

# A Social Media Guide

By Steve Spalding

Editor, Howtosplitanatom.com

I was going to call this “*The Guide To Social Media*” because provocative titles like that are worth a few thousand extra pageviews, but upon reflection “A Guide . . .” fit more snugly. There is no such thing as the definitive guide to “Social Media,” the idea that there could be seems ludicrous. There are only perspectives and moving targets, and this collection is worth as much as any of them.

I also wouldn't call this a blog post, it closes in on 8000 words and at that point you start running into novella territory. To make it more palatable, I'm including the option to download this as a PDF, so you can read it on your iPhone or something. I'm also including a table of contents, so you can skip to the important parts.

What would I call this? It's a look at the Social Web that covers everything from content creation to micro-celebrity. It's a guide for anyone who likes reading stories about the Internet, anyone who has ever thought of starting a blog or anyone who wants to throw their hat in as a web entrepreneur. It's a fun, quick read and at the end, if you're really lucky, you will have learned something interesting.

So let's begin.

## Table of Contents

- [Welcome To My Internet](#) (On the Art of Reading and Writing Guides)
- [Back To The Practical](#) (On Giving Practical Advice)
- [Don't Read This Chapter](#) (On Micro-Celebrity and Blogging)
- [Bigger, Better Media](#) (On Personal Branding and New Media)
- [Building Absolutely Incredible Businesses](#) (On . . . )
- [I Hate Blogging](#) (On Avoiding Burnout As A Content Producer)
- [Picking Good Horses](#) (On Goal Oriented Production)

# Welcome To My Internet

Welcome to [my Internet](#), be sure to sign in at the front desk.

Finished?

Good, great, now stand back — I've got something to tell you. I don't know where you came from, but I know what you are looking for — a new life, a new beginning as an [entrepreneur](#), a [writer](#), a [publisher](#), a netlebrity an "internet guy or gal." You are looking for the rapture of the geeks — the freedom, fame and success that only semi-anonymous bits and bytes can offer, and I'm supposed to help you get there.

**It's the reason that bloggers blog and content producers produce content.**

We love to hear ourselves speak (no really, we do) but we bleed for the opportunity to share something valuable with the world — something meaningful. Whether it's our recipe for peach cobbler or the secrets to [marketing your business online](#), we want to say that our words, pictures and videos *did* something, *changed* something, made the world just a touch better because they existed.

That's why it galls me to realize that only about 10% of what I turn out accomplishes that. The worst day of any writing career is the day when you realize how much crap you've passed off as gold. Worse yet is realizing that people are so accustomed to reading the facile, [hype-laden crap](#) that the web offers up as prophesy that most of them probably didn't even notice.

It makes you want to pack up your ball and go home, and trust me we've lost a lot of great voices for just that reason. Fortunately, most tunnels (even ones with speeding trains) have lights at their ends and sometimes the [old magic RSS wheel](#) turns up just the right posts to get you back on track, get you to realize that all the unreadable pap you've shoveled was a necessary part of a growth curve.

Helps you to see that anyone who tells you they are massively successful (think Techcrunch) and that they are proud of **everything** they've ever done to get there is either a liar or makes their money keeping up that particular fiction.

Helps you to accept that getting out of bed every morning and *wanting* to fix some small part of the world is sometimes as important as actually doing it.

It's at this point of recognition that I sat a few weeks ago, when I decided to put this together.

Over the next few (dozen) pages I'm going to give you a condensed version of everything I've learned about the web over the last few years. I'll weave this little tale with words, pictures, rants and links. If you make it through (which experience tells me about 1% of you will), you should have a slightly altered perception of the web and maybe, if we are all very lucky, you will have picked up some of the tools you'll need to make your way in this world.

## Let's begin with guides

I like to think of guides as the base meme-form of the Internet. Over the years I've written *a lot* of guides. Guides to everything from [starting a business](#) to a great, big bear of a tome on "[Web 3.0](#)". A handful of them have been great, some of them have been good, but most have been painfully mediocre.

## Why?

The web is a moving target and trying to wrap up any concept in blog post format is like trying to summarize religion on the back of a postage stamp. For that reason and many, many more I feel comfortable blaspheming my blogging brothers by saying that long form content (the book, the magazine, the newspaper) is far from dead — despite rumors to the contrary.

Where am I going with this?

Give me a week or two and I'll [tell you all about it](#).

## Back to my point about guides.

If you spend any time on this side of the shore, you're going to start to notice piles and piles of guides that tell you some pretty heady stuff — mostly it'll be about working hard, building community and the old journalistic acorn, "[content is king](#)." All of the people preaching these doctrines are right, the only problem is that they're leaving out all the juicy bits that matter — the "how" that leads up to these magical revelations and all the grinding, soul-less . . . [creative](#), life-affirming, beautiful work in between.

I wanted to give something back to you and since this series is aimed at filtering down all the noise I've generated over the years into something palatable, for the pilot I've put together a meta guide — a [guide of guides](#) if you will. Whether you're aiming to become a [media kingpin](#) or a [successful entrepreneur](#), this "guide" should fill you in on the basics you'll need to know and will be a good springboard for when you see it all over again written somewhere else.

At the very least it will give you something to do as I put together the rest of these posts.

For anyone who is confused, this is episode one of a seven episode “season” where I hope to cover just about every important thing I’ve learned about the web over the last two years. It will be spread out across this blog as well as [most](#) of [my backchannels](#).

It was born of a desire to be [better at what I do](#) and inspired by re-reading some of the [best](#) pieces of [content](#) on the Internet today.

The fact is folks I need to **add more value to your lives**. As a HTSAA reader I want you all to be better at everything that you do — better entrepreneurs, better marketers, better bloggers, better than *me*.

If I am not making your lives better I am not doing my job.

If we (as content producers) aren’t trying to help you, what type of credibility can we really have?

So join me as I wander through the last few years and uncover that 10% that matter and maybe a little more.

# Back To The Practical

Strange place isn't it?

The Internet is the only place short of Hollywood where your average person can become loved or hated by tens of thousands of people without ever having to put on pants.

Want to be Bill Gates? Mark Zuckerberg? Steve Jobs? [1] Lots of us do, few of us will. It's a "[power law](#)" problem and we're on the losing end of it.

Why?

Well, there is a lot of junk on the web. I don't care if you are looking for design tips, [entrepreneurial](#) advice or a guide to [search engine optimization](#) — 90% of what you read here or anywhere else isn't going to help you in the "infomercial testimonial" sense of the word.

Most of what passes for practical advice would, in any other circle, go by a different name — contrived. Maybe it's just a pretense of someone who sees the world in terms of solder points but I know deep down that I am not helping you when I give you *Top Blah Ways to Do Blah* when 7 of the 10 items are copies of copies of copies of concepts that you first read six years ago in an email. [2]

The advice you're looking for, the articles you need are the ones that answer "how" and "why." My list of marketing tips is only as good as its ability to change the way you market your product. My review of web application X is only as important as the reasons why I picked it over the twenty other identical products sitting in my "Read Later" folder.

*Anything* you read online is only as valuable as the degree it changes you, makes you think or gives you another line item on your [todo list](#). It's the fast food theory of content production — that double cheeseburger might be tasty and easy to buy but no matter how hard it tries it will never inspire anyone to do anything other than diet.

We try our best to be useful, mind you, but the Internet is a terrible medium to "teach." We have [floods of information](#) that we try to make sense of without context, without continuity and worse without any real arc. There is no story to tie it all together and the result is intellectual ADD. We become a society of title readers and list lovers. [3]

What is the web good for then? Fortunately, it's a really great place to discover people who might have knowledge worth tracking them down to learn more about. I like to think I fall into that category on my good days, and I can point someone in the direction of those who do even on my worst.

Then what of the blog post, the visual resume of [this web of ours](#)? I'd break blog posts down into four categories:

- Useless truth - Also known as applied common sense.
- Useful Lies - Pay attention to what's not being said because that's where the author makes his consulting fees.
- Hype - Same old story, same old spin.
- Gems - That rare 10% that makes the entire shebang worthwhile.

Take, for instance, my polemic on [What Really Kills Startups](#).

It's a great title and a Useless Truth. I go on about how Teamwork is important to startups and how lack of it can destroy you but I never explain how or why. Everyone loses in the bargain, I lose the opportunity to make a really valuable point and you're left holding the bag with a "truth" you can't apply. [4]

The Useful Lies are the teaser trailers of web content. They are articles designed to get you to buy into the author's work (consulting, web design, etc . . .). In product design Useful Lies can be replaced by coupons and free trials, the point is to get you in the door. There is nothing wrong with this, in fact, it is probably one of the best ways you're going to turn your netlebrity into a way to support your brood but as an information consumer I'd say Buyer Beware.

Hype is the majority what you read about products on the web. When products actually cost money to make typically the number of "big new things" coming out in a calendar year would be in the low double digits. Since everything we want to produce on the web is free, that has opened up the opportunity for dozens of "game changers" to come out every day. Combine that with unwavering publishing cycles and you have the 24 Hour News Effect, everyone is making marginally informed bets that their pet project will make it big, and everyone who trusts them follows along [calm as Hindu cows](#).

As for the gems, I'll collect a list of my favorite posts and get them to you when it's ready. Until then, take some time to check out today's show notes. [5]

I bet you're wondering where the practical advice I have been going on about all this post will come in. I decided to add some footnotes that should fill in the gaps.

1. Find five content producers you like in tech, follow them closely for a month — take a look at how they interact on their sites and in their social networks. Take notes. By the end of the adventure you'll probably know enough about using the web to be a competent "Social Media Consultant"

2. Write a list of things you want to say about a subject and subtract everything you've read before. If your list is empty, you don't know enough about the subject to be writing about it and that's OK. Anything that is still left is the value to have to add.

3. Don't let yourself be lazy. It is better that you not publish/produce anything than waste your audiences time with drivel. Sweat a little over what you produce — ask yourself whether you would read the entire thing, if the answer is no then be brave enough to change or delete it outright.

4. You can find the rest of my [thoughts on teamwork here](#).

5. Despite what you might think, I don't have a real problem with any of these four things existing. It's impossible to only write "great stuff," sometimes posts and projects will slip through the cracks. It isn't that you need to be perfect, it's just that you should always be trying to make your average better and to produce content that will drive it up.

Bonus. Learn to appreciate Points of Pain. Points of Pain are statements like, "I wish I could make calls without having to find a phone booth." or "Wouldn't it be great if I could get an encyclopedia online, for free?" or even, "I think pictures of cats are *hilarious* . . ." Products that answer clear Points of Pain succeed, those that don't have to spend time creating new pain points in the minds of their users. If there is [money sitting on the Internet's coffee table](#) it all belongs to those who are good at identifying new pain points.

# Don't Read This Chapter

We're all famous to someone.

Jeff Foxworthy is right up there with Brad Pitt who is just a little behind Ghandi, depending on who you want to ask. Here on the web [we love fame](#) more than the beating hearts of our iPhones. We love talking about it, we love being talked about because of it, we love the influence it brings and heck we love the fact that fame equates to cold hard cash in a world fueled by "personal brands" and the dollars of serial speculators.

What's the culture of the web?

That's like asking me to summarize the culture of the world. There are millions of people doing millions of things online, most of them in blissful isolation from the little snapshot of the Internet that I am referring to here.

It may not have dawned on you but all of the [glitzy, glamorous experts](#) of the web that we see explaining "our culture" to the world at large when MSNBC needs filler footage only make up one perspective, one tiny fraction of what the Internet really looks like. Despite how "connected" and "in tune" we feel as early adopters (ahem), we're all still just playing around in a sandbox with delusions that it's the Sahara.

What can I say to you about all this?

As a duly indoctrinated [member of the blogorati](#) all I can tell you is what I know and what I know is that the public facing web that the tech pundits and political commentators have created for us is a culture where fame and influence equate to relevance and relevance decides just about everything.

We are a culture that respects [ubiquity over depth](#); we are a culture where new is *always* a synonym for better; we are a culture so [enraptured by an idealized "conversation"](#) that we aren't even sure what it is we're supposed to be talking about but we're pretty certain it has something to do with Sarah Palin (this month).

In short, we're a **permanently refreshing episode of [the OC](#)** but with more Mac products.

Despite all of this (and because of most of it), there is no other time in the short, chaotic history of the Internet that I would rather work.

The reason is that more than any question short of, "How do I make money online?" The one that turns up the most is, "How do you become Internet famous?"

If this were *anywhere, anytime* else in the history of the world the answer to the fame question could fill a book or at least a [blog post](#). These days the most appropriate response is, “Well, turn on your computer.” Around here anyone can be famous and everyone is.

Digg Submitters, Friendfeed Addicts, YouTube Stars, Facebook Stalkers, MySpace Lurkers, Twitter Users, SEOs, Programmers, Entrepreneurs, Tech Pundits, Political Preachers, Mommy Bloggers, Marketers, PR Flacks . . . Getting tired yet?

All of these little kingdoms have their heroes, and just about anyone with an idea and a dream can roll into town, six-gun in hand and carve out [a little patch of land](#) for himself.

It’s the American Dream written in PHP.

What responsibility do we have to you, stalwart consumers of media? To entertain, mostly. As long as you like our version of *As The Web Turns* better than someone else’s you’ll come back for more. You’ll read this or you won’t not because I’m presenting you with startling truths but because you like my spin, same as it has always been but with one hairy, Gorilla of a difference — unlike the real world where a normal schmuck like myself would need a production company and a film crew to reach out and touch you, the “social web” and the platforms that define our culture make it as easy as opening up a new Firefox tab.

So I know what you’re wondering by now, how can this help you supercharge your Social Media presence and drive untold pageviews to your ten day old Wordpress install? Well first, slow down for a second hoss and take a few steps back with me.

Before you worry about getting comped to your first conference, or raking in piles of those theoretical Internet dollars get out there and explore the tubes for a while. Allow yourself to get sucked down the hole of [micro-celebrity](#) and see how long it is until you’re praying to be beatified on someone’s list of *Top Ten Users of Blah* or jumping with glee because you got a BETA invite before your friend in Guatemala.

When you can have a 30 minute conversation about the relative merits of [Twitter](#) versus [Friendfeed](#) and immediately realize how ridiculous you sound then you’re ready to step up to the plate and [change our little world](#). While you’re waiting for the epiphany (and the next episode), check the links in [this post](#), as well as this [gem](#).

[Last episode](#) I looked at a really bad post that I had written about a year ago about teamwork. This episode, I wanted to let you in on something I am really proud (a link to which I’ve deftly hidden in the body of this post) — it’s called *5 Things We Forget About The Web*, and it’s one of the few lists I’ve written that was meaningful to me.

Why did I like it?

It wasn't because it got a ton of traffic or that it received link backs from Internet superstars but because it *effected* the people reading it in some small way. It was a post where every word rang true to me and the information I wanted to convey actually translated to the people reading it.

Why should you care about the culture of the web?

Because it's the only culture in today's society where you as an individual can make yourself heard without riding the coattails of some larger organization. The power to express yourself, to build a product, to effect a crowd outside of your geographical cage is stunning. The fact that I know content producers and entrepreneurs in Canada, Russia, Japan and a dozen other countries across the globe and we can share information with each other floors me every time I sit by my computer, and more to my original point the fact that all of them were able to enjoy something that meant something to me and send me their feedback in real time — well, let's just say that's power.

While you're waiting for the next episode, take some time to find the best thing you've ever created and leave a link to it in the comments. I'll try to reply to all of them. You might be surprised at how good it feels just to know someone else has seen it.

# Bigger, Better Media

I am a brand! ([read this](#) for context)

I wish I had a bumper sticker that said that so I could stick it on my Hybrid.

Go ahead, laugh.

As silly as the “[personal brand](#)” thing sounds (say it out loud a few times), it makes enough sense for discussion. To you, my fair readers, I am only as relevant as the character that I have crafted for your viewing pleasure. That character, for the most part, is a good representation of who I actually am, but just like Pappa Bear Bill O’Rielly is probably a wee bit different than his show might portray, this blog and the rest of my little [Internet fiefdom](#) is only one angle on a (hopefully) more complex life.

Take this stuff, for example,

- I am an Electrical Engineer.
- I live in Florida.
- I am a Fencing coach.
- I don’t drive a Hybrid (though I would)
- I like music and movies and hiking and traveling and all sorts of other stuff you could probably find in my Facebook profile.

All of that isn’t as important to you as what I can tell you about [making your business better](#) or about [building better stuff](#). That’s why I don’t blog about any of that here.

That’s Media kids.

Media is the space between your story and my pocketbook. Media is the commercial that prodded me to buy my car, the newspaper ad that got me into the leasing office of my apartment, the 24 hour news rant that shifted the way I looked at candidate X or movie Y or product Z. Media is as much the lucid analysis of topics as it is sensationalist rambling around them.

We love media and most importantly we consume it ravenously.

New Media, “Social” Media is all this but with no budget.

If you want to understand New Media, watch Newsies. Besides being one of Christian Bale’s first films, it’s the most accurate New Media documentary that exists to date.

It has everything.

You have an industry (newspapers) growing in relevance and seeking to gain a foothold in the hearts and wallets of a society that still doesn't understand it. You have a few huge players (Pulitzer and Hearst) who have lost sight of what they originally wanted to accomplish with their platforms, and you have an entire field of minor characters (the newspaper strikers) trying to make ends meet preying off of the pennies that the industry titans rain down on them.

It's great stuff and it couldn't have fit better if they had cast the entire Technorati Top 100 to play themselves.

New Media is not some idealistic reinvention of media, no matter what anyone tells you. It's the campfire stories we tell, how we tell them and who we think tells the best ones.

It's the characters we create, the story arcs that we develop and all that stuff going on backstage that makes our medium worth following.

It's important, it's vibrant and it's necessary because unlike old media the cost of entry is a double Espresso and a domain name.

It's useful financially because unlike journalism where graft, bias and corruption are at least looked down upon, we are still writing the rules. It's the Wild West of content production. No one knows where the line in the sand should be, and even if they did there is nothing in the world that forces any of us abide.

For those seeking some direction, worry not, we have the covered too — marketers, advertisers and PR people the world over are more than happy to lead us in the "right" direction.

What else can you learn about [the media social](#)?

It's a fantastic place to become an expert on a topic (unless it's web applications, I think we have that covered).

If you're smart, you'll use it to help build some other business. Being a New Media producer in and of itself is a one way ticket to the soup line for 98% of people.

It's a great way to meet great people. Compared to the rest of the web, Social Media folks are surprisingly friendly. It has something to do with the fact that most of us are Marketers.

There is no such thing as [The Conversation](#), there are conversations and they are important, but there is no special link between your company writing a blog post a week and raising your marketshare.

Using New Media is hard. It involves liking people and talking to them like they were human beings instead of notches on your existential bedpost. For many Marketers this will prove an insurmountable task.

A few things to ruminate on until next time.

Pst, before you move on.

I wanted to leave you with my lesson for this episode –**The Secret** to Social Media, the two tips that will build your “brand” and make the world love your product no matter how ridiculous it is. These tips are guaranteed to wow all of your friends and change the way you do business™.

Alright, ready? Let’s begin.

The first is that as a blogger you should use Social Media to build expertise, not traffic. Once people care about what you have to say, traffic will come and trust me — there are a lot better places to get it than Twitter.

As a brand you should use it like a 24 hour help-line to track, monitor and talk to your customers where they feel comfortable — whether that is through publishers, from a [Twitter account](#) or in some elaborate video production. Again, get your eyeballs off of your analytics and realize that the people on the other side of your monitor have their [B.S. blasters set to kill](#) and the second they feel like you’re doing more shilling than talking, they’ll vet you from their lives permanently. The level of this behavior is directly proportional to their importance to you as a customer, so be weary.

Good examples for your consideration, [Comcast Cares](#) over on Twitter and [Intel’s Insiders](#) that my good friend [Michael Brito](#) (who you should be reading) turned me onto.

# Building Absolutely Incredible Businesses

Some of us end up becoming entrepreneurs. With the [economy how it is](#), I am starting to think we should be investing in something a bit more secure, like Lottery tickets. ([context!](#))

If you're reading this it's a safe bet that at one time or another you've traveled the web in search of truth and succor. In search of the grail that will reveal to you how to make your tons and tons of money from your business. Let's face it, it's hard building something that people want to use. Your average person has room in their lives for about half a dozen different services, and most of those slots were filled before 2001.

That's why you turned to the web. Secretly you were looking for [Steve Job's playbook](#), the magic combination of hard work, dirty tricks and good old fashioned common sense that would give your new born company a chance to play in the big leagues. What you found out was that no matter how many *guides to successful business blah* you read, it all came out tasting the same.

Why?

Because I (or anyone else) can't tell you [how to make your company successful](#), no more than I could explain to someone how to paint the Mona Lisa over the phone. At best, and this is on a good day, I can speak in analogy — iron down advice into talking points and hope some of what I say resonates with the knowledge you already have. The only way I can reach you through a medium like this is if you already know what you need to do and all you need from me is a gentle kick in the right direction.

It's the little secret that we don't like to let you in on. Most of what we do around here is spoon feed you the [contents of your own brain](#) — Hannibal would be proud.

Unfortunately that means that despite our best efforts, there's no magic to it, not even a little bit.

With that in mind, let's turn back to the question at issue.

How do you build a business that people will show up to?

Well first, search the Internet for "15 quick tips to [building a killer startup](#)." If you don't want to, I probably wrote something like that months ago so feel free to look through my dust bin.

Once you're finished relearning all the things that you already know with a few extra analogies added for flavor, keep this in mind –

The only surefire (ahem) way to get at all those theoretical Internet dollars is to build well and build often. This isn't advice, per say, it's an entrepreneurial fact of nature. It would be as if you asked me how you could learn to do 100 pushups, the answer that matters would be, "do more pushups." You will get stronger and closer to your goal as you push yourself by tiny increments every day.

Building well means working on projects that touch on points of pain. What's a "point of pain?" Other than another colorful image, it's anything that annoys you that you don't currently have a solution to. The more likely this "thing" is to annoy five of your friends, the better the chance that it is a point of pain and not just a personal gripe (there isn't too much money in fixing your own problems).

Find something that hurts, annoys or frustrates people and build a product that eases that suffering for them in the simplest way possible. You get bonus points if you're solving a problem people actually understand that they have, and you win the jackpot if you manage to get your solution out to market before twenty other equally clever people do.

If you can't cite your product's point of pain, all the [kid-tested, mother approved](#) business advice in the world won't be able to save you from the fact that you've developed something (I won't call it a product anymore) that is completely unsellable. You can't hope to sell something that people don't need to buy, as silly as this might sound a huge number of "startups" come onto the market everyday without being able to pass this simple test.

This is not to say that everything you build needs to cure Cancer or the end world hunger, while I would love if your social network for bird watchers touched on these issues — that sort of thing is not for everyone. If you are going to make a social network for bird watchers though, bird watchers better have a really good reason to come to the site and once they are there, if you ever want to see their smiling faces again, you better provide them with an even better reason why they're sitting on the Internet, chatting away about bird watching instead of going outside to do the thing that they love.

Moving on . . .

My next point, "build often" can be further summarized as **fail a lot**. I fail all the time. When I test out a new concept here on the blog, on the web in general, in marketing or in my daily doings I know that the likelihood of it becoming successful is almost zero percent and that's just my unshakable optimism talking. That's alright because failure, in that sense, doesn't bother me. I have a lot of balls in the air at once, and I know there is more than one path to whatever goal that I set out. The result is that my ego is never so tied to one project or one approach that I am afraid to risk it blowing up in my face. Since I've given myself other options to fall back on, I can risk *something* without feeling like I'm risking *everything*.

The strongest entrepreneurs are a cocktail of bulldog-like tenacity and incurable ADD. When they attack a task, they risk heart and hearth and home to make sure that task is successful but if it fails despite their best efforts

they shrug, chock it up to good experience and start chasing the next shiny object. The best of the best are the ones that don't take every bruised knee personally and recognize that success is a process, a process they will continue to work with until something finally sticks and presents them with an opportunity to make those boatloads of dollars that are always sitting at the end of an entrepreneur's rainbow.

Oh yea, about making money.

What pearls do I have for Internet entrepreneurs who are asking how they will pay their rent? It goes like this –

Advertising works if you have a sales team that can sell out your inventory to the top 1% of ad agencies. Brand managers (that top 1%) have money that they *need* to spend on digital, even in bad economies. If you can give them a convincing story and a decent opportunity, they'll pay your server bills for a long time. The problem is that getting a hold of someone who can make a buying decision is not a task to be taken lightly, the last thing the agency in charge of *Big Box Brand X* wants is to tell every startup with a website and a dream where to send their annoying deck.

[Ad networks](#) work if your costs are nonexistent and you can get a few hundred thousand people to show up to your site every month. The good networks are called rep agencies and they'll act as a sales team for you in exchange for a cut of your income. The bad ones will pay you \$.10 CPMs and will only really serve to keep you in Top Ramen — which for a blogger might not be so bad.

Affiliate advertising (Cost Per Action) works if you have a site that encourages people to buy things. Let's say you review luxury Yachts or computers or tacos. Chances are good that the people you write for came to your site because they want to purchase one those products. That's half of the battle right there. All you need to do now is give enough of them the opportunity to make a purchase and next thing you know (ahem) you'll be rolling in those commission checks. For everyone else, you will need some good luck or some really clever marketing to get this to work.

I know what you're going to ask. Is there a world outside of advertising? Yea and it's called your business. If you want a company that will survive economic rough patches or one that can turn a profit without scads of [VC funding](#) I would suggest looking long and hard for non-advertising based revenue sources. Until you find one, you're making a bet you're not likely to win.

Speaking of bets, I'm going to bet you tune in tomorrow for our next episode. If not, at least you won't be around to collect.

# I Hate Blogging

Like most bloggers I really, really hate everything about the industry I write for. Seriously, there are weeks when I just can't stand most of the [stuff I read](#), and can just barely stand most of the [stuff I produce](#).

Most recently, I have started being happy again with my contributions to the web because I came to two startling realizations: The first is that the best thing people can do for themselves and their careers is to focus all of their energies of the [things that they love](#), and excise as much of the things that they hate from their lives as possible.

The second is that Internet people, all of us, are really ridiculous.

We talk about ourselves too much. We spend too much time fighting. We like products that don't really do anything and we are all insufferable, [myopic narcissists](#) who are strangely content with that fact. You know what's the kicker? That's OK. I'm comfortable with this and if you are planning to stick around for long, you should be too.

Micro-celebrity is like being the [craziest person in Arkham Asylum](#). Sure you've won some kind of prize, but — you know — it's probably not going to get you invited to too many dinner parties.

Want some advice?

The best way to avoid writing the "I'm giving up on [insert Internet-based enterprise]" is to ignore whatever hierarchy that you might find yourself surrounded by. Do what you want, find the people who do it better than you to help make your dreams real and keep producing [things that you're proud of](#).

If you get trapped in the loving embrace of any culture you begin to be defined by it, and when you're not that one writing the definition things have a way of getting hairy. Every year I leave a rose at the grave of all of my blogging and startup friends who didn't realize this in time.

Recently I've cut myself off from the warm, beating heart of tech gossip. I've stopped reading Valleywag, I stay away from Techmeme and in general I walk a path that leads away from what most of the key influencers are chatting about (though I still keep up on the bullet points).

I've gained and lost a couple things in the bargain. What I've lost is that it's harder to get noticed. If you are on the treadmill, crooning about the topic of the day, it's really easy to get people to croon along with you. Bloggers spend exorbitant amounts of time and effort writing about the same topics everyday because it allows us to bask in the reflected glory shone from those topics. There are a lot of links, traffic and fame to be had

down that path.

Who doesn't want to pontificate on whether Mike Arrington is an evil genius or just a lonely, misunderstood publisher? Who doesn't want to toss their coins into the wishing well and bet on whether the Blackberry Storm will do for Enterprise what the iPhone did for consumers? It's just so easy, I should know, I've done it and had some success for it.

Why did I stop (or at least slow down)? Well, what I gained was much more important. I regained my voice.

Take this post for example. A post like this doesn't drive a huge amount of traffic, [it can't](#). It's neither topical nor overtly informative enough to do that. It's also way too long (like most of the posts in [this series](#)). That being said, if you read it I hope you've learned something that is uniquely me, that you've gained some personal value from it that you wouldn't have from a *Top Blah* list. If you're going to survive in this game for long, sometimes knowing that you have accomplished that has got to be good enough.

So for my parting shot I ask you to figure out what type of treadmill you are on right now. Whether it's work, blogging or something more subtle. Think about it and decide what steps you can take to either accept it or jump off. I can't give you some big twenty step guide as to how, but I will say that it's worth taking the time to find it.

# Picking Good Horses

What do you want to give to society?

What do you want to do? Why do you work? [Why do you work so hard?](#) Is it just the check, or are you shooting for a goal? Is there a point and if so where does it all fit in? Me, I fancy myself a picker of horses. Follow along, I'm going somewhere with this.

I like to consider myself a picker of good horses, except the horses are people, products and ideas. There are a lot of really fantastic ideas in the world but they are buried under the weight of all the bad ones. What we need are filters, people who can eye the right stag and tell you where to place your chips. Somewhere in the race to be everywhere and please everyone we forgot [the importance of being selective](#). I don't want to cover every startup with a PHP programmer and a dream (though I would like to talk to all of them), I want to cover and promote people with products that are changing the world.

Even if it isn't the World with a capital W.

I want to find anyone, anywhere tackling a point of pain in society and help them sort through all roadblocks in our Culture that cause us to turn a blind eye because we're too busy having Grande Mal Seizures over the latest microblogging platform.

I want to hear all of [your stories](#), find out why you do what you do, and give you (in 500 words or less) advice that might help you make your business just a little better than it was a day before.

I want to influence you to build products and services that help society, that use the platforms that we've been given to do something bold and new and interesting. I want to give all of you creators out there in TV land that little kick in the pants that you need to take whatever you're doing, look it straight in the eyes and say you can do it better.

I want to do all this and on top of that, carve out whatever living this interweb thing has to offer to people in the business of building.

That was the point of starting this blog. That is why I am sitting here at 2AM writing this so it can go live tomorrow morning. Over the years it is a point that has, at various times, been lost as I became too "practical" for my own good. Only recently did it dawn on me that you are the [people I care about](#), the ones sitting through this and nodding along as I ramble. Certainly I want there to be more of you, and they will [come in time](#) but I wouldn't give you guys up for the world.

So what is your contribution?

Do you really want to write about gadgets and building another social network or are you doing it because everyone else is? If you do love gadgets, which gadgets and why? What's your niche? What's your voice? What story do you want to tell and how are you going to tell it? If you could get unlimited amounts of traffic and money as long as you created something you were passionate about — what would you be doing and how would you present it?

Think about it.

I can tell you now that if you're really passionate about toe nail clippings, you probably won't be building a vibrant Internet career around it but it's still a good exercise. The easiest path to success is recognizing something that someone else isn't doing and finding a way to do it, the best way to find that "something" is to have a clear picture in your mind of what you really want to do and the best way to be successful at it, since we are all unique snowflakes doncha-know, is to take that thing and do it just a little bit better than your neighbors version of the same.

So as I end this series I leave you with a question. Why are you here on the web and what is it that you want to contribute?