



*Five Easy & Free Networking Tips
to
Help Your Business Grow*

Angelia S. Phillips

By Angelia S. Phillips
[\(femmeflashpoint of flashPress\)](#)

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Introduction

To say there's an ocean's worth of free and easy methods to spread the word about your hobby, your business, or to just share your ideas and goals, might be overstating things. But if so, it's not by much. There really are oodles of things you can do to broadcast yourself and gain some fans and followers, and many of them cost nothing more than a bit of time.

These assets are especially valuable if you're an entrepreneur on a tight budget and needing to increase your presence and promote your brand within the independent business community.

Here are five things that may help you do that without inflicting any wounds to your wallet.

The information I've included has been learned by research I've done on my own and with colleagues and friends in similar professions. It began several years ago when I wanted to go back to my journalism roots and write web-based articles. There was so much to learn and discover but most all of it was interesting and made for a fun adventure.

I began by writing for Ezines (electronic magazines), but discovered the income I generated for my work was only a micro-portion of what the site owners were earning. Also, writing for other venues on a regular basis felt a bit like what [Michael Hyatt](#) describes as building a home on rental property. Last, it was the sites that were getting traffic and their platform that was gaining far more for my work than I was, so I bid those sites goodbye and built my first website. That's been several moons ago and it was one of the best moves I ever made to establish my own business from my own platform, [flashPress](#).

The drawback in hanging my own shingle in the virtual world was losing the consistent support and regular reads and visits from colleagues who were maintaining their virtual homes in the Ezine industry. To help me gain a bit of ground, I approached a few of them that had become friends and requested they join me in a similar endeavor with their own work.

I was excited and grateful that most of them agreed and within a couple of weeks a few new sites debuted on the internet. Since I had already established my own site on Weebly, they followed suit. After we had the new platforms up and running we reached out to other pro bloggers and other types of businesses, inviting them to join us. Before long, we had several new neighbors in what we affectionately came to call *the Weeblyhood*.

Having a Weebly-based website wasn't a requirement to network with us, it was just a fun aspect of being close neighbors (even if it's in cyber-space only) who share mutual desires to gain ground in working from our own platforms. There is however an additional benefit in that

we have an added behind-the-scenes support system with our sites. Because we all used Weebly, we were able to learn to work with our sites together and consistently pass along tips and tricks on how to operate them. As well, if one of us has an unexpected difficulty in being able to post time-sensitive content, another of us can step in and lend a hand in the site owner's absence, if we have access to their site with editors' privileges. Things happen and having trusted backup is priceless.

The collaborative efforts have paid off in a variety of ways. We've learned a lot, are still learning and our platforms are still growing. This is the fruit of a few friends and colleagues being willing to network and loving it enough to encourage and help others do the same.

In acknowledging the collective effort, I want to give a big shout out of appreciation to [Vicki J. Warner of WarnerWords](#) and [Maria Jordan of marcoujor's musings](#) for their sincere interest and support in data gathering, implementing it into our work and being so encouraging to others to join us in the fun.

My [thanks](#) to you, too. The indie biz community appreciates your valuable interaction and I hope you'll find this compilation of suggestions helpful.

You don't have to explore them all in one day--goodness knows we didn't, but they're here for you when you're ready.

Best wishes in your endeavors,

Angelia S. Phillips (femmeflashpoint)
[Photojournalist at flashPress](#)

A website: your world-wide virtual office

Whatever your business or organization, if your goal is to gain clients or participants, it helps to have an online presence and your own platform to work from. More and more people are using the internet to both shop and browse for the goods they want to invest in.

Since much of my writing is devoted to promotions for the independent business community, one of the first things I ask about businesses and organizations is where to find their website. It's also one of the first bits of information I'll pass along to family, friends and colleagues that I think might be interested in the products (or services) a business is offering, where to find information about a club or organization they might be interested in joining or supporting.

If you fall into any of those categories, or someone you know does, don't fret if you don't have a website yet and are thinking they're expensive. Websites can be built for free and still look and work great. If you're needing someone to build one for you, the bushes are thick with affordable website designers. If you don't know someone who can build you one at little or no cost, my advice is to go to [fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com) and hire someone to do it for you. [Fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com) is an awesome resource within the indie biz community that has a large amount of very talented website designers and graphic artists who can help you for a very low fee.

Websites are adaptable and can change and grow with your business as needed. They're a worthwhile investment of time and effort to establish yourself with a virtual office within the online community.

If you aren't sure which website domain host to go with (examples would be companies such as [WordPress](https://www.wordpress.com), [Blogger](https://www.blogger.com) or my long-time favorite, [Weebly](https://www.weebly.com)), [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com) is one of the best go-to resources there is for learning how to work with all sorts of websites. My suggestion is that you watch a few YouTube tutorials on whatever domain hosts you're interested in using, and go from there.

YouTube School

YouTube is another free resource that you can learn nearly anything with. There are boocoos (*yup, I'm country*) of videos available right now, as I'm typing this. By the time I finish, there are likely to be thousands of new ones published. I'm a big fan of YouTube and have used it to learn how to do more things than I can even remember researching.

If you're wanting to learn how to market with low budget or no budget, consult YouTube. If you wanna (country, again) learn how to change your truck's oil, YouTube will have that info too. Once upon a time, I spent several years as a surgical transplant tissue recovery and processing technician at the University of Texas Medical Center. One of the first procedures I learned was recovering eyes (please don't wig out--it sounds awful but very caring people allow this procedure to happen so that others can see). I learned to do it by observing and then being observed by qualified transplant techs who mentored me during training. Now, you could learn how to do a variety of methods for the same purpose on YouTube.

So, if you're not sure how to do something, like edit a photo or build a cob home or grow your own pineapple, check YouTube. I'm writing this document in Google Drive on a Google Doc. It's one of many documents I've written and designed in Google Docs and guess where I learned much of what I know about using Google Docs ... ? Right. [YouTube](#).

I don't just go to YouTube to learn new things. I use YouTube much like other people use television for news and entertainment. There are some talented videographers out there, both with and without pro backgrounds in videography, producing videos millions of us love to watch.

Like most YouTube fans, I tend to follow, promote and support channels that are providing content I have an avid interest in. I say that to encourage you to get familiar with YouTube for more reasons than a quick-fix to learn something. It's a great place to spend a bit of time, make some friends, leave a comment here and there and subscribe to channels you enjoy.

Most YouTube channel owners sincerely appreciate their subs (subscribers) on both a personal and professional level. That's more than you'll get from mainstream media, so it's a worthy way to spend some time where your presence and input is truly valued.

Maximizing on your social network interaction

If the facebook pool party isn't something you've ever wanted to dive into, you're not alone. But, as a way to promote your work, it's still an excellent free resource and it isn't the only one. There are others that weigh in very well when it comes to social marketing. All of them are easy to use and will cost you nothing.

For this little how-to document, I'm going at it with a minimalist touch, focusing only on the most prominent ones. That's not to say the social networks that don't have bazillions of users aren't quality--they *are*. They're just used by fewer people, which can actually make them more effective. Think of them like cozy gathering places for like-minded collaboration as opposed to supermalls pulling folks in all sorts of directions.

Back to the more prominent social networking sites, the ones I can personally recommend, because I get business traffic from them, are listed below for you.

[Google+](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[StumbleUpon](#)

[Reddit](#)

When using any of them, it's easy to include your logo and/or business information on your home page. And remember, a social network business page isn't the same thing as a personal or professional website, it's just a page on a social network. However, it's a good idea to take the free or pro offers on social network sites to establish a business, hobby or group page because it's another method of providing links to any of those things. There is no cost if you go with the free versions, which are still very effective.

I have a personal and business header and profile page on Google+, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. A great advantage to these sites, is your business/hobby/group pages will get traffic and be noticed even without a great deal of interaction with them on your part. There are even free apps and services that can help you with advertising information about your business that can post information for you to the social sites. A few of my favorites are [Buffer](#), [Klout](#) and [TweetDeck](#).

Don't worry if you've never used them before. They're easy to use and I suggest if you're not familiar with them, try them one at a time and after one is familiar, get familiar with the next one. Also remember, YouTube is your friend when trying to learn how to use new apps, programs and features.

Below is an example of the difference in the pages on a social site, one for business and one for personal use. Both reflect my website address and both are established on Facebook.



The one below is the header on my personal Facebook page.



Each spot is an added opportunity to let other folks know that I have a website and where to find it.

You'd see similar profile pages on all of the social sites I use. It was worth the effort to establish them to reflect my business because I get several thousand visitors a month directly from folks finding my site through the social network venues.

Although it doesn't take much time to establish a presence in the online social networking sites, it still helps a great deal to interact with, at least a little bit every month.

I tend to visit a couple of them daily, for a few minutes, and admit I spend more time on Facebook than the others. This is only because the number of my family and friends is big. Many live in different states and countries. Most of them use Facebook more than the other platforms, so it's how I can keep up with them in the fastest, easiest way, outside of email and Skype.

Online social platforms work much the same as flesh and bone socializing in the real world. If you only show up to post your own information and relevant links, yet never bother to interact with other people's' interests, you won't gain much popularity. Most folks respond kindly and appreciate genuine interest in the things they post within your circles and will respond in turn when you're hoping they'll do the same with the information you share.

Dive regularly in the pro bloggers' pool

Pro bloggers can be an amazing asset to both businesses and consumers. Not only do many pro bloggers consistently give shout outs to others within the community for work well done, they also have readers who pass information back and forth among themselves in much the same fashion.

Here are a few examples of how that works.

I once wrote an article on flashPress that featured some products from a local soap maker. The company who made the product I found is [Sixth Street Soapery](#) in Evansville, Indiana. While prepping for my post, I went to their website and realized the product I was reviewing wasn't featured, so I called the number to see if it was still being offered or if it'd been discontinued. Thankfully, the product (a misting moisturizer made from essential oils that is the most amazing stuff I've ever used on my skin--you can read about it by [clicking here](#)) is still available, but wasn't yet available via their website.

During the phone call I discovered I was speaking to the owner of the business, Mary. I was able to do a short, impromptu interview with her during the call. I was so impressed with her awesome personality and how she does business. We finished up our chat by making arrangements for an onsite interview in her shoppe.

I ran the article focusing on the misting body oil. Later, I learned that Mary had seen an increase in business nearly overnight and gained some new customers.

That's one account of several others like it. It's easy to understand why spending some time socializing, commenting and sharing links to pro blog posts is a quality way to get acquainted with others in the indie biz community while at the same time promoting your products and services.

I suggest you find a couple of blogs to follow. It doesn't have to be an every day or even an every week thing. Just keep it in easy doses. Also, when leaving a comment on a blog post you want to interact with, take advantage of including a link to your website when possible. Other readers actually click those to check out other websites new to them.

Employ Matthew 7:12

"In everything, then, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the essence of the Law and the prophets."

Saint Matthew, New Testament, KJV

Whether it's business or personal, or whatever beliefs you adhere to, St. Matthew's text on the golden rule can be easily applied to all of us. A positive attitude can do wonders for getting us through rough spots and has the same effect when interacting with others.

Sometimes it's the ambiance that brings people back, even when they're not big fans of the actual product or services.

There are restaurants my friends and I frequented regularly when I lived in Texas and in Virginia. We didn't go there because they served the best coffee or because they had amazing interiors. We went because we enjoyed the ambiance and considerate care of the people who owned and worked in them.

That rates with many of us highly and is even more important than the quality of the product or services. That's not to say business should engage in poor quality offerings, just that quality service goes a long, long way. Couple that attitude with a little elbow grease and ingenuity, you might be surprised at all that can be gained from it.

Sharing is Caring

Free marketing includes the ability to shout it out for others who are producing products and services we love, at no cost. Word of a mouth, meaning a mention to family, friend or colleague is often all it takes to get them to at least investigate the business or product that you liked enough to share the info about.

Frank E. Peretti, one of my most favorite authors for nearly 30 years, once said of his first best seller that it sat for a few years collecting dust on the publisher's book shelves and didn't sell much at all until some folks in churches started telling folks in other churches about an awesome novel called, [This Present Darkness](#). The verbal passing of information grew and grew until it launched a best-seller that is still selling today.

That's exactly how I learned of the book, and its sequel. Since then, I've bought countless copies for friends that I knew would love the stories as much as I do and many of them have done the same thing and purchased copies as gifts for others.

The same can be said of your own business or business producing products and services you enjoy. It can be as simple as mentioning them in a Tweet about a sale they're running or why you love a product you tried. Your efforts can help spread the word about your business and in return, folks associated with the business will be inclined to help shout it out for your business too.

Opportunities for this come about much easier when you're active within whatever communities you socialize with, such as online social networks, clubs, organizations or even workplaces. Back in early summer of 2016 I bought a small bottle of organic body-oil spray from an organic grocer in Evansville, IN. I love the grocery store and my sister and I shop there often. It's independently owned and operated and I left my business card with a request for the owner to get in touch with me when she returned from maternity leave. I never heard from her so I've never written an article on her business. However, I *loved* the organic body oil so much, I wanted to write an article on it to encourage my readers to invest in some for their own use or as gifts for others.

There was only one bottle available but thankfully it had the business website listed on the bottle so I was easily able to view the website and call the business to get more information on it. The owner answered the phone and we spent a while getting acquainted with each other and our work.

Next day I was happy to get to publish an article on the oil spray and was also able to make arrangements to do a full, on-site interview with the owner at her organic soap shop in

Evansville. In return, I got an increase in readership and the business owner got a near overnight increase in product orders from new customers. Past all that, my readers got to be introduced to a wonderful organic product with more information on other products made by the same business to be written about in a subsequent post.

A little bit of sharing information worked out well for everyone who came into contact with it.

Epilogue

I hope you've found these few pages of information to be helpful to you. If not to you personally, then perhaps to someone you know.

It's information I've gained from trial and error, but also from friends and colleagues working together to build stronger independent communities for business and living in general.

There are a few other sites and resources I recommend for you to get familiar with, who are very supportive of independent artisans and other types of businesses and who have my continuing thanks for contributing to shouting it out for other businesses as well as sharing information on how they did what when establishing their own platforms, brands and identities within the independent business world.

Here's a short list for you...

- [Maria Jordan of marcoujor's musings](#)
- [Vicki Warner of WarnerWords](#)

I encourage you to subscribe to their sites and take a bit of time to read their posts and or view their videos. There's much to be learned from their unique styles, the content they produce and even their fans that interact with their sites via comments.

Of course, you're also welcome to contact me if I can be of further assistance to you. I'm happy to share what information I can, and I'm consistently engaging in learning new things to help all of us along the path of success in doing what we love and earning an income from it.

Angelia S. Phillips

[femmeflashpoint of flashPress](#)