

## Developing a successful Affiliate program

### First Steps

Once you are accepted as a Merchant we will endeavour to help you get going. While we have the technology, the reputation and the expertise these alone will not guarantee your program success. As in the real world some products or sites have more appeal than others. There are however lots of things that can significantly improve your return on investment.

Many large companies have their own affiliate managers, who know how to develop their programs. You may not have these resources but you can still maximise your chances of having a profitable program, so here are some tips we recommend to ensuring your greatest chance of success:

**Get them selling** - Confirm pending Affiliates quickly and get them working for you as soon as possible. If it is impractical for you to regularly check the Control Panel for new Affiliates wishing to join your program then it might be worth considering if 'Auto Acceptance' is an option for you.

**Don't bypass your Affiliates** - Ensure that you don't have a phone number on your site. This will be detrimental to your program. Affiliates tend not to promote a program that encourages the traffic that they send to your site to call a phone number, free or otherwise. Phone numbers encourage the visitor to circumvent the tracking used to assign commission and are therefore deeply unattractive to the Affiliate (The exception to the above is a customer care number which is okay as it shows that you have a customer care structure in place).

This does not mean that your site needs to be free of phone numbers, we recommend that Merchants create a landing page specifically for their Affiliate program. This looks identical to your normal home page only with the phone number removed. By doing this, all traffic sent by Affiliates will not see a phone number while traffic from other sources will.

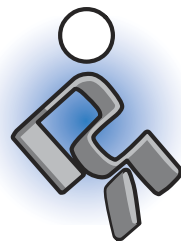
**Shout it out!** - Let the world know about your Affiliate program, add a sign up facility for it on your home page. Mention it in press releases and so on. This will attract new web site partners who have seen your site directly and wish to promote it.

We strongly recommend that our Merchants have a link within their site to their Affiliate sign up page on our site. This lets potential visitors to your site see that you have an affiliate program and will encourage the speedy growth of your program. After all, satisfied customers on your site are great potential sales people for you.

**Pay Affiliates on time** - by always paying your invoices in a timely manner, you can quickly establish a good reputation with Affiliates. It is important to remember that Affiliates talk to each other and a Merchant who pays commissions on time will always be preferable to one who does not, (even if their commission rate is slightly lower) Prompt validation is paramount to the success of a program but in order to validate sales, **a program must be in funds**. If you cannot regularly validate we can set up auto-validating on your behalf.

**Stay In Funds** - Ensuring your program is always in funds, thus guaranteeing that Affiliates are paid on time. This is vital in encouraging them to promote your program and will help you to attract other top Affiliates.

**Validate sales quickly and often** - This is paramount to ensure you have a successful program. Delayed validation will substantially damage or destroy a program. This can be irreversible as bad news spreads quickly in the affiliate marketing community. Key Affiliates can now choose from many lucrative programs and they must invest to generate leads or make sales. In order to sustain investment, they need to know about the return on their investment as soon as possible. Therefore, programs which can provide prompt validation are preferred by Affiliates. We have a track record of guaranteed payment for valid sales and



this greatly assists the loyalty of many of the top Affiliates. However, this cannot counter a program with slow validation. Affiliate marketing is unique, in that the advertiser does not pay unless a sale has been made or a lead has been generated. Wise advertisers recognise this invaluable benefit and provide the necessary validation and funding to successfully develop their program.

**Help them to help you** - if you have a data file of your products, allow your Affiliates access to it. Doing so means that you will get more of your products on more web sites and, in turn, more pages with your products will be indexed by search engines. This will ultimately increase the number of products you sell.

**Keep the feeds fresh** - At Paid On Results we have excellent product feed capabilities for you to utilise but we do require that you to supply product feeds and keep them up to date. If your feeds are linking to stock that is no longer available Affiliates will quickly swap links to a more reliable Merchant.

Product feeds enable Affiliates to integrate your product range into their own sites, this will have a positive effect on your sales through Affiliates.

**Add Sales Rank** - Also if you can add a sales rank to the product feed as this enables us to create [the popular] auto updating 'top 10' feeds for your Affiliates.

For more information on producing a feed for use on the network please go to:-

<http://www.paidonresults.com/pdfs/making-a-feed.pdf>

**Keep your commission rates consistent** - Always set your initial commission rate for Affiliates at a level you can sustain. Nothing is more annoying for an Affiliate than a Merchant who starts off with a high rate only to drop it a month later. This can be perceived as underhand. If however, you wish to offer a higher introductory rate, this will not be looked upon in the same light as long as you explain, in advance and clearly state what the ongoing rate will be after the special promotion period ends.

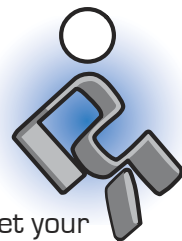
You will find it beneficial to have tiered commission rates with increased percentages to Affiliates who make certain sales levels. This can be set up by you within the 'Merchant Control Panel'.

**Incentivise Affiliates** - Reward your top performing Affiliates with prizes/bonuses for meeting targets and so on. You can, for instance, let them know you are running a competition to win [decent] prizes for those who achieve a defined sales target. You'll be amazed how this can incentivise Affiliates into making an extra effort to promote you.

**Communication is key** - Always try to inform Affiliates in plenty of time about any changes to your service or products so they can adjust their campaigns. It is also good to keep them informed of impending downtime or of site design changes. Finding out after the event, that something major has changed, never goes down well with Affiliates. Remember this is your virtual sales force so keep them in the loop. Communicating directly with your Affiliates can be done through the 'Message Centre' in your 'Merchant Control Panel'. Using this to inform Affiliates of changes or special offers really is a no cost way to remind them that you are in business and are pro active in building your program.

**Think like a customer** - Try entering the terms you imagine people might use to find your products into a search engine such as Google. View the top 30 sites for each term and contact them to let them know you have an Affiliate program for their product/service. If you do it in a non-spammy personal way you might just find the people you contact will be amongst your best performing Affiliates. This is because they already have 'on topic' traffic coming to their site (for more on this see the link to 'How not to email at the foot of page 3).

**Never use adware or spyware to promote your site** - this will only damage your reputation with on-line consumers. This will result in them being inundated with adverts when they try to use the Internet.



Also these programs target your own site directly, affecting your revenue. Additionally they target your competitors' sites making it possible that they could sue you for "virtual trespass" on their site.

**It is a team game** - The Merchants who are most successful tend to be those that understand the symbiotic relationship between them and their Affiliates. Affiliate Marketing works best when Affiliates see you as a pro active Merchant. By keeping Affiliates informed of what you are doing, you are showing them that you take the relationship seriously and that you value their help in selling your merchandise on-line. This respect of Affiliates can be highly beneficial to you in future campaigns and in recruiting more good Affiliates.

**Long life cookies taste good** - Setting a long cookie will show to Affiliates you value the users sent by them, this is very important for seasonal sites, as often people will find out about your site via an Affiliate and bookmark it, returning later to spend money. Merchants that only offer Affiliates short lived cookies will find they are often over looked in favour of their competitors who are offering longer cookies. Experienced Merchants know that 96% of all sales happen in the first 48 hours of a cookie being set, so offering a 365 day cookie will have little impact on their commission costs but will generate goodwill with their Affiliates.

**Consider network cookies** - If you have more than one site you might well consider network cookies. These allow you to link your sites together in order that Affiliates make commission from sales for other sites you own or promote. In short the Affiliate makes commission if someone leaves one of these sites and visits one of your other sites, also the cookie is set so that if they send direct mail to existing customers about the other sites in your network, the affiliate gets credited with any sales from this. Using network cookies provides a good additional incentive for Affiliates.

**Make sure you are competitive** - This might seem obvious but with other Merchants just a click away it is easy for your potential Affiliates to compare your proposition with that of your market competitors. Likewise it is relatively easy for you to see if what you have on offer looks attractive to them. If you are not being inundated with Affiliate partnership requests it may be worth looking at whether your deal is simply not proving to be attractive to them.

**Softly Softly** - Don't do everything at once, use a slow drip approach. Expect to build your program over several months. Remember, on-line sales are growing significantly world wide and you are ideally placed to take advantage of this.

Be careful not to pester Affiliates or use non-advertising (discussion) mediums to blatantly promote your program.

Avoid 'spammy' emails of a general nature. Concisely describe what is special about your program / goods / services. (For more on this see the link to 'How not to email' PDF below).

Key related terms into search engines and email non competing sites to advise them of the benefits of linking to your site.

#### Other useful reading

The importance of sales validation - <http://www.paidonresults.com/pdfs/validation-and-payment.pdf>

Network cookies - <http://www.paidonresults.com/pdfs/network-cookies.pdf>

How not to email - <http://www.paidonresults.com/pdfs/guide-notes-on-good-web-marketing-practice.pdf>

**Keep in touch** - We can both benefit from 2 way feed back. Let us know what works for you and what doesn't, as well as any suggestions you may have. We are making constant improvements and will advise you of any relevant developments

We hope that these tips will give you some ideas as to ways to improve your bottom line. Good luck!