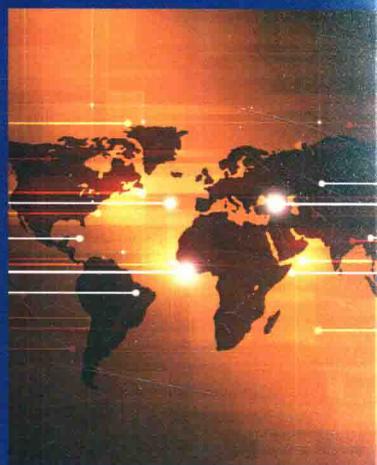


WOMEN, WORK, AND THE WEB

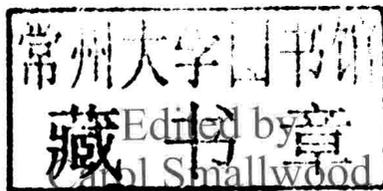


HOW THE WEB CREATES
ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES

EDITED BY CAROL SMALLWOOD

Women, Work, and the Web

How the Web Creates Entrepreneurial Opportunities



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Women, Work, and the Web

Foreword

Christine A. Olson

“No Guts, No Glory,” read the card from my friend. It sat next to the flowers my husband had sent on this, the opening day of my consulting practice. It was October 1984 and I was officially starting up Chris Olson & Associates in the extra bedroom of our house. On my agenda for the day was renting a typewriter from a local office supply store, speaking to a designer about a logo for my new business, and phoning contacts who might be interested in hiring me for my marketing and communications services.

The Internet was in its infancy and light years away from where I was sitting. I had worked on the DOD ARPANET network a few years earlier and I was an information professional, so I knew what was in the wings. But as a fledgling consultant I was in no position to leverage the network to my advantage. I didn’t even own a computer! Like other entrepreneurs at the time, I assumed I would rely on phone calls, faxes, in-person meetings, and courier services for conducting business.

So much for assumptions. Within three months I had purchased an IBM desktop computer for the sum of \$10,000. It used floppy disks, a black-and-white monitor, and a dot-matrix printer. I was on my own to figure out the spaghetti of cables that came with it and the software programs to make it run. Suddenly I had a business asset that consumed time and saved time. In 1985 being connected to the Internet still wasn’t an option, but I had electronic mail, and that became the beginning of adding electronic tools to my business mix and the new opportunities that would open as a result.

Incorporating the Internet into my consulting practice didn’t happen until February 1996 when I registered my own domain, Chrisolson.com. At the time, the Internet was comprised of 100,000 websites and I joined them that same year. I taught myself HTML and worked out network problems as I

encountered them. It was time consuming, but I was now connected to the electronic network that my prospective clients were beginning to explore.

Being linked to the Internet and having a presence on it became an important aspect of my consulting practice. Not only did I use my website to promote my knowledge, experience, and abilities, but I was able to locate and communicate with potential clients. For me the Internet became a two-way communications channel that outpaced and outperformed other business communications tools. As the Internet developed and grew, so did the entrepreneurial opportunities that opened up. For example, I took advantage of Internet-based electronic mail services by converting a paper-based newsletter to an electronic one distributed via e-mail and my website. I extended my workshops by leading virtual sessions using Internet-based conferencing services. I utilized video conferencing services to augment in-person meetings and expanded my consulting counseling sessions with clients by using Internet-based conference calls and desktop sharing. Today my business tool set is being expanded with survey-research, graphics, editing, and file-sharing applications based in cloud computing services that are easily accessed via Internet connections, regardless of platform, time zone, or geographic location.

The Internet has opened doors and delivered opportunities to my consulting business doorstep, and I have leveraged them to my advantage to meet goals and objectives. And so have the contributors to this book. The book's twenty-eight chapters offer candid glimpses into the role the Internet has played and currently plays in endeavors led by women. Arranged into five themed parts, "Fostering Change," "Running a Business," "Educational Applications," "Personal Aspects," and "Writing and Editing," the chapters give you a front-row seat to the stories behind the initiatives and businesses impacted by the Internet.

Each chapter has nuggets of advice and insight to be gleaned by anyone, male or female, looking to leverage the Internet for starting a business, identifying an opportunity, augmenting an existing venture, exploiting and expanding personal knowledge, contributing to society and humanity, fostering change, leading causes, teaching, researching . . . the list of possibilities is as vast as the Internet itself. In fact, the very existence of the Internet and its electronic environment has spawned unique entrepreneurial opportunities for women. Before the Internet there was no such thing as "blogging", Facebook, or Twitter, all of which now offer women ghostwriting and editing opportunities. eBay, Etsy, and similar electronic storefront services provide opportunities for women to be shopkeepers without geographic limitations. Without the Internet the world might not be the oyster for women that it is today.

To call out specific chapters for attention would emphasize one story over another. To be honest, I found every chapter to be fascinating reading. Every

story teaches and inspires in its own voice. No matter where you open the book, there is a chapter that can't be put down until it's finished. It doesn't matter if you read the chapters in order or at random, the stories are addictive reading, and many are penned by awesome women who have broken through traditional entrepreneurial barriers with the help of the Internet.

Collectively, the chapters provide a valuable list of recommendations for all entrepreneurs. Women looking to leave the workforce or who want to focus energy into different directions will find this book to be inspiring and insightful. The authors have made a point to share the lessons they have learned, outcomes from their experiences, and resources they found critical to their success. Many are familiar, causing me to conclude that there are aspects of being an entrepreneur that are timeless—Internet or not.

Take for instance the silence of working alone. I remember how quiet the house was when I first started my consulting business. In fact the whole neighborhood was quiet. Everyone left to go to offices in distant locations while I took my cup of coffee upstairs to my "office/former bedroom." The commute was nice but the silence was deafening. I had to play a radio to keep myself alert. Apparently the silence that comes with working by yourself at home is still a challenge, as several of this book's chapter authors explain how they handle it.

A piece of advice for aspiring entrepreneurs is "love what you do because you'll be living it twenty-four hours a day." This dovetails with another observation by many contributors to this book: as an entrepreneur the buck stops with you. You are the chief cook and bottle washer, and you also take out the trash. While the Internet may relieve some organizational and management tasks, a whole new set of Internet-generated tasks crowd the entrepreneur's desk. Unfortunately, the number of hours in a day is still set to twenty-four. The Internet hasn't changed that.

As a marketing and communications consultant I have seen firsthand how the Internet has altered the mix of promotion activities needed for maintaining and growing a successful venture, be it a business or social endeavor. The marketing savvy demonstrated and discussed by the chapter authors is commendable, and you will be wise to note, study, and act on their recommendations. They not only describe their approaches and results, but many authors explain and provide pointers to resources they found valuable.

When I began my consulting business I relied on market research that I conducted myself, by hand. Sending out several hundred survey questionnaires required many hours of licking stamps, filling envelopes, and hand-addressing labels. The Internet brings market research applications to an entrepreneur's desk and provides the tools for dissecting and analyzing results so that communications can be targeted to preferred groups of people. Many chapters in the book provide insights and guidance for conducting market research using Internet-based resources.

Back in 1984 being a woman entrepreneur was the exception, not the norm. When I named my business I purposely chose my nickname, Chris, because it was not gender specific. It turned out to be a wise decision that ensured no doors were closed to me immediately because I was a woman. To this day, I continue to surprise some phone callers because they assume I am a man, making the ensuing conversation rather enlightening as I listen to profuse apologies. The brand names used by chapter contributors prompts me to point out how important it is for aspiring entrepreneurs to be thoughtful when naming their endeavors. The Internet has made branding a significant task. A name has to be unique for a website domain name and should be able to carry over as the name for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts too. As of this writing the Internet has more than 265 million registered domain names making the creation and identification of a unique brand name rather daunting, but necessary.

And lastly, don't overlook the brief bios at the end of the book, as these provide snapshots of the chapter authors and in many cases add context to a chapter's points or scenario. Here's to the Internet and women everywhere who dream and create, and who put the Internet to work to benefit themselves, their loved ones, their causes, and their communities. Bravo!

Preface

Carol Smallwood

In a tight economy women entrepreneurs are making progress in a field that has been traditionally (along with science, math, and engineering) one in which women haven't been well represented—technology. *Women, Work, and the Web: How the Web Creates Entrepreneurial Opportunities* is by contributors from the United States and Canada sharing how the Internet has opened doors, leveled the playing field, and provided new opportunities. How the Internet has helped women with young children, caretakers of disabled family members, women with disabilities. How it has helped female veterans gain employment; put women into work boots; and allow women to publish in a male-dominated world, become editors, online instructors, and hold the First International Day of the Girl. The twenty-eight chapters are divided into five parts: “Fostering Change,” “Running a Business,” “Educational Applications,” “Personal Aspects,” and “Publishing and Writing.”

It is exciting to see how the creative contributors of different ages, backgrounds, and goals are using the web to further their careers and the status of other women as they progress online. I extend my thanks to everyone who contributed for generously sharing their experiences.

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Part I

Fostering Change

Chapter One

Blogging to Create Change

Amanda Peach

At first glance, *Plain Jane Activism*, <http://plainjaneactivism.blogspot.com>, might appear to be just another of the many 365-day challenge blogs permeating the Internet these days. Like those, Plain Jane's readers can depend on a daily infusion of new content from its author. Frequency of publication is where the similarities end, however. Plain Jane's author, Mae Suramek, uses her blog to challenge her readers to commit new small acts each day, such as "Act # 13: Challenge the status quo: Talk to a man about rape", all aimed at improving the lives of women. Where many 365-day blogs are concerned merely with self-reflection or capturing the minutiae of everyday life, either in photos or words, Mae's blog is concerned with the frank treatment of larger issues that impact women's safety, welfare, and quality of life, such as human trafficking, racism, and domestic violence.

The idea for the blog was born out of a family discussion of New Year's Eve resolutions; the conversation led Mae to commit to find a way to live more intentionally in the New Year. After some reflection, she decided journaling might be the answer. To force herself to remain consistent, she decided to commit to a 365-day blog format that would require her to publish every single day. She was not an experienced blogger when she decided to undertake the project and wasn't entirely sure where content would come from on a daily basis, but she knew she was tired of being silent.

Mae had spent nine of the last ten years in a very high-profile administrative position with her alma mater, Berea College, a small liberal arts school in Berea, Kentucky. As the director of Alumni Relations at Berea, she served as the face of the school's 17,000 alums. It was her job to bring alumni into the fold to financially support the school's mission, and to that end, she put a lot of pressure on herself to please everyone. Ironically enough, with each year she served in the position, she found herself further removed from the

politically conscious activist she had become as a student at Berea. The college, which prides itself on its commitment to social justice and on producing graduates who are concerned with the welfare of others, had cultivated in her a deep need to serve others. After graduating from Berea, she had served in both Kentucky and North Carolina in a variety of settings: an Americorps program, at a refugee resettlement center, in a domestic violence shelter, and with a human rights organization. Her life prior to becoming director of Alumni Relations had been dedicated to speaking out about social injustice in its many forms, but nearly a decade into her position at Berea, she realized she had somehow found herself with opinions she no longer felt comfortable voicing.

As she turned forty, Mae decided it was time for a serious change, and so she left her position at Berea College, not knowing what would come next. About the change she said, “I knew one thing for sure, which was that I would never again be silent or compromise my thoughts and views, no matter what I did.” After some soul-searching, Mae found herself in a position that was the perfect marriage of her need to speak out while also doing good: she became the director of the Bluegrass Rape Crisis Center. Still, the burden of nine years of silence was not alleviated by her work alone, and so Mae created her blog.

When she began writing the blog, Mae assumed she would only garner the attention of a few readers, mostly friends and family who shared her worldview. Most of her blog content is comprised of those topics that tend to not make polite dinner conversation: politics, religion, sexuality, the sex industry, and everything in between. She was surprised to find, then, that the bulk of her readers are actually twenty-something females, many of whom look to her as a sort of role model. She feels honored to be embraced by these emerging feminists that remind her so much of her younger self, and she has never quite gotten used to it. They write her privately asking for advice or telling her how much she inspires them. It is that feedback that, more than anything else, lets her know that she is on the right track.

GETTING STARTED: ADVICE FROM ONE BLOGGER TO ANOTHER

When I asked Mae what advice she would give others who might want to create a blog, she suggested that potential authors:

- Set aside a block of time to write every day and stick to it; this is the easiest way to be accountable.
- Limit how much time you spend on your entries. It is very easy to get stuck in a permanent state of editing if you don't reel yourself in.