

THE PLANTS SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

This document is for TalkBiz News subscribers only. It is the replacement for the chapter in “Need to Know,” previously called “The 7 Things You Must Include in Everything You do Online”

This is the first major update to “Need to Know” in several years, and includes both the edited version of the chapter and a working mindmap you can use to help plan out your use of the ideas it presents.

The flat graphic of the mindmap will be useful for folks who want to get a quick overview of the process, and for those who don't want to install and use a mindmapping program. The package also include interactive mindmaps you can edit and use as active planning and brainstorming tools. There is a version for Freemind and one for Xmind.

Both of those programs are available at no cost. Links are provided at the end of the document.

Please note that this is intended as a planning aid. It is not as in-depth as some of my other mindmaps, which are more in the realm of training systems.

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THE PLANTS APPROACH

In the original version of this manual, this chapter was called "The 7 Things You Must Include in Everything You do Online." Those 7 things were:

1. Sell product
2. Generate subscribers
3. Recruit active affiliates
4. Generate targeted traffic
5. Generate links
6. Create product
7. Build your network

Those are still the important aspects to remember, but things have changed quite a bit since I wrote that in 2008, and there are factors that needed to be added or adjusted for.

As an example, Facebook has grown from 100 million users in 2008 to a claimed 1.2 billion users per month in 2013. As it has grown, Facebook groups and "fan pages" have increased in popularity and familiarity, and they are now a serious force in the industry. In addition, Facebook has ramped up their advertising options to the point where you can, with a reasonable budget, reach a very large and tightly targeted audience in a very short time.

To put that in perspective, they went from an active userbase of less than 10% of the online population in 2008 to around 50% in 2013.

That doesn't even begin to look at Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, and other social media platforms.

Combined with significant decreases in the open rates of emails for many publishers, the expanding base of mobile Internet users, and the increasing prevalence of video as the medium of choice for many people, the landscape has changed in ways that make a 5 year old strategy ... a bit less than optimal.

A new perspective is needed to guide strategies for growing your business in a new environment.

In thinking about this, I decided the best way to go would be to resurrect an acronym from a couple of years ago, with some minor changes in the words and some major additions to the context. It is both more comprehensive and easier to remember:

PLANTS: Product, Links, Audience, Network, Traffic, and Success points.

To make the most of this, you may need to think about how you define each of these things.

For example, **product** isn't just what you sell. It's anything you deliver as the result of a promise made in exchange for something else. Including an email address for a subscription.

Articles or video for your newsletter, blog, or e-course? Product. Bonuses as an incentive to purchase an affiliate offer through your link? Product. Infographics, reports, guest posts, forum posts or blog comments, inspirational tweets, Facebook page updates, or anything else that isn't purely promotional?

All product.

Anything that is intended to deliver real value, as perceived by the recipient, should be considered to be product. Do that, and you'll find your results changing, sometimes in surprising ways.

When I talk about **links**, I should preface it by saying that I optimize for humans, not search engines. I know so little about SEO at this point that I'd be doing you a serious disservice trying to teach you much about that end of the process. I'll just say that focusing on human readers will be more likely to help your search engine placement than hurt it.

Focusing your link strategy on humans is, essentially, a traffic play. But it's a different kind of traffic play. One that involves reputation and expert status as much as immediate visitors to your site. It's a way to establish a presence in your market that outlasts the time it took to create the content around it.

It also provides some extra stability, assuming the content the links are attached to has staying power. That alone warrants separating it in your mind from the more standard traffic part of the formula.

Developing an **audience** is the new way of looking at what was called "building your list" for most of the 20-some years since the Internet was opened for public commercial use.

There are two ways of looking at the term "audience" that you should consider. The first is simple: The total number of people who have chosen to give you access to their attention for purposes of getting messages from you. This can be through email, Facebook pages or groups, Skype groups that you run, following you on Twitter, your blog's RSS feed, or any other broadcast medium.

The second is a bit less clear. It includes the people who actively read what you post, watch the videos in your YouTube channel, or otherwise choose to interact with your

content. And with you.

The goal is to get people first into the larger group, and then bring them into the active audience by providing them with what you promised, in a way that motivates them to act on your contacts. That can be through buying products, sharing Facebook posts, visiting your blog, spreading your message, or whatever else you may have set as your purpose.

You should have a clear plan for making that first contact, giving people a reason to take a look, and then expanding on that so they become more involved.

Your **network** overlaps this a bit. It consists of all the people with whom you have any kind of business relationship who aren't strictly customers. And that brings us to a question that has been debated for years online: What IS a "relationship" in the context of the virtual world?

I'm not Oprah or Doctor Phil. This isn't a "feel good" document. It's a business report, so we'll stick to a business answer. One that's measurable and focused and strictly business in nature.

A business relationship online is defined and measured by one thing:

How likely is the recipient of the communication to welcome your message and act on it, based on your prior interactions?

You can have all sorts of business relationships with any given person. They might be a customer, an affiliate, a supplier, a subscriber, a content provider, a partner in product creation, or any number of other things. Or any combination of any of those.

If you've been in business online for long, you probably have a ton of different, small networks, all of which overlap in some ways and are separated in others. If you keep your communications with them framed by the definition above, you'll nurture them, rather than nuking them.

If you put it into the more traditional context of real-world, offline business, your network would be defined as the group of people who, if they were screening their phone calls, would either pick up when they saw it was you or call you back later.

Your network didn't just get smaller. It only feels like it.

While **traffic** is incredibly important, it's a small section of this document. When you think 'traffic,' you should be thinking about anything you do to get visitors to a page with a call to action, and the percentage of them who do what you're asking them to do.

Simple, but an ongoing process. Get more traffic for less cost per visitor, and

constantly work on increasing the return on that traffic. If you focus on those simple numbers, your business could change in a huge way in a very short time.

Don't insist on being cheap at the expense of a solid return, though. If you have to pay more per visitor to get the kind of ROI you need, do it. Just watch the numbers. They'll tell you which way to go.

There are tons of ways to get visitors to your web site. We won't get into those here, but I will give you a couple of quick warnings: First, do not rely too much on any single traffic source you don't own and control yourself. You need to be especially careful that you don't let your business become dependent on a single source of traffic that could be shut down by someone else.

The second thing is to avoid putting too much emphasis on search engine optimization. I've seen far too many people lose their businesses because they focused on SE traffic and got hit by one or another algorithm change.

Success points are the end target of traffic. They're the places where you make an offer and ask people to do something. Buy a product, subscribe to a list, like a Facebook page, share a post, join a forum or group, promote a product as an affiliate, write a letter to their Congresscritter... any decision that requires them to take action.

These include the small actions that are easy to take, and the whole chain of actions that lead from there to bigger results. Impulse purchases can lead to trust, which can lead to higher ticket orders. Solid content and great products can lead to more affiliates, profitable exposure, and broader name recognition.

Don't be afraid to chain requests. It is often easier for people to buy something right after they've subscribed to a list, or to upgrade a smaller order than to go straight from zero to the full coaching system.

It can also be key to developing sales processes that attract productive affiliates. If you offer 100% commissions on a lower-priced front end product and 50% on an offer that's made immediately after the initial purchase, that can kick the EPC (earnings per click) well into the range that serious affiliates look for.

The thing you want to take away from this chapter is to incorporate at least 2, and often more, of each of these things in everything you do online.

As an example, suppose you are arranging an affiliate-based endorsed mailing by a site owner or newsletter publisher. Rather than just giving them copy to mail (or letting them create their own), you might offer to do an interview with them that relates to the topic of your product.

They could offer the audio recording of that interview to their subscribers as a bonus

for ordering your product, increasing profits for both of you. You each get to use the interview for other purposes, with the agreement that neither of you will give it away free.

If you plan these right, you can arrange a number of these interviews that cover all the major aspects of your topic using interviews with experts. This is a much easier deal to arrange than just asking someone to do an interview and spill their guts for nothing.

This shows real respect for their knowledge in addition to making them money, so it helps build the relationship with these individuals. That means a lot more in the long run than just saying, "Hey. I'll give you 50% to promote my stuff."

And, since the deal promotes them as much as you, it's much easier to get them to continue the offer indefinitely instead of stopping with a single commission-based promotion.

So, with a process like this, you're looking to: drive targeted traffic, sell product, create product, build your personal network, recruit active affiliates and generate links. Plug a few places into the process where people who don't buy can sign up for your list, say through an affiliate-branded mini-course that promotes your product, and you've got the Grand Slam.

This is really just an example of building a better offer.

Promoting your site with articles? Do a very in-depth version that will serve as a lead generating report or a chapter of a book. Then use a shorter version that still offers useful information as the submitted piece.

Want to get to know some of the players in a specific niche market? Create a product that includes them or points to their sites. Introduce yourself, give them a review copy to let them know what's being said, and take it from there.

Look at everything you do and see how you can connect at least two or more of the goals listed above into the process. Spend a half hour on that right now, and I'm sure you'll find lots of ways you can put this idea to work to increase your immediate profits and long-term growth.

If you're not sure where to start, start anywhere.

Got a product? Pick one of the 7 things and ask yourself, "How can I do more [whatever] with this process?"

Repeat it for each thing on the list. Then go do it.

When you're done, pick another part of your business and do it again.

THE PLANTS MINDMAP

It's easier to plan for these integrations when you're first laying out a product or process. To that end, I've included a mindmap with this version of the book that you can use to get these ideas clear in your head, and as a checklist as you go.

You can also use it to plan out an entire year's worth of each aspect of the PLANTS system.

The map is not just a flat graphic. It's an actual mindmap, in both Freemind and XMind formats, that you can edit and adapt to your own personal situation. I highly recommend creating a new copy of the map for each project, and having one "master" map for your year's goals.

Almost any mindmapping program will open Freemind maps, so if you're more familiar or comfortable with something else already, you can just import it into that and go. If you're not already using a mindmapping product, you can download either product free.

Freemind is a very linear product, and extremely easy to use. It has a lot of power, but it's also quite twitchy on some systems. It can refuse to open some maps for what appear to be almost random reasons. They have to do with the version in which the map was originally created, the version you have installed, and how up to date your Java installation is.

If it works with this file on your system, it's a great option.

You can download Freemind here:

<http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Download>

It's available for pretty much any platform, which is another reason I include it.

XMind has more power, but it's also missing some features I really like in Freemind. On the flip side, it has useful features Freemind doesn't (notably an easy to use notes function), it's more reliably backward compatible, and it can produce more visually pleasing mindmaps. It's a bit less simple to use, but the upgrade options are beyond anything I expect to see in Freemind any time soon. Especially the collaborative functions.

XMind is available for Windows, Mac OSX, Linux, and an all-in-one portable package you can run from a removable drive on different platforms. (No installation. Just unzip it to the portable drive or memory card.)

You can download Xmind here:

<http://www.xmind.net/download/>

The "basic" version is free, and a long way from basic. The advanced versions (Pro and Plus) are truly professional grade mindmapping software.

You'll find the mindmap files themselves in the "Maps" directory that was created when you unzipped this package. There's also some basic instruction on how to use them.

I hope you find this handy. If so, please drop me a line and let me know. Sugestions for improvements are also welcome.

You can email me at <mailto:paul@talkbiz.com>

Enjoy!

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