Building Traffic With Article Marketing

By

Yaro Starak

www.entrepreneurs-journey.com

and

Brian Clark

www.copyblogger.com

Part One:

An Introduction to Article Marketing

By Yaro Starak

I've been testing article marketing using the article distribution and repository service from Ezine Articles. Ezine Articles allows writers to publish articles that include a special area at the end called a resource box. In the resource box the author leaves a link or two along with a couple of sentences. Other webmasters and publishers are allowed to reprint the article on their own websites, newsletters or blogs, as long as they keep the resource box intact.

The idea from the writer's point of view is that you can increase your exposure by having your content reproduced around the Internet. Your are rewarded with one-way incoming links from the resource box, you don't have to reciprocate as you would with link exchanges, which in theory should reward you with better search engine rankings.

From a publisher's point of view it's free content. If you are struggling to keep a regular email newsletter going reprinting articles can be a fantastic way to reduce your workload. You can also use the content to populate a blog, website or any publication as long as you follow the reproduction rules.

My Article Marketing Test

I started article marketing by reprinting a small selection of the articles I published to Entrepreneur's Journey from about July 2005 onwards. I didn't put too much energy into it, spending a few minutes before I went to bed submitting an article every few weeks or so. I usually had to modify the articles slightly to make sure they follow the guidelines (for example you can't include too many outgoing links) and it would take about 10-15 minutes to submit each article.

I devoted the majority of my energy to submitting at EzineArticles.com because it's the market leader. Applying an 80/20 approach I figured if I was going to submit articles manually, as opposed to using automated software, then I should work with the service with the most traffic. I briefly tested with two other article directories, both of which had an inferior interface and less traffic than Ezine Articles. After receiving next to no results from the other sites I decided to stick to only Ezine Articles.

Last month I submitted my 20th article to Ezine Articles and feel that I am now in a good position to assess my results. By submitting more than ten articles to the site I was given "Platinum Status" which grants me unlimited article submissions, (before that you are limited to ten). While this sounds great it's not

really that big a deal, as long as you contribute reasonably coherent articles you will be promoted to platinum once you clear the threshold (it does make you feel cool though when it happens).

Incidentally the number of authors at Ezine Articles that have platinum status follows an 80/20 ratio as well. The greater majority of authors never make it beyond single figure article counts, with the prolific writers enjoying the most significant traffic rewards because they publish many articles, but only a handful of authors are like this. I am part of the minority in this case, having reached 20 article submissions, which I hear from "word on the street" is around the mark when you start to get good results (it's not a "hard" rule).

Looking at the Numbers

To assess the success of my campaign I looked for two specific results -

1. Incoming links from websites
2. The number of times the article was reprinted in non-website publications.

The first was easier to track - incoming links from websites - because I could use services like Technorati's back link lookup and my blog statistics so see whether any back links where coming from my republished articles. The other statistic was harder to track but thanks to a recently introduced feature at Ezine Articles you can get a fairly good idea how many people are republishing your articles in newsletters or other non-website sources.

On each article at Ezine Articles there is a quick publish button that spits out a html-formatted version of the article allowing publishers to copy and paste the content into a website or email. As an author I'm provided with statistics on how many times that button is clicked as well as how many times my article has been viewed, forwarded by email and a few other neat statistics.

Besides republication it's important to note that Ezine Articles itself is becoming quite a good repository of knowledge. While not every article is written by an expert, and no doubt there are a good chunk of pretty "light" articles published, there is a broad range of quite useful articles on many topics. Because of this Ezine Articles gets a lot of traffic and your articles can be pulled up in internal search many times.

Total views (pageviews) is included in statistics and I can report at the time of writing this article my 20 submitted articles are about to reach 5000 views total. Top authors report figures in the hundreds of thousands, however they are publishing over 100 articles. You get back multiples of what you put in and depending on keywords, titles and subject matter you can expect varying results (more on this below).

Lessons Learned

Testing Article Titles

Besides the direct traffic results there are some other important benefits from using article marketing. The one thing I'm really noticing is [how important the article title is](). Those of you who are copywriters or regular bloggers will be well aware that the title of your articles has the most impact on how often your article is read. The same of course applies in article marketing but it also impacts whether your article is republished. Given that most publishers first search article directories for content, your article title has to have the right keywords and has to be interesting enough to be clicked and finally, if you are lucky, republished. That's a lot of steps to go through and a lot riding on how good your title is.

Thankfully you can go back and change the title of any article (in fact you can change any element of your articles at any time but it has to be re-approved each time), however you should aim to get it right straight out the door. This is because your article is featured in the Ezine Articles main highly-trafficked category page when it is first published and will very quickly drop off as newer articles are published by other authors. You don't get this benefit when you go back and alter an existing article.

Short And Sweet

It's well known in the article marketing industry that the short, 400-600 word articles, generally get the most traffic. People have short attention spans and they want quick, easily absorbed tidbits, not long in depth quality articles (like I write!). Yes okay, I had trouble adhering to this rule and I still have trouble getting a point across in so few words. The statistics don't lie though and the short articles will get you more exposure and more traffic, so I spent some time cutting down some of my blog articles to give them a better chance of syndication.

The Vital Few

Every now and then one article will do much better than all the other articles. When you get the right combination of a solid title, a brief word count and a popular topic your article can go viral and be picked up many times. I can't really say that any of my articles went viral but a few did standout while others really struggled.

Quantity Over Quality

Speaking from my experience, most of the backlinks I generated from article marketing where not from quality sites. I can think back to maybe one or two instances where I was pleased to see my article republished in what appeared to be a reputable website, with high PageRank and a real audience. Most of the time

I spotted my article reproduced at splogs (spam blogs) - websites and blogs that republish content, slap a bunch of AdSense ads around it and hope to get into the search engines and make money from it. These still count as backlinks and help your traffic cause, but it's really a case of quantity over quality, which is not sound strategy when it comes to search engine marketing.

What About the Duplicate Content Penalty?

The duplicate content penalty is a major concern when republishing content. Remember Google (and other search engines) may penalize websites that produce duplicate content by removing the page from its index or reducing its search ranking. Now my understanding is that the original source of the article, as in the first place that Google finds the content or the version it deems as the oldest, won't be penalized. This is not a verified claim, I've heard counter arguments against it and in some circumstances if your source content is found after it's republished somewhere else (which can often be the case if your site is not regularly indexed in search engines and the site that republishes your work is), then it's your site that risks the penalty.

The answer of course it to modify your article before submitting it to Ezine Articles or similar directories so it's not a direct reproduction of the article on your website. In my case I reduced the size of most of the articles I submitted so they were not exactly the same as the originals, although they certainly would have shared paragraphs so I probably didn't do enough. I've yet to notice any penalization but there are a lot of forces in play here so if you are really worried, take the time to modify your articles or only submit original content.

Automated Article Distribution

Automating article submissions is a very efficient (80/20) thing to do and as such I don't recommend manual submission unless you are a cheap-n-silly control freak like me. At the basic level you can employ a virtual secretary or administrative assistant to do article submissions for you. Depending on your results this can be a cost effective means to market your website, but do a cost/benefit analysis (time vs. results) before hiring someone to do it for you.

There are article submission services that will submit your article to X number of article directories for $Y dollars, for example - ArticleMarketer.com. There are also professional software packages that will do the submission for you, so all you need to do is put your article into the software and sit back and let it role. Two examples of this software are ArticleSubmittPro and Jason Potash's Article Announcer (which I believe takes the cake for longest sales letter ever!).

Article Announcer by Jason Potash

I'm really very keen to try this software because it comes from Jason Potash and he has a fantastic reputation. At the moment the sales copy on Article Announcer

didn't convince me to spend the nearly $400 to buy the full package although I may yet give it a go. Apparently the software is really only half of the value and the education provided from the articles and audio are equally important.

I did email Jason (or his support staff anyway) to ask for a review copy for this blog but unfortunately I was turned down. All I have got to go on is what I have read in forums and reviews of Article Announcer. The software, while being certainly more efficient than manual submission, isn't completely automated and you apparently still need to do some grunt work to submit your articles to all the different directories. Anyway, until I get a copy of Article Announcer all I can do is speculate.

Is Article Marketing Worth Your Time?

Yes and no. I don't feel at this point with only 20 articles published, my on-again, off-again efforts and no testing of an automated system that I can make a conclusive judgment. I like the concept, I think it's better than link exchanges in some ways because you get one-way links but bad in others because many of the links come from poor quality websites. The potential for a viral explosion makes it very tempting and certainly if you work in mainstream niche industries (is that an oxymoron?) then your results may be fabulous (I'd love to hear about it if you have stories to tell - leave a comment please!).

Something else worth noting is the benefit of appearing as an "expert author" at EzineArticles.com. This is a powerful credibility tool and handy search engine optimization trick. Thanks to Ezine Article's significant presence in search engines (high PageRank and lots of backlinks) web searches for your name will often pull up your author homepage. If your name is reasonably common and faces a lot of competition in the search engines, your Ezine Articles expert author page may have enough of an edge to make certain that any searches for your name result in you as the first result. Your author homepage includes details that you can change anytime and you may include web links back to your own website or blog.

The other thing I like about Article Marketing, which is one of the main reasons I like blogging as well, is that it contributes to your overall exposure one little bit at a time. [Personal branding](#) is about lots of little things adding up to a tipping point where amazing things can happen (think mainstream media coverage and even penetration into the public consciousness).

Your traffic keeps coming because you have lots of little streams pouring in from many different sources. Article marketing is another stream. Unless you do some major publicity work, pull off a media stunt, or are already famous, using many techniques over time is one of the best marketing methodologies available to you. You may not reach that tipping point quickly, but it will happen, and your traffic foundations will be like a diversified investment portfolio - solid.

Part Two:

How to Get the Most Out of Article Marketing

By Brian Clark

In Part One, Yaro nailed it right on the head when he answered the question "*Is Article Marketing Worth Your Time?*" The answer to that question for *you* will depend a lot on not only how many articles you write, but also how well you execute within each article.

In my experience, article marketing can be a great way to get a site started in the search engines. Over the years, I've been able to achieve nice search engine results with article marketing for a host of service businesses and info-product sites. I'm now implementing article marketing in order to promote my blog, Copyblogger.

To spare you the trial and error, here are 5 tips on how to get the most out of your article marketing efforts:

1.   Headlines

As you likely know, headlines are crucial in almost any written communication, whether it be a sales letter, blog post or article. When blogging, your perfect headline is extremely compelling and keyword rich, but if you have to choose between the two, go with what's compelling to people first. A blog post that gets read and linked to is more valuable than a post with a keyword-packed title that gets ignored.

When submitting articles to directories for syndication, headlines are still crucial, but you're now writing for a slightly different audience. You're still writing for people, but now you're writing for *publishers* first. And the prevailing attitude among the people most likely to republish your content is that *key words matter most*.

So your focus with articles is just the opposite of your blog posts. Write the most compelling headline you can, but it absolutely **must** include attractive key words. Don't feel like you need to aim for the most popular keyword combinations related to the subject matter; there's simply too much competition. Think Long Tail instead.

Do keyword research and find good niche combinations. This is what publishers are looking for, and keeping publishers happy will make your article marketing efforts more fruitful.

2.   Resource Box

Never, ever, lose site of the fact that the links back to your site are the entire reason you are submitting an article for syndication. A great article with a bad resource box is a waste of your time and talent.

Various article directories have differing criteria for how much information can be placed in your resource box, or "byline." There are also specific rules regarding how many back links can be present, and how they can be formatted. Carefully review the rules, and maximize every link opportunity that is allowed.

If the directory allows three links, include three links. For best search engine results you should include at least one link back to your site using anchor text for relevant keywords. For example, I might link back to my site with the anchor text [web copywriting](#).

It's smart to vary the anchor text you use slightly every once and a while, and you may even link occasionally with "click here" or other more natural phrases. Simply repeating your desired keywords in your anchor text time after time will likely work against you with search engines.

Leave at least one link in the full *http://www.yoursite.com* format. Why? Inexperienced bloggers or publishers may accidentally fail to properly format your anchor text link, leaving you link-less. Plus, email editors who publish in plain text cannot support anchor text links, so you want to make sure you always preserve a fool-proof link. No link, no value.

Also, when formatting the *http://www.yoursite.com* link, never put a period at the end of a URL. In some instances that can cause the link to break. I simply try to never put the URL at the end of a sentence.

3.   Shorter Articles, More of Them

Conventional blogging wisdom says that shorter posts are better, and with "link and opinion" type posts, that's true. But there's a growing movement among resource-oriented blogs toward longer, more instructive posts.

With articles, it's essential that your articles stay short. There are two good reasons for this.

One, never forget the resource box. Your goal is for the reader to see who you are and visit your site. While you need to provide some compelling value in your article, it is simply a means to an end. Otherwise, your content is providing more value to the directory (and their AdSense ads) than to yourself.

Two, the key to successful article marketing is volume. If you naturally write long articles, go ahead and write them that way. Then split the resulting article into two or more article of 250 to 500 words.

The vast majority of authors who submit articles to the directories send in less than 10, then quit because the results are not overwhelming. You simply cannot get results with that few articles. I've been able to get great results in the search engines with as little as 20 articles, but the more you submit, the better your results. Volume is the simple secret behind successful article marketing, but most people simply do not make it over the hump.

Here's a hint that will help you come up with ideas. Surf around an article directory in the categories that are relevant to your topic. See what others are writing about. Now, put your own spin on some of those articles. You can always find a new angle. Remember, there's nothing truly new under the sun, but there's a million ways to tell a story.

4.   No Duplicate Content

If you're blogging, it's very tempting to simply submit your posts to the directories. I stay away from this. I think it's debatable that the search engines will penalize you for having content on your site that is also published elsewhere, but there is definitely some risk.

From a practical standpoint, simply having what you blog republished can hurt you with people who click through from your resource box. When I read a good directory article, and then click though to the blog only to see the exact same content, I leave. Fair or not, I'm not feeling the value of spending more time there.

Anecdotally, I've simply had the best results when there is no duplication of content. Often I will promote a free resource, such as a tutorial or other content that is delivered by email. The articles drive traffic to the resource and help it rank in the search engines, and I get a chance to start a recurring relationship with that visitor. The syndicated article was the first unique step in creating that relationship.

5.   Copywriting Matters

Your article cannot simply be an advertisement or pitch for whatever you are selling. In fact, even your resource box should not be pitching the sale. An article is a gateway that allows you the opportunity to begin a dialogue with a potential prospect.

Publishing lots of articles that link back to your target site or blog will help you in the search engines. However, to really get the most out of article marketing, you need to convert article readers into direct traffic.

To do that, you need a compelling headline, and a blockbuster opening paragraph. From there, your article should lead the reader step-by-step, sentence-by-sentence, to your resource box, where the call to action is such that the reader clicks through onto your turf. Learning basic and advanced copywriting techniques will improve your overall marketing effectiveness by leaps and bounds.

About the Authors

Entrepreneur's Journey is a blog aimed at those interested in Internet business and entrepreneurship produced by **Yaro Starak**. Yaro is a young entrepreneur from Australia who currently operates several Internet businesses that generate between $2000 and $8000 per month, which he operates from a home office or a laptop while traveling.

Brian Clark is a former attorney turned Internet direct marketer. He blogs about copywriting techniques at **Copyblogger**, which teaches entrepreneurs how to sell with blogs, email and web feeds. And since you can't sell to an empty room, Brian also explores strategies for *trading words for traffic* through blogging, tutorials and article marketing.