



Hawker Media

Advertisers paid me to blog about them. Is that so wrong?

NOVEMBER 6, 2007. Truth be told, I don't have much to say about liposuction. I weigh 145 pounds, have 14 percent body fat, and compete in the occasional triathlon. Still, I've got to come up with something lipo-related to post on my blog. After all, there's money in it for me. A week ago I joined PayPerPost, a service that links companies with bloggers willing to write about products for a fee. Since its creation in June 2006, PayPerPost and founder Ted Murphy have been accused of destroying the authenticity of the blogosphere by disguising paid messages as candid blog posts.

(Murphy points out that he requires bloggers to disclose their relationship with PayPerPost.) Could I become a Postie and make a little scratch without selling my soul?

I set some ground rules. I'm not going to turn my blog into an endless ad. I'll embed each plug in a post that is entertaining or thought-provoking. And I won't promote unethical companies. Take liposuction. I'm not going to shill for surgery I find unappealing. So I ask readers to comment about lipo. "I don't know if it's a good idea. What do you think?" Bam. I just made five bucks.

November 14, 2007

Uh-oh. I've logged onto PayPerPost to find that there aren't any decent opportunities left. Advertisers dole out writing assignments based primarily on a blogger's Google PageRank, a score that measures a site's

influence. I've burned through all the legit opportunities available to someone of my middling ranking. I've urged my readers to donate to the Alzheimer's Foundation of America. I recorded a folk-rock paean to the Hamilton Beach Eclectrics Stand Mixer ("40 watts to make four 1-pound loaves of bread/Hands-free mixing with a two-way rotating head"). I've made \$146.88.

Now I'm looking at offers from term-paper-writing services and shady loan companies. These guys use PayPerPost just to win links to their sites and boost their search-engine rankings. Let's call it what it is: spam. But I have no better option, so I take the opportunity from CustomWriting.org. I whip off something half-baked, include a link with the required, nonsensical anchor text—"What you need

to do is buy essay"—and publish. Unbelievably, it's approved.

November 29, 2007

I wake up to find my Google PageRank sitting on zero. In an attempt to protect the integrity of its search results, Google has launched a search-and-destroy on paid links, demolishing the PageRanks of Posties everywhere. Murphy, who recently changed his company's name to Izea, says he'll press on. But I'm getting out.

And thank God. The past month has been a downward spiral of moral compromise. I pretended to be enthralled by a service that sends letters from Santa to your kids. I wrote 53 meaningless words to provide a paid link to a Colorado real estate site. I even feigned a knee injury so I could plug Freeze It Gel.

There is one bright spot. One of my last gigs comes from Jessamyn West, a librarian and blogger who offers me \$10 to discuss how librarians "can help you make sense of a confusing world where information providers have all sorts of differing agendas." This is a post I can get behind.

"Your notions of purity are laughably quaint," I write. "How do you know who to trust? I don't know. But I do know someone who can serve as a guide ... That person is your local (or Net-based) librarian."

I publish. It feels good—like a shot at redemption. Plus, you know, it's 10 bucks.

—MATHEW HONAN



Opportunities