

Citibooks' Tips and Ideas on...

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Top 10 RSS Do's and Don'ts

S. Housley

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RSS is not quite a household word, but technically astute individuals are adopting the use of RSS feeds at an alarming rate. If you are interested in jumping on the bandwagon, but not quite sure of where to start, consider following these simple RSS feed tips to maximize feed compatibility and make your feed stand out from the crowd.

RSS DO's

1. Titles and Descriptions.

Always include meaningful keywords in your RSS feed's Channel title and description. Many readers will view or search for topic specific RSS feeds using keywords or keyword phrases. If you have descriptive keywords in your RSS feed's title and description the feed is more likely to be located and subscribed to by interested parties.

2. GUID Format.

Always include a GUID with each feed item. The GUID is a globally unique identifier. Each post should use a different GUID. The GUID will in some cases assist RSS news readers and aggregation software in determining when new content has been added to the RSS feed or when existing content in an RSS feed has been modified. If you do not use GUID's, the software used to aggregate the feeds may have difficulty detecting changes to feed items or the software may not always recognize new content.

3. Publish Dates.

Always include a publish date on feed items. The publish date should be used even if the content is timeless. The Publish Date will help readers determine that status of the content contained in the feed item.

4. Polish Your Feed.

Consider including images within your RSS feed. While the added images will not necessarily improve ranking, they will add a polished look to your RSS feed and help brand your feed.

5. Feed Hosting.

Either host your own feed, or set it up to forward to a third party from your

website. This will allow you retain complete control over the RSS feed. You will not need to rely on the stability of another company. If you control the forwarding and at any point you are dissatisfied with the service provided by the third party, you can redirect the feed to another location.

RSS DON'Ts

1. Plagiarize.

Do not plagiarize content in your RSS feed, there is little more to be said. Written words are considered protected in most countries. Posting someone else's work and taking credit for their words is wrong and will damage your reputation as a credible source.

2. Splog.

Do not create splogs by automating feed creation. Splogs just clutter the search engines and directories and make it difficult to locate RSS feeds with meaningful content.

3. Violate Copyrights.

Do not violate copyrights by republishing an RSS feeds contents. If you quote content from another RSS feed, credit the source and provide and link to the original source of the content. As a rule of thumb, editorial content should exceed the length of the quoted material in the post.

4. Violate TOS.

Do not republish RSS feeds without confirming that feed syndication is allowed. The terms of use are not always apparent, so it is important that you check the terms of service on the publisher's feed subscription page prior to syndicating the contents of another publisher's RSS feed.

5. Provide Multiple Feed Formats.

Do not provide multiple feed formats for the same content. As far as the subscriber is concerned, the version of RSS that you are using is irrelevant. Multiple versions of the same feed simply cause confusion. Almost all RSS readers and news aggregators support all versions of RSS, simply choose a version and provide a single feed.

By adopting good feed practices, you can reap the benefits of having an RSS feed. Following these simple RSS do's and don'ts will get you started on the path to RSS success.

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Top Strategies to Get Quality Links to Your Website...Even if it's New

Ismael Tabije

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In the current scheme of things, a website that has links from other related websites merit high ranking in the major search engines for its main keywords. This is so because the search engines consider the external links as votes of confidence by the other websites.

It's relatively easy and a breeze to campaign for reciprocal links when you already have a website with a high google PR and alexa rating. (Google PR is a rank based on how many relevant websites link to yours and Alexa is a measure of rank with traffic volume as the basis for computation).

But what about when your site is just new with a PR0 and an alexa rating in the 7 digits? It is definitely more difficult to find people who will want to link back to you. But don't despair yet; there are excellent strategies that will make life easier for you even if your site is new. Here are some of the best today:

1. Allow people to create a website for free by allowing them to use some of your web space. Since it's free they won't mind if you require a link to your site or even an ad of your product to be placed in their site.

2. Write articles and offer them to other related web sites for free. Include a link to your site and plug-in a promotional of your products at the end of the article.

3. If you have an ezine, allow other people to publish it on their web site. Include a back link to your site.

4. Visit a web site related to yours and write a positive review of the site. Tell them they can publish it on their web site if they include a link to your web site.

5. Search for shareware, freeware and demo software. Allow people to download software at no charge from your web site, if they link to your web site. To push the benefit further, ask for their email address where you will send the free download information. This will build up your mailing list even more.

6. Invite other web sites to use your discussion board for their web site visitors. Just have them link directly to the discussion board.

7. When you purchase a product and you are happy with its benefits write a testimonial to the website owner. The testimonial should give ample details of the benefits you gained. Include a link to your site. Give them permission to publish it on their web site.

8. Create an affiliate program of your site. Then invite people to become your affiliate. Give generous commissions. People will love to put a link to your site with their affiliate code built in the link.

9. Create a polling and award site for other web sites. Give the winners a “trophy” in the form of a banner that contains an HTML link to your site. This will also improve your traffic as normally the “candidate websites” will encourage their friends to visit your site to vote for them.

10. Create a specialized directory in your website where people can add their web site for free if they link to your site. The directory shall only accept websites related to your site content.

11. Create a free e-book that you can offer to your site visitors. The ebook shall contain a liberal sprinkling of your site URL. Offer the e-book as free giveaway to other websites if they create a link to your site.

12. Exchange articles. Write an article relevant to your content that contains a link to your site. Search other websites related to yours that also feature their own articles and offer to exchange articles - you feature one of their articles in your site and they feature yours in their site.

13. Join or create a web ring, a group of web sites on a similar subject agreeing to link with each other. Key in the keywords "web rings" into your search engine to find the web ring appropriate for your need.

Creating links with other websites is a long and tedious process. Patience is a virtue if you want to succeed. But in the long run, when the free traffic to your website starts rolling in regularly and continuously and you earn from your due, the effort will prove to be well worth it.

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The Importance of a Private IP Address in Email Marketing

Neil Anuskiewicz

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You comply with CAN SPAM. Your list is confirmed opt-in. You have spent time writing a compelling message and an inspiring call to action. Your graphic designers have designed a stunning custom email.

You then send the email to your list but find that your emails were not delivered to any of your subscribers at a major Internet Service Provider. This is a disappointing outcome to say the least, and you decide to look into the matter further in order to avoid low email delivery rates in the future.

Why did this ISP block your emails? You learn that the ISP has blacklisted the IP address that you share with numerous other customers of your Email Service Provider (ESP). Another email marketing customer sharing your IP address sent out an email blast and got too many spam complaints. As a result the ISP blacklisted the IP from which the email blast came. The problem is that this IP address is yours also.

Your email delivery rates were lower than normal because of the mistakes made by someone else. This problem was caused by factors completely out of your control.

The Problem and The Solution

You may be surprised to learn that most ESP's have a very small pool of IP addresses that nearly all of their customers share. Their large customers, however, do get a private IP address. Small businesses and non-profits typically have to share an IP or pay extra for a private one.

You should strongly consider requesting a private IP address from your current ESP or even switching to an ESP that offers a private IP as a standard feature.

On the other hand, if your deliverability numbers are already consistently high, it probably means that your ESP is already offering private IP addresses or that they they are doing a good job of managing relationships with the major ISP's.

What is an IP Address and Why Should I Care?

Every machine connected to the Internet has a unique number called an IP address. A decent analogy

The big difference is that you do not share your phone number with a large group of people. You have a unique cell phone number through which you can reliably reach people you know. They know it is you calling, and not some prank caller who happens to share your phone number.

With a shared IP address, you share your IP address with other customers of the ISP. With some ESP's, each customer shares an IP address with thousands of other customers.

When you send out an email campaign, your emails are stamped as coming from a specific IP address-similar to how caller ID shows who is calling you. It is kind of like "caller ID" for emails but you are lumped together with everyone else who shares your IP address.

The result of this situation is that ESP's are fighting a constant battle to keep their pool of IP addresses in the good graces of the ISP's, corporate networks, etc. While high quality ESP's make sure their customers are CAN SPAM compliant, recipients still can and will file spam complaints (maybe they forgot they subscribed).

If above a certain threshold of your recipients file spam complaints (it varies by the ISP or corporate network), the ISP or network administrator adds the IP address to a blacklist and block all email originating from that IP address.

It is worth mentioning again that the better ESP's have relationships with the ISP's and do a good job of keeping their IP addresses off the blacklists. If the IP address does get blacklisted, they are usually fairly effective at getting the IP address removed from the blacklist. This process is not always quick though.

Watch Email Deliverability Like a Hawk

The important point to remember is that deliverability is key to email marketing success so watch your email deliverability like a hawk. If your ESP is not performing for you then find out why and remedy the situation quickly. Try to make changes using your current ESP first. If nothing changes, then it might be time to consider a change.

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