

copyblogger

Effective Content Promotion

How to Use Alliances, Co-opetition,
and Your Enemies to Get More Likes
Shares, Links, and Traffic



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CHAPTER 1

The Granola-Munching Hippie's Guide to All-Natural SEO

You may have heard the bell tolling for SEO.

It's dying. It's dead. Google killed it.

If you've read articles about this, and believed them, you have my permission to not tell anyone about your foolishness.

Because the "SEO is dead" story is dangerously, laughably wrong.

It gets passed around because there's a sliver of truth in it — the primitive "black hat" stuff that some amateurish SEOs preach is going away, fast. Today we're going back to the future and uncovering the crunchy, sustainable, [all-organic SEO](#) that works today, and is going to keep working for the foreseeable future.

Peace out, man.

Go organic

The first ingredient of pure organic SEO is links. Fresh, real, relevant links from human beings who dig what you have to say.

I'm still seeing thin, lame, and boring content out there, and listening to site owners wondering why they're getting smacked in the mouth by [Penguins](#).

If you aren't getting natural links, your content is either boring, you write lousy headlines, or you're afraid to bang the drum with your [social sharing network](#).

If you don't have real links, you don't have SEO that works. I don't mean to harsh your mellow, but that's the reality.

Make content, not war

So what do other web publishers want to link to, and share?

Good content. We all know that.

To be perfectly clear, good content is:

- Useful (it solves an audience problem)
- Interesting (it's framed in a way that catches attention)
- Audience-friendly (it has an interesting headline and it's [formatted to be readable](#))
- Sticky (it invites the reader to settle in, learn more, and maybe take the relationship further)

All you need is (social sharing) love

Some of the “SEO is dead” nonsense comes from a misunderstanding of how the search engines handle links vs. social sharing.

Links and social sharing (like Tweets and Facebook shares) are both what Google calls “signals” of high-quality content, which is the stuff they want to put at the top of their search pages.

So what gets shared? Well, it's the content that's:

- Useful (it solves an audience problem)
- Interesting (it's framed in a way that catches attention)
- Audience-friendly (it has an interesting headline and it's [formatted to be readable](#))
- Sticky (it invites the reader to settle in, learn more, and maybe take the relationship further)

Sounding a little familiar here?

The big search engines want to rank content that's worth reading.

How do you know it's worth reading? If people are reading (and sharing) it.

That means sharing with links, with [Pinterest](#), with whatever's going to be invented 20 minutes from now.

If people find a way to share web content via psychic brain waves, the Google engineers will figure out how to include that as a signal.

Keep making shareable content and you won't have to make many changes when the platforms come and go.

Spam is unhealthy for children and other living things

We all know what spam in email is — it's that stuff asking us to make wire transfers to countries where we don't know anyone, or selling fake pharmaceuticals with a totally free malware bonus.

What the search engines consider "spam" is somewhat similar — it's thin, flat, stale content that's just there to pack in a bunch of keywords.

It's what bad SEOs think is "SEO Copywriting." (For the sake of reference, [here's what good SEOs do instead.](#))

If you're writing for search engines instead of people, you're writing spam.

It wastes your time, annoys the people you do manage to get in front of, and benefits no one — especially your business.

If you do this now, stop. Start writing for humans only. Once it works for people, *then* you give it a little tweak for the search engines.

Don't buy links, man

It's a worse bummer than brown acid.

Link buying used to be considered effective SEO by many. Copyblogger has never done it because we're kinda proud about not paying for lovin', but a lot of otherwise legitimate sites quietly did.

Google hated it, but they couldn't really figure out how to stop it.

Guess what. Google is really smart. I know three people who work for Google, and they're all ridiculously intelligent. When you're pitching your SEO strategy against some of the smartest people in the world, you are going to lose.

Don't buy links. Depending on how subtle your SEO is, it *might* work today, for a short time. Probably it won't work at all. And sooner rather than later, it's going to hurt your site.

Is optimization natural?

So is there any room left for a practice called “SEO”? Is optimization the same thing as spam?

The way I see it, SEO is like doing sit-ups for a nudist. It’s still *you*, in your 100% natural state. You’re just making things a little more attractive.

Optimization today is about helping the search engine robots figure out the fine points of what you’re talking about. It’s a gentle tweak, not mindlessly stuffing keywords or playing dumb tricks.

You might have noticed a theme here — for good SEO and other business benefits, web publishers need to make *connections*. Connections to bloggers, social media mavens, popular writers — anyone with the audience you’re trying to find.

The rest of this book will be about how to make those connections, and what to do once you’ve made them. Let’s get started!

CHAPTER 2

What Michael Phelps' 19th Olympic Medal Can Teach You About Smarter Online Marketing

If you were an Olympic-caliber swimmer, you could be forgiven for sort of hating Michael Phelps.

In 2012, he broke the record for holding more Olympic medals than any other athlete in history — 19 medals, of which 15 are gold.

During that summer Olympics, Phelps battled it out in a widely-publicized rivalry with his U.S. teammate Ryan Lochte. Even a casual observer got the impression that Lochte was, well, kind of sick of hearing about how great Michael Phelps is.

Lochte was quoted over and over again saying, "This is my time." And he did beat Phelps in the 400-meter medley, snatching the gold while Phelps didn't even make the podium.

But when it was time for Phelps to grab that record-smashing 19th medal, he needed his rival's help to do it.

Phelps won that 19th medal in the 4 x 200-meter freestyle relay — which means he needed the help of three other teammates, all working together toward a common goal.

When asked how he was able to beat Yannick Agnel, the brilliant (and scary fast) French swimmer in the lane next to him, he was quick to credit the nearly four-second lead given to him by his teammates.

Competition is great. Competitors keep us honest, keep us on our toes, and keep us improving. Without competition, we'd probably get pretty bored.

But competitors can also, at times, make the best allies.

Who else has the audience you want?

Wise online marketing begins with cultivating an audience — bringing together the collection of people who are interested in your topic and might be converted to customers.

The first letter of pretty much every copywriting or selling formula is “A” — for attention (or Audience, in this case). If you can't get a crowd listening to what you've got to say, nothing else is going to work.

The most brilliantly-written marketing can't work if there's no one there to read it — or if it's sent to an audience who's not tuned in to the subject.

You could simply buy traffic to build your audience, with pay-per-click or other forms of advertising. It's been done before, and it will be done again.

But it's expensive, and getting more so every day. It's also tricky — whole books can be written (and have been) about how to manage the intricacies of Google AdWords.

When it works — and it doesn't always work — advertising is a traffic faucet that can be turned on and off. If someone else (like Google) owns the faucet, and you have no other resources in place to grow your audience of prospects, they can turn that faucet off as easily as you can. That puts you in a very dangerous position.

Power to the people

So if you don't use advertising (or only use it for a portion of your traffic), how do you find your audience?

You find it by identifying individuals who have the audience you

want, then cultivating relationships with them to better serve *their* audience ... and grow yours while you're at it.

People with major followings know that the *audience always comes first*. If you can benefit their readers, viewers, or listeners, you've got a good shot at making an alliance. That can mean guest blogging, formal joint venture partnerships, or just plain old-fashioned networking.

Even the most obnoxious online mavens and celebrities (and there are certainly a few of those) rely on allies to get the word out and keep it going.

21st-century business is rarely a zero-sum game

Have you ever met anyone who owns *one* diet book?

Most people either own *zero* diet books (they don't worry about their weight) or they own a shelf full of them.

An audience coming to you for a solution normally isn't *only* coming to you. As the information economy becomes a *curated information* economy (meaning that someone needs to digest that huge mass of available information out there), audiences like to hedge their bets. They'll look for multiple experts, to reinforce their learning and make sure the advice they're getting is sound.

There aren't many "lone wolves" out there any more. Partnership and crosspollination are the name of the game.

If you're building your business on an audience attracted by your authority about a particular topic (which is what we think you should be doing), you want to spend most of your time working with, not against, the "competitors" for that audience.

But isn't this just manipulation?

I'm not a fan of sucking up to someone you hate just to make a business connection.

In the first place, it does a disservice to your audience. If you have a legitimate disagreement with a competitor (especially if it's a matter of ethics, rather than just style or approach), that person isn't a good potential ally.

In the second place, sucking up to people you can't stand will leach the soul out of everything you do and leave you disgusted with yourself. Which isn't why you're in business.

Friendly competitors like Phelps and Lochte don't make a secret of their rivalry. They're each respectfully upfront about their deeply held desire to win.

Respect and mutual goals allow rivals like these to work together when the situation calls for it.

CHAPTER 3

Score More Traffic, Subscribers, and Buyers by Discovering Your Second Customer

We all know what a customer is.

The customer is that lovely, wise person who buys our stuff. Whether we sell a product, a service, an idea, a candidate, a change of habits ... the customer is the one who buys.

If we don't have customers, we don't have a business. Simple enough.

But when you're doing business online, particularly if you're using content as part of your marketing strategy, you need another customer. One who might never take out a credit card to buy from you ... but who can still help take your business to amazing places.

I call it the *second customer*. This is the person who shares your content, tweets your post, talks up your product, gives you a great review on Yelp, and helps let the rest of the web know they should be paying more attention to you.

Some businesses pay far too little attention to the second customer ... and some pay too much. Here's how to get it just right.

What the second customer can do for you

The second customer has always been important — it's that social connector who tells all his friends what a great job you do, or the fashion icon who makes your product an "overnight" craze.

But in the age of the internet, we have lots more connectors, each of whom has an audience, large or small, that they might share with you.

- A second customer might share your thoughtful content on Twitter.
- A second customer might link to you, or run your guest blog post, and find you a whole new audience.

- A second customer might write a witty, compelling review that convinces buyers you're terrific.
- A second customer might introduce you to the business partner who can turn everything around for you.

Don't great ideas just spread themselves?

It's lovely to think that if we just duck our heads down and produce the absolute best content we can possibly create, that our content will fly around the web on magic wings and find an audience.

It's lovely to think that, but it doesn't work.

The web is social. Always has been, always will be. It's people who share content, people who talk up the best businesses, people who create the businesses worth talking about.

Apple did their part by designing the iPod — it was customers who spread the word. Then they did it again with the iPhone, the MacBook Pro, the MacBook Air, the iPad, ad nauseum.

Evernote did their part by creating a useful, well-designed little application — it was customers (including lots of non-paying second customers) who let the world know how great it was.

Dos Equis did their part by creating a clever, over-the-top series of “big idea” storytelling ads with their “Most Interesting Man in the World” campaign. It was their customers (again, many of them second customers who don’t drink the beer) who couldn’t stop talking about the ads — leading to a 22% boost in sales, according to the company.

Second customers are tireless. They’ll roam the web — the entire web, not just your comfortable little corner of it — to find the perfect customers for your business.

But you need to give them what they want.

What the second customer needs from you

The content connector needs some things from you.

- Your content needs to be good. Really good. Thin, weak, generic stuff won't do it. If you don't know how to create something epic, partner with someone who can.
- Your website needs immediate appeal. If it looks spammy, shady, or just plain hideous, connectors won't want to send their audiences there.
- Your site needs to be secure. Nothing makes your second customer look worse than sending their audience to a site infected with malware.
- Above all, your content needs to make connectors look incredibly smart and cool for sharing it.

Smart connectors know that their first duty is to their audience. When you help connectors by giving their audience a great experience, you will be rewarded.

Your first customer comes first

Now there are a few "businesses" out there that have millions of second customers ... and not enough first customers. A lot of "social media gurus" fall into this trap.

Your primary reason for being in business is to serve paying customers. To make their lives better in some way that is meaningful *to them*.

The world may talk you up — but if you don't serve paying customers, your business will crumble and die. No matter how much funding you can scare up.

No matter how much of a social media darling you become.

They come first. Their opinions are the ones that matter most.

But in the 21st century, in the globally hyper-connected world we're in today, second customers are an invaluable way to find those perfectly lovable first customers.

CHAPTER 4

How to Win a Zero-Sum Game: What to Do if Competitors Won't Link to You

Because Rainmaker Digital is a company that was born in this strange virtual place we call the worldwide web, partnerships and cooperation have always been central to what we do.

One of the most important of these is the ecosystem of voices that share our content. We work hard to keep engaging your interest and teaching you valuable things. And we rely on other web publishers to share what we create, so we can find new people to talk to.

We believe in cooperation ... but we know perfectly well that business is also a competition. And sometimes, competitors don't much want to play.

I'll borrow a term from author Robert Wright and call mutually beneficial cooperation a Nonzero Game. That's in contrast to a zero-sum game — the kind of game (like chess, or football) where there is one and only one winner.

A lot of businesses operate in a nonzero environment.

- Just because I love my personal trainer doesn't mean I won't buy another trainer's eBook of kettlebell workouts.
- Just because I love Ibex hoodies doesn't mean I won't buy a warmup jacket from the Gap.
- I have a favorite restaurant, but I don't eat there every time I want to get dinner out.

But you might very well be playing a zero-sum game

I remember one of our students who was having a tough time finding guest posting opportunities.

She's a beauty blogger — she writes about cosmetics, hairstyles, that kind of thing. And she didn't feel too welcome when she approached her fellow beauty bloggers about sharing a guest post with them.

The other bloggers she was finding hadn't gotten the news that working with your rivals (like Phelps and Lochte) can be the key to greater success for everyone.

If you sell insurance, if your prospect buys from someone else, he won't buy from you. Real estate agents, car salesmen, and actors are in a zero-sum competition. One winner, multiple losers.

You win the business or you lose it.

And if those competitors are using content as part of their marketing strategy, getting links from them — either with guest posting or just writing killer content — probably ain't gonna happen.

So as much as we like to promote “co-opetition,” is that even possible if you're in a zero-sum business?

It is, and we're going to talk about how.

Find related audiences

The answer for our beauty blogger was pretty simple.

If there isn't a single blogger in your topic who would be open to a guest post, the next step is to ask yourself,

Who else has the audience I want?

Do parenting bloggers ever run posts about hair or makeup? Would a careerbuilding blog consider running something on how to look more professional and polished? Is it possible a fitness blog would have room for a post on how not to scare people with your appearance as you're leaving the gym?

Yes, yes they would.

Blog traffic expert Jon Morrow likes to tell the story about how he hit a major home run by writing a guest post for Penelope Trunk's *Brazen Careerist* blog, which benefited the blog Jon was writing at that time, called *On Moneymaking*.

You would think that a blog called *On Moneymaking* would focus on blogs about ... making money. And looking for content publishers in that topic would have been a smart strategy.

But Jon found even more return — a lot more, in fact — by landing posts on blogs speaking to the same audience, but not precisely the same topic. He scored serious traffic (not to mention some great SEO benefits) from blogs about careers, and personal productivity.

Jon didn't feel hemmed in by finding guest posting opportunities on sites that covered the exact topic he did. Instead, he asked himself

who else had his audience — then pitched and wrote some excellent guest posts to woo that audience.

If the door is closed, go through the window

The short answer to all of this is: Don't agree to play by rules that don't suit you. You define your own game — that's why you started a business.

Figure out how to [create a new niche](#) that's never been seen before. Serve an audience in a way that hasn't been done yet. Make allies where no one expects you to.

If your outright competitors aren't into sharing your content, go a little sideways until you find the people who will.

Figure out the win-wins. They're there, but you have to look for them.

CHAPTER 5

Need More Links and Social Shares? Try Making More Enemies

So by now you know that real links (the kind you earn, not the kind you pay for) and social sharing are key components of natural SEO.

And by “natural” I mean “the kind that still works.”

So you’re busting your tail to:

- Create really good content,
- To get a decent headline on it,
- And to cultivate your online network to get the word out

That’s often enough to get some momentum going. But if you aren’t seeing it yet, there might be a critical piece of your message that’s still missing.

You might not have enough enemies yet.

Now this strategy can be *wildly* misused. And if you get it wrong, you'll do more harm than good.

But when you get it right, you fill one of the last pieces of the organic SEO puzzle — and just like every element of good SEO, it works for your audience and customers even better than it works for search engines.

You have to stand for something

A little while back, my kettlebell trainer shared a fascinating post from a blogger named Amber Rogers, whose blog is called *Go Kaleo*.

The post pulled me in with an engrossing story. It was about a subject I'm very interested in — fitness and nutrition. And it had a point of view. A sharp, smart, well-defined, and rather snarky point of view. It was a point of view that challenged the status quo — but *thoughtfully* (and supported by evidence, which is always refreshing).

The more I found out about Kaleo, the better I liked the content. I "liked" the Go Kaleo page on Facebook and started commenting and sharing.

I notice that some of my own friends on Facebook are now following Go Kaleo ... and sharing her work with *their* networks.

Taking a stand attracts attention. But you need more than attention.

You can't just be a contrarian jackass

I think we've all read content from acid-tongued critics who don't seem to have ever actually built anything.

People who are addicted to phrases like "punch in the face" and "go die in a fire." They're often clever and very funny. They have no trouble gathering links or shares ... but it's not in service of anything.

They pull our interest in ... sometimes in a pretty sick way.

But they build nothing. They create nothing. They offer nothing. They only tear down.

[Attention is not the same thing as authority.](#)

When you claim authority (not bogus "guru" authority, but real leadership), you're constructing something. If you aren't solving a problem for your audience, go back to the drawing board until you can.

Not everyone who builds is a nice guy. Steve Jobs wasn't a particularly nice guy. But he was no troll, either. He built a hell of a company ... one that added to people's lives, instead of sucking energy into an endless attention black hole.

Find your tribe, or create a new one

Here's Amber Rogers' self-description from her blog. Notice that it doesn't define her so much as it identifies who she serves.

"... trouble-making cheerleader of the boot-strappers, the overcomers, the kool-aid rejectors, the post baby body-reclaimers, the eaters and movers, the strong and powerful, and most of all, the critical thinkers."

Figuring out your big idea — your positioning — is about what you stand for, but it's also about who you *aren't*.

Go Kaleo isn't shy about making enemies. Rogers talks about the traditional dietary industry as "predatory." She talks about the "bro science" that informs a lot of popular fitness sites.

She's a warrior, and she seems to thoroughly enjoy duking it out on behalf of her tribe.

She is fearless, and I think that lack of fear comes from knowing that her content is *in service* to her audience. She offers constructive, positive advice as a counterweight. And she encourages her audience, always, to think for themselves.

When you know what you stand for, you'll know how to frame everything you create. You may not be quite as confrontational as *Go Kaleo*, but you won't be afraid to speak up, either.

The SEO benefits are great ... those who love you will talk about you, and those who can't stand you will talk about you even more.

But far beyond the SEO benefits, you'll be serving your audience. And that's always the best foundation to build on.

CHAPTER 6

The Essentials of Guest-Blogging Strategy for SEO, Traffic, and Audience-Building

One of the great dangers facing online business is the practice of [digital sharecropping](#) — building your business on a platform you don't control (like Facebook or Blogger).

So how can guest blogging be one of the most effective strategies to build your audience?

Odd as it may seem, it's because providing smart, well-written content on *someone else's* site is a great way to efficiently hit a number of audiencegrowing strategies at the same time.

It's also robust: unlike certain other strategies, guest blogging will stay strong despite what Google or other titans may do.

And if you tackle it strategically, guest blogging drives traffic (and other benefits) back to your site and builds your audience.

Guest posting takes a lot of work, mental energy, and time. So it's smart to think about how you can get the most bang for your buck. The more strategically you think when you're planning out your guest blogging program, the more you're going to get out of it.

You need to hold two things in your head at the same time — how this post will benefit the host blog, and how it's going to benefit your own business.

There will be times when you write a guest post to get a single one of the benefits outlined below — maybe to strengthen a relationship with an important content publisher.

But as often as you can, try to include every benefit in this chapter.

Key Tip: Before you write a post, make sure you'll be able to include at least one relevant link to your own content in the body of the post, as well as an audience-friendly call to action *and* your Google+ ID in your bio.

Here are four ways that guest blogging can grow your audience which means growing your business.

1. Guest blogging enhances your authority

When you're getting started with content marketing, you may be incredibly knowledgeable about your topic, but you have little authority — because no one knows you yet.

Placing posts on other blogs helps your potential audience start to associate your name with high-quality information. And a bit of the authority of your host blog will transfer itself to you.

The more readers see your work, the more authority you will generate. It's a cumulative process, but one that can happen quickly if you have the ability to put in a lot of work over a short period.

2. Guest blogging brings in an audience, not just traffic

Anyone can buy traffic using pay-per-click or other forms of advertising. And that can be a good strategy. But what you're buying is just that ... *traffic*.

Traffic from a guest post, on the other hand, is already an audience. In other words, it's already a group of people interested in your topic who are also intrigued by what you have to say.

You'll still need to convert those visitors into a longer-term relationship, by using smart content marketing strategies. But with a guest post, you've already taken the first few steps in that process.

Key Tip: In the bio for your post, send traffic to a landing page you set up just for readers of that blog. Use a strong, clear [call to action](#) and remember that the content there needs to [benefit the reader](#).

You'll be able to add, refresh, or update content to that landing page as your business evolves, without having to ask the host blog to update a link.

3. Guest blogging builds your publisher network

How do little content publishers grow up to become big content publishers?

They make connections. They develop a healthy network of publishers (large and small) who will help them get the word out.

A tweet or link from a big enough publisher (one with a passionate, responsive audience) can get you well on your way to the minimum viable audience that can support your business.

You probably won't start out by writing for the biggest names in your topic. And you don't need to. Most successful content producers build their networks by writing for sites with slightly bigger audiences than their own, then gradually working up to sites that have more and more readers.

Key Tip: Writing one post for a blog is nice, but writing multiple times for the same blog will bring in much greater rewards. Create a relationship with the blogs you write for, and contribute as regularly as you can. Once a month is often a good rhythm.

4. Guest blogging is superb for natural SEO

As we talked about earlier, building high-quality links is one of the trickiest (and most important) elements of effective SEO. Guest posting allows you to get a relevant, natural link, using the anchor text of your choice, on a site that has excellent search engine authority.

Just remember: as always with SEO copywriting, *keep things natural* and audience-friendly. Write for the readers first, and search engines a distant second.

Key Tip: Don't stuff your guest posts with links back to your own material. One or two highly relevant links will do you more good. Include a few links to your host blog's cornerstone content in your post as well.

How do I do it?

It's one thing to know you want to place some guest posts ... and another thing to actually place them.

Because guest blogging is such an important strategy, the next chapter will detail precisely how to find and network with the

CHAPTER 7

A 10-Point Plan for Connecting with Online Influencers

There's a dreadful truth about online business and marketing.

While you can, in fact, make money in your underwear, there are limits to how antisocial you get to be.

The web isn't really made up of algorithms. It's made of people. In all their frustrating, imperfect, and complicated glory.

Don't get me wrong. Systems are smart. Automation has its place. Creating functional processes will do a lot for your project or business.

But at the end of the day, you still have to deal with people.

One of the most critical aspects to building an audience for your business is making high-quality connections with other web publishers. From SEO to reputation management to growing traffic to your site, connections matter.

Here's how you can make high-quality connections with bloggers and other content publishers in order to find a wider audience for your own content. You don't have to suck up or turn into some weird networking-addicted phony. Here's what to do instead:

The 3 Foundational Building Blocks

Before you can start making connections, you have to build from a place of strength. Make sure you have these elements in place before you start reaching out, or you'll find that your networking takes you in the wrong direction.

1. Build something worth talking about

Influential people — whether they're celebrities, business leaders, or web publishers with large audiences — virtually always have one thing in common.

They have a lot of people coming forward who would like to engage their attention.

If you're known for doing something interesting and useful, it makes it a million times easier to make the connections you want to make.

- Josh Kaufman created the [Personal MBA](#) to empower professionals to educate themselves more effectively, quickly, and cheaply than they could with a traditional MBA. That's remarkable.
- Amber Rogers created [GoKaleo](#) to help women recognize the predatory tactics of fitness and diet gurus, get off the self-hatred bandwagon, and think critically about health, nutrition, and fitness. That's remarkable.
- Adam Baker and Grant Peele produced the documentary [I'm Fine, Thanks](#), showcasing the lives of dozens of people who have worked to free themselves from complacency and traditional assumptions. The film inspires and challenges viewers to take a hard look at their own lives. That's remarkable.

None of those people has any trouble making connections with influencers ...because they've done something that lots of people will want to know more about.

Do something epic — even if it's epic on a micro scale. One great project will open doors you didn't even know existed.

The simplest way to do something epic? Create some interesting, and genuinely useful content. And yes, a great blog absolutely counts.

2. Be a good egg

Anyone can get social media attention by being an ass. And, as we have seen again and again, many do.

But making an ass of yourself only gets you attention ... it does nothing for your *influence*.

All of the networking advice in this chapter depends on you being a good egg.

Be positive. Share content that's helpful. Put your best foot forward. Make more friends than you do enemies.

It's fine to hold some controversial opinions. As we talked about earlier, that can be a great way to stake out a remarkable position with your audience.

But if you pick fights 90% of the time, you'll become known as someone who only knocks down. You need to be known as someone who can build.

"Be nice until it's time to not be nice."

–Dalton's Rule #3 from Road House

3. Be interesting

Everyone likes to hear "I love your work." But if that's the sum total of what you have to say, the conversation fizzles fast.

(There are a few influencers who can spin *your* love of *their* work into an hour-long self-appreciation monologue. Thank goodness, these people are pretty rare.)

Have a point of view, think critically about your topic, ask interesting questions, and stay informed. No matter how crowded your topic, there's always room for someone who can think and speak intelligently about it.

The 3 Places You'll Create Connections

Now that your foundation is set, you need places to actually get out and find your influencers.

4. Spark the connection on Twitter

Right now, Twitter is one of the best venues for sparking connections with content publishers. It's not as popular with the general public as Facebook is... but it's often *more* popular with bloggers and content creators.

Remember your foundation. Be helpful, be charming, be interesting, and point to remarkable things (including remarkable things created by other people).

Twitter works because it's easy to find your favorite influencers and it's a low-risk environment. It's relatively easy to approach even folks with large audiences ... just "@" them.

It's also a noisy environment, so it can take some time to make yourself heard. Don't let that worry you. Get out and start putting your friendly, useful face forward.

5. Deepen the relationship on Facebook

Twitter is great, but 140 characters is a pretty significant limitation.

At some point, you'll want to deepen connections by going further with the conversation on a platform that supports that. Depending on who you're talking with, [Facebook](#) is a great venue right now.

(Although for your influencers, it may be Tumblr or Reddit or a particular online forum. Focus on the principle, not the platform.)

Longer-format platforms allow for more complexity and better continuity. Contribute to a conversation worth having. Remember your foundation.

6. Do some serious deals in meatspace

"Meatspace" is the cyberpunk term for what boring normal people call the real world.

You can make some amazing connections online, but if you can swing it, always try to take things face-to-face at some point.

Conferences are a great way to solidify lots of connections over a couple of days. Meet for coffee, or a drink, or breakfast. Have conversations in hallways.

When you get a chance to meet face to face, take it. It often creates a whole new level of engagement that can last for years and yield surprising benefits.

The 3 Don'ts

It wouldn't be a good list post if I didn't throw in a couple of warnings. There are a few things you can do that will make your efforts at connection much less successful.

Avoid these three in particular:

7. Don't whine

"Oh, you're a blogger? What do you complain about?"

–Julien Smith

It's so easy to fall into a pattern of constant whining and complaint on social media.

Resist. Strongly.

Whining, as any parent can tell you, is profoundly irritating. And so often, what feels like "making conversation" to us comes across as whining to the poor suckers on Facebook or Twitter who are reading us.

We all need a little pity party sometimes. Call a friend and ask her for coffee (and give her fair warning that you're in a whiny mood). Don't make a habit of dumping your bad day all over your social media connections.

8. Don't gossip

"If you don't have anything nice to say, come over here and sit right by me."

Talking about others behind their back is so seductive. Most of us do it, and most of us secretly find it rather delicious.

But it's dangerous.

When you tell a long, unflattering story about someone I like, you've damaged your ability to connect with me. And you may have no idea you've done it.

You've also taken a very real risk that I'll run back and tell my friend what you've been saying.

Your career (and your psyche) would be better off if you simply never talked about anyone when they weren't present.

That goal's a little lofty (and I'm far from there myself, trust me), but try to get into the habit of thinking twice (or three times) before you share a juicy story.

The reputation you save may be your own.

9. Don't squee all over your shoes

I stole this phrase from the lovely and remarkable Pace Smith.

The thing is, I know where you're coming from. I'm a fan girl too. I've got my own heroes, and I have to fight that urge to babble when I meet them.

But if your hero is worth your admiration, she probably gets a little weirded out when people treat her as something better than human.

Again, it's great to let people know you're enjoying their work. Enthusiasm is a lovely quality. Step #3 can be helpful here. If you're geeking out about the topic (rather than about the person), you can often find some common ground.

And one last point ...

10. It doesn't always work the way you thought it would

Way back when I started my first blog, I secretly imagined that one day I was going to have tea & crumpets with Seth Godin every day. Turns out I can't really eat crumpets ... all that gluten's no good for me.

Also, possibly more to the point, Seth just wasn't all that interested. (To be clear ... he's always been very nice. Just not daily-crumpets-level nice.)

On my path, one of my goals was to some day develop a good working relationship with Seth Godin. Things didn't work out exactly

how I had visualized. But a bunch of other good stuff happened on that path, and I did end up building great working relationships with lots of other amazing people.

You have to follow the path you're actually on, which sometimes bears only slight resemblance to the one that was originally in your head.

"The plan is nothing; planning is everything."

–Dwight Eisenhower

Do have goals. Do have some folks in mind that you'd love to create professional relationships with.

Then do a bunch of epic stuff, be a good egg, know your topic, and make yourself useful, and see where the real path leads.

It's going to go somewhere good. Just be ready for a few interesting twists.