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~ Counting the Cost Ezine ~  
Everyday Abundant Living at Its Best

May 1, 2009 issue  
Volume 9, Issue 17

Ideas, insights and inspirations for living each day to the fullest.

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"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."  
John 10:10

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~ Letter from the Editor ~

Dear Friends,

I know many of you are probably sick of hearing about Disney by now, but I wanted to report that we had a wonderful time on our trip. We only had one day of rain while we were there, which made for a soggy day but much shorter lines. The other days were sunny and warm, but not at all hot. It was a delightfully restful time for all of us.

One of the best things for my eight-year-old (and me, too!) was trading pins with Disney "cast members" (employees). Disney rules say that cast members must trade pins with anyone who asks to trade. Lydia had a ball swapping pins with so many different people. By the end of the week, I had gotten into the fun, too. I had my own lanyard and was trading pins like a pro. It was addictive! I only wish we had gotten our pins and lanyards off eBay before we arrived in Orlando. My sweet in-laws treated us to many of our meals, so part of the money that had been budgeted for meals ended up being used for pin paraphernalia. Fun, fun!

Blessings,

Nancy  
<mailto:nancy@countingthecost.com>

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**Feature Article:**

**How to Spring Clean Your Website**

by Terri Seymour, [www.SeymourProducts.com](http://www.SeymourProducts.com)

Spring is a wonderful time of year but it might not be so wonderful for your online business. The weather is getting nicer and people are spending more time outside, away from their computers. One way to get more people to come to your website is to do some spring cleaning and I don't mean your house! Our websites can get stale and outdated if we do not clean them up periodically.

There are lots of things you can do to freshen up your site and bring new life and new customers to your online business.

1. Add a new section filled with resources, information and maybe even some special deals for your customers. Use relevant keywords to improve your ranking. For example: if you own a home decor business, offer decorating tips and advice. Show people how to decorate on a budget or how to redecorate with things they already own. By providing information and resources along with your products, you are giving people a reason to keep coming back. This is how you build trust with your visitors and get more sales.
2. Remove all dead links, outdated information and products. Nothing is worse than going to a site and finding links that don't work or information and/or products that are no longer useable or helpful. Go through all the links on your site and freshen up the content to offer up to date information!
3. Give your homepage a facelift by adding new graphics, text, etc. Redo your banner and give it some new life. Take out the old graphics and add some fresh new images. Research your keywords and revamp your text with some effective keywords. Write a new introduction to your site detailing

all your new additions.

4. If you haven't yet tried blogging, read up blogging and zap some life into your site. Some free blogging sites are Blogger and WordPress. Blogging is a great way to improve your search engine ranking while expanding your network.

5. Update your product line. Add some fresh new products and offer the old products at clearance prices. Have a Spring Sale and liven up your sales! Keep those customers coming back for more!

6. Add a "What's New" page so you can let everyone know about all your updates now and in the future. This feature could get more people to return to your site to see what's new.

7. Research the colors used on your site. You may find changing the colors of your site can bring a whole new life to your business.

8. Put a small survey on your site. Ask your visitors what they would like to see and what type of products they are looking for. Getting the information straight from the horse's mouth could do your business a lot of good. Offer your visitors a small gift for answering the questions on the survey.

9. Renew your goals! Make new goals and write out a new business plan. Learn from your experiences, good and bad, and improve your plan for success.

Spring is a time of renewal, revitalization and re-energizing. Our online businesses are no exception.

About the Author:

Terri Seymour (also known as "The eBook Lady") has over ten years online experience and has helped many people start their own business. Visit her site at

<http://www.seymourproducts.com> for resources, \$1 resell ebooks and software, free tutorials, affiliate programs, free ezine, and free business ebook with Master Resell Rights. <http://www.seymourproducts.com/free.shtml>

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Readers' Poll Question:  
What Will They Say about You?

Last month I had the privilege of doing something I had never done before: delivering the eulogy at a funeral service. I did not know the deceased personally, but am very close to her daughter, who asked me over a year ago if I would speak at her mother's memorial service when the time came. Preparing for the service affected me in ways I did not expect. During the weeks before her death, I found myself not only thinking about what I would say at Mrs. Garrett's funeral, but also thinking about what I would want people to say someday at my funeral.

Those ruminations inspired our last Readers' Poll question which asked, "What would you like people to say about you at your funeral? How do you want to be remembered by those who knew and loved you?" Here are just a few of the responses we received:

"More than anything I want them to say that I was a person who couldn't stop speaking about the Lord Jesus and the way of salvation through Him. That is my heart's desire, but I find myself getting caught up in the busyness of daily life caring for my family and home. Just in case I may have overlooked a family member or friend, I am planning to include a last sharing of the Gospel moment at my funeral. It is important for me to get my funeral planning done because this means so much to me. It's something that is currently on my To Do list." ~ Julie

"I would like for people to say she fought a good fight and finished the race serving Jesus our Lord and Savior and she slid into the grave as if it were home plate saying, 'Wow, what a ride!'..." ~ Linda

"I would like people to say something along the lines of this: Although not perfect or without fault, I did my best to be kind, helped others without seeking recognition, enjoyed life to its fullest, loved to laugh, never lost my inner child, and used my God-given talents to the best of my ability." ~ Liz

"Wow, what a timely thought. We just found out a friend has been diagnosed with inoperable pancreatic cancer. He's lived his Christian life with great integrity. I know his

neighbors, friends and family respect and love him for it, and when opportunity comes will say as much. Much like Barnabas, he's been an encourager and lifter of burdens. I hope as much can be said of us as we live our lives 'Corum Deo' ('in the presence of God')." ~ Anonymous

"I had to share an idea my daughter came up with. I am an artist who does a few shows a year and her idea was when I die they would set up my 'booth' at the funeral and anyone who wanted to take a piece of art was welcome to have it. A great way to keep them from having too much of my stuff around and also to bless others (I hope, anyway!). This could be done with any collection that someone may have had that the heirs aren't interested in keeping. It could also create a huge cat fight, but my hope would be a nice memento for folks to remember me by." ~ Heather

"My dad came from a poor, working-class family that had plenty of problems. He went to college on the GI Bill after he finished his stint in the Air Force -- he became a mechanical engineer and the first person in his family to get a college degree. He went on to become the youngest plant manager ever in the Fortune 500 company where he worked...He became a senior vice president and was starting to think about retiring when he died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2003 at the age of 54. Many, many people came to my father's wake and funeral and shared wonderful stories about him, how he was so funny and smart, so dedicated and very principled. But one lady shared the most special memory. She came very early the first day of his wake, before it officially started at 5:00. No one but my mother and we kids were there yet. The lady introduced herself to us and said she was a security guard in my dad's office building -- a huge building in downtown Chicago where thousands of people worked. She said she had just gotten off work and taken the bus to the funeral home (a bus ride of more than an hour in rush-hour traffic) and she couldn't stay long. But she wanted to meet my mother and tell her that of all the people who worked in that building, my father was the only one who learned her name and greeted her by name every day. Most people walked by her every day without seeing her at all. My dad's company flew their company flag at half-mast for a day to honor my dad after he died, but what that lady said to us was the biggest tribute he got. I want to live my life so that someone says something like that about me to my children at my funeral." ~ Catherine in Minnesota

Editor's Note: While we are on the topic of death and funerals, here is a something one of my friends in Memphis recently shared:

"Nancy, I don't know if this will be appropriate for your newsletter but thought I'd pass it along just in case. I recently made arrangements to give my body to science through Genesis ([www.genesislegacy.org](http://www.genesislegacy.org)). They use your body for doctors to practice surgery. I toured the facility and was very impressed. They were doing knee surgery the day I



"Talk It Out" Question:

What to Do with Outgrown Kids' Clothes

By now most of you have probably heard of Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA). This law went into effect in February and was designed to limit the sale of children's items containing unsafe levels of lead or certain phthalates. Apparently as a result of this new law, one of our readers is having trouble finding places to take her children's clothes to sell on consignment. Janise wrote:

"I have a question about shopping for kids clothes at consignment stores. Since the new law went into effect in February banning the sale of anything (toys or clothes) for kids under 12 that contains lead or phthalates, I can't find any consignment stores in our area that will take or sell children's clothes. I hadn't used consignment stores before because we mostly used hand-me-downs, but my daughter had some really nice winter clothes that she'd grown out of. They were stylish enough that it didn't seem wise to keep them for future use, so I thought I'd try consigning them since they were in good condition. Now I can't find anyone willing to take them. Are other people finding this, too? What do we do with clothes and toys too good to throw away? I'm not opposed to handing them down to someone else, but in my circles, I've got the youngest child and don't readily know others I can pass clothes on to." ~ Janise

So Janise's question was really two-fold. First, are any of you finding it harder to consign since the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act went into effect? Also, if you can't sell your clothes on consignment, what are some other options? My assumption was that Janise knew she could always take the clothes to a thrift shop, but was looking for other options. Here are some of the responses we received:

"I'd suggest Janise offer her clothing on Craigslist or Freecycle in her area. There are MANY people (even in rural areas) that 'will drive for a bargain.' Not knowing her lifestyle, are there any other moms (church, school, social events) that she can invite for a clothing exchange?...The next best thing would be to donate to a needy organization. Even the Red Cross takes donations in some cities to help the victims of fire, flood, or catastrophe. P.S. The churches in my rural Tennessee area that do consignment sales generously give back 70% of the proceeds to the seller vs. some consignment shops that only offer you 30% -- check the fees before you take your clothes in!" ~ Denise

"PLEASE use Freecycle.org!" ~ Marsha

"You could post the clothes on Zwaggle.com. This site allows you to give and receive kids' stuff, including clothes and toys. You accumulate points for each item given, and later you can use those points to earn items that other people have posted. Or you could offer them on Freecycle to anyone

who needs them." ~ Angela

Thanks to all of our readers who took time to respond. If you'd like to read more of the responses we received for this question, check out our "What to Do with Outgrown Kids' Clothes" page on the Counting the Cost website at <http://www.countingthecost.com/tio/kidsclothes.htm>.

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Our Newest "Talk It Out" Question:  
Hard Water Blues

How can a family keep its laundry clean and fresh when the area's water supply won't cooperate? That was the question one of our readers recently submitted. Dawn wrote:

"You may have covered this before, but I have not seen anyone address laundering with hard water. I live in Alaska in an area where the water is very hard and smelly. We do have a salt system that helps with the discoloration and smell. However, I cannot seem to get my clothes to smell fresh nor remain soft - especially towels. Any help with this would be greatly appreciated." ~ Dawn

Have you had to deal with this problem, too? What solutions worked for you? Send your suggestions for Dawn to us at: <mailto:nancy@countingthecost.com?subject=Hard Water>  
Many of the responses we receive will appear in the next issue of the newsletter and on our website.

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Creative Frugality Explored:  
Organizing Your Purse

One of the ways that I keep my life simple is to carry a small purse. I don't feel the need to be a "boy scout": someone who is prepared for every possible situation by carrying a ton of stuff in her purse. I know a small purse can contain all my basic necessities. That way, if the purse I am carrying begins to get crowded, I know it's time to declutter my purse!

Our last Creative Frugality question dealt with organization, specifically organizing your handbag. The question asked, "Please share your creatively frugal methods for keeping your purse organized. How do you balance having everything you need with not having so much that you can't find anything when you need it?" Here are some of the responses we received:

"I do a few things:

1. I have multiple purses, and I switch between them regularly. This forces me to clean out anything that doesn't belong in them each time. I certainly won't put used tissues or crumpled receipts into the 'new' purse! I have my 'mommy purse' with room for my daughter's things, I have a backpack purse good for when I'll be doing a lot of walking, I have my turquoise purse and my red purse which only get used with appropriate outfits, I have my 'standard' black purse... If I haven't used one of my purses in a year, I give it away, so that I don't have a whole closet of clutter purses, just those that I use.
2. Sometimes I put a small purse into a larger bag. The purse has my usual items -- wallet, keys, phone, etc. -- but the larger bag might have snacks and water bottles and a library book etc. If I am running errands, I bring the purse with me, but if I'm going to be out and about for a while and need more stuff I'll bring the purse inside the bigger bag.
3. I carry a smaller purse most of the time. There is no chance for it to get too cluttered; it fits just what I need.
4. I have one pocket just for receipts; otherwise they get lost and rumbled." ~ Kristina

"My organizing strategy starts when I am buying a purse. First, it has to be the right size, not tiny and not gigantic. Second, it has to have at least one inner pocket, zipped. This is where I keep my cash and coins. It is helpful if it has at least one more pocket to separate a few things I always carry: a lipstick, Chapstick, Tic-tacs. Then I also carry a small mirror in case one of my contacts falls out. I also carry a tape measure, which comes in handy and a small folding scissor. Then I throw in my wallet, which holds my checkbook, ID and cards, in the middle area. I found the perfect purse at my last shopping trip at a thrift store: brand new [still had tags] leather, perfect amount of pockets/pouches: \$5.99. It was a bit pricey for me [I like to pay \$2-\$4] but I splurged." ~ Shaunna

"I like to keep items in make-up bags. I found a cheap set of clear ones in different sizes once at a dollar store and containerized everything from tissues to lip stick, gum, coupons, etc. They have worn out and now I have them in varying colors and sizes in my purse. This also eases the process of changing purses." ~ Rena

"I couldn't survive without a zip-top bag in my purse. I store my 'Tide Stain Pen' (great for when husband gets spaghetti sauce on him in restaurant), click pen, small notepad for tracking my money spent, wet wipe, tube of lipstick, small packet of headache med for hubby (he gets migraines). I couldn't live without this. It helps keep my purse organized and I don't have to go fishing in the bottom of my purse. Sometimes I will even carry a toothbrush and small tube of toothpaste in it." ~ Jill

"During back-to-school season, I buy a new pencil holder case that usually is on sale (the kind that is made out of cloth with a zipper). These holders are priced significantly less than same-volume make-up cases. Additionally, I like the longer profile because it seems most of what goes into it is longer in length rather than round (such as lipsticks, lip liner pencil, small tube of foundation, breath mints, comb). I get something really loud in color so I can look into my purse and find it quickly." ~ Marie

Editor's Note: If you are even remotely interested in this topic, I suggest you visit the page where all the responses are posted (<http://www.countingthecost.com/cf/cf161.htm>). There were several that were very good and carefully detailed, but too long to post here. Good reading!

Thanks to all of our readers who took time to respond to this question. If you'd like to look through previous discussion questions, visit the "Creative Frugality" page at: <http://www.countingthecost.com/cf/creativefrugality.htm>

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Our Newest Creative Frugality Topic:  
Creative Gardening

It's that time of year. Gardening enthusiasts everywhere are pulling out their spades and shovels, and dusting off their gardening gloves. Forget about Christmas! For these people, the gardening season is the most wonderful time of the year.

Our newest Creative Frugality topic focuses on combining creativity and frugality along with your gardening skills. The question asks, "Tell us about your favorite creative low-cost, low-space gardening strategies. How do you save time, money, space, or resources while indulging your passion for gardening?"

Think about it and send your money- and space-saving tips to us at: <mailto:nancy@countingthecost.com?subject=Gardening>. Many of the responses we receive will appear in the next issue of the newsletter and on our website.

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~ What to Expect Next Time ~

When someone you know experiences a death in the family, do you often find yourself at a loss as to what to do or say? In the next issue, author and funeral industry insider Sylvia Loner shares practical strategies that you can use to be a "Death Angel" -- someone who extends compassionate care to those who are grieving. Don't miss it!

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~ Counting the Cost Reader Classifieds ~

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~ Additional Resources from Counting the Cost ~

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