THE SECRETS TO BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE

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stay on search

I wanted to first thank you for downloading this whitepaper! I hope you find some really helpful tips when going out and building relationships online.

If you are someone who is looking to improve your personal or company brand, develop long-lasting relationships, and built up your professional network online….this whitepaper is for you!

In this whitepaper, I will teach you three core elements of building relationships online.

1. *Qualities and Expectations Needed to Build Meaningful Relationships*

2. *How to Find the Right People to Build Relationships With*

3. *Tactics to Create, Develop, and Maintain These Relationships*

INTRODUCTION

Building relationships online is becoming extremely crucial in creating a brand and presence on the web. The old adage "It's not what you know, but who you know" is still relevant and can be applied to building online relationships today. The more meaningful relationships you can build with others in your industry will help you to build personal brand recognition, credibility, and traffic to your website.

SECTION 1: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING QUALITIES & TRAITS

- **Passion/Drive**: Regardless of what industry you are in or the responsibilities you have within a company, having passion for what you are doing is essential! You will notice that if you do not LOVE what you do, that fire and desire will die very quickly.

- **Being Honest**: This may be one of the most important qualities when trying to build relationships online. Being truthful, open and honest with the people you are connecting with will have a tremendous impact in your ability to build relationships.   If you try to be someone you are not, people will start to pick up on that, and it can actually have a negative impact on you and your brand. Make sure your name, job title, experiences, and knowledge is true to who you are.

- **Professional & Courteous**: It is important that you be kind, courteous and professional, until you get to know the person and their personality. Some people will continue to stay formal during your conversations and others will be more informal. Make sure that your conversations and dialogue stays professional until you feel you have built a rapport with that person. It is also important to always thank the person for their time and for anything that you are requesting from them.

- **Patience:** Building social relationships online takes time! Just like in real life situations, you are not just going to all of a sudden become friends with someone and earn their trust. The same rules apply online. It will take some time to build a dialogue, form several interactions and build trust with people.

- **Willingness to Give:** You have to be willing to offer your expertise, knowledge and most importantly TIME , in order to connect with people. "Giving" is really the foundation for building relationships online. Listening to others and offering your feedback, advice, opinions, products/services, are what will make people want to continue discussions.

SECTION 2: TYPES OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

During the process of developing a relationship, there are going to be a number of different ways that you will be communicating with people. It is important that you have a combination of direct and in-direct communication to build multiple references and touch points. By talking with the person directly and then having them indirectly see you through other avenues, it can make your relationship more dynamic and genuine.

- **Direct Communication:** Building relationships by direct communication simply means that you are directly speaking with someone. Examples of direct communication include e-mails, tweets, comments, Facebook messages, phone conversations, IMs, and face to face. Having direct communication is essential for developing an actual relationship. It will help each of you to understand the other on a more personal level and paint a clearer picture of the type of person they really are. It can be hard to truly know who a person is just by indirect communication.

- **InDirect Communication:** Even if you are not directly communicating with someone, you can still be building a relationship with them. The most common forms of indirect communication online would be sharing a link to someone's content on your Twitter and Facebook accounts, writing a review about a person or their product from your blog/website, mentioning the person at a conference or event, referring business to someone, and through word of mouth. Indirect communication can complement your direct communication and show the person that you are promoting them in other ways, not just when you talk to them.

SECTION 3: FINDING INDUSTRY INFLUENCERS

Finding out who the key players are in an industry should be a relatively painless process. There is a reason why these people are the influencers, so finding their blogs/website/products should be easy.

You can start by running a few Google searches:

- Top "Niche" Blogs
- Top "Niche" Websites
- Top "Niche" Products
- Top "Niche" Professionals
- Top "Niche" Experts

- Top "Niche" Twitter Users
- Top "Niche" Companies
- Top "Niche" Organizations
- Top "Niche" Forums
- "Niche" Conferences

Start looking at the top few search results pages to see who shows up. Try to find an "About the Author" page, "Executive Team" or "Recommended Links/Blogroll" which typically have links to the better sites in the industry. Identify trends in who people are talking about or websites that are being referenced.   If you find industry conferences and events, see who will be speaking.

Another way to find influencers is through Twitter. Using a few different services like TweepSearch and Twibs you can do a search for a relevant keyword and it will bring back relevant Twitter users. If you sort the data by "# of Followers" this can help you segment the results better to see who have lot of people following them. You can also go to Tweetmeme to see what is getting hot across the Twitter community. Usually anything that is on the front homepage or within a category front page is going to be industry leading blogs.

On Facebook, do a search for relevant Facebook Groups and Fan Pages in your industry. See who the administrators are and who is being active in the groups. Lots of times you will find some big players managing these groups.

A few great resources to look at are social bookmarking sites like Digg and StumbleUpon. Similar to Tweetmeme, you can see what popular content is hot on each of these sites. It should be said that these sites can be manipulated to rank well, but still a great place to go to find industry blogs and influencers. Also try to find industry specific bookmarking sites, for example Sphinn is a social bookmarking site for Internet Marketers.

SECTION 4: DON'T FORGET THE LITTLE GUY

It may seem easy to dismiss the little guy who may be just starting out with little to no presence in the industry. However before you simply ignore a comment they left or a question they asked you via e-mail, you may want to re-think about taking the time to respond.

Here is why:

The majority of the people you are going to be communicating with are going to be regular professionals (unless you are already a big fish). You have a better chance of getting a response from the average Joe and building a long-term relationship. Influencers tend to be extremely busy and only like to build relationships with people who will make it worth their while. I am not saying that the top dawgs in the industry won't talk to you; there is just a better probability that you can develop a relationship with someone who is around your same influence.

Applying the Long-Tail to Building Relationships

Similar to SEO, when you optimize for the long-tail, you can drive more traffic to your website because the tail equals more than the head; the same rule can apply to building relationships online. Of course, if you can develop relationships with the industry influencers, it can have a huge impact on your credibility, however it is much harder to do that (similar to optimizing for the head in SEO). However, if you can develop relationships with a large number of average influencers, collectively it can be as or more powerful than having a few industry influencers.

SECTION 5: COMMUNICATION METHODS

- **Identify Primary Method(s) of Communication:** This section is very important in improving your response rate. Listen first and do some homework to find out where each person spends the majority of their time online. It may be Twitter, Facebook, Linkedin, an industry social bookmarking site, a forum, or another platform. See where they are spending the majority of their time in order to have a better chance of them seeing your message. If you tweet a message to someone who only checks their Twitter account once a month, there is not a good chance of them responding.

- **Utilize Multiple Social Outlets:** You can further increase the response rate by reaching out through multiple platforms. For example, typically if I send someone an e-mail, I may follow up with a Twitter or Facebook message the next day, just to confirm they received my e-mail. Having multiple options for communication can help depending on what you want to talk to them about. If you want to share a quick link or update, using something like Instant Messenger or Twitter is more appropriate, than writing an e-mail.

SECTION 6: THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Everybody has a different method for managing their relationships online, so I thought I would explain how I manage my communication with people.

Have a Goal: Even though I simply enjoy talking with others in the industry who share similar interests, I will have an end goal in mind. Make sure you have some reason for contacting someone. Everybody is busy with meetings, deadlines, and a thousand other responsibilities, so be respectful of their time. Be direct, to the point, and make it worth their while.

Be Realistic: It is important to understand who and where you are in the industry. Obviously if you are brand new to an industry and just started a blog, don't expect the top 5 bloggers in your industry to

write a guest post for you. Start by leaving comments on their blog, following their updates, and RT their content to get on the radar.

5-Step Communication Process:

1. **Start with a Spreadsheet**: I just create a simple Excel document with a number of columns to segment the data. Columns include NAME, E-MAIL, TWITTER HANDLE, WEBSITE/BLOG, PRIMARY COMMUNICATION, and LAST COMMUNICATION. This way you have a bird's eye view of all of the people who you are in communication with, along with important contact and communication info. Maintain and update this spreadsheet as you move forward with your communication efforts.

2. **Reaching Out:** Typically I will try to make an effort to contact between 5-10 new people a week. This way I am not bombarding hundreds of people a day, which can make it hard to manage and is less personal. I will also try to contact people of similar interests so that when I write a personalize message or email to them I don't have to drastically change what I say.

3. **Follow Up:** Whenever you have successfully contacted someone who responds, make sure you try to respond promptly. If you requested the person to do something (guest post, interview, feedback), try to set a deadline so that it is not just an open-ended request. This will help keep your communication flowing and not turn into a dead dialogue. People are much more likely to follow through with something if there are guidelines and it is time sensitive.

4. **Be Persistent, But Not Annoying:** Especially when you contact some of the top industry influencers, it may take a few times before they start to notice you and respond back. Understand that they probably receive hundreds of e-mail each week with offers, requests, etc…so be persistent, but not to the point where they block your email and social media profiles.

SECTION 7: THE TACTICS

Below are a number of tactics and strategies you can use to help interact, engage, and develop long-lasting relationships online. By utilizing many or all of these tactics you can significantly increase your online relationships, which can equal more industry recognition and credibility.

TWITTER

Twitter is such a great communication and monitoring tool, that it is hard to ignore it if you are going to build relationships online. With Twitter, you have the power to monitor, engage, and track conversations in a quick and informal discussion format. By having a proper Twitter profile and avatar, it can become one of your leading engagement tools.

- **Follow Them:** The first thing you will need to do is start to follow the people you are looking to connect with. Start to understand the type of content they are sharing, the updates they are leaving, when they are most active, and create an overall understand of who they are as a person. Twitter is just one way that you can begin to paint a better picture of their personality and communication style.

- **RT and DM Them**: Once you have started to see the type of content they are promoting, begin reading their content. Start ReTweeting their content to your followers and even message the person a follow up to something they wrote in a blog post. This can be much more personal than leaving a comment on the site, and can help to start a dialogue.

- **Answer Questions**: One of the best opportunities I have seen on Twitter is when an industry influencer asks a question. That is the perfect time to jump all over the opportunity to start engaging with them.   If you can help them by answering their question and also introduce yourself, it can be a win-win. Try using a site called [Tweet QA](#) to find people asking questions on Twitter.

- **Twitter Lists:** Try creating specific Twitter lists that are tailored for a certain theme or topic. For example I have a few lists that I created that segment "Bloggers", "SEOs" and "Internet Marketing companies." Those people and companies will start to notice that you have added them to your list. It can help be a way to filter the people you are following to only see certain types of tweets.   One really good tip that someone told me about was to create a private Twitter list for people you are looking to connect with. This way you can closely pay attention to what they are saying and they will be segmented from the rest of the updates.

- **Monitor, Monitor, Monitor:** Use a Twitter client like [Hootsuite](#) to setup a column for monitoring chatter related to specific keywords in your industry. This can be another way to help answer questions, reach out to users with similar interests, and identify the key players.

FACEBOOK

Who isn't on Facebook at this point? Exactly! So just like Twitter, it would be hard to ignore this social network. This is another great way to learn more about a person and built a stronger understanding of the person. Facebook is much more personal than Twitter, so take advantage of being able to see where they are from, what they like to do, etc… Maybe there is some connection that can help give you a reason to contact them.

- **Friend and Become a Fan:** See if the person or company has a Fan Page that you can become a fan of. This way you can have their updates pull into your Facebook homepage. Watch what they are posting to their wall and the type of content they are sharing. Pay attention to see if they update their Facebook account more than their Twitter or other social media profiles.

- **Leave Comments:** Leave positive and insightful comments on the links they share. Click the "Like" link if you enjoyed a post they submitted and leave a comment about why you liked it. When the person goes to look at their Fan Page, if you have commented on a number of updates, they will most likely be intrigued about who left the comment.

LINKEDIN

- **Connect with Them:** This can be a little bit harder to do, since LinkedIn is more of a professional and secure social network. Use opportunities such as when you see them at a conference or seminar – be sure to include that you enjoyed their presentation at an event in your request to connect .

- **Recommend Them:** One of the most powerful things you can do for someone on Linkedin is leaving a recommendation. Of course you should actually know the person at this point if you are going to leave a recommendation, but by leaving a positive review about the person, this will be seen by anyone who visits that person's profile. The fact that you took the time to leave a nice recommendation can really resonate with the person and they may return the favor. If you haven't gotten to know them personally, you can always leave a recommendation about their blog, if they have on, as a starting point.

- **Leave Comments:** Similar to Facebook, you can leave comments or "Like" an update the person leaves on their profile. Again this can be another way to show that you are following what the user is sharing and help them to take notice of you.

- **Answer Questions:** Answering questions that people have in the LinkedIn community is definitely a great way to build your reputation as an industry expert. However, I have actually built some great relationships with people whose questions I have answered. It is a great way to get the conversation started. People also are very appreciative that you would take the time to answer their question, so they are more inclined to reach out to you and thank you.

- **Join Groups:** There are a number of industry groups you can join to engage in the conversation. Many industry professionals will answer questions in groups they started, so be sure to be active in these once you join.

BLOGGING

- **Blog Mentions:** Many people, especially the bigger names in the industry have alerts setup to monitor mentioning of their name, brand, products, etc… By mentioning the person or content on your blog, it can come up on their radar and they will visit your site/blog. So indirectly you could end up getting the persons attention and possibly having that person contact you via e-mail, blog comment, or a social media reply.

- **Response/Follow-Up Posts:** A very effective way to start a good back and forth dialogue is to write a response or follow up to a post that someone else wrote. By writing a response blog post, you are addressing their position on a particular topic and contribute your thoughts of whether you agreed or disagreed, and why. For a follow up post, you can elaborate on the subject to try to offer your two cents and expertise. Doing this can make the other person realize that you are reading their content and voicing your opinions.

- **Reviews:** Review-style posts are great for products/services that you truly use and believe in. Recently I wrote a review post for a new Wordpress plugin that I use on my website. This in turn, led to other opportunities with the company that created the plugin. If you write a quality review that generates a lot of buzz, it can spark their attention and help to either start or maintain a relationship.

- **Interviews:** Doing an interview (by e-mail, video or podcast) can not only help to build rapport with the person, but help associate you with the other person in the minds of the people watching or reading the interview.

- **Blog Comments:** Commenting on the blogs of the people you are building relationships can be an act of good faith because you are taking the time to read their post and leave an insightful comment. The blog owner will take notice and hopefully you can start a back and forth discussion through comments.

- **Guest Posting:** Probably the best way to give back to someone and offer your expertise is to request to submit a guest post to their blog. Submitting a post that is relevant to their readership can exposure yourself as an expert to their readership and builds trust with the blog owner. A fantastic resource for finding quality blogs and blog owners to connect with who accept guest posts is [MyBlogGuest](#), created by Ann Smarty.

E-MAIL

- **Personalized E-mails:** The more targeted and relevant you can be in your e-mails the better your response rate will be. When you are reaching out to new people, don't just gather a long list of e-mail addresses and send out a mass e-mail. Take the additional time to personalize each of your e-mails. If you are looking to build a long-term and lasting relationship, sending someone a personal e-mail will show that you are not lazy and just trying to be friends with anyone and everyone.

- **Routine Check-Ins:** It is important to maintain the relationships you have been building, so sometimes just sending a friendly check-in e-mail just to see how things are going, can go a long way. It can just be a way to see how things are going, if they have anything new going on, and maybe it will trigger them to want to discuss something they have been meaning to discuss with

you. Depending on your relationship and communication frequency, sending an update email once a month is a good way to keep the relationships alive.

GIVING BACK TO LOYAL READERS

- **Top Commenters:** A great example of this is the blog JohnChow.com, run by the making money online guru, [John Chow](). He has a section on his sidebar that will promote the top commenters on his blog. Each of the top commenters will receive a link in his sidebar that goes to their site or blog. Given the fact that his site has a PageRank of 5 and generates tons of traffic; that is a very nice gesture of giving back to his readers.

- **Discounts/Specials:** So what person wouldn't like to get discounts or deals on new products you create or events you are hosting? Give your readers unique promo codes for discounts by posting them on your blog, RSS feed and newsletters. This can be great for upcoming eBooks, training courses, and conferences. Even though you are not speaking to your readers individually, you are still reaching out to the group collectively which can have a tremendous impact on your readers loyalty.

- **Links, Links, Links:** As everyone knows, gaining inbound links is a huge part of SEO, so if you have a reputable domain with a lot of trust, linking to your friends and new relationships can be a sign of good faith. Linking in your blogroll, within posts, and banner space can be generous for a quality link and traffic.

GIVING TO INDUSTRY INFLUENCERS

- **Special Invite/VIP:** Giving away VIP access to certain content or products can make people very appreciative, especially when there is only limited access to content or an event.

- **Free Products/Services:** For digital products it can be easier to give away compared to businesses selling tangible products because of the cost associated with creating the product. However getting your products into the hands of relevant influencers can be as or more powerful than spending thousands of dollars on other marketing campaigns. From a relationship standpoint it can be a way of getting feedback and suggestions on how to improve a product.

- **Sneak Peaks:** I have been contacted a number of times to be invited to a beta launch of a new SEO product that was going to be released to the public in the near future. Personally I was flattered that the company thought highly enough of me to personally reach out to me, but it also was a way to being a new relationship. Because they gave me early access to their product, I was able to test it before the public and give me insights. I also went ahead and prepared a review-style post for my blog, for when they official launched. Giving influencers the ability to

use and cover a new product before everyone else gives them the first mover advantage on marketing the product, which is always greatly appreciated.

COLLABORATING/PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- **Webinars/Podcasts:** Collaborating on a webinar or podcast can give you the chance to work with the person directly.

- **Mutual Site Advertising:** Depending on the quality of each of your websites, you may be able to swap banner advertisements to try and market to each other's readers.

- **Mutual E-mail Marketing:** This is where you cross-market each other's content and products to your in-house marketing list. This can be very rewarding for building new relationships because of the ability to expose your blog/site to a new and relevant audience.

- **Workshops/Training Seminars:** Working together on day/week long workshops or seminars can be a way to combine your credibility to form an expert tandem. You can also work closely in content preparation, marketing efforts, and execution.

- **Client Referrals:** For relationships where both offer complimentary services, you can help to promote each other's client base and growth your businesses.

INSTANT MESSAGING

Instant messaging can serve as one of the most convenient communication tools when building relationships. It gives you immediate access to your friends and people whom you are building relationships with. You can utilize this fast form of communication for things like feedback, content promotion, follow ups, reminders, recommendations and overall building your relationship.

Personally a good system that I use for managing my IM list is to use a universal IM client like [Digsby](#) or [Pidgin](#) that will allow you to link all of your IM clients together into one list. This will make you more accessible in case someone only uses one particular IM service. I also break up my lists into different segments depending on who the person is. For example, I have lists for "Clients" "Bloggers" "Social Media" "SEO" and "Influencers". This will allow you to manage your list better and reach out to the appropriate people.

Please let me know what you think of the whitepaper. I would love to get your feedback since this is the first one. Keep checking the blog for more free whitepapers, videos, and products that are going to be released in the near future.

Sincerely,

Mark Thompson
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