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stories of the world's most successful
internet marketing entrepreneurs

FOREWORD BY MARK JOYNER

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Report Inside!

FROM THE
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
JOEL COMM

Joel Comm

Author, "Click Here to Order"

www.ClickHereToOrderBook.com

When I wrote *Click Here To Order*, I really wanted to focus on those who played an important role in the history of Internet marketing. I deliberately keep the spotlight off myself and make very few mentions of my accomplishments in the manuscript.

However, over the past few months people have questioned why I have not included my own story in *Click Here to Order*. So many people that I decided to pen one more chapter — the chapter missing from my book. This is my story...

Like many of the marketers in *Click Here to Order*, my story doesn't follow a straight path. I didn't sit down one day and create a business plan that would take me directly to online success then follow it step by step. I don't know anyone who did that.

Back in 1980, in fact, when I like to think this all started, I was very similar to most young people who had just laid their hands on their very first computer. I dragged it out of the box, plugged it in and opened up the manual that explained how to write BASIC code and program algorithms.

Then I turned to the page that described how to install games, shoved in the floppy drive (that was how they came then) and never looked back. I certainly never looked at that programming guide again.

I'm still a computer gamer. And I still can't code my way out of a paper bag. But I knew even then that I liked computers and that I enjoyed playing with them. I just didn't realize that they could make my life materially better too.

That first happened in 1994. I was reading a computer game magazine and I realized that the people who write the reviews must get all their software for free. That seemed like a pretty good deal. I like computer games, and I definitely like free. If I could find a way to become a computer game reviewer, I figured, I could also get all the games I want without paying a dime.

There was just one problem: I didn't have any writing experience, and it seemed probable that the software magazines get stacks of resumes every day from people applying for what seemed to me then the best job in the world. So I started my own publication: *The Dallas Fort Worth Software Review*.

Now, the *Review* wasn't exactly *The New York Times*. We didn't break new stories and if the readership reached double figures it was only when a friend asked to see what I was doing. That doubled the readership. But I was now the publisher of a software magazine and I hoped that that would be enough to get me through the doors of the games companies.

I scripted a pitch that began "Hi, I'm Joel Comm, editor of *The Dallas Fort Worth Software Review...*" and started making phone calls.

It worked. I spoke to Activision, MicroProse, Sierra Online — all the big games companies of the time. And their marketing departments started shipping me their products.

Soon it was like Christmas every day in my house. Software came in almost by the boatload. I didn't even have time to open them all, let alone play them all. I certainly couldn't review them all. But if I just ignored them, I thought, it wouldn't be long before the games companies would stop being generous to me. I didn't want that to happen, so I started looking for help.

At that time, there was no Craigslist and very few forums. But there were Internet Bulletin Board Systems so I put up an ad for writers to review software. Of course, I couldn't afford to pay anyone for their reviews but the writers would get to keep the games for free. It was the same deal I was getting and if it appealed to me, I assumed it would appeal to other gamers too. More than 30 people answered. Two of them still do contract writing for me today.

And *The Dallas Fort Worth Software Review*? That still exists too, although it now has a different name and it covers a lot more topics than computer games. It also has a lot more readers.

When I was introduced to the World Wide Web, I realized that it would make a much better home for my reviews than a box in my garage. Along with my friend and partner Ken Burge, my software newsletter became the core of my content at WorldVillage.com.

Today, WorldVillage is just one of my websites, but when I set it up I didn't really know where it was going to take me. This was in the early days of the Internet and we were all still feeling our way, but I was optimistic. I really did think that if I built a site filled with interesting content, people would read it, and there would be a way

to make money from it. All I'd need was a little time and I'd figure it out. An angel investor agreed and put in \$25,000. I quit my job to work on the site full-time.

Things didn't go quite the way I'd hoped. Building a website was hard work. Monetizing it was even harder. And \$25,000, I found, doesn't go very far. It wasn't long before my checking account had just \$1.70.

I can remember turning to my wife and saying, " This isn't working out. I don't know what we're going to do."

As you read *Click Here To Order*, you're going to hear this story many times. An entrepreneur starts out with a big idea, dedicates himself to it, takes a risk, makes a sacrifice... and watches it all go belly-up.

And then just when it looks like it's all over, when the business is teetering on the edge of a cliff, something happens. Something always happens.

Or rather, the marketer does something to make something happen. In the case of Michael Fortin, it was using a sales letter to improve his cold-calling. For Matt Bacak, it was listening to people who wanted to know more about his opt-in list than his interviews with millionaires.

And for me, well, it was nothing so practical. I prayed. I can remember saying, "God, if you want this business to go on, I'm going to need your help. You're going to have drop some money straight out of heaven otherwise I'm just going to have to assume this isn't what I'm supposed to be doing."

You can call it an answer if you like, or you can call it luck, but before the week was out I had received an email from someone I'd never heard of at a Japanese company I'd never heard of, saying that they wanted to translate our content and localize it for the Japanese market.

That didn't look like money from heaven to me. I figured I'd be able to charge a couple of hundred dollars a month at best, but it seemed worth discussing, so we talked. Before I even had a chance to open my mouth, he said they would pay \$5,000 a month. It was

enough to keep us going to the next phase. Perhaps it was money from heaven after all?

Helped by the Japanese agreement, WorldVillage started to move forward but it wasn't spectacular. Had our readers in Tokyo decided they'd had enough, it wouldn't have been long before I would be in trouble again. We were profitable, but precarious.

That changed in 1996. My Webmaster sent me a link to a site called SpringerSpan.com. This was a site that belonged to Eron Jokipii, a student at UCSD. Like me, Eron was a keen gamer. Unlike me, he knew how to code and had created one of the web's first multiplayer games sites. Users could play chess, hearts, checkers, bridge and a whole host of other games against other players in real time.

It was great fun but there was just one problem — Eron clearly knew nothing about marketing. There were only ever three or four people logged in at any one time. That didn't just defeat the purpose of the site, it was also a waste of an opportunity.

I sent him an email, told him that I thought his site was cool and asked if he was interested in teaming up. We could rework the site a little, run it on WorldVillage (which by then had a pretty solid user base) and he could continue expanding on it. He'd supply the programming and I'd handle the marketing. We negotiated and he agreed. Out of that — my first joint venture — was born ClassicGames.com. Instead of one or two players logging in at a time, we soon had 600.

That number was about to rise dramatically though. Yahoo! had seen the site and they wanted in too. They invited us to San Jose, but instead of partnering with us as they'd originally planned, they asked to buy us out. They even took Eron with them. He spent seven years as their Chief of Games Yahoo! which is still one of the most popular gaming sites on the Web. (Incidentally, if you visit that site and look at the avatars, you might notice someone with a red cap and a goatee beard. I always like to leave my mark...)

Selling ClassicGames was a good move. The Internet was really taking off and now everything I'd hoped about the Web seemed to be coming true. Venture Capitalists were throwing money at anything with a .com at the end and the Web was awash with cash. Looking back now, those were crazy times. People were paying 25 or 50 cents for a name on a double-opt in list. I remember Pets.com

was paying us \$10 for every customer we sent them. Drugstore.com was doing the same thing — and they were handing out \$10 coupons for every \$10 purchase. It was an incredible period, one of those times that comes around maybe once in a hundred years and you just have to collect as much as you can before the good times end. I think one month we sent Drugstore.com 3,000 customers and enjoyed a \$30,000 check.

That was when I launched DealofDay.com. I liked being able to save money and I liked using coupons that I found online to do it. I figured other people would do the same. The site's mantra was "Save money, have fun."

People came in droves. They clicked our affiliate links to buy purchases that they were going to make anyway. We didn't need to do any hard-selling and the marketing was a breeze. The companies just made their offers and we spread the word and served the links. It was great... and then the bubble burst.

Looking back, I can say that I should have seen it coming. We all should have done. But we were too busy picking up the gold lying on the streets to notice that none of the businesses that were paying these huge affiliate rates were actually making money themselves. They weren't real businesses with real business models. These were fly-by-night companies with no real revenues. It was bound to explode, and when it did, I took a big hit. I had to lay off everyone... including myself.

I was down and I was out, but I couldn't accept that it was all over. The good times would come back, I told myself. The streets would be paid with gold again. I just had to wait, and in the meantime live off the windfall from the previous years.

By January 2004, we were still going through our savings. We weren't hurting then — those good years had been very good, after all — but we clearly couldn't continue like this forever. One day, my wife turned to me and said, "How long are you going to do this?" I told her that if nothing had changed by the middle of 2004, I'll start looking for another way to build a business. Things weren't looking good.

But something already had changed — I just hadn't noticed it yet. The previous year, Google had launched its AdSense for Publishers program. It's a program with two sides: on the one side, Google

AdWords lets advertisers bid for keywords and have their ads show up on a pay-per-click basis when people conduct a search at Google. The owner of a travel company, for example, could bid on "cruise" or "flight," show his ad to people searching for those terms and pay every time someone clicked to his site. On the other side, AdSense lets anyone place a code on their Web pages and receive ads based on the keywords in the content. When someone clicks, they get a share of the revenue.

It was the greatest idea since... well, the Web. For advertisers, it was fantastic. They only had to pay if someone actually clicked and because the ads were only shown on relevant pages, they were getting targeted leads. For publishers like me, it looked like a totally reliable way to monetize users — just what I'd been looking for.

In June 2004, I signed up, pasted the code on my sites and waited for the cash to roll in. By the end of the month, I'd made about \$40. I took the code off.

That was a big mistake and one I always tell other people not to make. I'm forever advising people to test, test, test. My first AdSense experience provides a pretty good example of why you should do just that. For the next few months, I didn't have AdSense on my pages. Every one of those days, I lost money.

What changed my mind was a conference later that year with about two dozen other Internet entrepreneurs. At this point, I'd just about given up on AdSense. I'd played with it a little more but the most I'd made was about \$25 a day. That's nice but it wasn't going to be enough to pay for the business. But as I was sitting in the conference room, the person next to me had his laptop open and was looking at his Google report. I could see he was making between \$200 and \$300 a day.

It was one of those eureka moments, one of those times when wonder how you could have missed something so obvious and so good. I could have kicked myself. But that would have hurt, so instead I pulled out my own laptop and right there in that conference room I did what I should have done at the beginning. I started testing my AdSense code.

I tested the different ad unit sizes. I tested the color schemes. And I tested placement. That day, my income rose from \$22 to \$80.

This is what I'd been waiting for. This was the gold that I knew was still out there on the Internet's sidewalks. After I returned home, I kept testing, kept trying new strategies and kept track of the results. After a few months I was making \$500 a day from AdSense and sometimes even \$1,000. And the best bit of all was that once the ads were optimized, I didn't have to do another thing. It was all passive income.

At that point I started sharing what I was learning with friends and associates. I contacted Chris Pirillo of Lockergnome.com, a site I'd always admired, and told him that although he was using AdSense he wasn't doing it in a way that maximized his revenue.

He told me he didn't have much time to talk about it. The next day I got an Instant Message from him. It contained just one word: "DUDE!"

He had implemented what I had suggested and it had revolutionized his business model. His site, which had always been packed with great content, was now making the money its quality deserved.

I did the same for some other friends. Both Dave Taylor and Bob Rankin, for example, were happy to find that with the right strategies, they too could make more money with AdSense. Then someone suggested I spread the word even further and put what I'd learned in an ebook.

I wasn't sure about that. Until now I had just been sharing information with friends, trying to lend a hand. After all, it had taken me a long time to test each of these strategies and it wasn't as though my income was going to fall if other people did the same thing. On the contrary, the better the advertisers did out of AdWords, the more of them would sign up and the bigger the pie would be for all of us. But I'd never really entered the Internet marketing world. I'd conquered affiliate marketing and I'd built content-based websites that made a lot of money but writing an ebook? This was all new to me.

But I gave it a go. I forget about trying to make the language all flowery and just wrote like I spoke. I pretended that I was on the phone with one of my friends explaining the results of my AdSense testing.

In February 2005, I released the first edition of my ebook *What Google Never Told You About Making Money With AdSense*. It contained all of the strategies that I'd discovered were the most successful on AdSense. I was hoping that if people like Chris Pirillo and Bob Rankin had found that information useful, maybe it would help other people too. And if I could make an extra \$1,000 a month from it, that would be fantastic.

Of course, when it came to marketing my book, I made use of my affiliate knowledge. One affiliate who signed up was none other than Paul Myers. Paul's TalkBiz.com website had already made him a legend of internet marketing and when he started promoting my ebook to his list, sales started coming fast and furious. As he spread the word, other marketers signed up. In two days, we'd made \$10,000 in sales.

I'd like to think it's because people just love my writing but not even I could persuade myself of that. It was just the right product at the right time at the right price. I had found a thirsty audience that wanted to know how they could make money with AdSense. My ebook explained exactly how to do it. By the summer of that year, I had produced the second edition, doubling the length to more than 120 pages.

I now had a lot of affiliate partners and the second edition did even better than the first, spreading my name around the web. That was when my friend Jeff Walker suggested that I attend an Internet marketing conference.

That really sounded like a terrible idea. I've always been too fidgety to spend a long time sitting in a conference room. The idea of traveling a long way to listen to lectures really didn't appeal to me.

Boy, did I have the wrong idea! Eventually, my friends persuaded me and in November 2005, I attended Armand Morin's Big Seminar.

It was incredible. When I showed up at the hotel and as I walked up to the bar area, I saw someone waving me over. It was Armand Morin himself. That was the first time I'd met him although I'd heard his name many times. I was stunned that he recognized me, and he wasn't the only one. Lots of people recognized my face from my Web page and soon I was meeting and talking with some of the greatest marketing legends on the Internet: people like John Carlton, Dr. Mike Woo-Ming, Dave Lakhani, Stephen Pierce, Alex

Mandossian and Mike Filsaime. All of them had known who I was because they knew my ebook. I was a mini-celebrity and I didn't even know it!

Over the years, that "celebrity" has just gotten bigger, fed by the fact that I've sold thousands of copies of my ebook for \$97 apiece. Whenever someone has a product that successful, it's always going to give them a certain level of credibility in the industry. But what really moved things up a notch was when I decided to publish a traditional book. There's just something about having a book and being able to call yourself an author that boosts your credibility. People really do see you differently: they see you as *the* expert in your field, and that's always going to be valuable.

One of the people I had met at the Big Seminar in 2005 was a guy called David Hancock. David is the CEO of Morgan James Publishing, a New York City publisher. David talked to me about the idea of becoming an entrepreneurial publisher.

I'd never heard of anything like this, and to be honest neither had anyone else. David had created a completely new publishing model. The way things had always worked in the publishing industry was that there were two models. On the one hand there was "self-publishing" or "vanity publishing." An author would pay thousands of dollars to have his book made and then try to sell it out of his garage. On the other hand, there's traditional publishing. It's made up of about a dozen huge companies that have lots of subsidiaries all of whom give small advances and even smaller royalties. The authors usually end up with very little. Neither of those appealed to me very much. David's entrepreneurial model did sound interesting though. As an author, I had to invest money — just like a self-published author — but in return I received distribution and very large royalties. I liked the idea of investing in myself, and David and I made a deal.

From that deal came *The AdSense Code*. For the most part, we took the third edition of *What Google Never Told You...* and made it into a traditional book. It was updated and enlarged a little but most of the content was the same. The result was phenomenal. The book didn't just sell; it screamed off the shelves. We hit both the *New York Times* and *BusinessWeek* bestsellers lists, something that I don't think has ever happened in this industry. My credibility just went through the roof.

Now, a lot of people have asked me how I came up with the name for the book and the cover — both of which I think contributed to its success. Like many things in the world of online marketing, I have to give credit to my friends. The title came up while I was waiting to speak at a conference in North Carolina. I was with Mike Filsaime, Gary Ambrose and Craig Perrine when Mike turned to me and asked: "Joel, what changed that made your AdSense revenue increase so dramatically?"

I thought for a moment and I said "I cracked the code."

"That's it," he said.

"That's what?" I asked.

"The title of your book," he replied.

Immediately, I thought of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* which at the time had been sitting on top of the bestsellers list for weeks and looked like it was going to stay there forever. I took the cover, replaced Mona Lisa's eyes with my own and sent it to my publisher. I meant it as a joke. He loved it and decided to use it as the cover. To really cash in on the publicity, we launched the book on the same weekend that *The Da Vinci Code* came out in the theaters.

With the success of *The AdSense Code*, life became a great deal easier. When I'd formed my first joint venture — the partnership that would lead to ClassicGames.com — I'd made the first move and I'd had to do a lot of persuading to make things work. Now everyone and their uncle wanted to form a joint venture with me. I was able to pick and choose the partners that I thought had something to offer my readers and I got to work with some fantastic people. This was also the time when reality television was really taking off, and like so many other people I was glued to *The Apprentice*, keen to see what sort of lessons I could pick up by watching The Donald. When I got together with Eric Holmlund, one of my joint venture partners and the owner of a production company, to discuss our next project, it didn't take us long to come up with the idea for *The Next Internet Millionaire*.

This was hugely ambitious. I'd always been pretty keen on the idea of using video on websites but no one had ever tried to create an entire television show online. The difficulties were enormous. We needed to raise vast sums of money to fund the project, find

contestants, house them, film them completing challenges, edit the footage into 50-minute episodes and bring in viewers. Logistically, it was the toughest thing I'd ever had to do.

It was also incredible fun. Eric put together a fantastic script and his team worked with the team I now employed to create a truly professional-looking product. The show really did do everything we wanted it to do: it was entertaining, it caught the public's imagination and most important of all, it let us put all of the things we knew about Internet marketing in front of a general audience and do it in an entertaining way.

Creating *The Next Internet Millionaire* made me work very closely with some of the Web's top marketers and it really got me thinking about how far we'd all come. None of us had started out with the idea of making money on the Internet. All of us had made large sums and were continuing to enjoy regular flows of passive income. And chatting over coffee as we waited for the crew to set up the lights for the next scene, I discovered that all of us had fascinating stories to tell — stories that were both inspiring and which described the history of Internet marketing.

With *The Next Internet Millionaire* coming to a close, I knew that was the story I wanted to tell. I met with David Hancock and asked him what he thought about a book that would reveal exactly how the Web developed as a commercial tool and give credit to all of the pioneers who created the systems we all use every day. He thought it was a great idea.

Click Here To Order is always going to be a work in progress. Every day, the Internet changes a little more. New earning channels are created and more strategies are discovered to generate more sales. There are plenty more chapters to be written, and I hope that's going to be true of my story too...

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A vertical banner for "Joel Comm's Top 1% Network". The top section has an orange background with the text "Joel Comm's" in white, a large "1" in a blue circle, and "TOP ONE NETWORK" in white. Below this is a white bar with the text "The social network for TOP MARKETERS" and a mouse cursor icon. The next section has an orange background with the text "Monthly downloads and resources" and "30 day RISK FREE trial" in white. At the bottom is a photo of Joel Comm, a man in a suit, smiling. Below the photo is a blue bar with the text "Join Now!" in white.