

These services are free at the moment, and many people have written to thank us for them. I see the forums as a good focal point for the industry and a great way for people to share ideas.

Audri: What do you think are the three key elements that make your site successful?

Steve: I think that frequency of hearing from us is a key element. Not daily, but on the other hand not every 3 months. I think I have a good balance — about every 4 days or so.

And of course content. Our newsletters have lots of useful information and dozens and dozens of links to previous newsletters and sales letters. So our subscribers know they'll always get a lot of useful stuff.

I mentioned previously about timely response to email and inquiries. I attempt to answer the special ones within 24 hours — even if it is to say I am working on it. All the standard emails are answered daily by my secretary and we send out a mail-merge personalized email to every new subscriber. We do this 2 or 3 times per week so no one is ever more than 72 hours away from a first letter.



Audri: That's great. Do you have any suggestions for how other businesses can apply what you've done to their own Web sites — even though they are selling very different products and services?

Steve: Attention to clients is crucial. Answer them quickly and as fully as possible, but sort out the people who want everything for nothing from those who are really interested. We use a survey and questionnaire on reply letters — especially for people who are starting out in the farming area, or those who want very detailed quotations.

If they keep coming back without specifying what they want, we ask them politely

to complete the survey. If they decline, we tell them that to prepare a quotation or an estimate or whatever, requires a non-refundable deposit of \$250, deductible from their first order. Nobody has time to spend their efforts on non-qualified buyers.

We receive anywhere from 150 to 200 direct emails every day, so the sifting and sorting has to be done quickly.

Don't be afraid to say no to non-prospects and always ask for the money with the order.

Audri: Good points. You've told me you're on track to do \$500,000 this year in revenue. That's very impressive. Can you tell us a little about how you make money?

Steve: Ostriches On Line does not have one single profit center that makes this a viable operation. We have lots of little profit centers that make up the whole business.

Profit margins vary. Our finished products have the highest margins. The book I bought outright costs me \$23 each and we've sold lots of them for \$75 each.

The Business Plan is a \$95 charge that has virtually no cost now. I wrote it and I update it every so often.

Ostrich meat profits vary from 50% for retail down to about 18% to distributors and brokers. Consultancy is a straight repayment for my time or the time of the people I work with to provide the service.

Audri: Sort of like not having all your eggs in one basket, eh Steve? <g>

Steve: Right, Audri! <g>

Audri: OK. Now let's move on to attracting people to your Web site. What do you think have been the three most important things you've done to promote your site?

