

MONEY FOR NOTHING

(AND YOUR CLICKS FOR FREE)

by Seth Godin

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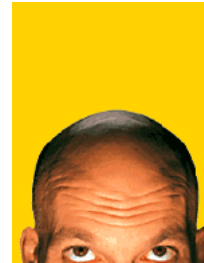
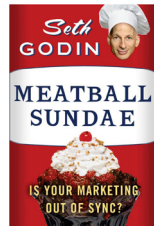
Unique Useful & Updated

Three Secrets to Web Traffic

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Dedicated to the Giant Squids

**It's not that difficult,
but it takes some strategy to build web pages
that attract traffic... not just today,
but for a long time after they're built.**

THREE U'S AND THE HAYSTACK

After you build a page on [Squidoo](#) (or a blog, or anywhere else on the web, for that matter) there's an almost irresistible urge to panic. Panic, because you've put in all this work and then you feel sort of powerless. "No one is looking at my page!"

It's human nature. We want to be noticed, we want our effort to pay off and we hate to fail.

So, the question: How do I get more traffic? It's not just you. EVERYONE wants to know the answer to this question. They want to know how to get more traffic to their blog, their corporate website, their Squidoo lens. More.

There are plenty of tactics about how to get more traffic to your pages online. Dozens of blog posts and great advice, easy to find. **WARNING: None of these tactics work without the three U's that are covered in this book.**

The three U's? Yes, it's simple:

Useful

Updated

Unique

The reason you don't have enough traffic is pretty obvious but still hard for most people to embrace. The web is a haystack, the biggest haystack the world has ever known. The reason that Yahoo and Google are so important is that they help us find what we want in the stack.

And your lens or blog or page or store is just a tiny little needle.

Of course you don't show up first in Google. I'd be stunned if you did. With a million matches on a typical term, the odds of showing up first are, ready for this... a million to one.

That means that the search engines can be really picky. Sure, there are ways to trick them (for a while) but pretty soon, the average stuff just ends up somewhere in the middle. If you can settle for this, you should, because the alternative requires some effort. This is a really short ebook about three requirements to avoid the middle, three ways to stand out, three ways to make all those other tactics actually work for you.

You can skip these three and spend all your time and your money trying to beat the system. *Or*, you can embrace the system and put it to work for you. It's worked for me so far, and I've managed to rank highly for dozens of terms for my blog and my Squidoo lenses.

If you spend any time at Google, what you'll discover is that the people there are universally committed to making the web better. I can't remember ever talking to anyone at Google (or Yahoo for that matter) who said, "hey, that's a pretty lousy page, but we make a lot of money on it."

SUPERSTITION

What people do:

When we see a system we don't understand, we make up stories. Humans used to think that space was filled with ether, that supernatural beings rode chariots through the sky to make the sun rise and that stomach ulcers were caused by pastrami sandwiches. We saw phenomena that we didn't understand and made up stories around them.

There's a lot of stories about search. Certain kinds of content, we hear, gets you banned. Other kinds of link structures always work. There are gnomes at Yahoo with a blacklist. Certain political parties are favored... the list goes on and on. We find a few data points to support a theory and suddenly it becomes a religion. We follow habits slavishly, all hoping

to please the search gods.

It turns out that it's a lot simpler than that. The search engines have been really up front about what they seek and what they link to. I thought I'd give my best shot at explaining it.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT SQUIDOO

If you're already a Squidoo lensmaster, feel free to skip this little section. If, on the other hand, you found this ebook some other way, a quick explanation:

[Squidoo](#) is a platform that lets anyone build a page about anything. Online. For free. In just a few minutes.

Just to be difficult, we call the pages "lenses." A lens is your viewpoint on a topic. There are lenses on the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#), the best way to get a [dragontattoo](#) and a wide ranging page about [digital photography](#). In fact, there are about 300,000 lenses on just about every topic imaginable. Each hand-built by an individual, like you, for free.

Lenses focus attention, drive clicks and even earn royalties. None of that happens, though, if people don't notice your lens. Hence this ebook... a way to build pages that get noticed and clicked on. It works for blogs and commercial sites too, of course, but I'll be using Squidoo lenses as my examples. (Hey, it's my company and my ebook, so there you go.)

THE FIRST U: USEFUL

Before there was LonelyGirl and before there was NumaNuma, the web was a tool. The money and time that's gone into it has paid off because people become more intelligent and productive when they find what they're looking for.

Guess what? The search engines know if your page is lousy. They know if it's some sort of dead end trap. They know if people see it and then flee, and they know if it's actually helpful. How? Because they track how often people hit the 'back' button. Because they track how many other sites are linking to you. Because they have thousands (literally

thousands) of well-paid people looking out for every trick and scam in the book.

Most people online are trying to solve a problem. They want to know something or find something or buy something. They want to meet someone or learn something. A useful lens solves their problem. It gives them a sense of meaning, helps them understand what's what.

It's not just Squidoo, of course. Blogs do a great job of solving problems. Consider this great post from Joel Spolsky about [Finding Great Developers](#).

Or take a look at these two lenses. They seem pretty different, but they both get tons of traffic:

<http://www.squidoo.com/turkishhaircut>

<http://www.squidoo.com/HollywoodDolls>

The reason they show up in search is simple: They solve a problem. They solve a problem without ego, without distraction and with authority and confidence. And they solve it better than any other page.

That last part is critical. No one cares if your lens is *good*. They care if it's **great**. Irresistible. The one and only best spot online. Not in your opinion of course, but in their opinion.

Here are three more great lenses. <http://weirdest.babynames.ever.com> , <http://www.squidoo.com/make-lemonade>, and <http://www.squidoo.com/laptopbag>. Notice that if you were looking for information on any of these topics, you'd be delighted to find one of these lenses. Same as great blogs, like [boingboing](#).

I'm actually uncomfortable writing this section, because it feels a lot like say, "if you want to succeed, work hard." It goes against the grain of the rock-star, shortcut, I'm-in-a-hurry-here's-some-cash American way. Sorry, but every shortcut I find isn't really a shortcut.

In fact, it takes more time and effort to game the system than it does to just build something useful.

THE SECOND U: UPDATED

Search engines and blogs are now obsessed with *recency*. The theory is simple: the web moves fast, faster than any medium ever. So recently updated pages are worth more than old pages, all other things being equal. Sure, there are still classic pages like this: <http://www.venganza.org/>, but in general, updated, fresh pages beat old ones.

This sounds so simple. It's actually pretty tricky to do.

If, for example, you have 20 or 40 Squidoo lenses, going to each one and updating it regularly can be quite a chore. You need to do it, no doubt about it, but you also need some help. That's why user-generated content is such a tremendous asset. If you build a page that attracts other contributors, your content stays fresh.

Take, for example, this argument on Scott Adams' blog about religion: http://dilbertblog.typepad.com/the_dilbert_blog/2007/07/the-atheist-who.html. The framework gets built once, but the ongoing debate inside of the page keeps it fresh and worth returning to. At the extreme, a site like [Digg](#) is changing all day, every day, always staying fresh even though the organizers of the site aren't writing the content.

Many blogs allow people to leave comments. Squidoo will soon expand on this by allowing moderated discussions (we call them Duels) as well by using a Digg-like feature we call Plexo. Plexo allows your visitors to vote links up or down. So, for example, you could build a page about the top ten candidates for president and let your visitors vote their sites up or down all day long. Even if I saw the page last week, I might want to come back this week to see how my favorite candidate is doing.

THE THIRD U: UNIQUE

I saved the most important one for last. In the haystack of the web, there's not a lot of room for *me too*. If you build a page and use almost no effort, rely on defaults, write as little as you can, find no original links and copy and paste text from Amazon, don't be at all surprised if you don't get any traffic. In a world of millions of choices, you don't *deserve* any traffic, do you?

The most successful Squidoo lenses, like the most successful blogs and the best stores, are all filled with unique stuff. Remarkable stuff, even. Stuff worth talking about. Links you can't find anywhere else. Collections of information that actually make a point. Hand-built organization that teaches. Copy that's worth reading.

“Oh, boy,” you think, “this is a lot of work.” It is, and that's **great news**.

It's great news because it means that for the foreseeable future, the secret of getting tons of organic web traffic has NOTHING TO DO with who you know or how much money you have. It revolves around a simple truth: great pages get more traffic.

One thing that makes a page unique is that it's the best in the world on that topic. It is uniquely able to save time, solve problems, expose shortcuts and save money for the user. Or at least entertain her.

Most blogs are boring. Most Squidoo lenses are a little thin, to put it gently. Most corporate websites are selfish, cookie-cutter exercises in committee thinking that no sane person would choose as the best in the world. The more shortcuts you take, the longer it takes to get to where you're going, at least online.

THE HALL OF FAME

Have you ever visited boingboing.net? It's one of the five most popular blogs in the world, and no wonder. It's amazing. Mark Fraunfelder and his colleagues kill themselves every single day. They create remarkable content, stuff that people can't help but talking about. They deserve every piece of traffic they get.

Here's a [fairly long lens](#), but Ronni, the creator, has shown up on a regular basis and improved it. Just a few minutes a day, sure, but it adds up. As a result, it rules the search engines, because if you've got a problem that this page can solve (starlings!), you'll be happy you ended up here.

Or consider [this single page post](#) about the new Amazon Kindle. Out of more than a million pages in a search on "Kindle terms of service", this page makes the top three. Why? It doesn't follow any of the obvious tactics. Instead, it's merely updated and unique. It has a point of view. It's worth talking about.

A lens doesn't have to take a year to create, and it doesn't have to be very long, either. Here, for example, is a lens on [the best cookies ever](#). It probably took a few hours to build, but once it's done, it's done.

I could probably go on for pages and pages but I guess you get the idea. Find the top pages on most topics and you'll probably discover that those pages are pretty good. Some of them are astoundingly good.

You have the chance to use your blog or your store or Squidoo to build useful, updated, unique pages that people can't help but talk about. Once you do that, it seems, traffic follows.

NEXT STEPS

Google is on a mission to build a better web. That's why they encouraged blogs, why they hunt down spam pages (even those with AdSense on them) and why they seek out pages that are unique, updated and useful.

I'm thrilled when I see a great Squidoo page, because it means our platform is working, that people are using it not to game the system or make a few bucks, but to contribute something precious to the conversation. You're building pages that teach or soothe or inspire... stuff that's in short supply. So thanks.

If you're convinced, go visit <http://www.squidoo.com/lensmaster/dashboard> and update your lenses. Add a discussion or one of our new duel modules. Write a few paragraphs about what you wished you'd known before you know what you know now. Add unique collections of links, or annotate the ones you've got. Insert plexo lists so your users can vote. The short version: build a page other people want to see.

Don't worry so much about the search engines. If you embrace the three U's, they'll embrace you. And if you see Mark Knopfler, tell him I said hi.

Seth Godin is the founder of Squidoo.com, a popular site that makes it easy for anyone to build a page about a topic they care about. He blogs at sethgodin.typepad.com. If you type *Seth* into Google, you'll see what he means. You can find a list of Seth's books [right here](#).

MAKE A PAGE, RIGHT NOW. WHY NOT?

Squidoo makes it easy to have your say. Just click a logo below to get started.



Make your own TV channel
using YouTube

NEW!
SQUID
ZIPPER

Yes, it's true.
Squidoo goes local.
Become the online
mayor of your town.



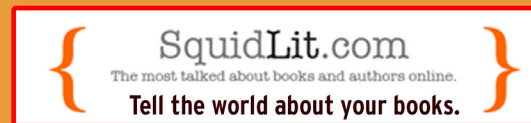
Review your favorite movies (and get paid for it)



Write a biography of your favorite person



What are you
passionate about?
Build an ever.com
page and share.



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