

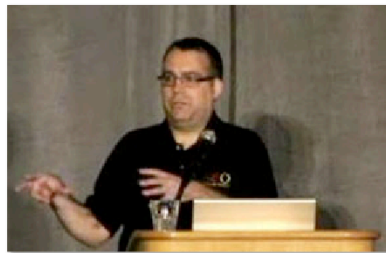
Plan B:

A Simple, Step by Step Plan to Launch & Grow Your Own Information Business

Week 5:

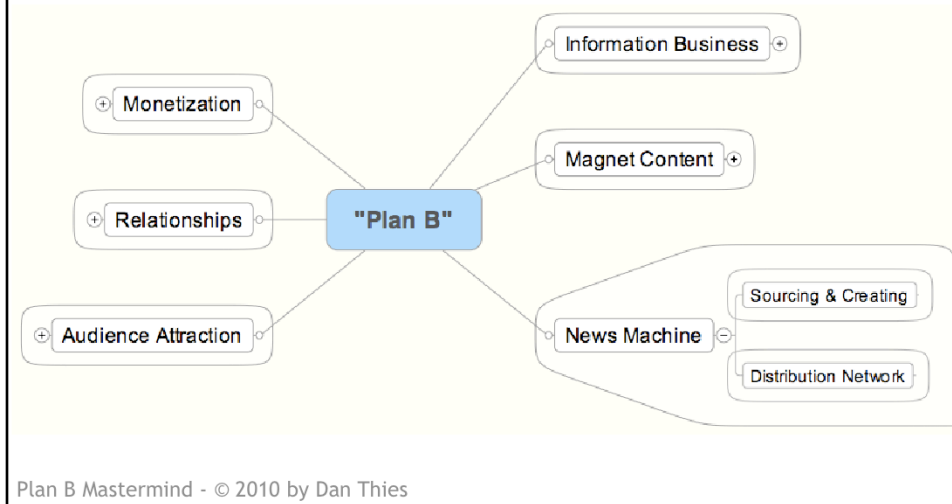
Sourcing News & Creating
Your News Machine

Presented by Dan Thies



Hello, I'm Dan Thies, and I'd like to welcome you to Plan B, a simple step by step plan to launch and grow your own information business. This is a 12 week course, and today, in week 5, we're going to cover how to source news in your topic, and create a "news machine" that will allow you to stay engaged with your audience in between your major Magnet Content posts.

Phase Three: News Machine



So let's review the plan - our 12 week program is divided into six Phases – mapping out the foundations of your information business, developing Magnet Content, creating and deploying a News Machine, attracting an Audience, expanding your audience and content with Relationship Marketing, and finally, Monetization. If you're pretty sharp and good at finding your way around the Internet, there's a good chance you can complete each week's missions in a few hours, but a more realistic expectation once you begin working on your business is that you will need 8-12 hours per week to keep things moving along. Budgeting your time can be a challenge, and the next two weeks, as we build out a news machine, will add significantly to the time involved, so if you're not quite ready to commit to this, just go through the exercises of setting things up. It's better to start later than it is to have a false start.

Week 5 Overview

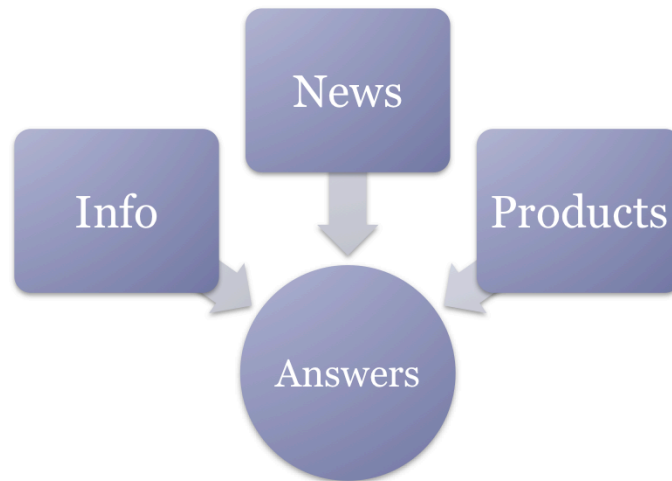
- Becoming “The Answer”
- The News Machine
- Gathering Sources
- Writing It Up
- Publishing



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Here’s a quick look at what we’re going to cover this week. I briefly touched on the idea of becoming “the answer” for your audience as it relates to your topic, and I’ll explain more about what that means. We’ll look at what the news machine is intended to accomplish, then walk through the steps of setting it up. Gathering sources, selecting news items to write about, writing up the news, and publishing.

Providing Answers Means...



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The folks in your audience are gathered together by a common interest in your topic – it may mean different things to different individuals, but there are really three things they'll be looking for you to provide, in order for you to become their #1 source of answers. First off – they need Information – someone to answer the question, “what do I need to know about this topic?” We solve this with Magnet Content. Second, they want to stay abreast of the News in your topic – what’s happening, what are people talking about? We solve this with a news machine – where we’ll also link to other people’s information. Third, they want to know about different Products and services – to answer the question, “what should I buy?” This comes in as we get ready to monetize with our own products, but we can also let our audience know about others’ products that they may want or need, and when new products are released, that’s newsworthy, and relevant to your audience – your opinion about the value of those products will also become very important to your audience.

The News Machine

- Links to other web sites & resources!
 - Value-added descriptions & editorial
 - Engage with the audience daily
 - Fodder for email, Twitter, Facebook, etc.
-
- This week – building the machine
 - Next week – distribution networks

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So the news machine is an important part of Plan B – these are items that you will post in your News category, that for the most part, are links to other people’s web sites and interesting resources from around the web. For your part, the description and editorial commentary that you add to the post, before you link out, is what makes YOU the place where they want to go to get their news - because you provide the framing and context for what they are seeing. The news machine allows you to engage with your audience daily – even if you aren’t ready to produce the massive amounts of magnet content that it would take to publish epic works of information on a daily basis. The news machine also becomes fodder for email, Twitter, Facebook, and other channels, where you can reach more of your audience. This week, we’re going to focus on building the news machine itself, and next week, we’ll talk about those other distribution channels.


Five Easy... Chunks

- Gather (RSS feeds)
- **Select (Items)**
- **Write (Descriptions)**
- **Publish (Content)**
- Optimize (Linking)

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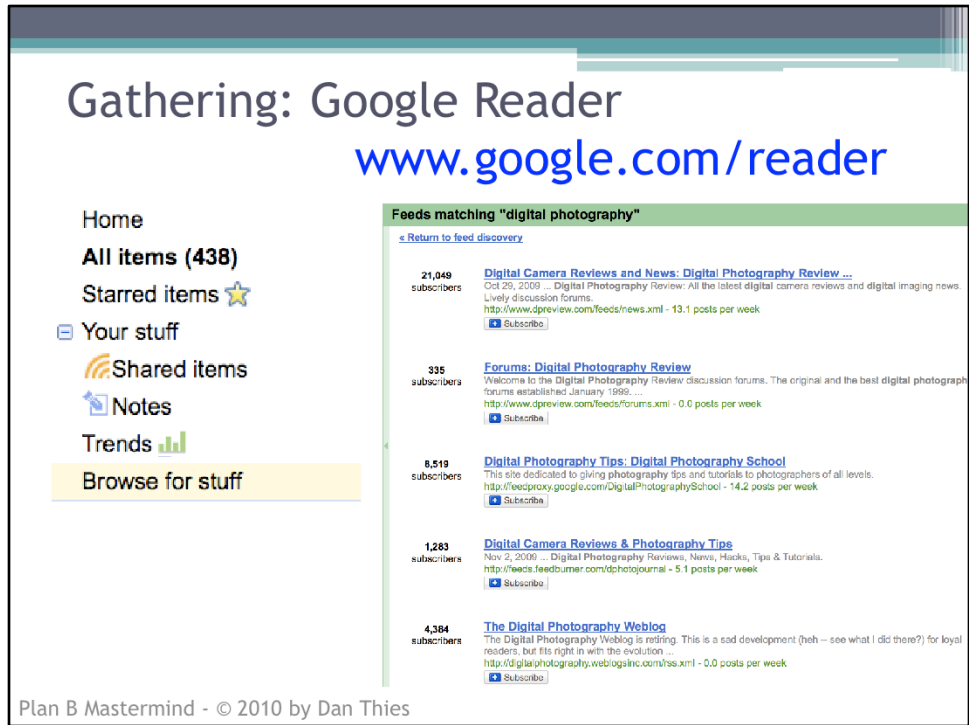
There are five pieces to the puzzle here, of making your News Machine into a content machine and a traffic machine. You'll gather sources together – in the form of RSS feeds, which you'll review in a feed reader. You'll select a few items to write about, write up the descriptions and commentary, and publish that content. We'll use a simple Wordpress plugin to get those posts to link to other content on your site, which helps draw more search engine traffic into your site over time.

Gathering: RSS Feeds

- Forums...
 - Blogs...
 - News Sites...
- 
- Almost everyone publishes a feed!
 - Some are “full text” feeds
 - Others are partial feeds (headline, teaser)
 - Learn to work with RSS feeds!

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If you're not familiar with RSS feeds and using feed readers, you've got a little studying to do, I'm afraid. Just about every information site, every social media site, every community, forum, blog, or news site... darned near all of them publish RSS feeds. The little orange beacon you see here shows up all over the place – not everyone uses this icon for their feeds, but darned near everyone publishing content on the web has a news feed that you can subscribe to in your RSS reader. Whatever your favorite web sites, blogs, and forums are in your topic, it's a safe bet that they'll have an RSS feed you can subscribe to. Some sites publish full text feeds, where you can read the entire thing in your reader, others publish partial feeds with a headline and a teaser, and you have to go to their web site to read the rest. If you don't know anything about this, it's time to get on Youtube and Google, read up, and go through some tutorials. Working with RSS feeds is essential to staying on top of information online, and once you've started doing it, you'll wonder what took you so long.



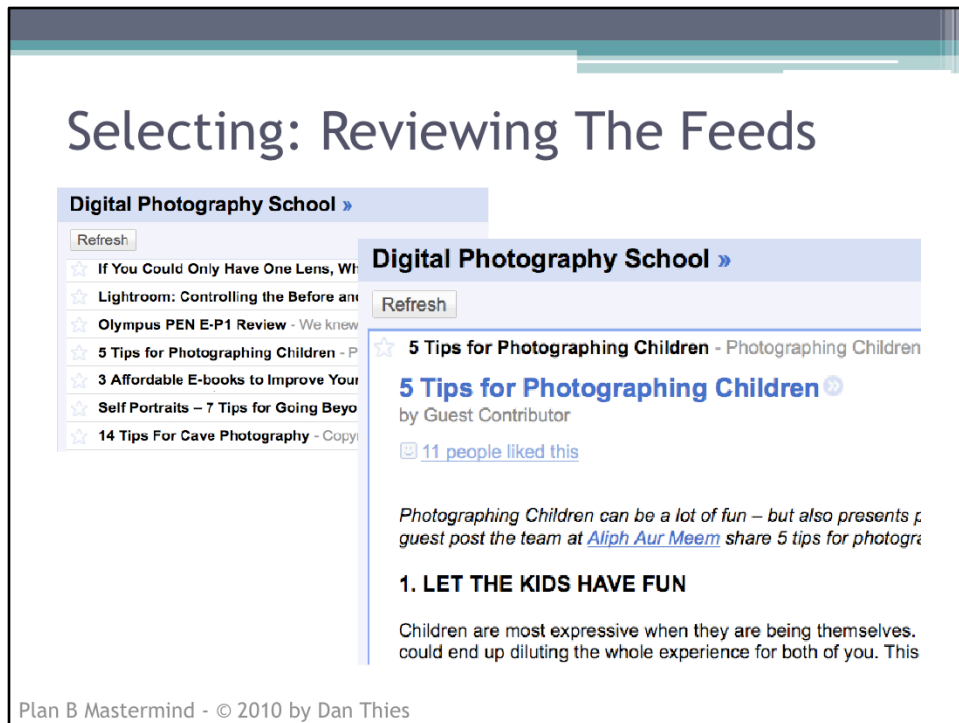
You have a choice about your RSS reader – there are RSS news reader applications for Mac, Windows, Linux, iPads, Androids, you name it. On the iPad, I like NewsRack. On Mac and Windows, I like NetNewsWire and FeedDemon. But one of the best RSS readers for our specific purpose is Google Reader – you can find it at www.google.com/reader – and they have plenty of helpful info on how to use it. If you don't have a favorite, I'd start with Google Reader and only switch to something else if you see a need. You'll need a Google account for this, and if you use a Google account for email and stuff already, it may be easier to set up a separate Google account for your Plan B operations. As you find interesting web sites, blogs, and news sources, you can subscribe to their RSS feeds in Reader. You can also search in Reader for other feeds on your topic with the "Browse for stuff" feature, and Google will even suggest feeds for you based on your current subscriptions.

Gathering: Google Alerts

www.google.com/alerts

The screenshot shows the Google Alerts creation page. At the top, the Google logo is followed by a search bar containing the text "digital photography tips". Below the search bar, there are several search results listed, including "Digital Photography Tips" and "Digital Photography Tips: Digital Photography School". To the right of the search results is a "Create a Google Alert" form. The form has a text input field for "Search terms" containing "digital photography tips". Below this are three dropdown menus: "Type" set to "Comprehensive", "How often" set to "as-it-happens", and "Deliver to" set to "Feed". A "Create Alert" button is located below the dropdowns. At the bottom of the form, there is a small disclaimer: "Google will not sell or share your email address." Below the search results, there is a checkbox for "digital photography tips" and a "Comprehensive" label. To the right of the checkbox, there are links for "Feed" (with a feed icon), "View in Google Reader", and "Reader". At the bottom left of the page, there is a footer: "Plan B Mastermind - © 2010 by Dan Thies".

Another Google service called Google Alerts can be really cool, depending on your topic it can be a big time saver. Google Alerts allows you to enter a search query, and have Google create a custom RSS feed with just the latest results as it finds them. As an example, if you have a site about digital photography, you could have Google Alerts scouring the web for digital photography tips, and sending its latest finds right into Google Reader for you. You want to be logged into your Google account when you go to Google Alerts to set them up, which allows you to instantly add the search feeds to your Google Reader subscriptions.



Once you've got some subscriptions, you can go into Google Reader and look at the "All Items" view to see the full stream of news, or you can organize your feeds into folders, or look at individual feeds. Scan the list of item titles, and check out the most interesting ones. This will take more time at first, because you'll probably go nuts with subscriptions, and have way more information than you need. That's okay – what I like to do is keep a folder in my news reader for "Reliable" sources that always give me great content, and separate folders for forums and news sites that are mostly irrelevant noise. Just look for stuff that your audience would be interested in – preferably good information, although if you feel like it, you can occasionally throw in some bad information and warn your readers about why it's so bad.

Selection: Step by Step

- Read through your feeds...
- “Star” the items you find interesting
- Look at your “starred” items...
- Select a few to write up & publish

- One 25-minute chunk to review & select
- One 25-minute chunk to write ‘em up & publish
- This is *extremely* “outsourcable” ;-)

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Step by step, it’s a pretty simple process. Read through the feeds, and use the “Star” button in Google Reader to flag anything you find interesting. Then you can go through the Starred items and take a deeper look, and pick a few items to write up and publish to your site. In an hour a day, you can publish a lot of news – one 25 minute chunk of time to review the items and select a couple to write up, and another chunk to write up the descriptions and publish the posts. This is something that you can easily outsource to just about anyone who managed to get an A or a B grade in creative writing in high school or college – your local community college is crawling with underemployed students who can write a little bit – although, at this stage, outsourcing is kind of NOT the point, since we’re trying to establish YOU as an expert on something – we’ll get into how you can leverage your audience for this kind of work in week 10 – which allows you to outsource for free, and with better quality content to boot.

Writing: A Simple Formula

- Title / Headline
 - Title of Article [Source]
 - e.g. 8 Great Windows Tips [WindowsWorld]
- What It Is, Where It's From, Who It's For
- Why It's Good / Useful / Interesting / (Wrong)
- 100-200 words about it, then:
 - Link to them! [Read \[Title\] at \[Source\]](#)
- Link to related stuff of your own if it fits

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So you've picked a few items to write about – great – but what are we going to say? Well, there's a simple formula, almost a template, that you can use. What we're going to do is write a description of the thing you've found, and then give your readers a link to it. If the article you're linking to has a good title already, then you can simply repeat the title and put the name of the source in brackets, as I've done in the example here. That's the title of your post. Then you just need a brief description – first paragraph, what it is, where it's from, who it's for, like, "Pat Smith at Windows World has a great list of tips every Windows user needs, which will be even be useful for those who haven't upgraded to Windows 7 yet." Second paragraph, why it's good, useful, interesting, whatever – give an example or a brief quote here if you like. If you're writing about something you disagree with or don't like, say so – and explain why here. Even 50 words is often enough to explain what they're going to see, mine usually wind up around 100-200 words, and if you end up with a couple extra paragraphs, that's fine. So you write up what it's about, and then you're going to LINK TO THEM. Something like read the rest of (title) at (source), linked to the original article you're writing about. Just link to it. If you have relevant posts that add something of value, you can link to those items in another paragraph or two following the link.

Publishing

- Quote, but don't STEAL! Give love with links!
- Browser-Based: (Google Reader) & WP-Admin
- Scribefire Plugin For Firefox
- Deepest Sender plugin for Firefox
- Post immediately, publish later, or save as draft?
- Check out Instapaper for "reading later"
- Start with simple – make sure you're going to DO this, then work on improving workflow

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That's really all there is to it. I've simplified the workflow quite a bit here, to avoid creating any possible confusion over what we are doing. We are NOT publishing someone else's content on our site – we are publishing LINKS to other people's content, with an original description that ADDS VALUE for the audience. It's okay to quote, but don't steal people's content, and don't play nofollow games on the links – just link out to them – give love with links, and we'll talk about how to get that love back in a few weeks. The simplest thing to do is just to have one browser tab open with Google Reader, and another tab with your Wordpress wp-admin page where you can write the posts. There are a couple plugins for Firefox that I use sometimes, called Scribefire and Deepest Sender, that let you write posts and publish them without going into your Wordpress dashboard, and if you go into the Tools section of your wordpress dashboard, there's a bookmarklet called 'press this' which you can use to post quotes and links – some people love it, I don't use it myself. When you publish, some things you'll probably want to post right away because they're hot and topical, but you can also schedule these news posts, just like we talked about last week with magnet content. So maybe you write up a bunch of them at once and then drip them out over time – this lets you manage your workflow and time, while creating the nice steady flow of news your audience will want. It's better to post one thing a day than to post 8 things on Wednesday and nothing for another week. If you do a lot of browsing around the web during the day, and want to remember stuff so you can write it up later, I use a service called Instapaper that lets me grab a quote or save the entire post into Instapaper where I can read it later and write up a post. Start with very simple stuff – just pick an item or two and write 'em up each day, make sure you're really going to be able to keep up with this one way or another, and think about ways to improve your workflow later on.

Wordpress Plugins: YARPP

- “Yet Another Related Posts Plugin”
- Automatically adds links to “Related Posts” on each post
- So... every news items also links to other news and magnet content
- Yes, there are other plugins.

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I mentioned a minute or two ago, that you might want to link from your news items to related posts – and there’s a plugin for that called YARPP – which stands for Yet Another Related Posts Plugin. This plugin, once you turn it on, will automagically add links to related posts at the end of each post you publish. So, every news item could link to other news and magnet content that’s related to it. Yes, there are other plugins, and you’re free to spend as many hours as you like looking for a better one, but personally, YARPP does the job well enough that I don’t feel like looking for something better.

A Deceptively Simple Mission...

- Set up Google Reader / account
- Gather the feeds that will “feed” your news machine!
- “Star” some interesting stuff
- Work out your time & post scheduling – goal = daily news

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All right – your mission for this week, sounds deceptively simple, but it may take some time. Set up your feed reader – which is probably Google Reader, and create a Google account for it if you need one. Gather the RSS feeds from your favorite blogs, forums, and news sites, and any google alerts feeds you want. Sift through it, star some stuff you find interesting, and be ready to write about it. As I said in the beginning of this week’s lesson – don’t start writing and publishing until you’ve worked out how you’re going to keep the flow going. That may mean you just write up something you stumble across every day, it may mean that you write up several items on a Saturday and schedule them to go out throughout the week. Your goal is to have *something* going out to your audience through your site at LEAST once a day, and preferably several items per day, including any Magnet Content that you produce. If you’re not sure how long it’s going to take you, just do some dry runs – where you go through the exercise, save all the posts as drafts, and run a timer to see how long it takes you. You will get faster, and all those drafts you’re saving can be published later, so you’re not wasting your time either way.



Next Week:

The Plan B News Machine:
Building Your Distribution Network

Well, it's time to get to work, so do the work! In week six, we'll talk about setting up the distribution networks that will pump your news out into across the Internet and directly to your audience. Thanks for your time today, and we'll talk again soon.