

AUTHORITY RULES

The 10 Rock Solid Elements of Effective Online Marketing

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The 10 Rock Solid Elements of Effective Online Marketing

au·thor·i·ty *noun*: the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior.

Authority is powerful stuff.

Authority can be abused and it can definitely corrupt...

But it can also build trust, admiration, and respect.

And when it comes to online marketing...

Authority is what works.

The Shocking Power of Authority

Let's say you see a newspaper ad saying the psychology department at Yale is running a little "experiment on memory." Paid volunteers are needed for the hour-long study, so you figure why not?

Upon arrival at the lab, you meet two men — a research scientist in a lab coat, and another volunteer just like yourself. The researcher proceeds to explain the study to you both.

He tells you the study is about the effects of punishment on memory. The task of the other volunteer will be to learn a series of word pairings (he's called the "Learner").

Your job as the "Teacher" will be to test the Learner's memory of the word pairs, and administer *electric shocks* for each wrong answer. And for every new wrong answer, the voltage goes up.

You're not sure about this whole thing, but it must be okay, right? The testing begins, and when the other volunteer misses a question, you pull a lever that delivers a mild shock.

Over time, though, the shock levels increase, and the Learner is grunting audibly. At 120 volts, he tells you the shocks are really starting to hurt. At 150 volts, he tries to quit. The researcher tells you to keep going, and that the shocks will cause "no permanent tissue damage" to the Learner. You continue questioning and delivering punishment for incorrect answers.

At 165 volts, the Learner screams.

At 300 volts, the Learner refuses to respond any longer, as the shocks are impairing his mental capacities. The researcher tells you to treat non-responses as incorrect answers.

The Learner is screeching, kicking, and pleading for mercy with every subsequent shock, all the way up to 450 volts when the researcher finally stops you.

Scary story.

This couldn't possibly have really happened, right? Well, actually, it did, in 1963 at Yale, during a series of experiments by Stanley Milgram.

But here's the real scoop about the Milgram experiment:

- there were no actual electric shocks
- the Learner was an actor
- the study had nothing to do with memory.

What Milgram wanted to know was how far the Teachers would go when told to continue to deliver those shocks, since *they thought they really were*.

About two-thirds (65%) of the subjects administered every shock up to 450 volts, no matter how much the Learner begged for mercy. However, without the researcher's encouragement to continue, the study found that the test subjects would have stopped giving punishment quite early on.

The results shocked the Yale faculty (no pun intended), and have become a part of modern psychological lore. Every aspect of the experiment had been carefully vetted to pull test subjects from a standard cross section of ages, occupations, and education levels. In other words, these were not sadistic savages — these were people just like you and me.

A 2002 analysis of the original study confirms the findings.

What could possibly lead to this behavior?

Milgram concluded it's our deep-seated sense of duty to *authority*. We're trained from childhood to respect and trust authority figures (such as scientists in lab coats), and the obedience that comes with it stays with us throughout our lives.

Even when we feel something may not be *quite* right.

Cashing in with Authority

What Milgram wanted to know was how far the Teachers would go when told to continue to deliver those shocks, since *they thought they really were*.

Does authority have anything to do with people trusting you when money is involved?

You bet. Here's another crazy example of our obedience to authority that copywriter Dean Rieck loves to tell.

All Your Deposits Belong to Me

A television reporter dresses up in a security guard's uniform and sets up in front of a Las Vegas bank. He sticks a sign on the ATM embellished with a *big gold badge* and the following message:

“OUT OF ORDER — GIVE DEPOSITS TO GUARD ON DUTY.”

Bank customers start showing up. Each time, the fake guard smiles and asks if the customer wants to make a deposit or withdrawal.

This whole scenario is ridiculous, right? No bank would conduct business this way.

And yet, customer after customer handed over cash, checks, Social Security numbers, credit cards, account numbers, PIN codes... you name it. Out of 10 people, only one hesitated, but even he complied seconds later.

When the reporter revealed the deception and asked the flabbergasted victims why they handed him money and private information, they all gave pretty much the same answer:

“Because of the uniform. Because of the sign.”

In other words, they complied because he was perceived as authoritative and therefore, trustworthy.

Why?

Neuroscience reveals the somewhat frightening answer. Brain scans show that the decision-making parts of our brains often shut down when we encounter authoritative advice or direction.

That's part of what makes authority so powerful. And why authority carries great responsibility.

When you're looking to influence people and build a powerful business online, authority is the way to go. People respect other people who have authority, expertise, and impressive credentials just like they respect people in lab coats and police uniforms.

And they respect authority even more when you demonstrate it rather than simply claim it. More on that in a minute.

Simply put, authority makes you more important in the eyes of others... someone who should be listened to and treated better. And it's not just people who operate this way.

Google Loves Authority Too

“ We believed we could build a better search. We had a simple idea, that not all pages are created equal. Some are more important.

~ Sergey Brin, Co-Founder, Google

“ It's quite complicated and sounds circular, but we've worked out a way of calculating a website's importance.

~ Larry Page, Co-Founder, Google

“ To rank well, build a site so fantastic that it makes you an authority in your niche.

~ Matt Cutts, Head of Google Web Spam Team

So... *people* respond to and follow important people more than others. And Google ranks important *pages and sites* higher than others.

We may be on to something with this authority thing.

If you've been around the online marketing scene for a while, you may be familiar with the paradox of search engine optimization (SEO). SEO is the art and science of ranking high in the search engines (mostly Google) for the words people are using to find what you have to offer.

It boils down to this:

If *people* think you're important, so will Google.

This perplexes many webmasters and online marketers, since they wonder how people will consider them important when people use search engines to find things online in the first place. How are you important if you're invisible in the search engines to start with?

And how does Google *know* people think you're important anyway?

For one, they know because people *link* to you, and Google follows those links to index and rank web pages. And thanks to services such as the Google Toolbar, Analytics, Feedburner, Google Reader, Gmail and others that keep you logged-in to your Google account, the Big G has an enormous amount of usage data that shows what people actually spend time doing online.

So, there's that. But how do you kick it off?

To get people to link to you and generally pay attention *in the first place*, you have to start thinking about authority in a different sense. Luckily, any dictionary will get you on the right path with the *other* definition of authority.

All Your Deposits Belong to Me

au·thor·i·ty *noun*: [1] A citation (e.g. from a book) used in defense or support; [2] the source from which the citation is drawn; [3] an individual cited or appealed to as an expert.

In order to get the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior online, you need to become an authority that others cite (link to) in their online content. Which means, of course, you need a content-rich website that demonstrates your authority in the first place.

Your content actually *demonstrates* your expertise, compared with a website or bio page that *claims* expertise. This is a crucial distinction, because it truly levels the playing field and allows anyone to come along and build authority that outpaces even recognized and credentialed experts in a particular niche or field.

How is this possible? Well, it's due to the one essential truth about how both people and Google perceive authority:

What other people say about you is more important than what you say about yourself.

Authority is all about perception. *Perceived* authority can outrank *actual* authority, because both the general population and the most powerful search engine on the planet look to what others “vote” to be the most relevant expertise for any given topic, rather than some other method that might give a different result.

Let me give you an example.

Let's say Professor X is the world's foremost authority on green widgets. This guy really knows his stuff when it comes to green widgets, and he's got the PhD in green widgetology to prove it. He's also published several scholarly papers on the topic of green widgets, but unfortunately those demonstrations are deemed too valuable to publish freely online.

Bad move, Professor X.

Then there's Ned Newbie. Ned is passionate about green widgets, even though he didn't quite make it to graduate school. Ned is teaching himself everything there is to know about green widgets by doing his own research and reading everything he can get his hands on.

The scholarly journals won't touch Ned with a 10-foot pole, but that's okay... Ned decides to blog about green widgets and share what he's learned so far with anyone who's interested. It doesn't matter that Ned doesn't know as much about green widgets as Professor X (yet), because Ned figures his own understanding of the topic will increase by having to transform his research into content that can be viewed across the planet.

Ned's absolutely right. And here's the good part... whenever someone needs to cite (link to) a web page when mentioning green widgets, they link to Ned.

Two years later, Brad Pitt confesses a fascination for green widgets during a Barbara Walters' interview. Suddenly, everyone is hot to find out more about green widgets. Search traffic surges, reporters are digging for sources... it's downright green widget mania.


Who will people find? Who will the media contact?

That's right... it'll be Ned. Sorry, Professor X.

The key to becoming an authority in any area is to learn all you can, and share all you can. Then you make money by selling something related to your authority, and even by re-packaging the content you've already created.

As you might have guessed, there are ways to go about this that provide better results than other approaches (especially in the competitive niches that don't need Brad Pitt to drive traffic). Let's get into the elements that result in authoritative websites that work.

The 10 Rules for Building Authority Websites

 To punish me for my contempt for authority, fate made me an authority myself.

~ Albert Einstein

The last thing I want you to think is that following rules is the way to succeed. In fact, breaking a few of the “rules” people try to dictate to you might be the smartest thing you ever do.

The title of this report has a double meaning. The first way to look at it is authority *rules*... as in it kicks ass and can't be beat when it comes to publishing and marketing online.

And that's the truth.

But when it comes to building authority sites or blogs (same difference, really, given Google's preference for constantly-updated content), some things are fairly critical. The following ten elements of online authority are important enough to be considered *rules* that should be followed, not broken.

Let's take a look at each:

Rule One: The Winning Difference

The *winning difference* has been a critical concept way before the web came along. And it's been called a lot of different things over time in various contexts: a unique selling proposition; your position in people's minds; your purple cow... and on and on.

Essentially, it's what makes your story *stick*.

There are a lot of ways to differentiate yourself, but no matter how you do it, it's absolutely essential to building an authority website. In many ways, it's how unique your content is that sets you apart, and that's why the winning difference is rule number one... and why all of the following rules support it one way or another.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [Take 15 Minutes to Find Your Winning Difference](#)
- [What Boston and Nirvana Can Teach You About Finding Your Winning Difference](#)
- [Differentiate Your Blog or Die](#)

Rule Two: Don't Sell... Teach

Many people think the main barrier to online marketing success is a lack of *traffic*. But it's really a lack of *trust*. People love to buy stuff, but they hate to feel sold. So despite the fact that you're building a website that will build your business, you need to concentrate on delivering value that builds authority.

Educational, tutorial-style content works online. It attracts links, it brings traffic, it builds trust, and it causes you to rank for relevant keyword-phrases in search engines. And all the while, you're decreasing sales resistance, because after all... what is effective selling?

Selling is simply *educating people* about the benefits of doing business with you.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [Don't Sell... Teach](#)
- [The Two Types of Tutorial Marketing](#)
- [Content Marketing 101](#)

Rule Three: Cornerstone Content

A *cornerstone* is something that is basic, essential, indispensable, and the chief foundation upon which something is constructed or developed. Cornerstone *content* reveals what people need to know to make use of your site and do business with you.

Beyond that, your cornerstone content should naturally rank for your most important keyword phrase (it's what your site is about, right?). But to attract the links you need, your cornerstone content must not only be strategic—it must provide *off-the-hook value*.

Think about it this way: Imagine your ideal customer or client calls you on the phone. She's got money and a problem, and you've got the solution. What would you tell her?

MORE INFORMATION:

- [How to Create Cornerstone Content That Google Loves](#)
- [SEO Copywriting 2.0](#)
- [Five Link Building Strategies That Work](#)

Rule Four: Headlines and Hooks

The process of building authority involves a constant battle for attention. When you're an unknown just starting out, it can be tough. But when you're well established, you're often competing even for the attention of the faithful. Let's face it... it's noisy out there.

Your *headline* (or the title of your content) is what determines whether or not your effort even gets a chance. Think about this: On average, 8 out of 10 people will read the headline, but only 2 out of 10 will read the rest. Improve the odds with a *killer* headline.

A *hook* is the angle or the attractor that gets people interested in your content, no matter how dry the subject matter. It could be a great analogy, a pop culture reference, a historical intersection... whatever. It's just got to be *intriguing*. Your hook not only helps you write a killer headline, it also keeps people glued to your content and more inclined to spread the word.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [How to Write Magnetic Headlines](#)
- [The History of Link Bait](#)
- [The Ira Glass Guide to Link Bait](#)
- [How to Attract Links and Build Traffic](#)

Rule Five: Win Friends to Influence People

Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* is one of the bestselling self-help books ever published, and for good reason. But as the web gets more social, *winning friends alone* can make you immensely influential.

It all goes back to that basic truth about building authority: *What others say about you is more important than what you say about yourself.*

So, make friends with influential people in your niche or industry who can vouch for you and your content. Make friends with social media power users who can promote your content on Digg, Reddit, and Delicious. Make friends with people on Twitter who can retweet your content to their followers. Once that happens, your own readers and followers will start doing the same, and the benefits of authority get truly sweet.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [The Secret to Effective Content Promotion](#)
- [Why Content Promotion is a Virtuous Necessity](#)
- [The Susan Boyle Guide to Being Loud and Proud](#)

Rule Six: The Money's in the List

“The money's in the list” is an old saying from the direct mail industry. If the mailing list is dead on target, even uninspired copy sells. If you send a brilliant promotion to a bad list, it still bombs.

Online, buying a “list” of subscribers and followers is stupid... it simply has no value. But putting out great content for “hits” and page views alone may be even sillier.

The point is to get relevant visitors to your site to request updates every time you publish... whether by email, RSS, or carrier pigeon (okay, maybe not the pigeon). Getting people to opt-in and pay attention to you over time is the key to building authority... and to selling them something in the future.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [Where's the Money in Blogging?](#)
- [10 Effective Ways to Get More Blog Subscribers](#)
- [How to Increase Your Blog Subscription Rate by 254%](#)

Rule Seven: SEO Matters

Pssst... here's a secret. Search engine optimization is not that hard (at least in this context). In fact, I'm going to point you to free resources below that basically give away the farm when it comes to SEO for building an authority site.

The only mystery is why some online marketers neglect SEO. Some seem to think it's somehow *bad* because it's "gaming Google," which is obviously in violation of local statutes, common decency, and the Geneva Convention.

It's not. In fact, everything in this report is exactly what Google *wants you to do*. And if you're doing the stuff revealed in this report, Google *wants you to rank well*. But you won't rank well if you ignore SEO, and some jerk with shoddy content and a basic understanding of SEO will. And we can't have that, can we?

MORE INFORMATION:

- [The Blogger's Guide to SEO](#)
- [Keyword Research for Bloggers: A Comprehensive Guide](#)
- [SEO Copywriting 2.0](#)

Rule Eight: Code Google Loves

One thing some people who *get* basic SEO miss is the quality of website code. You can do everything else right, and still lose to other sites because of jumbled, poorly constructed HTML.

You'll hear time and again that WordPress is the best way to build a site (whether you call it a blog or not), and that it's extremely SEO friendly. And that's true (with a few tweaks). But many of the free themes (designs) for WordPress destroy that search-friendly start with sloppy code.

Chris Pearson (my designer, business partner, and friend) solved that problem with his innovative Thesis framework for WordPress. And that's one reason why Google's own Matt Cutts, search legend Danny Sullivan, and some of the top SEOs and professional bloggers around use Thesis for their own sites.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [Thesis WordPress Theme Demo Videos](#)
- [Proper HTML Code for SEO](#)
- [SEO & Importance of Valid Source Code](#)

Rule Nine: Design Makes the Site

They say "clothes make the man," and that's because human psychology that favors and trusts pleasing packaging. The same applies to the way you dress up your content with site design. Don't be sloppy.

When I first started Copyblogger, I thought content was the only king. As long as I followed the *authority rules* with regard to my content, that was all that mattered, right?

That was until the aforementioned Chris Pearson (an unknown at the time) created an iconic site design (now built on the Thesis framework) that helps my content spread and grows my authority to this day. As Copyblogger grew in popularity, Chris Pearson became a rock star web designer. But there's no doubt that Chris's design also helped Copyblogger become what it is.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [Thesis WordPress Theme Demo Videos](#)
- [Blog Design Style Guide](#)
- [Thesis Gallery Showcase](#)

Rule Ten: Tend Your Tribe

When you become an authority figure, what you really become is a *leader*. And leadership involves great responsibility, because it involves great *power*.

Seth Godin has set the buzzword for online authority with his new book *Tribes*, and it's because he smartly taps into that primal psychological need for people to belong and to follow the leader. The question is... what kind of leader will you be?

Remember: Authority is powerful stuff. Authority can be abused and it can definitely corrupt... but it can also build trust, admiration, and respect.

Treat your tribe well, and authority will serve *you* well.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us](#)
- [Is Your Tribe Holding You Down?](#)
- [What's Your Tribe's Secret Language?](#)

Your Next Step

Your next step is to *go forth and conquer*.

Okay, given the amount of information in this report and all the supplemental links, it's a lot to digest. But hopefully you've now got a good framework to roll with.

And it's also true that a lot of these points can benefit from elaboration. No worries there, because if you're getting free updates from Copyblogger, we're exploring all aspects of building authority sites each and every week.

Copyblogger articles also reveal how to convert that authority into cash. Here are two additional free mega-resources to get you started on that:

- [Copywriting 101: An Introduction to Copywriting](#)
- [Landing Page Tutorials and Case Studies](#)

And if by some chance you've got your hands on this report without signing up for [free updates from Copyblogger](#)... well, that's totally cool with me. But if you want more help building an online marketing presence that works, hop on board:

- [Sign up for free updates from Copyblogger](#)
- [Follow Copyblogger on Twitter, too](#)

And please... if you enjoyed this report, feel free to share it. Link to it from your site, and/or [click here](#) to Tweet it, Stumble it, or share it on Facebook.

Thanks for your time and attention. More great content coming soon...

Best Regards,

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