

Issue 50

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A DOZEN FREE TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO GIVE YOUR ONLINE BUSINESS THE EDGE IT NEEDS

My customers and subscribers are always asking me about freebies on the 'Net...

Can free resources provide solutions to their marketing needs?

Are they a viable way to avoid some of the costs of marketing online?

And many of you already know that I am not usually an advocate of freeware or free online services, but persistently ask...

"Aren't there ANY freebies I can use?"

Allow me to restate my mantra: Your most important e- business tools must be high-quality, dependable products and services.

You will never establish your e-business as a serious presence on the 'Net if your pages are filled with the garish advertising and sponsorships that typically go hand-in-hand with free services, or if your site has too much downtime, or if the services you use are constantly closing up shop...

At the very least, you absolutely must have reliable web hosting, effective site design, and good software.

The better these elements of your e-business are, the more efficiently your business will operate, the more easily you will establish your credibility, and the more money you will

make in the end.

You simply can't afford to cut corners here -- you get what you pay for with these products and services, and paying for them is just the cost of doing business.

However (now that you've been sufficiently warned!), there are A NUMBER OF VERY GOOD TOOLS AND RESOURCES available on the 'Net that are FREE.

And these can be excellent ways to complement your existing tools at no cost, helping you to make your site stickier and more user-friendly, make your keywords more effective, keep an eye on your competition, find potential business partners, and more...

Of course, I recommend that you proceed with caution in the "free" world, and always be aware of what you may have to give up (like reliability) or give over (like advertising space on your site -- and potential customers).

But the following 12 tools and resources can be effectively used to give your online business that EXTRA EDGE YOU NEED TO STAY AHEAD OF YOUR COMPETITION.

LINK PARTNER EVALUATION TOOL

<http://www.alexa.com>

The Alexa toolbar is one of the most useful tools around for businesses on the 'Net. Alexa provides a free, downloadable toolbar that opens in your web browser whenever you're online.

The most useful feature is a "site info" option. When you click on this button, Alexa lays out all the details of the site you're on, including:

- - The traffic ranking of the site (this is also listed right on the toolbar itself)
- - A list of related links (two or three of the most popular links also appear on the toolbar)
- - The number of other sites that link to the site
- - The contact information of the site owner
- - All site/user reviews

This is the exact information you need when you're researching high-traffic sites in your industry and considering link partnerships or joint ventures.

Use this information to...

- - Decide how much you're willing to pay for advertising
- - Make educated decisions about the worth of a joint venture partner
- - Determine the credibility and the perceived value of the site

The list of related links -- which also has its own button on the toolbar -- is an excellent way for you to find other popular or similar sites that might be good linking partners or joint venture partners.

Use this list to determine other popular sites that your Target market visits -- start by looking at your own site with Alexa's toolbar, and see what related links are suggested!

When you're establishing the credibility of a joint venture partner, be sure to check out Alexa's "WayBack" button.

The WayBack Machine allows you to see the past pages of any existing sites, or even see sites that no longer exist, letting you check out the history of any online business and understand how the business, the site, and the marketing approaches have developed or changed over time.

The toolbar also contains a Google search option, so you can jump directly into a search without having to leave the page you're on.

Alexa was designed to be used with Internet Explorer and Microsoft Windows, but the toolbar may slow down or even crash your browser unless you are using Explorer 6.0.

You can download the latest version of the Internet Explorer browser free at:
<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads/ie6/default.asp> For Mac users or those using Netscape Navigator, the Alexa "snapshot" is available as a free download from:
http://pages.alexa.com/prod_serv/snapshot.html

FREE IMAGE-REDUCING TOOL AND "TOOL KIT" TRIALS

<http://www.marketingtips.com/netmechanic>

NetMechanic is a "tool kit" resource offering a number of free trials that are great for easily locating potential problems with your site and repairing them quickly.

Address problems such as...

- - HTML code errors
- - Browser display problems
- - Lengthy load times

- - Broken links
- - Site downtime

Some of these tools will even give you a free monthly update!

However, you'll get a limited version of each tool unless you're willing to pay the fee. But NetMechanic's image-reducing tool, GIFbot, is totally free and is a particularly useful resource.

Using GIFBot is an excellent way to reduce the file size of your images so that your web pages load faster -- and you don't lose those impatient surfers.

Image files can be reduced by as much as 50-85% in many cases, and it's so easy to do that nowadays you'll look totally unprofessional with huge, lagging image files that take forever to load on your site.

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FREE E-MAIL CLIENT

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<http://www.eudora.com/download>

Eudora is a dependable, well-established e-mail client that offers a version of their software free -- and without all the advertising that comes with most free e-mail clients and services (including the "sponsored" version of Eudora).

Eudora Light is a scaled-down version of the original, but still offers plenty of punch and is available without all the ads -- although the newest version of Eudora Light MAY contain the occasional ad or sponsorship.

Using this free version, some of the regular features of Eudora will be removed, including:

- - spell check
- - statistics on how much mail you send and receive
- - multiple personalities
- - stationary
- - multiple signatures
- - advanced editing features
- - advanced filtering features ...

But unless your e-business is large or your mailings are particularly complex, this free

client may be all you need for now.

FREE-TRIAL KEYWORD SERVICE

<http://newsletter.easy-home-business.com/hts/wordtracker.html>

Using a service such as Wordtracker allows you to easily discover which keywords are frequently searched by your target market -- but are not being used by your competition.

Wordtracker has compiled a massive database of terms that people search on, so all you have to do is enter your keyword, and Wordtracker tells you...

- - How often people are searching that term
- - How many competing sites are using that particular keyword
- - How much they are bidding for keywords in the the pay- per-click search engines

A tool like this will help you optimize your search engine ranking by targeting keywords and phrases that are frequently searched by your best potential customers, but that few (if any!) of your competitors are competing under.

Capitalize on the streams of neglected and missed traffic that are passing your competition by -- and even discover misspellings of your keywords that may be drawing traffic!

The free trial version of Wordtracker, however, will only compare your keywords with AltaVista, while the paid version compiles results from the top 24 search engines, directories, and pay-per-click engines.

If you're happy to limit yourself to AltaVista, you can use the free trial as many times as you like. Otherwise, the paid version is available for \$6.51 per day or \$21.70 per week, with monthly and yearly subscriptions available as well.

You might also want to try out Overture's Keyword Popularity and Suggestion tool, available free at: <http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>

Overture's keyword service will give you a list of related searches that include your term and tell you how many times those terms were searched in Overture in the last month.

This is a good way to find out the popularity of your keyword, but Overture doesn't list bidding amounts.

If you're looking for great deals on your keywords, your best bet is to search in both Overture and Wordtracker to gauge popularity, then use Wordtracker to determine your bidding strategy.

FREE BROWSER COMPATIBILITY SERVICE

<http://www.AnyBrowser.com>

The browser compatibility experts, AnyBrowser offers every tool you'll need to make your site viewable, as the name suggests, in any browser.

The most useful tool is the "SiteViewer," which allows you to see your web pages as surfers will see them on multiple browsers.

For example, your site may look different in Netscape Navigator 3.0 than it does in Internet Explorer 6.0 -- images may be broken, tables may shift, and so on.

With AnyBrowser you can ensure you meet the needs of every browser.

You can also make sure your coding checks out and your links aren't broken, and view an example of how your listing will appear in the search engines (what description will be used, what the title will be, etc.).

AnyBrowser is also a great resource directory, pointing you toward a variety of really useful free tools. It's a great place to find online HTML tutorials, banner exchanges, CGI scripts, free HTML editors, free classifieds, free fonts, free graphics, free Java scripts, free message boards, and more.

FREE SEARCH TOOL

<http://www.Atomica.com>

Atomica is a downloadable search tool that allows you to search multiple information sources at once.

After you've downloaded the personal (free) version, you'll have a search bar right on your desktop.

When you search on an item, you'll get results from some or all of the following resources, depending on your search term:

- - Technology
- - Dictionary

- - Thesaurus
- - Translations
- - Quick Tips
- - Acronyms
- - User Links
- - Web Search
- - Encyclopedia ...

All in just one step! No more messing around with multiple search tools; Atomica consolidates them in one source to save the precious time of the busy netpreneur.

FREE SITE OWNERSHIP INQUIRIES

<http://www.betterwhois.com>

"Whois" inquiries will tell you the owner of a particular domain name.

Just enter the URL and you'll get the name behind the web site (business name and contact), administrative contact information, and technical contact information.

Not only does this allow you to collect the contact information of your competitors -- it's also a great way to collect the names and e-mail addresses of similar businesses for the purpose of proposing business relationships such as joint ventures or link exchanges.

FREE CONTENT

<http://www.FreeSticky.com/stickyweb>

This resource is a good place to find free (or cheap) content for your site, so you can keep your site fresh and interesting for your visitors -- and keep them coming back.

Find articles, news briefs, headlines, tickers, tips of the day, and more.

The broad variety of topics ranges from financial advice to hip hop headlines, from travel guides to lottery results.

You can also give away free software applications directly from your site, many of which are available for co-branding.

Another good source for articles is: <http://www.ezinearticles.com> This site offers free content designed for both web sites and e-zines.

Watch that you don't just load up your site with a lot of stuff that you think is interesting. The material you provide has to be relevant to your business and your customer base.

Also be aware that the sponsorship information that is usually included can pull your readers' attention away from your purpose -- and, most important, the sponsors' links can draw traffic away from your site. It is always a good idea to have quality content on your site, but be discretionary, and make sure it's worth the risk involved.

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FREE E-MAIL CAMPAIGN ROI CALCULATOR

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http://www.MarketingToday.com/tools/roi_calculator.htm

A very cool tool...

Marketing Today's ROI calculator is an easy-to-use little device that allows you to accurately estimate what kind of return on investment you can expect from your upcoming direct mail or e-mail campaigns and promotions.

The most accurate way to operate this tool is to use the response rate you received from your previous mailings to calculate your ROI for future mailings.

All you have to do is enter the numbers: the number of mailings you'll be doing, your total costs, the response rate you expect, the conversion rate you expect, and how much you expect each buyer to spend (i.e., the cost of your product or service).

Hint: If you do not have previous response rates and conversion rates to base your figures on, you should estimate much lower than you think necessary.

If you guess too low, you'll just end up with extra cash on hand; guess too high, however, and you'll be making a costly mistake.

The ROI calculator is a simple tool that acts as an excellent reality check when you're determining your marketing costs.

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FREE REFERRAL SERVICE

<http://www.iRecommend-It.com>

This free service can be used to create a "tell a friend" link on your web site, whereby your visitors can recommend your site to their friends or colleagues.

As we all know, referrals are the best influence... we are far more likely to be open-minded about information that is presented to us by someone we know and trust.

Having a referral tool set up on your site is one of the best ways to get the word out -- and use viral marketing to your advantage.

When a visitor wishes to recommend your site, they simply click on your "tell a friend" (or equivalent) link and they're immediately sent to iRecommend-It's referral page, where they can enter their name and e-mail address and recommend your site to up to eight people. iRecommend-It offers sweepstakes, great prizes, and free newsletters as incentives to your referees -- but do stop to consider that these may distract your visitors and lead them further away from your site.

Your visitors can also choose to receive news and announcements from your site by simply opting in at the bottom of the referral form.

FREE SITE SEARCH TOOLS

<http://siteLevel.whatUseek.com>

SiteLevel can set you up with effective, free search tools for your web site.

If your site is more than a couple of pages and doesn't have a good internal search tool, you're probably losing many a frustrated visitor.

While appeasing your visitors, a site-level search engine also enables you to find out what your users want and need.

SiteLevel's search tools allow you to track what your visitors are searching for and see what they are finding or not finding, so you can adapt to their agendas and increase visitor satisfaction -- and the stickiness of your site.

SiteLevel also lets you customize your own search results page to make it suit the look and feel of your web site.

The basic (free) version has more than enough "oomph" for the average small-business web site, allowing you to index up to 1,000 pages and incorporating a variety of search

strategies.

MORE FREE MARKETING TOOLS

<http://www.TheFreeSite.com>

You got it...

The Free Site is free stuff! And lots of it!

Not everything on this site is e-business related, but you can find plenty that is.

Probably the most useful section for e-business is the "webmaster" section at:
http://thefreesite.com/Webmaster_Freebies/ Here you'll find the "Internet Seer" site monitoring tool that provides downtime alerts so you don't lose valuable customers.

You'll also find:

- - Tools to help you check your keywords and your link popularity
- - Suggested methods of winning awards for your site
- - Scripts, banners, and polls
- - Guestbooks, message boards, and more...

The Free Site also lists free technical support and online tutorials, free personal management tools, plenty of Java script resources, free fonts, clipart, graphics, icons, and buttons, plus much, much more. Again, be wary of freebies that ask for advertising space in return... but you might want to bookmark this page!

FINAL THOUGHTS:

With this set of tools at your disposal and these great resources backing you up, you have a number of ways to start getting the edge on your competition... at no additional cost!

For those of you who are a little more technically inclined, you may want to check out some of the many free CGI script resources out there.

Two good places to start include: <http://www.hotscripts.com>
<http://www.cgi-resources.com>

The tools I've recommended are personal favorites and I know you'll find them incredibly useful.

There is very little standing in your way with these tools -- in most cases, they'll do nothing but improve your marketing techniques and your business.

But remember to always weigh your options when you're choosing free services or software. Find out whether any advertising will be included, whether you will be bound by any restrictions or obligations...

Consider what effect these "catches" might have on your marketing strategy or your customers. Always be aware of the price you may have to pay for anything that is "free."

Corey Rudl

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Corey Rudl is the owner of four highly successful online businesses that attract more than 6 million visitors and generate over \$5.2 million each year. He is also the author of the #1 best-selling Internet Marketing course online. To check out his site that's JAM-PACKED WITH THE EXACT INFORMATION YOU NEED to start, build, and grow your very own profitable Internet business, I highly recommend visiting [this site](#)

This guy really knows what he's talking about!

To your success

Dr. Roberto A. Bonomi

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Roberto A. Bonomi is the owner of the successful www.easy-home-business.com site and the incredible "How to Sell on The Web" e-book

If you are looking for the best information to drive traffic to your website and make more sales, then I highly recommend you to visit <http://www.easy-home-business.com>

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This guy really knows what he's talking about!

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