



## **Growing with the Help of ClickBank and “Real World” Experience**

“Computer science major fails class on how to use Microsoft Word.” Granted, that’s not your typical preamble describing a successful Internet entrepreneur. Then again, it seems like every online retail story has a twist and the tale of Sam Stephens is no exception.

Stephens is the highly successful developer and owner of DLGuard ([www.dlguard.com](http://www.dlguard.com)), a powerful software script that helps protect downloads and facilitate business transactions on the Web. Since its inception DLGuard, a ClickBank product, has grown steadily and profitably.

As the largest online retailer for those engaged in developing, selling and promoting digitally downloadable products and services, ClickBank provided Stephens with all he needed to start and run his online business. ClickBank offers DLGuard affiliates to promote his products, guaranteed tracking of sales and unprecedented fraud protection, all of which are key to a thriving online business. Today, DLGuard is one of ClickBank’s most successful products.

It appears that Stephens inherited the “entrepreneur gene” from his father, who owned and operated a sheet-metal business. But Stephens’ love wasn’t metal – it was the wires and processors of computers. So, he entered university as a computer science major.

While in college, Stephens found himself in a situation that many students face – he was broke. “I was sick of scraping together coins to buy lunch, so I decided to open my own business,” Stephens said. “I started building computers and selling them through the local newspaper. This led to selling computers to small businesses, which in turn led to computer networking, and general IT support, contracting to local businesses.”

Business was good, he liked his work, money was coming in but he was so busy that something had to give. The “casualty” of his entrepreneurial success at the time was his academic studies. “Apparently, if you miss exams, you fail,” Stephens noted dryly. “I made history, becoming the first Computer Science student to fail the course on using Microsoft Word.”

Stephens left college to focus on computers and his business, eventually taking a position with a company he was contracting with.

After being laid off from that company, and then from another due to corporate downsizing and restructuring, he went freelance again, writing software programs for others.

As serendipity sometimes dictates, it was a sale that fell through that gave him the impetus and motivation to start his own Web-based company. “I saw potential in the product and decided to give running an Internet business a shot,” said Stephens. “It started to sell so I continued to add features.” Flash forward three years later, and DLGuard – the name he eventually gave that company – is now one of the most advanced self-hosted download management systems in the Internet marketing industry.

### **ClickBank Helped Fuel Success**

When Stephens started his company, he did what many do: research. “When I first started out in Internet marketing I read as many free reports as I could,” noted Stephens. “When I would visit a marketer’s Web site I’d also check their sales link to see which payment processor they used. This is how I found ClickBank.

“ClickBank helps *a lot* with launching and running your online business,” he said. “Like any business, the less work you need to do, the more time you’ll have to spend on growing your business. Because ClickBank takes care of all the payment processing and paying of my affiliates, all I have to do is just check the mail every two weeks for my check, freeing my time up to concentrate on running and growing my business.”

And, after seven years, DLGuard is still growing. Stephens expects a 25 percent increase in 2008 over last year.

“This is my full time job, and has been since the end of 2001,” he said. “While there were some very ‘lean’ years in between (something all businesses, including offline businesses, face during their start-up years), DLGuard has grown to a stable and steady income.”

### **Business Strategies**

Stephens credits his company’s success to some business strategies that he says are not exclusive to the online world, but are approaches that are sensible, clear headed and sustainable.

“In the Internet marketing industry there is always talk of making a ton of money in a very short time, and even though some people have done this, in the long run this is simply not workable,” he explained.

“I look at my business as a real business, one that I want to be around for a long time. Rapidly expanding businesses can self-destruct. I’m a strong believer in controlled expansion.”

And, a strong believer in quality. “Quality is so important,” Stephens said. “Especially at the start of your career. People will see you the same way they see your product. Create a great product, and they’ll think you’re the nicest guy on the face of the earth. Create a bad product, and they’ll think you’re all shades of dodgy.”

Today DLGuard has become a standard for self-hosted download and customer management systems in the Internet marketing industry. Currently there are multiple versions of DLGuard and there are plans to release industry specific versions.

“Basically I create products that I need to use myself,” Stephens said.

“As an Internet businessman, if I need a product, then chances are many other Internet business people will need the same product. I would say that this is part of my secret to success: my products are built as a solution that I, as an Internet businessperson, require, NOT simply as a product to sell.”

### **ClickBank “Simply Works”**

But, whatever the future, and whatever changes DLGuard goes through, Stephens believes strongly in utilizing the ClickBank platform to its fullest extent.

“ClickBank offers a solid system that simply works. There are no intricate or outdated issues that many payment systems have that can fail. It’s a simple system that does what you want it to do,” he said. “Couple that with the fact that ClickBank takes care of affiliate payments for you, freeing up a lot of your time to do other important things, such as growing your business or heading down to the beach for a few hours.”

“I’ve worked with around ten other payment processors over the years to integrate them with DLGuard. Most of them simply make developer’s lives difficult. A combination of bad programming and not listening to customer feedback has made their systems much harder to use than they should be,” Stephens added. “ClickBank, on the other hand, has created a simple and easy-to-use system that works every time. It’s simple for the seller, and just as importantly, it’s simple for the buyer. The costs involved in starting up are minimal and it’s very easy to get a new product up and selling, and up and selling very quickly. I recommend ClickBank highly and often.”

### **Advice for Others**

Always one to share his knowledge and experience, and because his experience with offline business, sales and customer support has given him a real-world and working knowledge of how to run a successful business, Stephens offers these tips for anyone interested in starting their own online business.

- Whether you run an offline or an online business, the basics behind business success is always the same: create a product people want, make sure it’s better than your competitor’s product, and then start selling it. And then treat your customers like gold.
- Be flexible. The industry changes so much you need to roll with it – keep ahead of the wave.

- Treat your online business like you would an offline business and you will go far!
- Many people think that millions can be made on the Internet with no work and no start up costs. Unfortunately, that's simply not true.
- Every successful Internet businessperson has worked at it.
- Mistakes will be made, learn from them.
- While starting an Internet business costs a fraction of starting an offline business, it still does cost some money.
- If possible, start your business while you're still working at a full time job. This will allow you to channel some of your income into your business, building a solid foundation.
- Work out your costs of doing business (including customer support) and make sure your income is greater than this. Your business must turn a profit, however this is something often overlooked for people starting out in Internet business.
- When the doubt and frustration sets in, take a break and recoup. It can be hard work launching a business, so don't burn yourself out.
- ClickBank is GREAT, especially for people new to Internet business. ClickBank makes starting a new business very easy.
- Above all: enjoy yourself. If you're not enjoying running an Internet business, then before you achieve success you'll find yourself rocking back and forth and drooling on your straight jacket in a padded room. So enjoy what you're doing! Life is too short to hate your job.