

Building an online news site

The TideArt.com story

Artist showcase: Mavrosi

Sun, Feb 17 2013 12:37:52 PST



News feed

Shading food case study

Sun, Feb 17 2013 12:00:23 PST
Often, some types of 3D elements can be harder than others to create realistic looks, and...

Carbon Scatter 2 trial available

Sat, Feb 16 2013 8:27:44 PST
E-On Software announced that Carbon Scatter 2 is now available to download as a trial. Th...

YouTube introduces new channel layouts

Fri, Feb 15 2013 16:20:57 PST
YouTube has made several changes in its interface during the last few months, including th...

Mental Core 1.5v1 update

Thu, Feb 14 2013 12:40:48 PST
A new version of MentalCore, 1.5v1, has been released. This is a shading, lighting and ren...

123D Creature released on iPad

Thu, Feb 14 2013 12:41:32 PST
Autodesk has been busy releasing new apps on iOS and today it launches its latest called 1...

Rhythm & Hues bankruptcy may indicate troubled VFX industry

Tue, Feb 12 2013 23:29:29 PST
In a move that surprised the whole industry, Rhythm & Hues has filed for bankruptcy just a...

Interviews

Interview with Zarathul

Thu, Feb 12 2013 15:24:23 PST



Blend Swap interview

Thu, Feb 9 2013 15:41:18 PST



DarkBrain interview

Sun, Jan 27 2013 7:41:39 PST



RenderPal interview

Sat, Jan 19 2013 12:57:30 PST

Features

Dealing with censorship

Thu, Feb 14 2013 17:53:36 PST



Pixel Editor review

Sat, Feb 9 2013 17:19:23 PST



The art of criticism

Wed, Jan 30 2013 16:24:23 PST



10 tips to avoid procrastination

Fri, Jan 25 2013 13:35:22 PST

2013 Animation School

www.VFS.edu Digital-Animation
Make the Change this New Year w/ a Career in Character Animation Today



AdChoices

Subscribe

Receive TideArt news directly to your inbox.

Email address

Top stories:

10 places where artists can find inspiration



Top 13 reasons to become an artist



How does Blender 3D compare to professional software?



Find us on Facebook



Patrick Lambert

it in.

Free 7-day trial

learn more

Building an online news site

The TideArt.com story

By: Patrick Lambert

© 2013 - All rights reserved.

Table of content

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Treat your project like a business](#)
- [3. CMS and hosting](#)
- [4. Getting the right name, domain and logo](#)
- [5. Features you want to have](#)
- [6. Social plugins and other tools](#)
- [7. Some technical details](#)
- [8. Taking care of small things](#)
- [9. Thinking about SEO](#)
- [10. Mobile presence \(responsive design vs mobile site\)](#)
- [11. Creating a social presence](#)
- [12. Creating a mailing list](#)
- [13. Ways to reach out](#)
- [14. Dealing with copyrights](#)
- [15. Updating content](#)
- [16. Public relations](#)
- [17. Making money with ads](#)
- [18. Hiring contributors](#)
- [19. More ways of making money](#)
- [20. Long term vision](#)

1. Introduction

Greetings and thank you for opening up this ebook! Let me introduce myself, some of my background, and tell you what you will be able to find in this content, along with why you may be interested in reading further.

My name is Patrick Lambert and I'm a freelance writer. While that's my official title, I prefer to think of myself as a content creator. This is because I like to make content, many types of content, and I have always liked it. My vision of the world is that as we are not around for very long, I like to create as much content as I can, whether it's to entertain, inform, or help others in some way or shape.

My main job, meaning the activity that bring in the most money, is writing various articles about technology and marketing. I help businesses by providing content for their blogs, and I publish my own opinion pieces in various magazines. But I don't stop there. I've been coding and creating web sites using PHP, HTML, JavaScript and other languages for years. I also make digital art using programs like Poser, Vue, Illustrator and Paint.NET. Finally I write ebooks like this one.

But in our case here, I will discuss a web site that I started in early 2011. I've started a lot of sites in the past 15 years, but this one was significant for a couple of reasons. In an era where most Internet marketers started sites focusing on selling products, I wanted to make a site where my passion of news, art and technology could be brought up to the front. Instead of turning myself into a salesperson, attempting to bring in clients who would stick around just long enough to read a product demo, I wanted to make a site that would have some real values over the

long term.

So the goal behind TideArt was to primarily make a news site, a portal with real information, content that would entice people to keep coming back. The reason I decided to make a site about digital art is both because it was a subject I knew, and even though there are other popular sites about art, none of them seemed to focus on digital art. Either they provided content for all art forms, including traditional art, or they focused on a much narrower niche, like 3D modeling or Adobe Photoshop.

Now, TideArt has gone from 0 user to over 70,000 monthly page views from 40 countries, over a thousand pieces of content, hundreds of features, and several contributors. Success can be measured in many ways and I will touch on that later on, but in my mind this is a story that can be helpful to teach some things to others.

During the almost two years that TideArt has been running, I've made a lot of experimentations and a lot of mistakes, but the site is still up and chugging along, and through all of this I learned a lot. Now it's time for me to share my experience and hopefully help you be successful. The information in this ebook should be of use to anyone who may want to start a news site from nothing.

One last note is that when I started the site, I didn't have much money to invest. The process may be very different if you have an initial investor to help you out, and I'll touch on that a bit along the way, but most of the concepts in this book will apply if you have a limited budget. While you do not need much money, you still

need a bit in order to pay for the domain name, hosting, and some basic advertising.

2. Treat your project like a business

I've never been to business school, but I do know a bit about what it takes to run an online business. Being a freelancer is similar to being a small business owner, except you don't have to deal with employees or a lot of the extra paperwork. But what I did know is that everything rests on marketing and awareness. Even though many people say content is king, that is only true if people can see your content, so early on I decided to treat this project like a business.

What this means is that before I even started the site, I needed to do some research. The idea of a news site was already in my head, and had been there for quite a while. So what I did was go around to other news sites to see what they were doing, how popular they seemed to be, and what appeared to be the key to their successes.

I learned very quickly the power of branding. Everyone knows that branding is important, and that companies like Coca Cola or Pepsi rely on their brands heavily to keep growing. If a well known brand starts a new product, tries a new marketing angle, or even if they just publish a press release, they will be picked up by thousands of news outlets and average people will pay attention purely because of the brand name.

What I found is that the same was true for news sites. Even though many pundits

say that news is now a commodity, and that everyone has an opinion, the fact is that when content comes from a well known source, it has a lot more credibility than if it comes from an unknown source. Simply going to social aggregation sites like Reddit, Digg, Newsvine or Hacker News, I could see that the links that would typically go to the top were always from the most well known sites.

For national news that often meant CNN, The Huffington Post, ABC and CBS, while for technology that meant Techcrunch, Mashable, CNet and so on. This means that for a new site to get traction, it can be very hard. But another thing I noticed was that there were very few art news items that would surface on these sites, confirming my belief that there was room for a site like TideArt.

The bottom line that I learned before I ever started coding is that I needed to decide on a consistent brand and stick with it. Changing in the middle of the road was not an option, and this is why thinking long and hard before you ever write your first line of content is so important. I selected the keywords I wanted to use, the niche I wanted to attack, and so on.

Thinking like a business also meant deciding the type of budget I wanted to dedicate to the site. In my case it was easy because I already had a hosting solution and I didn't plan to spend a lot on marketing, simply because I didn't have a lot of money to dedicate to the site.

3. CMS and hosting

Building a web site can be hard, and building a good web site can be even harder.

Many companies spend millions on making a new site, and even then they may fail horribly. In my case I was fortunate because I already knew how to code, and I quickly decided to make my own custom code from scratch on a hosting account I had.

So the first thing you need to decide is whether you will go with a Content Management System (CMS). I highly recommend that you do, unless you are a seasoned web developer and are confident of your skills in making your own custom site. There are many options out there like WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr and so on. The most popular is WordPress because it offers the most flexibility and there are many plugins available for things like social interaction, forums, galleries and so on.

If you decide to be hosted by the CMS company, such as opening an account at wordpress.com instead of downloading an instance of WordPress on your own server, then you don't have to worry about having your own hosting. However if you do want to host your site, then I highly suggest that you get a Virtual Private Server (VPS) or go to one of the content delivery networks like Amazon Web Services (AWS). The reason is that site availability is crucial. When I started I was on a shared account, and while it was very reliable for many months, sometimes I had to bang my head against the desk when my site was down because some other user was hogging all the resources.

Regardless of whether you go the custom DIY route or get a pre-made solution, in the end all that matters is what the users will see. If you want to make a site that

has value and where people will want to come back, it's critical that you take plenty of time to work on the site design, layout and ease of use. I cannot stress how important this is, and even though content really is king, having a bad looking site or a layout that doesn't make sense will scare users away.

Here's an example that surprised me with TideArt. Originally, I built the site to have a blog-style interface. If you go to the site and click on the *Switch to blog view* link under the main menu, you can see what I mean. It basically shows each article one after the other, like pretty much every other blog out there. What I quickly found out is that when I would go to submit links to my site on other sites, on forums or through comments, I encountered several occasions where people referred to TideArt as a 'blog' in a negative manner.

While blogs are very popular, the problem is that they are too popular. Making a blog is easy, and almost everybody is blogging these days. But if your goal is to make a news site, a place where you may have multiple authors, features that are of interest to more than just your own readership, and want to become known as a brand, then having a unique theme and a unique content layout is crucial. I experimented a lot with different layouts until I came up with the one we have today, and that you can see on the cover.

It took me a long time I figure out the right layout, and I looked at what other news sites were doing. Very few well known news brands have a purely blog interface, they all present content in different layouts, and this helps their branding effort. It also helps differentiate your site from a blog. Don't just use the default template of

whichever CMS you choose, investing in a good template, or making one yourself, is very important.

4. Getting the right name, domain and logo

So after I decided on the way TideArt would be made, I had to actually find the name I wanted. Back then, I simply knew I wanted a news site about digital art, I didn't have a name yet. One good way to find a name for a new site is going to one of the many registrars and typing names that pop into your head, seeing if they are available. Unfortunately, the web is around two decades old now and most good names are gone.

I knew I wanted a small name with *'art'* in the name and it needed to be easy to remember. I tried dozens of names until I came up with TideArt, as in a rising tide in the ocean, and the tagline you can see at the top of the site *'the rising art of the digital age'*. This line connected to the name of the site, and the fact that it was about digital art, breaking the link with traditional mediums.

One thing to remember here is to be careful about trademarks. One issue that came up early on with TideArt is that when I would type it in Google, a bunch of ads and results for the company *'Tide'* would come up. In this case, because we're in two very different industries, it does not matter. But you cannot use a proper name from some other company in a similar niche. Also, before you even buy the domain name, make sure you do a Google search with that word, to know the kind of competition you will have when trying to rank your site.

The template I used to make the site was based on a free CSS file that was available for free and which I highly modified to fit the vision that I had for the site. As you can see on TideArt, everything is centered around a single color palette. Tones of grey and white keep coming back, and that's true for everything from the template, the logo, and even the favicon file, the little icon that you see in your browser tab. It's important for a brand to be very consistent across the board.

Finding the right logo for a brand can be very hard. Some tricks include using part of the name like I did for TideArt, but sometimes you may want to pay \$5 on Fiverr and see what others can come up with. Or there are also a lot of free logo generators online that can give you an idea. For one of my other sites I used such a logo generator and then modified it to fit the site. Simply type in *free logo generator* in Google.

You should only start building the actual site when you have everything that you need. This includes your hosting account, domain name, site name, logo, template, and a very good idea of what the finished product will be like. Otherwise, you will find yourself redoing a ton of work as you see the result and decide it's not what you wanted.

5. Features you want to have

So as I said previously my idea was to have a news site and a portal that would be helpful to people, and where they would want to come back. Once that's established, there are a lot of additional features that needed to be decided on. Obviously the main part of the site will be the content, but I didn't want a simple

blog where everything would be dumped together.

So early on I selected various categories based on what made the most sense for this business. I came up with these titles: News, features, interviews, showcases, and later on I added videos.

News items were fairly straightforward. The digital art field has a lot of potential news sources, and to fill this up I started a Google Reader page where I added every type of news I would want to cover. This includes feeds from other art related sites, general news sites, companies in the business such as Adobe, Autodesk and so on.

Features would be articles that I or a contributor would write about a specific subject but would be longer in length and also more substantial. Because a certain week could get 20 news articles but just 3 features, I felt it was important that they be separated, because news typically has a short shelf life, whereas features have a longer appeal.

Interviews were one of the crucial sections that would end up being useful for many reasons, which I will discuss in the marketing chapter. But basically, these would be interviews of people in the industry, such as well known artists, people who created software or services useful to artists, and so on.

Showcases are simply a way to showcase art from a particular artist, and have some great imagery to show on the site. Because TideArt would be about digital

art, I felt it was a necessary section of content.

Finally, I didn't have videos as its own separate section at first, but I quickly found out that videos are plentiful, and deserved their own section. Also, because of the way I eventually designed the layout, having a separate section for videos allowed me to create code that would show previews of each video on the main page.

From those initial sections, I then started to think about other features. The most obvious one being commenting. It may not seem like much, but having comments on a site involves a whole lot of issues. First, any time you allow anonymous users to interact with your site, you dramatically raise the potential for security holes, so it's very important to make sure the comments section is air tight. Also, spamming and trolling is a constant problem for any web site.

So because I was writing all of the code myself, I wrote the comments section as well, and added code that would send me an approval link so I could reject spam and trolls, and I made sure it was isolated from the rest of the site, in its own SQL database. If you use a CMS like WordPress or Tumblr, there are great plugins that can help you do the same.

Since the start of TideArt I also considered adding other features such as the ability to add profiles for artists, or even forums. What I found however is that any community-driven feature like these requires a big enough community in order to start it. What you don't want is to start a forums section and have three posts in it. I felt that it would be best to wait until the site was much bigger in order to start

those.

6. Social plugins and other tools

If you use a CMS, plugins is an area you won't have too much trouble with. There are hundreds, if not thousands of different plugins doing all sorts of things. You can add plugins for social integration, comments, chat, reputation, you can even explore the gamification of your site which is a very popular concept these days.

Personally, I had to implement all of it manually, but it still wasn't too bad. All of the social platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus provide an API to do this, and there are easy to use libraries that can be integrated into most popular coding languages like PHP, Perl, Java and so on.

There are two ways to add a social link to each post. The first is to make a button, which is basically just an image that links to a special URL to share content on the social network. These are the current URLs for the three most popular sites:

http://facebook.com/share.php?u=YOUR_URL

http://twitter.com/share?url=YOUR_URL

http://plus.google.com/share?url=YOUR_URL

All you have to do is link to these URLs and add your post's address. Then, when a user clicks on it, he or she will have a window open up and suggest that they share your post to their friends. Or, the other way to do it is to integrate the social network's code on your own site using JavaScript. Obviously, the first method is

much easier, but the second method is much more integrated. Users will see an active *Like* or *Share* button with the number of friends that already shared the post.

What I ended up doing is integrating Facebook, but link other social networks. The reason is that Facebook is by far the most popular social network over the others, and I decided that I did not want to overload pages with outside libraries.

Remember that when someone goes to your site, their browser will have to load all of these plugins, whether they come from your own site or others. I find the experience of going to a site that has 15 different social plugins to be miserable and slow, and I did not want TideArt to be like this.

So certainly use plugins and social integration if you want, I feel Facebook is still a very worthwhile addition, but be careful not to overload things. The more you rely on third parties, like adding Facebook Connect, comments and so on, the more your site slows down and if something happens, you may encounter serious problems as functionality is suddenly removed when Facebook or some other third party goes down.

7. Some technical details

Since I've talked a lot already about the fact that I created the code for my site entirely myself, I thought it would be helpful if I talked about that a little. The reason for making it myself is because I'm somewhat weird when it comes to coding, I like to have complete control over my own creations. I had already done it for my home site and several others since, and so it only made sense to do the same with TideArt. If you asked whether I would recommend others do this, I

would say probably not, but it can be a very worthwhile learning experience.

TideArt runs on a single file, *index.php*, created obviously using the PHP language because that's the one I know. It currently holds at 822 lines of code and uses a SQLite library to store content. When creating a new site, many people would automatically go for a MySQL or MS SQL RDBM. However, I really like SQLite for its simplicity and reliability. Basically when you have a web site, you rely on the web server to be up so that your site can be accessible. However, if your content is stored inside of a database server, you suddenly double your minimum requirements.

This isn't an academic requirement either. In the vast majority of cases when a site goes down, it isn't the web server, it's the database server. You can still access the page, but you start seeing errors like *503 Service Unavailable*. This is a sign that while everyone can get to your page, the database server is overloaded. This never happens with SQLite since it's simply a file.

Now the downside of SQLite is that it relies on disk I/O to function, but this only becomes important when you have a very large site. TideArt and some of my other SQLite based sites have been to the main page of many places like Reddit and Hacker News, and it never went down due to being overloaded. Also, SQLite has the advantage of being extremely easy to backup, since you simply have to copy that one file. A database server requires a data dump and this can become messy when dealing with multiple servers.

Finally, I created my own administration interface to allow the creation and edition of posts and entries. I also do not rely on any outside library, which means no JQuery or other framework. The two reasons for this are that again, I like to know what each line of code on my server does, and also I never have to worry about security from other products. I highly doubt JQuery has a lot of security holes, but I've experienced those times several years back when WordPress and other CMS installations would have constant security issues, where sites all over the web would get hacked because they were just a day late in updating.

Basically, I believe that using a bloated system that is too general purpose like most blogging engines out there are these days leads to slower performance and too many security risks. Also, by using my own custom code, I find that I can add custom features much more easily.

8. Taking care of small things

Once TideArt was up and running, the domain was pointing to the right place, the files were up, and the template was set, then it became time to take care of small details. In the two years since TideArt has been running, I must have modified some part of the site over a hundred times. And this is still a somewhat simple site.

The first thing I would say is to make a test site. Never work on a live site if you don't want things to go wrong. In my case it was easy, I simply copied the files over to a test directory and made changes there, and when happy with them I just copied them back. Regardless of how you do it, make sure you have a test site, because if you make a mistake and your whole site is replaced with a cryptic error

message, that can't possibly be good.

Still, iteration is very important, it's crucial even in making sure that your site is effective. There are hundreds of data points that may seem simple and irrelevant, but can be very important in deciding whether people will come to your site or not. Make sure your text font is big enough, readable enough. Make sure your colors are clear, and that your banners are not too intrusive. Get familiar with the concept of A/B testing, and make sure to use it constantly on your users along with analytics software to see what works best.

One example I can give you is that originally, my template was set for a screen 800 pixels wide. Back then I was on a laptop that had a 1280x800 resolution, and that looked fine. But now I'm on a 1440x900 resolution, and I know many people use over 2,000 pixels wide. I quickly realized that there was no point in having such a narrow site. I eventually decided that 1024 pixels was a much better. This meant a lot of time spent on reformatting images.

Details can be everything, and making sure your layout and content are as good as they can get is worth the time investment. I mentioned that originally TideArt had a blog layout, but I decided to go with a different front page. What I found is that people would view far more articles with the new layout. I also made sure that some of the most interesting content like the showcases were on top.

Finally, don't underestimate navigation. It's very important that your menus are simple and clear, so that people know how to get back home and how to get to the

various sections of your site. Also don't forget to test the site in multiple browsers, and make sure you take care of accessibility. By using things like ALT tags and labels you can be sure that even if blind people access your site, or users of older browser who cannot see images, they will still have a usable experience.

9. Thinking about SEO

When you first start a news site, or really any kind of web site, you have no authority and no ranking. Your site is new and unknown. This is why Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is important and should be done from the very onset. The term itself often gets a bad connotation, but this is mostly because of the black hat practices that often go on. SEO is needed and something every large company does.

SEO has two components. The first one is on-site methods which you should employ to make sure both users and search engines have an easy way to find you. The first thing is to make sure that your site is easy to navigate. Links should be placed properly, and text should be legible with no mistake in them. Google actually said that its crawler is able to parse JavaScript, follow links, and check spelling. Low quality content gets a penalty in ranking.

Then, you need to make sure you assign the correct titles and META tags. These are tags that are in every HTML page and that search engines can read. It used to be that META tags were very important, and webmasters would need to add keywords, descriptions, and more. Right now, the most important tag is the description one. This is what a proper META tag looks like inside of your code:

```
<meta name="description" content="In this article we review the latest Apple iPad.">
```

Remember that what you place in this tag is what will appear under your page title in a search result. As such, it's crucial that the description is well written, describes the post correctly, and has the right keywords in it. Also, make sure you have a different title and description for each post. One early problem I came up with on TideArt is that because I use only one PHP script to generate all content, the META tag would not change and only had the TideArt front page description. I quickly learned that when anyone would encounter a link to a specific post on the site, that same description would always show up.

Another type of newer on-site element you should take care of is called the OpenGraph. This is a series of tags that were invented especially for social media. One in particular is very important, and it's the OG:IMAGE tag. This is the image that shows up by default when someone shares your post on social media. For example, let's say you add content to your site about a specific subject and you add several images as well. How do you know which image is going to appear next to your page when this content gets shared on Facebook or Google Plus?

The answer is that if you do not have the correct tag, you won't know. The social network will pick one at random. Worse, it may pick an image that is on that page but unrelated to the content. Before I started using OpenGraph tags, Facebook had the nasty habit of picking the Copyright image, or the TideArt logo, instead of the

image I added with the content of the shared page. This is what a proper OG:IMAGE tag looks like:

```
<meta property="og:image" content="http://tideart.com/files/ipad.jpg"/>
```

If you use a modern CMS then it may handle all of those tags for you, but if not, you should make sure that you add them yourself. Now that you're done with on-site SEO, you need to worry about off-site. The first thing to do is go to Google and search for *Google webmaster* so that you can access the webmaster's portal. This is a page Google provides where you can make sure your site is getting indexed by the search engine. If it isn't, then you can submit it yourself. You can also submit a sitemap, which is recommended if you have a lot of pages on your site.

10. Mobile presence (responsive design vs mobile site)

These days a mobile presence is essential. Some stats show that mobile web users are growing faster than desktop users. In places like Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia, there are a lot of people who get a web-capable smartphone before they even own a desktop or notebook. Not only are they accessing the web mostly through a mobile browser, but that is the first and only way they can access it.

What this means is that you need a mobile site. Right now there are two popular ways to make a mobile site. The old way, and what I implemented on TideArt, was to detect the *user agent* of every user and figure out whether they are on a mobile browser or not. Every browser sends a string of text to web sites describing

themselves, and you can parse that text to figure out if they are on a mobile browser. This has the advantage of being able to provide a completely different site, optimized for mobiles. The disadvantage however is that because there are hundreds of mobile platforms, it's easy to miss some.

Just as an example, this is the PHP code I use on TideArt:

```
$useragents = array('Mobile', 'Blazer', 'iPhone', 'Android', 'Palm', 'Handspring',  
'Nokia', 'Kyocera', 'Samsung', 'Motorola', 'Smartphone', 'Windows CE',  
'Blackberry', 'WAP', 'SonyEricsson', 'PlayStation Portable', 'LG', 'MMP', 'OPWV',  
'Symbian', 'EPOC');  
$mobile = 0;  
foreach ($useragents as $useragents )  
{  
    if(strstr($_SERVER['HTTP_USER_AGENT'], $useragents)) $mobile = 1;  
}
```

After that, you can simply present a different CSS file, or a whole other site, as you wish. There is another way to handle mobile sites, one that is newer and is becoming much more popular, called *responsive design*. With this method, instead of trying to detect the user agent, you detect the resolution of the screen. Then, in your CSS file, you create a section for large screens, and one for small screens. You can even make one for medium sized screens as well, like tablets.

This has the advantage of always being right, and not mistaking a mobile browser

for a desktop one. However, it can only help you change CSS components, not actual page components, so the changes you can make between desktop and mobile are more limited. If I had to suggest one way or the other however, I would say go with responsive design.

This is an example of the code you would use in your CSS template to enable responsive design:

```
// Add your desktop entries here  
@media (max-width: 480px)  
{  
// Add your mobile entries here  
}
```

Remember that the point of having a mobile site is so that people with a mobile browser can use your site effectively. This means having bigger font types, having buttons being usable on a touch screen, and presenting the information in a way that is easy to see. Remove any extra content or features that would clutter the interface. Nothing is worse than going to a site on a small screen where you need to constantly pinch and zoom in order to see the content.

11. Creating a social presence

By now you probably know the importance of adding social plugins to your site in order to allow your viewers to share content. But this doesn't mean you shouldn't have your own presence on these social networks. As a news site, reaching a bigger

audience and keeping them constantly updated is crucial for you. Since you will likely have constantly updated content, you need to get them to subscribe to your site on whichever platform they use.

The first thing you need to make sure is that your site supports RSS. This is a simple protocol where people can subscribe using Google Reader or any other RSS client using something called a feed. Fortunately, most content management systems create RSS feeds automatically, but if yours does not, then you should take care of that. Feeds are not used as much as before, but for a news site, it is especially important that you support RSS.

Then, make sure you create a presence on all of the social networks. This means creating a Facebook page, a Twitter account and possibly even a Google Plus page. Both Facebook and Twitter are crucial, and Google Plus is slowly becoming important as well. Then, you can start bringing people to those pages. The way to add likes, followers or shares is through marketing and PR, and we'll talk about that in other chapters, but one thing to remember is that social networks are not like typical ads.

A lot of people go to social networks in order to keep up to date on their friends and family. Typically, news and information can fit nicely in this category, so when you start a news site, having a heavy media presence is important. For TideArt, I started by creating my pages on the various social media and made sure they were branded accordingly, and then I spread the word to friends and also to other pages that touch the same subject. I quickly managed to get a small following.

Once that social media presence is established however, you also need to link that back to your site. All the social networks offer widgets that you should take advantage of to place on your site. This way people can follow you on Facebook or Twitter right from your home page, which also helps gather followers. Social media is very important for your site and keeping a constant presence is crucial as well.

Most CMS allow you to automatically post to your social presence as well. Personally, I used the Twitter and Facebook API to make it so when I add a new post on TideArt, they automatically get sent to those networks as well. That way I don't have to think about manually going out and posting that content every time. Having regular posts on your social presence is important to keep people up to date.

However make sure not to flood them with content. While regular updates are needed, you don't want people to unsubscribe. Another important thing to keep in mind is to stay focused. Your site caters to a specific niche, and you don't want to start posting items that are unrelated.

12. Creating a mailing list

For many web site owners, the concept of a mailing list may seem foreign, or as something that doesn't appear all that important. But anyone who has done some Internet marketing will tell you that a mailing list is very important, perhaps even more important than any other type of marketing you can do, and there are good

reasons for that.

Even if over the years, many products like IM and chat have claimed to be the next big thing since email, the fact remains that email was and still is the number one way for people to talk to each other. It's also the number one way to reach your viewers. You simply can't rely on them to bookmark your site and come back constantly. Sending emails is a very important way to remind them that you're around.

This is why pretty much every company with a web presence uses a mailing list, and why these little forms with the text *Subscribe to our mailing list!* are shown so prominently on so many sites. These lists work. You could use those emails simply to automatically send weekly summaries of what content you posted on the site, or to announce contests, new features, events, and so on.

The first thing you need to do is create a simple form on your site so people can enter their email. The text I picked personally is *Receive the latest news to your inbox* but there are many ways to suggest people subscribe to your list. A good way is to offer them something, such as a free ebook to anyone who subscribes.

Once you have people subscribing, there are two ways to handle these email addresses. The most common and comprehensive way is to use a service like MailChimp which will allow you to manage emails, create newsletters, mailing services, even link your RSS feed to that list. It can be somewhat complex and time consuming to create all of the forms and templates for this, but if you manage to

get enough people to sign up, you end up with a very valuable mailing list.

The other way is to use a service like BlogTottr which will do all the hard work for you and automatically forward your new posts to your subscribers any time you update your RSS feed. This is much less customizable, but you can set it up very quickly and then forget about it.

Right now on TideArt I'm using the second method because all I have to send are automatic updates. However I have plans to offer more substantial emails and at that point MailChimp will probably be my service of choice. After investigating the various service offerings, they seem to be the cheapest and most powerful one out there.

13. Ways to reach out

As a news site, your number one priority is reaching your audience. Obviously, the site itself is your main vehicle to do that, but there are many other ways as well, things you can do to enhance what your web site is providing, and help you reach a larger audience. I'll talk about a couple of things you can do and whether I experimented with that on TideArt.

While your site may have a mobile version, and it really should because of the reasons already mentioned, you may also want to create an app. A lot of large sites create their own apps, especially newspapers and other news sources. There are many who complain that apps should not be made to simply replicate a browser's behavior, and should instead have more features. There is a good point to that,

unfortunately users of iOS and Android have become used to using individual apps. If your site becomes popular enough, you may want to create a native app.

The easiest way to create an app is by using one of the many online services that offer this solution. I personally tried Andromo, but there are many sites out there and they all work the same way. Basically, you open an account, then through a web interface, you can design your app. This only works for basic things like information pages, web pages, videos, image galleries, and so on. You do not need nor get access to coding in those apps.

Once you have your app ready, and for a simple native app that accesses and displays your web site, it can take just a few minutes to do so, then the online service will offer you compile what you created into an app for you to upload to the Android and Apple marketplaces. This usually costs money, but may be worth it in the long run. Otherwise, if you want complete control over your app, you may want to try PhoneGap which is a developer platform you can download and then create your app with.

The main benefit from an app as far as you're concerned is the fact that you can send push notifications when you have new content on your site. The whole point of these additional methods is to get your viewers to keep coming back. Another way to do that is with newsletters. I already talked about building a mailing list, but having a regular newsletter you can send to those people is great. You can send it every Friday, and then your users will expect it.

For TideArt, one thing I thought about was creating a magazine. Since I already cover art, it seemed to make sense to publish a magazine as well with some of the art featured on the site, along with news and features. What I quickly learned is that print magazines cost a lot of money. If you've ever explored the possibility of self-publishing books, you may know about services like Lulu which offer you to print books for you and send them to potential buyers. The problem with magazines is that the one place publishers make the most money is in physical stores.

You know when people go to the cashier, the last rack right next to the exit is usually filled with magazines. This is true for supermarkets and many other types of stores. In order to get this kind of exposure, you need an actual publisher. So I decided against making the jump for TideArt, and I would suggest you do not consider this route until you already have a large viewership.

Finally, make yourself a list of places where you can reach out and market your content on a regular basis. For your site to grow, you need to bring in new viewers. You can always spend money if you have a marketing budget and buy Google AdWords, or Facebook ads. But even without a marketing budget, there are many places where you can share your content, including forums, blogs, Facebook groups, and so on.

The important thing is to always be mindful of where you post your links, so that you do not come out as spamming. Always stick to sites that cover a similar niche, and repeat that process on a regular basis.

14. Dealing with copyrights

Any blogger or site owner who posts regular content has to deal with getting images and other rich media to help the text that they create. When you do that, you need to be careful about copyrights. There are a few things to know about images and other content that you get from the web to add to your own site, especially if you wish to run a news site.

The main concept behind copyright is that anything which is created and has not explicitly been declared as public domain or free to use, is automatically copyrighted by whoever created it. This means you can't go to random sites and find images to use with your content. However, there are a few exceptions you can use.

The first way is to buy content. Many large sites maintain accounts at iStockPhoto or one of the many other stock imagery sites. These sites make it easy and convenient for you to buy images to use along with your content. They usually sell points and then you can spend those points on individual images, depending on the resolution you need.

Then there's something called fair use. Basically, you can use part of copyrighted content without paying for it as long as it falls into one of several very specific categories. Fortunately for us, news reporting is one such category. This is what allows a news report to show Coca Cola's logo next to an articles about their company without having to pay them money for using the image. Note however that it has to be a small part, like a logo or single image, and it has to be for content

that directly talks about their product. You can't just take a photograph of IBM's building then use it for an article talking about one of their competitors.

The same applies for quotes. If a company posts a blog entry and you deem that this is worth a new post on your site, because you cover that niche, then you are allowed to take a small portion of their post and use it in a quote, without the need to pay them. Also one very useful tip is that anything created by the US federal government or one of its agencies is automatically in the public domain, and can be used for any purpose.

Videos work differently because more often than not, you will be embedding videos from sites like YouTube or Vimeo. Here, you are allowed to embed any video you want for any purpose. The reason is that this is a feature that YouTube, Vimeo and other sites provide for you. Anyone who uploads a video to these sites agrees to terms that say people like you and me can do that.

Of course, these are all just general guidelines. To have the real legal answer about any specific copyright issue you should consult with a legal expert. These are simply issues I've come up against while running TideArt.

15. Updating content

So now that you know how to create a site, maintain your social presence, and do some basic marketing, let's talk a bit about updating your site with new content. One of the early struggles that I had with TideArt is deciding what to cover exactly. News is everywhere, and there are new things happening all the time. At first I was

alone updating the site, and I needed to keep the number of new articles under control.

My main way to find news is by using Google Reader. What I did early on is take many feeds from hundreds of places and gather them on Google Reader. This includes generic news sites like CNN, BBC, Reuters and so on, along with specialized sites already existing in my niche, art. Then I added the blogs and press pages for any company that operates in the same niche. In my case this meant Adobe, Autodesk, and so on. Finally, any site that could potentially have features or content that could be of interest to viewers of my site, like art galleries.

This meant that I suddenly had a lot of potential news items hitting my screen every day. At first, I would do a dozen posts almost every day, but at some point I realized a lot of the items I would add had no real value. For example, a lot of sites out there post tutorials about digital art. There are sites specialized in doing that, and this isn't what TideArt is about. So I decided to stop adding posts linking to those tutorials. The first reason is that people who really care about that content already knew about these other sites, and the whole point of a post like that would be to send the viewer to another site, which is not exactly good business.

So I had to learn to balance the amount of content I would add to TideArt. This is something you have to decide for yourself and there is no right answer. Usually, more content is better, but you have to be careful not to flood your viewers with posts. Check out sites in your niche and how much content they post. There are many philosophies about this. For example, I once counted that The Verge, a

popular tech news site, posts around 50 stories every single day. Other sites posts just one or two. It depends on how many writers they have, what they cover, and what their audience expects.

The most important thing really is that you post regularly. This is the most crucial part, because you don't want people to forget about your site. You want them to keep coming back. Whether you post ten stories a day or ten per week, you want to be consistent. If you skip a single week you may find that your traffic will go down, and the people who left will not come back. TideArt was silent for about a month during the two years in operation and suffered exactly this phenomenon.

16. Public relations

The main way most sites will typically get exposure and bring in traffic is through ads or word of mouth. These are things that either cost money or time, and which you as the site owner will have to do yourself, until you get a high enough income to hire marketing people. But as a news site, there are other ways you can use to get the word out.

Marketing is just one of two ways you have to grow your site. The other is through PR. When a company releases a press release, and then news media take it and write articles about them, that's Public Relations (PR), and that is very valuable. If you happen to know someone in your niche which already has an audience and you manage to get them to mention your site, that also is PR, and can be more effective than a marketing campaign, at a fraction of the cost.

Try to find people who already have an audience, either because they are well known in your niche market, or because they have a podcast or radio show about the same subject, and reach out to them. Try to get them to cover your site, or some features that you introduced. If you write an interesting feature article, then you may want to send them an email and just see if they will talk about it to their own audience. The most difficult thing here is to not sound like you're kissing ass or spamming.

In the case of TideArt I utilize two ways to do PR. First, every week I showcase artists in the site's *Showcases* section. I reach out to artists on DeviantART, CGSociety or any other digital art community, and ask them if they would like to be featured. This gives them free exposure, and in return they may talk to their fans about the fact that their art was showcased. It's a win-win situation.

I also try to do regular interviews with people in the industry, either companies that produce tools for artists, or even artists themselves. Again, it can be an easy way to get quality content for your site, and is useful PR since they in turn may advertise the fact that they were interviewed on your site.

As you can see, PR can bring in useful, high quality content, and give you free advertising all at once, if you know how to take advantage of it. This does not replace marketing, but it can be a useful addition.

17. Making money with ads

So far we've mostly talked about building the site itself along with bringing in

traffic. This is what you need to concentrate on at first and you should take the necessary amount of time to make sure your content is at a high enough level, and you have enough traffic coming in. Then, you can start worrying about making money.

Even though you may genuinely love the subject matter that your news site is covering, let's face it, no one can do a time consuming, laborious job for very long without getting paid. We all have bills to pay off and we all need to bring in a solid income. So you do need to find ways to bring in some revenue from the site.

The simplest and most obvious way to make money from online content is with ads. Google AdSense is the single most popular ad network out there. The reason is that they are the biggest and they thus offer the best rates. The way it works is simple. You register for an account, then select which sizes of ads you want. They have a lot of dimensions available and you simply pick a size that fits with your template.

Once you add the code that they provide to your site, then the ad network will automatically scan your content, and start displaying ads that are relevant to that content in the ad window. This is all done automatically, and the ads come in from advertisers who pay Google in order to have their ads shown. Every time one of your viewer clicks on an ad, you get paid. Usually these amounts are not high, they could be anywhere from \$0.01 to \$0.30 on average, but some niches pay more.

As you can see, the goal in order to make money is to have more traffic, and for

that traffic to click on ads. For that to happen, you need to make sure ads are well positioned on your site. You don't want to overshadow your own content, but you also need those ads to be in prominent locations. Finding the optimum location for your ads is a real art and requires a lot of testing and practice. I won't go into details on how to optimize AdSense ads since there are whole books on the subject, but you should keep iterating on your designs, see what works best for you.

Another way to make money is through affiliate marketing. Unlike AdSense which is a Pay Per Click (PPC) model, where you get paid whenever someone clicks on an ad, most affiliates get paid when someone makes a purchase, so they use a Pay Per Action (PPA) model. You can go to a site like ClickBank and find a long list of products that you can advertise on your own site. Anytime someone clicks on the ad for that product, and they buy the product or service, you get a percentage of the sale.

The best way to do this is to go to companies that are already operating in your niche market. For example, TideArt is a site about digital art, and so I went to Lynda which is a company that offers online tutorials about digital art software like Adobe Photoshop. Most affiliate products will give you a much higher share, like 20-30%. So if the product you advertise is a \$50 monthly membership, if a single of your users clicks on the ad and buys the membership, you may get \$15.

Tracking all of this can be complex, and you should really use an analytics software such as Google Analytics. This will help you keep track of your traffic numbers, and then you can compare that with your conversion rates. Typically, a

good ad placement will see a conversion rate of around 2-9%, depending on the market you are in.

18. Hiring contributors

When you start your site, you most likely will be alone needing to do everything, from design to marketing and content updates. But at some point, assuming that the site is successful, you may start thinking about getting some more people to help you. Getting contributors is a major step you may need to take, and there are a few things to keep in mind before you make the jump.

First, you need to understand the kind of workload that this site will involve. A typical large scale news site has a full crew behind it which provides support and constant content updates. A typical news room may have a dozen reporters, technicians, and management staff. There are people constantly scanning Twitter, major news networks, and getting tips from the public about current events. If you're starting into this adventure alone, then you obviously do not have all of those resources, so you need to manage your time effectively.

Studies have been done that show most people tend to browse the web around noon and around 6 PM. This corresponds with their midday lunch and the end of the work day, which should not be a surprise. It also means that the times which are most useful to post new content would be just before then. So if you're working on the site by yourself, you may want to concentrate your work around these time periods. However, studies also show that it is far better to spread your updates all day long than to post everything at once. Some people even use automatic delayed

posting scripts so that their content gets put up all day long.

But if you really want to create a platform that will be useful for a lot of people, you may want to get more than one voice on your site. The first way to do that is trying to get volunteers. People will become volunteer contributors if they think it will be useful for themselves and for others. Right now TideArt is at this stage and has a few unpaid contributors. You can easily find such workers by posting ads on Craigslist or other forums, and offer exposure to them in exchange for their writing skills. It's important not to expect too much from volunteer contributors. After all, you aren't paying them, so you can't expect them to submit a lot of posts.

The second way to get contributors is to offer commissions based on ad revenue. A lot of sites hire writers and then give them around 30% of the ad revenue that their particular posts bring in. This can be useful because it's in their interest to advertise their own posts, so you will get some marketing along with it. You do however need to have a system in place that will track and report exact numbers so you know how much to pay them.

Finally, most major news sites pay writers by the article, anywhere between \$15 and \$200, depending on the niche and the budget of the company. This is usually something you will be able to consider only once your site is bringing constant income. One last note is to make sure you get familiar with taxing laws. You will want to make any freelancers sign a tax form so that you know whether or not to keep taxes from them.

19. More ways of making money

If you get cash starved, or you simply want to get a bigger income amount from your growing site, you may want to investigate more avenues to bring in profits. Ads are the most obvious ways, but there are others. Many large news sites have been exploring the concept of a paywall in the last couple of years. The New York Times for example limits the amount of articles you can read per day if you do not subscribe.

As a small or medium site, it would be difficult to adopt a paywall unless you have really compelling content. News is a commodity these days, and finding out what happened at a specific event is very easy with the Internet. If you cannot access one site, there are dozens more willing to tell the information for free. The only way a paywall can work is if you have unique content that people really want to read.

A better model is to have a premium membership that gives special benefits. For example, one project that is currently in development with TideArt is the concept of profile pages. By providing a service to users, something that is related to the niche market you cover, you can get a small percentage of your viewers to pay money. The trick of course is finding out which services you can offer, and how much people are willing to pay.

Another avenue to make money is sponsored posts. As your site grows, you may be approached by companies interested in reaching your audience who will offer to pay you if you write a post about their company or product. This is a good way to

make some extra cash, but you need to be careful. In the news business, reputation is very important. If your viewers think you don't have integrity, they will go elsewhere. Make sure that any paid post is identified clearly. The same applies for reviews of products you get for free. If a company sends you a product for you to review then you should disclose it.

As your site becomes more known you will likely start getting these kinds of emails, especially if you go to conventions and other networking events in your niche. People will hand you stuff in the hope that you will write nice things about them, but you always have to be careful about appearances. Networking events are great places for you to get connections and exclusive access, but you must always maintain an appearance of neutrality.

20. Long term vision

TideArt has been running for around two years now. It started as a brand new site that was completely unknown and is now a portal which provides news and information for fans of digital art around the world. At some point, you have to come to a conclusion about whether or not the site is a success, and if it's worth continuing. Smart entrepreneurs say that the hardest task of any business owner is to realize when their business is not going to make it and then kill it.

Success is obviously a word that can mean many things. Why are you starting a news site in the first place? Is it to provide useful information, bring people together, fill a need in the industry? Is it to get a residual income, or a full time job? Is it to get a buyout offer? All of these are potential successes, and it's up to

you to decide what you are after.

For me, TideArt is a success because it became what I envisioned, and because while I always want more people to come to the site, the traffic numbers are high enough to feel like the site is playing its role. Is it a financial success? Right now it isn't. If I had to count the number of hours I and my contributors put in on maintaining and updating the site, the revenue that comes in does not even pay a minimum salary. But it's up to each of us to decide how high is successful enough.

Finally a buyout is something a lot of entrepreneurs hope for these days. This is the concept that you will start your business, grow, and at some point a large company will come in and offer to buy you out for a large amount of cash. This happens, but it is very rare. I think it's foolish to start a business this way, because you never get the same attachment to it if you expect to sell it down the road.

Now of course it's up to you to act. Hopefully by learning from my example you now have a better idea of what's involved in running a small or medium news site, the challenges, the marketing, content, and every facet of the business. Should you follow my example, or are there things you should change for your own project, only you can decide.