

SPI Podcast Session #11 (<http://www.smartpassiveincome.com>)

5 Questions You Need To Be Asking Yourself To Improve Your Online Business, Blog or Website.

Hey what's up! Welcome to the 11th session of the Smart Passive Income Podcast.

When we look for help to improve our businesses, our blogs and our websites, we usually look outward, meaning we ask other people for help, or ask for their suggestions or even pay for it at times. Today, I'm going to ask you to take a different route and look within and provide you with some questions that you can ask yourself about what you're doing online.

1. Am I leaving a good first impression?

Here's a small tip that I once heard somewhere that has stuck with me forever since I heard it: **treat your blog or website like you would your own house.**

I love this analogy, because think about it - it's where you live, so you want to make it look nice not only for you and how you want it to be, but for your visitors too.

How we meet somebody is how we remember them. If the first impression is bad, it's REALLY difficult to change how people feel, and this is tough for us because it only takes a few seconds before people have some type of initial thought about us, our websites or blogs or our business. Don't get it right the first time, and it can be hard to get people back.

This is why it's extremely important to make sure that when people visit your website for the first time, whether it's through search engine traffic, through a link from someone else's site or a recommendation from a friend - that your site feels very welcoming.

If you visit someone else's house and there's trash everywhere, cockroaches in the kitchen and dog poo on the floor - you're not going to want to be there, and you probably don't want to come back. Even if things get cleaned up, you'll have that image of the first time you saw that house. Again, **treat your blog like you would your own house.** Clean it up, make people feel welcome, offer them a drink, let them sit down and relax -

When this translates to websites and blogs, this means:

1. **Introducing people to who you are and what your site is about.**
 - a. **Are YOU on the site?**
 - i. It's okay to be a little personable on your site. I mean, when you invite someone over, you're not wearing a mask when you meet and greet them, are you? Would you not even say who you are?
2. **No pop-ups.**
 - a. What is a popup?

- b. Why I don't like them (use house example)
 - c. What I want to happen.
3. **Easy to read and navigate throughout your site.**
- a. Can people in your house find their way around. If the bathroom is down the hall, a right at the second intersection, two lefts and then make a u-turn until you see a cowboy, who will then tell you which direction the bathroom is at depending on the time of day - then it's not going to be very fun. Online, especially, the less people have to think, the better. Make it easy for people to navigate through your site.
4. **No heavy advertisements.**
- a. I've been on sites where the ads take over, and I immediately leave. What does that tell me when there are more ads on a page than actual content. What is the primary purpose? Probably not helping me, so I'm out.

These are all things that are important in leaving a good first impression. If you feel there's stuff on your site that could make people want to leave, then fix it! If you don't know how, hire somebody, because you're losing out on potential readers, subscribers and future customers at this point - before they even get into your awesome content and what you have to offer.

If you don't know where to hire people, try Elance.com or Odesk.com. These are services where you can post a job that you want done, and providers will bid on how much it will cost to do the job. I use Elance several times, even for iPhone apps, and that is what I used to build the first few versions of The Smart Passive Income Blog. I've since hired another company to do the latest design that you see, but the point is that I made sure I had my website the way I wanted it to look because I know exactly how important those first impressions are.

2. Am I Giving People a Reason To Come Back?

There are a ton of websites out there, and within each niche there are a ton of other websites all talking about virtually the same exact thing.

So how does one differentiate themselves from everyone else talking about the same exact stuff.

Sure, of course we can say - create awesome unique content.

Duh.

But we all know that already, and that's really something we all should be doing. And yes, no content is purely 100% unique, but the way you present it can be. Just something to think about.

Now, I'm not the very first person to start a "how to make money online" type blog - definitely not. I wish I was, because I'd have a lot of money, but I'm not.

In fact, I'm probably an idiot for choosing to enter this niche because it is so competitive, but this just shows you that there are things you can do in any niche to stand out from the crowd, build a community and get people coming back to your site.

Number One: *Put your personality into your website.*

No one else is like you, so there's honestly no better way to stand out from the crowd and make people subscribe to you and keep reading your content than just being you - writing in your style, and speaking your mind.

You shouldn't be writing for the search engines, which many of us do, but they are just machines. They can get visitors to your site, but when people read your content, they're not going to stay, and it's the people that drive our businesses and our success online, not the machines.

Along the same lines as personality, I think you can really get people to connect with you if you **have an intriguing story**, or at least something that you can share that makes you unique.

Stories **excite** and they help us connect. As a storyteller, you have the power to really capture an audience's attention, and attention is exactly what you need in this online world. It's the very first thing that needs to happen in the chain:

Attention -> Trust -> Permission -> Exchange

At campfires, just imagine a storyteller and all of the faces of the kids who are sitting around the campfire, waiting to hear the next part of the story. Fishing stories getting passed along as other people get involved and share their own stories about how their fish was "THIS BIG" (with arms stretched out all the way).

I'm the first one to admit that I know I have a fantastic story, one that really connects with people. I don't try to make it something it's not - but I know a lot of people can relate to someone getting laid off, working online and making it work for them. I'm always happy to share that story because I know it inspires, but also because I know people can connect with me on a deeper level than just "Hi I'm Pat and I work online". You've got to have a story of your own, but it has to be true too. A made up story is easily detectable.

So what do you do if you don't have a story - don't make one up...**MAKE ONE HAPPEN**. Put yourself in a position to make a great story happen.

One last thing I'd like to talk about beyond putting your personality in your blog and also connecting with people through a story, is creating a sense of community on your site.

This can be hard to do, especially when you're just starting out, but if you can incubate a community on your site, grow a steady stream of fans and people who just love what you do

and how you do it, then that will get people coming back too. The more OTHER people are involved, the more them and everyone else on the sideline (those who don't comment or don't participate) will keep coming back.

Oh, and here's a bonus strategy that I use quite often on my blog to get people to come back:

I tell people exactly what I'm up to (with regards to online business), and tell them I'm going to report on it at a later date.

Examples:

- The Niche Site Duel (<http://www.nichesiteduel.com>)
- When I redesigned my blog
- My Monthly Income Reports
- My Wordpress Plugin development

I try to get people involved in what I do - not entirely giving them full access to what I'm up to while it's happening, but just the fact that they know I'm working on something makes them want to come back and see the results, or see what my income is like the next month, or see what this wordpress plugin I'm developing (there's actually 2 now), and how it works.

When it comes to your content, are you talking the talk, or are you also walking the walk? If you walk the walk, then people will be interested to see how you do it. What will they miss out on if they don't come back? That's what you should think about - make them want more, by giving more.

3. Am I Giving People an Easy Way to Consume My Content?

Okay, so now that we've worked on our first impression and getting people to come back, there's a piece of the puzzle we haven't really talked about yet, and that's giving people an **easy way** to get your content.

You see, there are a variety of ways that people like to consume content. We know about the different forms of media - like text on a website, audio through something like a podcast, or video like on YouTube - but what I want to talk about isn't about that - it's the kind of technical ways that people like to consume content and get more of your content if you're willing to give it.

So for example, your email list.

If you're doing any type of business online, you have to have an email list, and here's why:

1. It's still one of the best ways to reach people. Just think - how often do you check your emails every day? For some of you, it's probably the first thing you do in the morning, and I know a bunch of people who just can't stand seeing unread emails in their inbox. So, if you write an email to someone, it has a high potential of getting read.
2. What if your business shuts down tomorrow, or Google dies or something totally

unexpected happens and your website gets hacked and is unusable. There is no better way to contact the people who were once on your website than via email. It's basically your lifeline because without that, you've got nothing. You can't contact each and every one of your RSS subscribers (people reading your content through a reader like Google Reader). Even here on iTunes for the podcast, there's no way I can reach out to each and everyone of you if, say, iTunes took away my podcast for some reason. If I lost my blog today, I know I could easily start a new one and get it up and running in no time, with a large community already behind it, because of my email list.

Beyond those reasons, it's also just a really personable way to give content to people, another way for them to consume your content and better connect with you and what you do.

For more about starting an email list, please check out my beginner's guide which can be found at <http://www.smartpassiveincome.com/emaillist> (2 L's)

Another way people consume your blog content is through an RSS reader.

RSS, which stands for "Really Simple Syndication", is a way that people can read what you write without having to go to your website, because it's more convenient and people can read RSS "feeds" from other places all in one spot, like in a Google Reader, for example.

So, the takeaway here is that A LOT of people use RSS readers, so give people opportunities to subscribe. A lot of people put a subscription button at the top of their webpages (that orange button with the white, sort of blips coming out from the corner), which is good, but what happens when people read your content? They scroll down and then that subscribe button is gone, so give them an opportunity to subscribe to your content at the end of your posts too, which is when hopefully they'll be so impressed by what you wrote that they would have to subscribe. Sure, they could scroll up to subscribe, but people don't think "oh, that was awesome, I'm going to subscribe now", without something triggering that thought, like the ability to subscribe at the end of your posts.

Also, don't forget about email RSS subscriptions. Some people, instead of reading blogs and content in a reader, like to read them in their emails. So, they sign up to receive emails whenever the blogs they subscribe to write new content. I like to give people this option too. I once took it out, and a ton of people asked me for how to subscribe to my feed via Email.

Now, don't be confused here. This is different from the email list. By letting people subscribe to your RSS feed via email, you don't get to capture their email addresses - this is all done on the backend automatically by the feed service, such as feedburner or feedblitz.

So, to answer a question I know a lot of you have - which is "How should I do email on my website, if I have the option to sign up for an email list and have an option to sign up for my RSS feed (or blog posts), my answer is - it's up to you. I have both on my blog, because some people only want to receive my blog posts via email, and not my newsletter emails and broadcasts,

while others don't want the blog posts, but want my newsletter and broadcast emails.

The email subscription service I use for my newsletter, Aweber, does have the ability to both capture email addresses and send out daily, weekly or monthly updates of blog posts on your blog to your subscribers, but again I like to keep the RSS and the newsletter separate, and give people the option of which one they want to choose. It's up to you.

Another thing about easily consuming your content is how you structure it.

Meaning, how does your blog post or website content LOOK to your visitors.

If a post you write is just one huge paragraphs with no breaks, it's going to be hard to read and it might blind some people. Of course, you'd use paragraphs, but there are more things you can do to make your content even more easily readable:

- Use an eye-friendly font. I like Arial, but there are a number of other web-friendly and eye-friendly fonts you can use.
- Break up sections of your post with headers, which are usually a larger font and is the title of your next section.
- Use bullets and numbered lists.
- Use bold text and italics
- Use pictures to prove or emphasize points.

By doing all of this, you can make your posts scannable, which is what most readers do anyways. The more easily scannable your content is, the better.

Maybe some of the content you want to produce is more easily consumable in something like an eBook!

Take my eBook, eBooks the Smart Way (ebooksthesmartway.com), for example. This eBook was made up of a series of 10 different blog posts that I wrote a LONG LONG time ago. Those posts were good, and they taught people exactly what I teach in the eBook I created, but because I've taken those posts and packaged them neatly into a pretty eBook, with more graphics, more pictures and more information - it's a lot more easy to consume.

Also, since I use it as a free gift for subscribing to my newsletter, it immediately establishes authority in my niche (a lot of people come to me referred to by others who have read my eBook, and that's specifically what their friend mentions about me for the referral), and it helps bring in more subscribers. I think I'm currently averaging between 45-60 new subscribers each day, which is awesome.

Again, check out eBooksthesmartway.com to see how I structured my eBook, how the delivery process works and you'll get on my newsletter, which will not sell you or force you to buy anything. It's purely content. Again - another way I'm trying to stand out from the crowd.

4. Is My Content Sharable?

And lastly, the big question is - Is your content sharable? Can it easily be shared with people.

We live in an age where we all want to know what everyone else is doing (I mean, just look at Facebook and everything we learn about everyone else from it - OMG, Kyle is no longer in a relationship!), and at the same time, we're all willing to share.

When it comes to our online businesses and blogs, **people will share** what you wrote, spoke or filmed with others - you just have to give them an easy way to do it.

This means utilizing easy to share buttons like the Twitter retweet button, or the Facebook Like button on your blogs.

This means making it easy for people to "stumble" your site (which is a fancy term for bookmarking it to the popular social bookmarking site, stumbleupon). And the same goes for Digg or Delicious, which are two other social bookmarking sites.

It really just takes one influential person to read your content and share it with their followers before you get a huge mass of traffic and new subscribers and potential customers. Their followers will come by, then some of them will share it with their followers, who retweet and share it with their followers - so on and so forth.

Also think about this? Are you giving people a reason to share? Some people will do it just because that's what they do, but maybe there's some kind of incentive. Maybe you've already shared their material with your followers, so now they'll return the favor. Maybe you're holding a contest, and one entry for the drawing is to tweet your contest page.

Maybe your content is just so kick butt that it just basically shares itself. In other words, a "pillar article", which I just wrote a post about the other day, so check that out on the blog (again, show notes are available for each show on the blog under the podcast tab).

The thing about SHARING is, a recommendation for your material from a friend through some kind of share or word of mouth, whatever, is FAR FAR FAR more powerful than anything you can say to that person.

Create content that gets people to share it and recommend it to their followers, and you'll see some awesome results.

1. Am I leaving a good first impression?

2. Am I Giving People a Reason To Come Back?

3. Am I Giving People an Easy Way to Consume My Content?

4. Is My Content Sharable?

5. Why Am I Listening To You, Pat?

What I mean is, you're here listening to this podcast, or maybe reading the transcript on my blog, but we're at the end of this session - you would have had to invest a certain amount of time to get this this point in the episode, so the question is, why are you here listening? How did you find me?

Now, you don't have to tell me the answer, but I think you should think about it - I mean really think about how and why you're here investing your time listening to me, and what you can learn from that. The answer will be different for everyone, but it's just something to think about, something to get those gears going in your head so you can be part of a real life example as to how and why people follow others.

Put those practices into place on your own site, because they are what YOU know best, and see what happens.

I hope you guys enjoyed this session of the Smart Passive Income Podcast - like I mentioned, show notes are available on the blog at smartpassiveincome.com, and again I'd love for you to receive my newsletter and get your free copy of eBooks the Smart Way (an eBook is exactly how I got started in this business), by going to eBooksTheSmartWay.com.

Thanks!