

Martyn Moore

WORKING WITH JEREMY



I'VE worked from home for seven months. I sometimes did it when I had a "proper job", but that was different.

I used to work for a media company, but the attitude to home working was old fashioned. "Watching Jeremy Kyle?" was a typical jibe. Ironically, the newspaper I edited regularly promoted working from home, but we weren't allowed to practise what we were preaching.

Actually, as far as me ending my former career was concerned, an argument about home working was probably the second to last straw. The last straw involved a Romanian lady acrobat and some talcum powder, but that's another story.

The compromise agreement between me and my former employer contained restrictive clauses. For example: "If you do this, we want the money back." The upshot was 12 weeks of limbo.

I signed on at the Job Centre and was shocked by the amount of security they need for the clients who drop in after they've been to the pub. The chances of finding a job paying £100k a year were slim but I turned up every other Tuesday to take advantage of the free dentistry.

Life consisted of winter walks with the dog, teaching myself how to create a database-driven website, picking up the kids from school and making dinner. I liked it. I could get a week out of a shirt if I wore a clean t-shirt under it every day.

“ This online networking led to my first commissions as a freelance writer and I soon had a growing new client base. ”

When I added Twitter to Facebook and Linked In, any spare time between dog-walking, HTML-wrangling and my Jamie Oliver books was immediately filled. Incredibly, this online networking led to my first commissions as a freelance writer and I soon had a growing new client base.

Suddenly I'm busy. A new laptop means that the garden is my office when the rain stops and I've got to know my neighbours. In fact, there's a whole new world right here in my street.

But sometimes it feels as if the street is my world and I miss the gossiping, posturing, manoeuvring, flirting, politicking, back-stabbing, "did you see the game?" entertainment of the office.

When you consider the fun I'm not having, it's weird that as a home worker I find it hard to stay focused. I'm too easily distracted by IT for a start, so it doesn't help to sit at a computer all day. Maybe I need more meetings.

And I swear my guitar sits in the corner of the study whispering to me. "Come on," it quietly chimes. "Just half an hour will sort that G to B minor." And I'm away.

Soon my children will be back at school, bless them. And another barrier to productivity will have gone with them. They're so much more fun than work.

I'm writing this in the garden on a hot day in August. I haven't had a tan like this in years but I don't resent working late, weekends or anytime it's raining because I'm doing it for me.

Jeremy Kyle? Still haven't watched him. But I listen to Jeremy Vine as I raid the fridge each lunchtime. Radio Two is fattening.

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FEATURE :: SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

The secrets of search engine optimisation

By Emily Hill

SEARCH Engine Optimisation (SEO) has a reputation as a black art, or at the very least a thing of mystery - an exclusive club to which only the chosen few have access.

The reality, however, is far more mundane. SEO essentially boils down to three things: The way your website is built, the content that populates your site and the websites that link back to your site.

The myth is that 'if you build it, they will come'. The phrase ought to be: "If you build it in a Google-friendly way, they will have a chance of finding you". It's less catchy but more accurate. If you're having a new website built, you need to choose your web developer carefully. Structuring a site to be search engine friendly is a topic that would fill a large book of its own, but in brief whoever is building your site should ensure it has:

- Meta tags
- HTML and Google site maps
- Link paths
- HTML based text with no graphics embedded
- Static urls
- CSS formatting and/ or standard rollovers for navigation menu
- A robots.txt file
- A 404 error handling page
- Absolute, rather than relative links
- No internal Javascript or Flash
- No frames

The phrase 'content is king' is just as hackneyed as 'if you build it they will come', but it's not far wrong. Google, Yahoo, the newly-launched Bing and all the other smaller search engines have one thing in common: they're all competing with each other to display the most relevant websites when a user runs a search using a keyword (or combination of keywords).

“ It is much better to take a "quality over quantity" approach to SEO. ”

Back in the old days of the internet, this simply meant peppering your text with "Dentist Bedford" if you were - you guessed it - a dentist in Bedford. However, it didn't take long for keyword spam to become a huge problem, so today's keyword optimisation needs to take a more organic approach. A dentist in Bedford would need to write original content around "teeth", "tooth", "dental surgery", "south" as well as "dentist" and "Bedford".

The other aspect of web content is the need for unique content to be added to the site on a regular

basis. This can be achieved in a number of ways, for example bolting a blog onto the site and posting new articles each day/ week; or writing regular news items.

One of the most important, yet most overlooked, aspects of search engine optimisation is getting back-links. This means websites linking to you without you needing to link back to them. When other websites link to yours this tells the search engines that your site must be of some importance.



Generally speaking, the more links you have back to your site, the higher your ranking will be. However, it's also important to make sure that your back-links are of good quality. One link from the BBC's website is worth hundreds of links from obscure sites with low traffic.

Search Engine Optimisation is certainly labour-intensive but it's by no means unachievable if you're a small business without the resources to pay a specialist SEO company. Never be tempted by offers of "guaranteed top 10 rankings" or "a million guaranteed back-links".

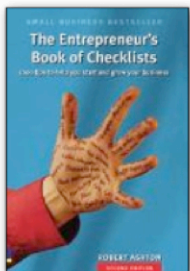
More often than not, your top 10 ranking will be for an obscure irrelevant keyword, and your back-links will come from "link farms", i.e. spam sites set up for the specific purpose. Any SEO benefit you derive will instantly disappear should you stop paying the link farm company - so you are effectively being held to ransom.

It is much better to take a "quality over quantity" approach to SEO. Focus on increasing your ranking for the most relevant keywords that attract targeted traffic to your website.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Entrepreneur's Book of Checklists

By Robert Ashton



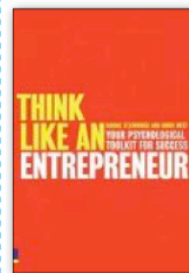
I like lists. The thing with a book of lists is that you can dip in and out and scan quickly for information. And so it is with this book. Ten ways to look bigger than you are, 10 ways to find more time, 10 sleepless nights you can probably avoid. See what I mean? They were selected at random and each one would be worth at the very least a cursory read. The thinking behind the book is that with 101 one things to

do, a budding entrepreneur needs checklists; they need reminding, prompting and warning. This is the kind of book that could be kept by the bed, in the glove box or even in the downstairs loo - Philip Smith.

Price: £12.99 / Publisher: Pearson

Think Like an Entrepreneur

By Robbie Steinhouse and Chris West



How do entrepreneurs think? Chances are you'll not bump into Richard Branson or Martha Lane Fox at a party to be able to ask them, so this book will help plug that gap in your business networking. Steinhouse, who has built his reputation over 20 years in the recruitment, property and insurance sectors and West, a marketing guru and writer, have come up with an insight into the way those who are successful think on their feet

and tackle, for example, risk. The authors draw on a neuro-linguistic psychological programme to help new and growing business owners develop a can-do attitude - Philip Smith.

Price: £12.99 / Publisher: Pearson Education