIENCE

Passion is something the blogger has. To be successful requires others (their readers). This point was made concisely by Chris Garrett, "This is a key part of success, who are you serving and why?"

Chris emphasises the possibility of finding an audience in line with your interests. He feels that he should have left the IT focus much sooner to concentrate specifically on the internet,

> What I should have done was found a new audience, an audience that was willing to both appreciate me and also benefit from this knowledge. People who would value this differentiation rather than try to downplay it.

MEETING

A successful blog is the meeting of a blogger and their audience.

It seems that if the blogger has passion, this is likely to contribute to the success of a blog in at least two ways. Firstly it can provide the energy to keep writing – especially in the early days while building an audience. Secondly, it will be easier for the writing to be engaging: a writer who is bored or uninterested in what they are writing about will find it hard to write interesting posts.

Then there is the audience. As the book title says, "Nobody Cares What You Had For Breakfast". And as the traditional marketing wisdom says – find a hungry crowd and you

won't have trouble selling them food. People read blogs and buy bloggers' products because of their needs and interests not the blogger's.

Once a blog has an audience most bloggers engage with their audience and modify their writing to fit their audience. They will run surveys, track comments, see what gets stumbled or tweeted and adjust to suit.

TO CONSIDER: you and your audience

Are you willing to do stuff that isn't in line with your passion, at the moment, to get to the point of making your living doing what you love?

What would you write about for free anyway?

Can you write a lot about what you are interested in? Could you list 100 possible titles – that's only two posts a week for a year.

It is easiest to fish where the fish are (and other people are fishing). It is easiest to get a slice of a large existing audience (if you can find an attractive way to make yourself somewhat distinctive). Building an audience can take a very long time. Do you know others who are interested in the same topic as you (and who may find your approach to it attractive?). If not, do you have a way of finding out?

ENTREPRENEURSHIP: FREEDOM, MONEY AND RISK

When asked why they like how they live, or why they started making their income this way; there is one theme that recurs – freedom. It is put differently by different people, but it is the same.

Chris Garrett, when asked about the satisfactions of his lifestyle, puts it this way:

> For me being able to provide for my family and spend quality time with them, have freedom to go places and do stuff under my own timetable, pick and choose what I work on.

Carol King has this to say:

> The thing I love most about being an entrepreneur is the flexibility. I love setting my own hours and schedule. I love knowing that when I want to take an afternoon off I can and I do not need to ask anyone's permission.

Robb Sutton:

> All of this chaos really started because I was sick of working for someone else and I wanted to be a part of the industry I loved so much instead of another random rider. [Robb writes about mountain bike riding.]

Is it about the money?

Well, of course it is. To make money doing what you love implies making enough money. And of course it isn't. The money is the way, the means, to doing what you love. It is what can be bought with the money that matters to these people.

This is the bigger context of Chris Garrett's previous remark:

> For me being able to provide for my family and spend quality time with them, have freedom to go places and do stuff under my own timetable, pick and choose what I work on. That's wealth. . . . I have turned down some huge dollar figures because it was not the correct fit for my family or myself.
>
> Money is a means to an end, and knowing what it can and won't do for you is part of growing up I think.

Risk?

When freedom is discussed, the discussion of risk is usually not far away. Some advocate risk as essential others advocate a path of caution.

Here is a joke used by Edward de Bono. Q: What is the difference between a thief and a businessman? A: A thief takes risks.

The point of the joke is that any businessperson would much prefer guaranteed returns and a sure thing to a wild stab in the dark. The consequences of risk are especially acute for those in small business. As Mark Silver points out: "My business supports our family, why risk this if I don't have to?"

Mark advocates a cautious step-by-step approach: "Try something in a small way, if it works then do it bigger." And he points out that, "Those who founded big spiritual movements (Martin Luther King Jr, Mother Teresa, Gandhi) kept their work very small at the beginning until they worked out the kinks and then they took it larger."

Mark also points out that risk is unavoidable - but that, "some people don't see this. Relying on the status quo and relying on your current job lasting is also a risk."

LIFESTYLE

These successful bloggers clearly love their lifestyles. You may well think: "What's not to like? They are making their income doing what they love – sounds pretty good to me!"

However this lifestyle may not be for everyone.

It is mostly a small business lifestyle. This means (especially in the early days) that you are usually doing everything – the stuff you don't like often taking up time that you'd rather spend doing the work you do like.

Income is not guaranteed by relying on an employer – but it is not guaranteed for the entrepreneur either. It may be years before you can afford to outsource the work that you don't want to do.

The emphasis on freedom and having choice, which these people relish; means that there are choices to be made. If you find making choices difficult, if you like rules to follow and you feel secure within structures organised by others; this lifestyle will have its challenges for you.

TO CONSIDER: is this lifestyle for you?

To move toward this lifestyle can be done in small steps. The start-up costs for a blog are quite small and so should be possible for most people. This means that it is easy to check out the possibilities without risking large amounts of money or, perhaps, time.

This gives you the opportunity to see if you find this lifestyle suits you – if it fits with your preferences.

Imagine your perfect day, as vividly as you can. From waking to sleeping – try to imagine it with all of your senses. What is the day you dream of having? What are the qualities of this lifestyle? Is freedom part of it?

Then there are your preferences about freedom. Can you put a price on freedom? How much would you need to be paid to work full-time at something you hate? Would you be willing to do this? If freedom isn't high on the list of what you desire, then an entrepreneurial life may not be for you.

MISTAKES MADE, LESSONS LEARNED

These people speak openly of mistakes and willingly of the lessons they have learned.

Chris Garrett:

> My mistake: I didn't capitalize on the opportunity enough. I was a good little boy who did as he was told rather than looking out for myself.
>
> I had a golden opportunity but I sat on it for the sake of doing as I was told and living in my comfort zone.

Corey Freeman, when asked about lessons learned, provided what amounted to a checklist for a successful blog:

> My first professional blog, Diligent Design, taught me the lessons I would need to succeed years later. I learned that to build a great brand, you have to do a few things:
>
> Have an awesome, non-changing design.
> Write rock-solid content.
> Comment on other blogs.
> Talk to people.
> Have personality.
>
> What didn't work? Well...a lot of things. I learned that:
>
> you can't keep changing your theme every week because it pisses people off and destroys your brand.
>
> you can't continually delete posts because you don't like them - you have to learn to revise.
>
> you have to put some personality into your writing, because acting like other people just gets in the way of your real message.
>
> Also, even if you dream about having giant conventions and selling swag, it doesn't work if you only have one loyal reader...
>
> Finally, that even if it feels tedious, planning is important.

Mark Silver provides lessons about the big picture of business, and what it means to be in business:

> Things don't happen overnight. Those who are quickly successful usually have business experience; sometimes even from another internet business. They transfer business skills from elsewhere. . . .
>
> Relationships and trust take time to build – they don't necessarily happen more quickly because the medium can bring quicker communication.
>
> Business is the same on line as off. The same things apply to internet marketing as to offline business – constructing the offer, how to speak so that others are engaged, dealing with the details of the business. Humans have been the same for millennia and business fundamentals are still the same – it is still about trading: how to interact with someone using the written word.
>
> Having an effective business takes a combination of heart and spirit (the successful have a sense of internal connection/confidence); and dealing with the details – the infrastructure that supports the business. (People who headed mass social change movements were backed by big organisations: Gandhi had the satyagrahi and the Congress Party, Martin Luther King had the backing of various political organisations, Mother Teresa had the Catholic Church).

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

All of these people are energised by opportunity. And they have channelled this energy into dealing with the details. Some seem to do this naturally; others seem to have needed to learn to do this: but they all do it.

All of these people have found their audience. Their audience may have been a group they were already part of (Robb Sutton had long been part of the mountain biking community) whereas others, like Carol King, took time to find their topic and then needed to find their audience too. Their paths have been different but they have found and developed an audience and a relationship with it. At no stage, in any of the interviews, was there even a hint of seeing the audience as just a collection of dollar signs. The distinctive quality of blogs is the possibility of a two-way conversation, and all these successful bloggers use this to build a relationship with their audience.

While all these people have a sense of self-confidence there is also a willingness to learn. They are open about their mistakes and what these mistakes may have cost (in some cases

this may have been a great deal). They may not enjoy making costly mistakes (who does), but they do have a way of learning from them and moving on – not being stopped by the mistakes. This quality of resilience may be a very important if you wish to be as successful as these people.

OVER TO YOU

These successful bloggers have generously shared their experience. I find their stories inspiring. I hope you do too.

The question is where to start on the journey to making your own income by doing what you love. The simplest way is to go with what captured your attention.

Then find something you can do about what captured your attention. If it is easy and you can do it now, so much the better. The first step doesn't have to be big or dramatic – the most important thing is that you make it.

I WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

I hope that reading about these successful bloggers is the first step on your road of making your living doing what you love. Please let me know how you go as you set out on this journey.

If you have any comments you would like to make you can email me: livingauthentically@gmail.com.

Looking forward to hearing from you, Evan.

My name is Corey Freeman, and I'm a 17-year-old female freelance entrepreneur. I started working online when I was 12, and I started my own web design business at 15. My dream is to own my own publishing company that creates websites and products focused on teaching others.

I currently run the blog Headway Hacks and plan on re-launching my blog Writer Seven some time in 2010. The website you are currently on is my personal blog. Here you will read about my journey through life as a young entrepreneur.

When I'm not online, I'm usually hanging out with my best friend Haley, playing video games, trumpeting it out in band, or reading. I also love beef patties, the number seven, and alternative rock.

If you ever get bored, hit me up on twitter @coreyfreeman and don't forget to subscribe to the feed!