



Interview with Irena Whitfield Internet Business Consultant for 3rd Millennium

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/>

1. Can you tell us a little about yourself, your background, how you got started?

I have been in international business and finance for more than 20 years, owning two companies in the offline world. However, my original profession is a computer system engineer.

On the Internet I had, in fact, worked twice before this time in different fields:

- i. in 1992 when my business partner and I had been developing computer programmes and needed to test them with various partners in different countries. The Internet, though extremely slow at that time, was the answer for the programme transfer.
- ii. then, for almost five years on forex, ie as a foreign exchange trader, doing business on all the foreign exchange markets through three main London market-makers.

And now: I launched my real online home based business in 2000 ie Internet Business Consultancy on my domain: <http://www.thecassiopeia.com/>

a. Why did you get into internet marketing?

In fact, I didn't have any special reason. It all started by accident. I traded forex online at that time and didn't have much to do between trades, so I surfed the web. One day I received an email from SFI inviting me to join them. By the way, it was a spam email :). It caught my attention and I joined. I liked it, started to learn how to set up a webpage, the HTML code and build my first site, SEO stuff, and that was it. Then slowly, I became involved more and more, left trading and started full-time with my site. It was back in 1999/2000. Later in 2000 I launched my ezine Pathway To Success. <http://pathwaytosuccessazine.thecassiopeia.com/>

2. You have several sites, how much time do you invest in each one?

Not much now. The system now works automatically, I only update the sites and publish my ezine - about 2-4 hours but not every day.

But it used to be different in the past. I used to work full-time, I should say long, long hours overtime, in fact, all the time, about 12-14 hours a day.

a. Do you do all the content/designing yourself?

Yes, but I also use materials provided by partners eg affiliate programmes I promote or articles submitted by my subscribers for publishing in my ezine Pathway To Success and Subscriber Corner: <http://www.thecassiopeia.com/SubscriberCorner/>

3. While the majority of your sites have a financial focus, Westies, is about dogs, could you explain how you decided on that site and how you've built it up, e.g. marketing strategies, content production, design...

I have several major hobbies: 1. business and finance ie entrepreneurs and everything related to a wealthy lifestyle like motivation, relationship, weightloss and wellness, then 2. westies (- I have one) and 3. gardening.

So the decision is obvious, and my sites include the above complementing items. The reason behind this is quite obvious: it's also what I know the best and can help others the most effectively.

<http://relationship.thecassiopeia.com/>

<http://selfhelp.thecassiopeia.com/>

<http://weightloss.thecassiopeia.com/>

<http://wellness.thecassiopeia.com/>

<http://gardening.thecassiopeia.com/>

An example: westies: I had a westie for almost 16 years, and now I have another one, so it was easy for me to set up a site about westies for other people who have westies, are interested in them or thinking about adopting one. Westies are a very special breed and they need specific knowledge and treatment to have a happy, healthy and long life in the family. Marketing was simple: I started to answer questions people sent me.

I've also written several books plus my new book 'My Life With A Westie' (- short stories from the real westie life plus a manual helping westie owners and lovers keep their westie healthy and happy for many years.) is going to be published these days and will appear in bookshops in over 100 countries within two months.

<http://westie.thecassiopeia.com/>

<http://westie.thecassiopeia.com/RealWestieWorld.html>

4. What sort of costs were you looking at to start each site?

Starting an online business from home is not expensive but even if you have a computer, you still need to have money to buy a domain, webhosting, to pay for energies, plus you need to have a financial, cash reserve for about 6 months to be sure you can continue your standard of living before you start earning the income you imagine. That's the basics. I always recommend people who are employed not to leave their job until their online home business can make them a sustainable income.

5. How long did it take your first online venture to start making a profit?

I didn't know anything. I started from the scratch, learning everything myself but still it didn't take very long, it was something like 3 months but it was not a sustainable income. It took longer. I don't remember the exact period but it was about the 6 months I mentioned above. It was not a problem for me because I traded on forex plus I had 2 offline companies and the Internet was just an experiment for me at that time.

6. How do you market your sites?

At present I do it solely through publishing my ezine and social communities.

a. What specific tools have you used successfully to get more customers and make your site known?

I was very lucky because my first teachers on the net were Netscape technicians, who taught me all I needed to know about designing a proper website and how to create my webpages to be found in #1 places on the search engines. I followed their advice on two Netscape and Google. It worked. Before long my site was #1 all over the Internet and in fact, my first testing page received 10,000 visitors within the first days, which was absolutely amazing at that time.

Then, of course, I started to create more sophisticated and professional sites, used all the possible tools to make my site seen everywhere, most of them won't work today, because the Internet advances so fast. You've got to update, modify, improve and test and watch everything you do almost every day until you create your automatic or at least automated system.

In case you are interested in details you can read it all in my bonus book '77 Questions & Answers to Ezine Success'. You can get it by downloading from the page below (- scroll down the page):
<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/WebLions/Pathway/SpecialGift4.html>

b. How do customers find you online?

The main source is still search engines but recently social communities are becoming more and more important. Also, my subscribers are very loyal, most of them are with me since 2000. Then RSS and groups of my ezine are becoming a good retainer too. And of course, through articles I publish.

7. Talk to me about your advertising... where are you spending your ad dollars... is all your marketing initiative online?

Yes, all my marketing, promotion and advertising is online. Most of my advertising is done through publishers communities.

8. How much do advertisers pay to advertise?

This year I stopped all advertising in Pathway To Success. My subscriber base increased quite fast to over 250,000 subscribers which I, in fact, never mailed to because hosting companies and ISPs sincerely hate broadcasting like this, so, my usual number of subscribers I used to mail was about 138,500. But I didn't have time to clean the subscriber addresses for quite a long time, so I decided to do a big overhaul and stop all the advertising.

9. Can you predict how your profits will shape up in any given month?

Yes, of course. You've got to be able to do this, otherwise your cashflow and income wouldn't be sustainable. But you should always base your predictions on the most reliable data you have, not any fictitious or wished-for numbers.

10. About Your Ezine Pathway To Success: can you tell me about how you decide what to put in your newsletter?

Basically, my ezine is published for online home business owners ie netpreneurs. The goal of my ezine is to provide these people with everything they need to make their online home business successful. So, Pathway To Success brings articles, tips on tools, promotion, profitable opportunities plus other resources, recommendations, advice and fresh information netpreneurs may need.

11. What tactics do you use to keep people interested?

This is tough because the online competition is very tough and every issue must fight for its place in the sun, and must be better than the one before, which is very difficult long-term. If you're not better, people simply unsubscribe with no regard that your ezine has been great for even many years. I must admit that not all issues are the best but I always try to provide fresh, useful information. Also, issues containing my own articles are definitely the most popular. Over time people learn that my information is reliable and highly useful, so they stay. It is also very important to build credibility; people must be aware that you wouldn't recommend anything just to make a couple of dollars out of them. So, I always put lots of valuable, attractive, useful and free items plus a few paid to keep the balance and make money as well.

12. Do you work from home? Employees?

Yes, I work from home without any employees. I used to have hundreds of employees in my offline companies but when I started to make great income online I stopped that, and can say that it is a great relief and real independence.

13. What does your typical day look like?

How many hours do you dedicate to working online?

My typical day is pretty easy now; most time I devote to my family, my hobbies and shopping I've got to admit :). Now I work about 2-4 hours a day online but not every day.

14. What mistakes have you made/challenges have you faced?

Oh, yes, all of us make mistakes. No one can achieve anything without constantly testing, checking, correcting, improving... I've made several mistakes but one is just very recent and I haven't yet corrected it but I will. The mistake is reducing my ezine scope: Pathway had always contained 3 articles and 5 tips. This year I thought that it would be better to reduce it to one article and three tips because people are busy and long ezines are not in, so to say. People simply don't read that much. BUT I lost a number of subscribers and those who stayed want me to go back to the previous format. I plan this next year.

My advice is: no one can avoid making mistakes, and I even think it's good. Mistakes are what helps us move forward. But it's necessary to analyse what you do and correct the mistakes if you can, or at least take a lesson if you can't correct it.

15. What do you know now that you wish you would have known when you first started out?

It's quite fun all the way, I enjoy it very much and don't look back much; I did the best with what I had at that time and that's it. I definitely prefer future. This doesn't mean, however, that I don't evaluate my past actions, of course, I do and the results tell me what to improve, so, I do it and am going on... I even think that starting online was easier at that time than now,... possibly.

I feel I should say something specific but I don't remember anything. I carefully planned everything, evaluated, learned as much as I could (and still do)... I first set up my system and then simply continued doing what was necessary until it started to work automatically and stopped needing me all the time.

16. Can you share some advice about what steps new entrepreneurs should take to launch their careers?

Yes, yes. I think the 10 points below should be the basics:

1. Carefully prepare for the business: get as much information and knowledge as you can to avoid fatal mistakes like starting without a proper business plan, evaluating risks... Most people who repeatedly fail online start without any proper preparation.

2. Set up a working system: decide on a niche, closest to you, and create a system that will work automatically long-term. Examples: definitely a part of such a system should be a ClickBank account, both affiliate and merchant, Paypal, your own domain, a decent hosting so you will not have to change your hosting company every other month,...

3. Motivation, discipline: lack of these is the killer number one of any starting business. Since the very start it is necessary to set up working hours, plans for every working day, setting up goals, checking, testing, evaluating achievements... and most of it is routine and quite boring, so discipline and motivation - drive is necessary to keep you moving forward. Read more about the necessary discipline here:

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/Guide/Article12.html>

4. Avoid myths, lies: another online danger. Accept as a fact that there are no mystical secrets, no get-rich-quick schemes giving you power to succeed at once without work and earning you millions overnight. Your knowledge and experience should be on such a level that you are able to distinguish and tell a lie. All these are published and offered everywhere online only to get money out of the pockets of people who just start and seem to be an easy prey.

5. Investment: you must be ready to invest in your online home business. Of course, it is much cheaper to start an online business than the offline but still you can't do it without certain investment upfront, and then a monthly amount you will need to keep it going until your online business starts to make you enough money. So, a good, realistic calculation is another vital item without which nothing can be done.

6. Decision-making, Action: lack or inability of these is another powerful killer. Many people get everything they need but simply sit and do nothing, watching out for a miracle. Or another extreme is to aim at perfection: it is necessary to decide at a certain moment and start actually doing things and get better under way.

7. Start small and grow: this is easier and also much more profitable and stable long-term. Also, be careful about purchases/expenses.

8. Original content: it's not important if you write your content/information yourself or ask someone else to write it for you but in any case your content must be original, all your business must be original. Forget all copying, don't believe that you can make any money using copied, someone else's content or actions. Be original.

9. Changing your business line: while I generally advise to have several product lines to offer because of securing stability and sustainability of your income, I don't recommend changing your business branch. It's much better to start with one niche and over time keep adding complementing products and services. This way you will build a stable and reliable business much easier.

10. The last one but the most important: behave as an entrepreneur from the very start. The proper attitude is vital, especially if someone comes from a job working for someone else. The shift in thinking from an employee to an employer is crucial. To realise the responsibilities and the ability to accept the responsibilities for your own life, the life of your family and the consequences resulting from every single decision and action of yours is sometimes too much for many people. And this is the reason no 1 why so many people fail.

Resources:

1. 7 Golden Rules to Financial Prosperity

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/Guide/Article28.html>

2. 10 Basic Internet Traps

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/Guide/Article24.html>

3. Top 10 Reasons Why Financial Disasters Are Inevitable

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/Guide/Article29.html>

4. More articles to read:

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/Guide/Articles.html>

5. Everything about building wealth and financial stability:

<http://money.thecassiopeia.com/>

6. Pathway To Success Ezine Archives:

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/PathwayIssues.html>

7. theCassiopeia.com recommends:

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/theCassiRecommends.html>

8. TheCassiopeia.com News:

<http://www.thecassiopeia.com/News.html>



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