

TOP 20 AFFILIATE PROGRAM MISTAKES



AND HOW TO
AVOID THEM

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When I started my first affiliate program back in 2005...I literally knew NOTHING about how to run an affiliate program.

Through a LOT of trial and error...and some huge mistakes, I built a \$12.6 million affiliate program in the next two years.

Some of those mistakes were nearly fatal to our affiliate program (and our business) at the time.

The GOOD news for you is that you don't have to make the same mistakes I did...

Read through this guide and you can avoid them.

With each mistake, I share not only the WRONG thing to do but the RIGHT way to do it to boost your affiliate sales!

MISTAKE #1:

Waiting too Long to Start My Affiliate Program

Most people wait until they are desperate to start an affiliate program...a terrible time to start an affiliate program (or anything for that matter).

Don't wait until it's too late.

Simply put...when you don't have an affiliate program, you put a very low ceiling on your growth.

SOLUTION: Start an affiliate program long before you NEED one. In fact, go ahead and start one RIGHT NOW, even if you are just starting out with your business.

MISTAKE #2: Sending too Long of a First Message

When I first started reaching out to affiliates, I sent long, verbose emails with all sorts of details, stats, and links.

That is totally WRONG! No one reads them!

SOLUTION: Make your initial contact super short (3-4 sentences). Your goal is not to get a YES response right away. It's not to share EVERYTHING with them about your product or program. Your goal is simply to inspire enough curiosity that they write back with three simple words: TELL ME MORE.

To get your own copy of my #1 email for finding affiliates, go to mattmcwilliams.com/bestemail



MISTAKE #3: Thinking You Have to Know ALL of Your Affiliates

A lot of the gurus out there teach that you have to know all of your affiliates. That you have to have a personal relationship with them.

When we first started our affiliate program, I knew absolutely NO ONE. In fact, none of us did. We weren't the cool kids. We didn't have dads who knew the right people. We started with nothing, so I thought that meant I would have to grow super slow.

And yet, in 2 years I built a \$12.6 million affiliate program.

SOLUTION: What changed for us was that I realized it was impossible to build a large affiliate program and know all of our affiliates. Get comfortable not knowing them all and having personal relationships with them.

MISTAKE #4: Not Investing Enough in Relationships Early On

On the flip side from #3, I didn't spend enough time investing in relationships with affiliates.

Once we got them, I didn't nurture the relationship. Nor did I spend enough time investing in prospective affiliates who might not promote us for a year or two (or longer).

SOLUTION: Early on, spend 20% of your time investing in current affiliates and 10% on prospective affiliates. That still leaves 70% of your time to focus on acquiring new affiliates that are lower hanging fruit.

MISTAKE #5: Setting the Affiliate Cookie Length Too Short

When I first started our affiliate program, I made a common error:

Too short of a cookie.

That meant that affiliates were missing out on sales...and I was missing out on a chance to get them promoting even more! It also cost us a lot of prospective affiliates who only worked with companies who had a lifetime cookie.

SOLUTION: Commit to a lifetime cookie. It will barely cost you any additional money and it's worth the investment.

MISTAKE #6: Not Working with Smaller Affiliates

I was told smaller affiliates weren't worth the time.

Rather than have 100 small affiliates each making a few sales, we wanted 1 or 2 large affiliates making 100s of sales.

There are 3 problems with that strategy, though.

1. You put all your eggs in just a few baskets.
2. You miss out on growing smaller affiliates who remain loyal for life.
3. You miss out on chances to test things out with smaller affiliates who are more likely to be guinea pigs.

SOLUTION: Work with smaller affiliates. Train them. Share what's working with them. Build an ARMY of loyal evangelists.

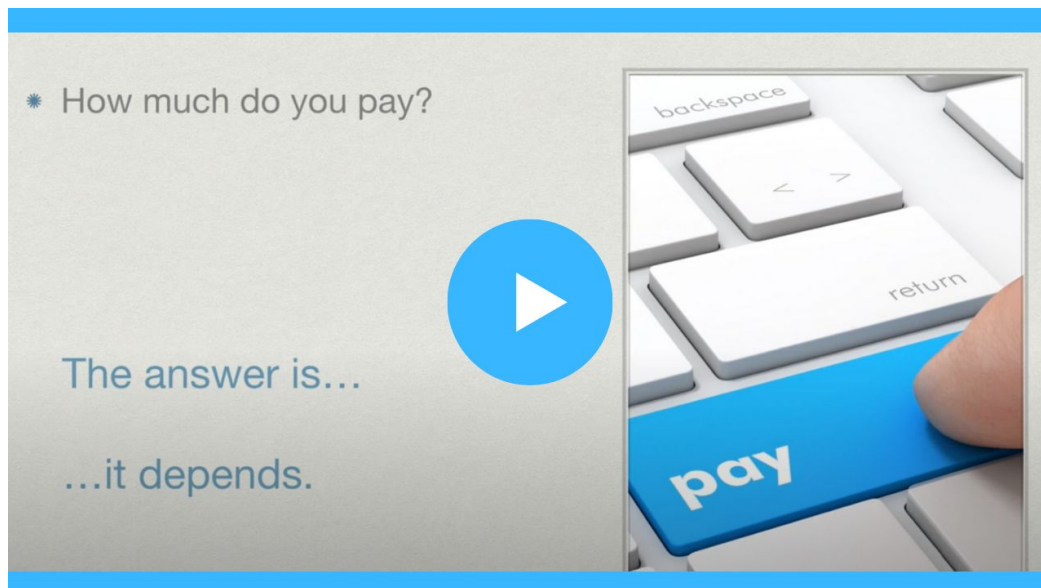
MISTAKE #7: Being Cheap with Affiliate Commissions

At first, I tried to save a few bucks by being cheap with our commissions. Prospective affiliates hated it and many affiliates who signed up stopped promoting.

The irony is that folks who won't hesitate to spend 70% or 80% of their revenue on ads (or even lose money on the initial sale) balk at paying a 50% or 60% affiliate commission. DUMB!

Healthy affiliate commissions are your best investment, so don't be cheap!

SOLUTION: [Watch this video](#) to learn how to properly determine your affiliate commissions.



MISTAKE #8: Not Taking Time to Analyze Affiliate Data

I get it...you are busy, but it only takes five minutes a day to look over your program's data.

When you fail to keep an eye on the data, you miss out on important trends. You miss affiliates who stop promoting and you miss out on possible fraudulent activity.

SOLUTION: Take five minutes a day to review important data. Here's a list of things to look for:

Affiliates who are up X% Year-over-Year

Affiliates who are up X% Month-over-Month

Affiliates making their first sale

Affiliates hitting a milestone (\$1,000 in commissions, 100 sales, for example)

Affiliates with significantly lower/higher than average conversions

MISTAKE #9: Forgetting the Basics as You Grow

Once our affiliate program started growing, we got away from what got us there. We tried to get fancier and forgot the proven strategies that were working.

Don't make this same mistake!

SOLUTION: Keep a close eye on what you are doing in your program. Create a scorecard of strategies that are working and review it quarterly (or even monthly) to make sure you are following the basics.

Continue to review regularly and find what is working...and do MORE of it!

MISTAKE #10: Not Inviting Customers To Become Affiliates

What better source of promotional partners than your customers, right? For some reason though, almost no one we talk to thinks of asking their customers to promote them (I didn't when I first started). I have no idea why this is, but it's a great source of affiliates.

- They have an intimate knowledge of your product.
- They have a personal success story with your product.
- They know, like, and trust you and will defend you to others. You couldn't ask for better promoters!

SOLUTION: Set up an autoresponder email to ask your customers to become affiliates. Depending on your industry, you might want to NOT call them affiliates but something else like "partners" or "ambassadors." This email should be sent roughly 60-180 days after they purchase and re-sent every 90-180 days to unopens.

PRO TIP: If you use a system such as InfusionSoft that runs your affiliate program and CRM on the same platform, automatically sign your customers up as affiliates. Then send the email with their link.

MISTAKE #11:

Not Meeting In-Person & Not Interacting Outside of Professional Conversations

For years, I was elusive. I was the mythical affiliate manager that people had emailed with, even talked to on the phone, and occasionally seen on video, but never actually met.

From the time I started my first affiliate program in 2005 until 2014, I attended only 3 conferences. And even then, barely hung out with anyone.

Even when I won multiple Affiliate Manager of the Year awards, I didn't go to the ceremonies in person.

I also wasn't on social media and rarely interacted with our affiliates outside of a professional setting.

This led to poor relationships that were more transaction-based and not personal.

Don't be elusive and 100% professional like I was!

SOLUTION: Attend industry conferences, get active on social media with your current and prospective affiliates, and develop genuine relationships with them. Know their kids' names, spouse's name, favorite teams, etc. Reach out to them when their team wins (or loses) and develop friendships with them that extend beyond a professional relationship.

MISTAKE #12:

Delegating Communication

As our affiliate program grew, I got busier and busier. I also had other responsibilities inside the company that took multiple hours per day.

As a result, I was forced to delegate many of my responsibilities as Affiliate Manager. While this was necessary, I made the mistake of delegating some things that I shouldn't, such as much of the communication with affiliates.

Don't do this!

You can delegate reviewing the stats, creating swipe copy, setting up affiliate portals, and even some affiliate training, but you should never delegate important communication with affiliates.

If you've done what we've talked about already and built those relationships, they need to hear from YOU! An email or text from you will get 5X the results of the same from your assistant or another team member.

SOLUTION: Make affiliate communication a priority for you. Dedicate at least 30 minutes every single weekday to reaching out to individual affiliates and an hour a week to mass communication.

MISTAKE #13:

Not Recruiting New Affiliates Every Single Day

When I first started trying to find affiliates, I spent 5-6 hours a day doing so. It consumed me. I would spend hours at a time doing nothing but researching affiliates and reaching out to them.

Even when we had 20-30 affiliates, 90% of my time was spent finding new affiliates.

Once we had about 200 affiliates, the rate at which I recruited new affiliates slowed down dramatically.

This is one of the most common growing pains with affiliate programs. You reach a point where managing the current affiliates is taking up 50% or more of your time. And if you have other responsibilities inside the company, it feels like you have no time to recruit affiliates.

SOLUTION: Commit 20 minutes every single day to finding new affiliates. Put it on your calendar as an appointment. I still remember doing this every Monday-Friday at 8:35am right before our leadership standup meetings. I'd do 20 minutes, take a bio break and head to the meeting. It was on my calendar, so no one would try to schedule anything else and I was consistent with it.

MISTAKE #14:

Removing Inactive Affiliates

One of the biggest mistakes an affiliate manager can make is to remove inactive affiliates.

The reasons why you would want to activate an inactive affiliate are obvious, but I know a lot of people who don't do it on purpose. They just assume the effort is not worth it.

They think that if someone signs up and doesn't promote, it must be because the affiliate changed their mind or it's not a good fit. Or maybe they are just lazy or are spying on them.

Sure, you'll find some examples of that, but most of the time, it's just because they got busy. They got busy with other work-related tasks. They got busy with their kids. They got sick. In other words, life got in the way. And all they need is a gentle reminder.

When they come back from whatever kept them from promoting, they have a mound of email, calls to return, posts to write, and videos to record. They aren't thinking about you. No offense, but it's just not high on their priority list.

But that gentle reminder gets them back on track and fired up again. That's all it takes with most people.

SOLUTION: Read these two blogs to learn how to activate your affiliates: [How to Activate Inactive Affiliates \(in a Launch\)](#) | [How to Activate Inactive Affiliates \(Evergreen Program\)](#)

MISTAKE #15:

Not Creating Custom Individual Promotion Plans for Affiliates

When I first started my affiliate program, everything was 100% mass communication. And all the promotional plans were one-size-fits-all.

This is a huge mistake because every affiliate is different.

SOLUTION: Create a personal promotion plan with them. Below I have a video that walks you through how we do ours (this is some of our “Secret Sauce” when we run affiliate programs for clients), but here is the gist:

You meet with affiliates one-on-one before the promotion and craft a custom promotion plan that works with their calendar.

[Watch this video](#) to learn how to co-create custom promo plans with your affiliates:



How to Co-Create Promo Plans with Your Affiliates



THE AFFILIATE GUY TV

Watch later

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HOW TO CO-CREATE PROMO PLANS w/ YOUR AFFILIATES



Our secret strategy for getting them to promote more

MISTAKE #16:

Not Offering Affiliates Specific Promo Strategies

This mistake ties a bit into the last mistake, but it's less about promotional plans (when they promote) and more about not providing specific strategies to help them promote more.

Don't make the mistake of not offering affiliates specific strategies that will help them promote you better. If you rely on generic strategies and messaging, you'll get 80% of the results, but if you want that extra 20%, you gotta get specific!

Examples include exclusive coupons, bonuses, images, and videos, even helping them develop exclusive messaging that will resonate with their unique audience.

SOLUTION: Work with your affiliates to learn what specific strategies, messaging, and tools will serve them and their audiences best. Then offer those resources to your affiliates. Do whatever you can to HELP THEM!

MISTAKE #17: Not Having Enough Entry Points

When we studied the difference between 7-figure launches and 8-figure launches, the biggest thing we found was the number of entry points.

7-figure launches averaged 5.6 entry points and 8-figure launches had nearly DOUBLE the number of entry points!

An entry point is any opportunity for a prospect to engage with your content. It could be a video, a webinar, free report, blueprint, livestream, ebook, assessment, quiz, sales page, or various other free offers to generate leads.

The more the better.

Our first few affiliate programs only had 4 or 5 entry points. Usually 3 videos, a webinar, and maybe a livestream or ebook. That was it.

We only provided 5 reasons for affiliates to mail. This is a huge mistake and limits your leads and sales.

SOLUTION: Provide at LEAST 8 entry points for your affiliates. It's often as simple as creating variations of existing entry points, such as creating an ebook version of a video. Offer a second webinar or add a livestream to the mix. Anything to offer more variety and entry points.

MISTAKE #18:

Not Policing Affiliates

News flash: There are some bad apples out there.

While nefarious affiliates are rare (I've dealt with less than 50 out of 300,000+ affiliates), they can ruin a program if not caught.

Examples of bad affiliates include those who:

- Generate fake leads to win leads contests
- Offer cash back bonuses (usually not allowed)
- Send junk traffic
- Violate FTC rules and don't disclose that they are an affiliate
- Credit card fraud
- Usage of spyware or malware

The list goes on.

It's your responsibility to catch them and remove them from your program. It's the right thing to do for you and your other affiliates.

SOLUTION: Monitor affiliates for bad behavior. 99% of bad affiliate behavior can be brought to light by reviewing the stats daily (see Mistake #8 above). Keep an eye for stats that show something sinister might be afoot.

MISTAKE #19: Not Providing the Right Creatives

When I first started an affiliate program, I literally gave every affiliate the same single email copy and one blog post. That was it!

It makes me sick to even think of that now.

You can't just give affiliates one version of swipe copy and maybe a Facebook post and call it a day. They simple won't promote much and will lose interest in your program.

SOLUTION: Give them the right swipe copy for email, social media, blog posts, and even ad suggestions for podcasts. Multiple versions for each entry point (at least TWO versions for email for each entry point, two Facebook posts, and multiple Tweets, for example).

For more on how to create effective swipe copy, check out the post, [*How to Write Swipe Copy for Your Affiliates: 5 Mistakes to Avoid and How to Make the Most of It*](#) from our Head Affiliate Launch Coach, Mark Sieverkropp.

MISTAKE #20:

Not Communicating Enough Between Launches

If your affiliate program is based on launches or infrequent promotions (like a quarterly sale), you may do like I used to do back in the mid-2000s...

Lot's of communication in the weeks leading into a launch, lots of communication during the launch, an email or two after, and then...

Crickets.

Nothing. No communication whatsoever.

If you do that, your affiliates will lose interest and will stop promoting. You'll create one-and-done affiliates rather than get partners who keep coming back year after year and promotion after promotion.

SOLUTION: Communicate on a regular basis with your affiliates. If you have an evergreen program, once a week. If you do once-a-year launches, reach out every 2-3 weeks between launches to provide updates, check in, offer tips, and keep them in the know.

Now What?

Now that you know the mistakes to avoid and the RIGHT actions to take, what's next?

Your next step is to learn the classified playbook I've used for more than a decade to run affiliate programs for myself and folks like Michael Hyatt, Shark Tank's Kevin Harrington, Brian Tracy, Lewis Howes, and brands such as Shutterfly and Adidas.

I recently hosted an exclusive **5-hour** training called *The Affiliate Code* where I revealed this playbook, including five of my top secret, never-before-shared strategies that we closely guarded for years.

We opened up the recording to the public at a substantial discount...and you can get access to the information responsible for building a \$12.6 million affiliate program in less than two years. [**Just CLICK HERE to get access now!**](#)

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