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# Cyberpreneur Research

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BEN2014 – Introduction  
to Cyberpreneurship

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## INTRODUCTION

*Samsul Zamzuri is a cyberpreneur.  
He lives in Sg. Buloh, many kilometres away from any centres of commerce.  
His housing estate does not have fixed line Internet services.  
He works from home.  
He makes RM 15,000 a month.*

*Now, what is a cyberpreneur? It is a combination of the words 'cyber' and 'entrepreneur' and loosely means many things but generally regarded as meaning an entrepreneur who has an online based business on the Internet that targets international consumers. These cyberpreneurs do not need offices or extensive support staff all over the world. They just need an idea, a great idea, and a cable to the Internet.*

*Samsul Zamzuri fits this description perfectly in all sense of the word. He belongs to a new generation of business men that have an ambitious international outlook with great scalable ideas. By connecting to a flat world platform and utilizing modern workflow and collaborative tools, they have involved themselves in a new kind of business that knows no boundaries and is only limited to where the influence of the Internet and the World Wide Web touches.*

*Sitting from his living room and with his trusty laptop and clicks from his mouse, he makes RM 15,000 a month with barely any cost. How does he do it? What does he actually do?*

***This report is a small insight into the man, his mind and how he works.***

## PROFILE



**Name** : Samsul Zamzuri Abu Bakar  
**DOB** : 19/12/1975  
**POB** : Sg. Petani, Kedah  
**Marriage**  
**Status** : Married

## Education

**Primary** : SK Darul Aman, Sg. Petani, Kedah  
**Secondary** : SM Sains Sultan Muhammad Jiwa, Sg. Petani, Kedah  
SMK Ibrahim, Sg. Petani, Kedah (Form 6)  
**Tertiary** : University Malaya  
(Ba. of Economics - Majoring in Applied Economics)

## Past Occupation

Part Timer - Cybercafé, Pantai Dalam, Lembah Pantai (1999)  
Data Entry Clerk - IHS Malaysia (2000-2001)  
Sales Executive - Johor Franchise Development (2001-2002)  
Internal Auditor - Metro Parking (2002-2005)

## Hobbies

**Reading** : Magazines (IT, Technology)  
Novels (Sydney Sheldon, John Grisham)

## Contact

**Address** : No. 18, Jalan DC 1/11,  
Desa Coalfields, Sg Buloh  
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**E-Mail** : samsulzamzuri@gmail.com  
**Website** : <http://www.szab.net/blog>  
<http://www.szabnetwork.com>

## IDEA DEVELOPMENT

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*This section will discuss Samsul's business model in a nutshell, his ideas and topics regarding idea development.*

## In a Nutshell

Samsul is in essence an online publisher. He publishes articles, reviews, commentaries, essays and links on his many websites on the Internet. Some of them are written by him but many of them are written by other people the world over. These websites attract many people to come to his websites and read. They are called '*traffic*' in web business terms.

He uses an online based content advertising model. There are ad spaces on his websites reserved for advertisements usually connected to the content being offered. As they read, his audience may also click on the ads to get more information on the product or service they're currently interested in. The more his audience clicks on the ads, the more Samsul can charge his advertisers. The more traffic he generates, the more profit he will earn. Currently, his many websites include websites on consumer product reviews like hand phones and MP3 players and also sites providing tech news and tools.

Another one of his main profit generation engines are web directories. In the Web world, '*traffic*' is important for business. All websites hope for a critical mass of audience or many '*hits*'. The way to get that kind of mass are by having lots of links to other sites and be linked by them in return. More people finding links to your website will mean many more people will click on them to go to your website and will mean much more profit for you since you have many more readers and can charge more.

Web Directories contain outward links to all sites and function like a Yellow Pages of the World Wide Web. Many web surfers come to these directories as a means of procuring information on topics or products. So, these directories have the potential of directing a mass of readers to the sites linked to them and websites will pay huge amounts of money monthly to get listed.

Samsul owns a few of these directories.

## History

It all began with a one page website.

As a part timer in a Cybercafé in his university years, one of his tasks include building a small website for the cafe. He learned HTML, the language of Web programming and had some fun. What he didn't know was how valuable that knowledge would get in later years.

In 2003, Samsuri was a budding tech enthusiast. One of his favourite activities was customizing his PC Windows desktop to look more that of an Apple Mac OS X's (rival operating system) user interface. Through various tools and software, one can manage to change the look of Windows to the more aesthetically pleasing Mac OS X. He loved visiting [aqua-soft.org](http://aqua-soft.org), one of the only websites at that time dedicated to such a community.

However, like all great ideas come, he discovered a problem. Aquasoft was a forum based site. The tools and software posted by its users on the forum were all over the place in many different sections and threads. The average new user would find it a headache to keep up with the development of tools. Samsul didn't like it and wanted to group all the tools together in an easy to find system.

Soon, he had his website up on a free web hosting service on GeoCities, one of the premier free service providers at that time. Traffic to his site started to soar over the months and reached to around 500 visitors a month. He got a piece of advice from his Net friend from the US, "**Why not make money from your site?**"

Samsul adopted Google AdSense. The system basically adds a group of text link ads to the side of your websites. Any person who clicks those ads will generate some income for the webmaster. The webmaster can't click it himself though as the system has policies and countermeasures against such cheating. Money came for Samsul but only a few cents at a time.

By then, he was interested. A recurring question he had was "**how can I make more?**" He started doing lots of research and visiting any resources on the Net for such information. The search led him to buy an eBook called AdSense Secrets for US\$ 97. From then on, real profit started arriving as Samsul tweaked his websites. When he received his first US\$ 157 cheque from Google, the only way he wanted to go was forward.

## Ideation

Passion is of primary importance to Samsul like many if not all, traditional brick and mortar entrepreneurs. He pursues only ideas that he likes and whenever the inspiration comes to him. For example, his main income generating site OSX-E came about because he loved PC desktop customization. Love of the topic is what pushes him on which kind of websites he makes.

Samsul prefers a more serendipitous approach to generate ideas. Whenever he sees something that catches attention, he grabs the opportunity. "Being a fast thinker is very important in this fast moving business," he says. He makes it a habit to immediately register a domain name when the idea hits him.

However, having just a good idea is certainly not enough today. An important factor is also about idea differentiation. "*How different are you from your competition?*" begs asking even more. Samsul's websites are different from these points:

### ❖ Customized Templates

- ❖ as a website providing information, how different your web site looks from the others in your category is important. Samsul's templates for his sites are all coded by professional web designers. After every year, he redesigns his sites to constantly generate a new audience and re-attract the old ones.

### ❖ Unique Content

- ❖ Samsul aims for differentiating content for his websites. A unique example is OSX-E up to this point, there is really no other site like it. Providing content for niche markets is really the way to survive on the Web. Be a specialist not a generalist.

### ❖ One Stop Centre

- ❖ in Samsul's stable of websites, many of them provide information on popular consumer products like TVs and the latest gadgets. He structures these sites to be like a one stop centre for everything his readers need, from product reviews to purchase links.

❖ **Content Display**

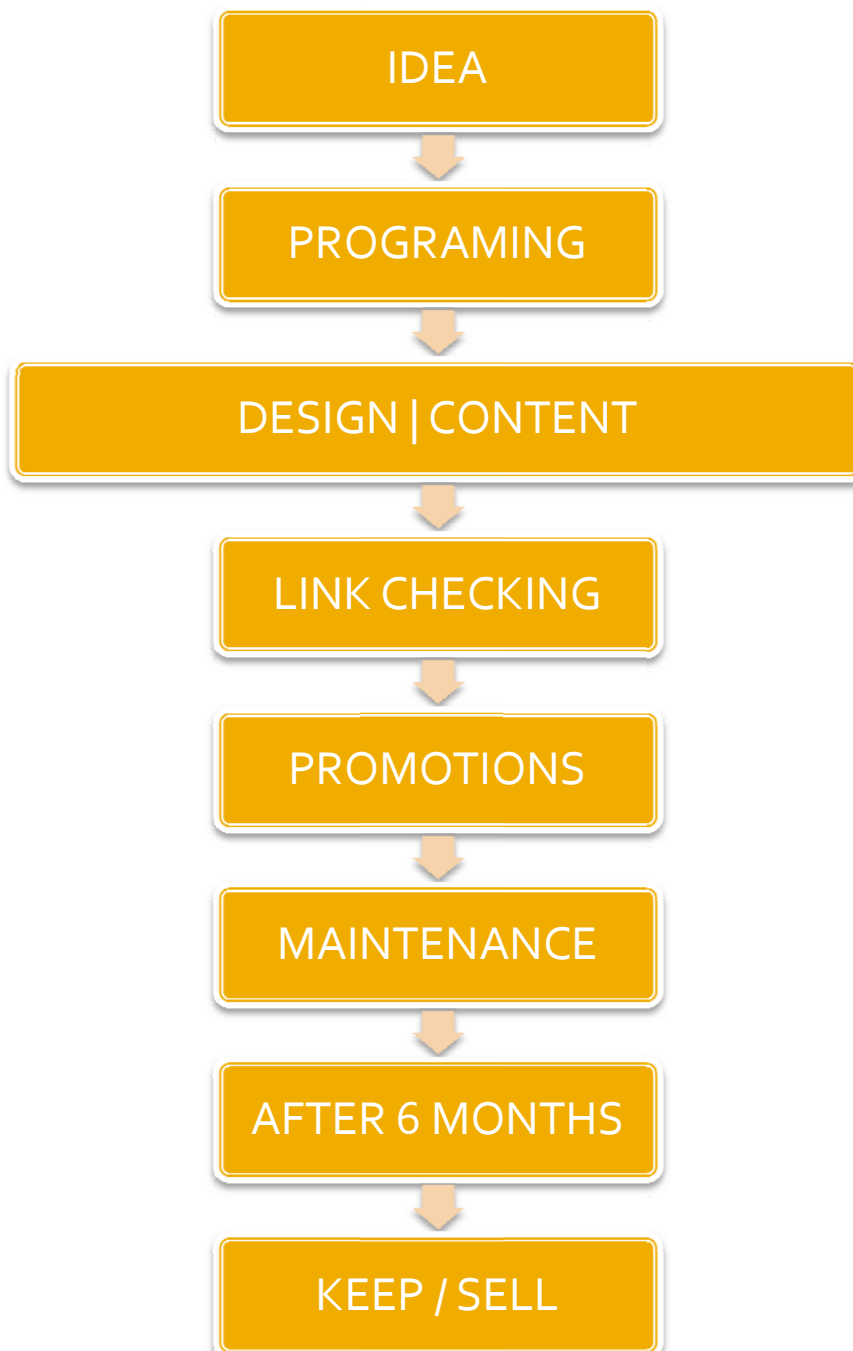
- ❖ on his web directories, Samsul figured out a way to differentiate. He lists his links by the amount of payment they offered to be listed. While other directories just group the sites together without featuring any one site, Samsul puts his highest bidders on the top of the page and states their offers at the side (US\$). This generates an active bidding culture and more profit.

❖ **Local Hosting**

- ❖ especially on sites that offer files for download, this factor is important for reliability. Most other sites on the Internet link to remote services, out of their control, to host files and content. These remote hosting providers are usually free and so are not controlled by the sites using them. When those providers go offline, a huge amount of files on the websites may be gone. Samsul recognized this and so hosts offered files like software and tools on his own site. This way he controls the reliability of his site and attracts more web surfers.

## The Creation Process

The following are the general steps Samsul takes to get a website from an idea to finished product. Each cycle takes about 1-2 months.



**❖ IDEA**

- ❖ develop rough ideas
- ❖ state functions & features of site
- ❖ obtain domain name

**❖ PROGRAMMING**

- ❖ look for web programming scripts with appropriate functions (CMS, PHP)
- ❖ hire programmers online

**❖ DESIGN**

- ❖ hire designers online
- ❖ provide creative brief
- ❖ provide examples of intended look
- ❖ concept drafts from designers (colour scheme, fonts, look)
- ❖ first draft review
- ❖ adjustments
- ❖ final design

**❖ CONTENT**

- ❖ sourcing of content
- ❖ development of content
- ❖ content review
- ❖ adjustments

**❖ LINK CHECKING****❖ LAUNCH**

- ❖ employ professional PR writers
- ❖ provide brief
- ❖ press release sent out to websites

**❖ PROMOTIONS**

- ❖ purchase ad banners from websites
- ❖ purchase text links from websites
- ❖ submit launched website to web directories

**❖ MAINTENANCE**

- ❖ hire bloggers for daily content update
- ❖ moderate website daily

**❖ AFTER 6 MONTHS**

- ❖ 100 visitors a day
- ❖ \$150 monthly income

**❖ KEEP / SELL**

## MARKETING

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*This section will feature Samsul's marketing strategies and target market.*

## Research

Before working on a website, Samsul does preliminary research through the Internet and also surveys through polls.

His research encompasses idea generation and also some specific web business research including keyword popularity and Search Engine Optimization (SEO). To a webmaster, these factors if not setup properly may turn your site to success or failure.

### ❖ Keyword Popularity

- ❖ research of popular keywords to be included in a site's URL. For example, if you're selling golf products, you might find that users mainly search on the keyword 'golf swing'. If your site's URL incorporates 'golf swing' in the name, your site will be easily found

### ❖ Search Engine Optimization

- ❖ specific techniques to make your site appear and be more easily featured on the top pages of important search engines like Google and Yahoo! Often quite technical, it is an important way to boost site popularity

## The Readers/Users

Generally, Samsul's target market is the international proficient web user. Specifically, his websites target different segments of web surfers.

*OSX-E - the PC desktop customization community, tech enthusiasts*

*Consumer Review Websites - the working adult, tech consumers*

*Web Directories - webmasters, website owners*

The design of his websites is tailor made to his audience and updated to modern trends and tastes.

## The Customers/Advertisers

Samsul has a range of clients from one off advertisers to constant clients. His websites are targeted to different advertisers much like how a newspaper has different sections and their advertisers choose which section their product connects with.

Mainly, they are:

### ❖ Competitors

- ❖ in the highly competitive world of online advertising and web directories, links from anywhere and everywhere are good, whether they come from your competitor or affiliated sites. The main advertiser on one of Samsul's web directory is a rival web directory with a bid of US\$ 203!

### ❖ SEO Companies

- ❖ a big percentage of Samsul's blog readers and other tech sites are webmaster and owners themselves. SEO companies are targeting this segment.

### ❖ CIAO

- ❖ an online electronics consumer site, it has been a constant advertiser on Samsul's own consumer review websites.

## The Competitors

In the online world where things happen at light speed, innovation and subsequent imitation also happen at light speed. Competition is rife and constant complimentary imitation between rivals is part of the business.

As an example, when Samsul hit a goldmine with his method of displaying sites on his web directory, other web directories took notice and a few imitated him. One site even became highly successful by copying his method.

As Samsul says,

*"When they imitate you, imitate them back (their winning features) and then innovate and upgrade some more. Competition is good. It creates a healthy market."*

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## Promotions & Advertising

Just like in the traditional publishing business, online publishing also requires extensive and constant advertising and promotional efforts. Samsul uses many methods to promote his websites:

### ❖ Press Release

- ❖ immediately as the site is launched, Samsul hands press releases to PR websites and other appropriate websites

### ❖ Forum Announcement

- ❖ Samsul also promotes the site on the forums that he visits and in the posts that he writes in those forums

### ❖ Banners

- ❖ banner ads are bought on related and popular sites. These banners are graphics, either static or moving, on the major sections of websites.

### ❖ Text Links

- ❖ text links are purchased on relevant websites connected to Samsul's website's content

### ❖ Viral

- ❖ Samsul also depends on the word of mouth of his satisfied audience. A good site offering good content not gotten elsewhere can really benefit from this type of advertising.

## Pricing

Samsul's pricing model for his advertisers depends on a number of factors:

### ❖ Traffic

- ❖ This is a main requirement. Advertisers only choose to advertise on sites that can reach a wide audience (large traffic)

### ❖ Google PageRank

- ❖ This is one of Google's inventions - a method to rank websites based on their relevance and popularity. A high Google PageRank will mean many good things to a website, specifically that it has a big user base and its content is relevant to the searches of web surfers. A high PageRank also means that you can charge more to advertisers

### ❖ Backlinks

- ❖ Backlinks are the websites that link back to your own site. For example, a website that features Apple computers will have other sites like Apple PC accessories and Apple software linking to it. A high number of backlinks means audiences/users from other websites are also directed to your own site. Advertisers can reach a bigger audience.

### ❖ Location

- ❖ Location, location, location. This age old business advice also matters in the online world. Where you want to place your ad will change the price charged to you. A webpage is flexible with advertising options for the top, bottom, left, right and even the middle sections of the page. The top section is generally regarded as the most expensive as it is where a surfer will first look when visiting a website.

### ❖ Frequency

- ❖ How often do you want the ad viewed? Just on the front page or on every page of the website? The more times it appears on a webpage, the more the advertiser pays.

❖ **Size**

- ❖ This applies to the size of graphic banners on websites. Advertisers can make their choice from small to large and square to rectangle shaped.

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❖ **Discount**

- ❖ Discounts are given to advertisers for bulk purchases and also upfront payment.

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**EXAMPLE**

text link on the right side of a page - **US\$ 30**  
banner on the top side of a page - **US\$ 200**  
banner on the right side of a page - **US\$ 100**

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## MANAGEMENT

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*This section discusses management practices in an online business environment and issues pertaining to working from home*

## Collaboration

By leveraging on the Internet to conduct business activities, Samsul also has at his disposal world talent. Unlike brick and mortar businesses, Samsul does not need to hire locals. He works with people as far off as Serbia and Pakistan. The Internet as part of the flat world platform has certainly changed the face of collaboration.

**Here is a look at his international team:**

*Template/Web Design* : Philippines, Serbia, Pakistan  
*Moderator (OSX-E)* : USA  
*Bloggers/Writers* : Malaysia, USA, India, Ecuador

Apart from the countries, the team members also vary in age. Samsul hires based on merit and most of his hires are teenagers still in college.

Samsul is a '*participative*' style manager as compared to the more dictatorial style. He basically hands freedom to his staff to the way they wish to handle things. They just have to work under a general framework that he sets and some ground rules. Mainly, bloggers must post an article everyday and moderators must be online in the forums/sites that they moderate every day. Lack of updates is bad for his business.

### **How does he motivate his bloggers to work hard?**

He offers a 50% profit sharing system. The blogger gets as much from his work as Samsul does.

Workflow and collaborative tools have come a far way since the advent of the Internet. By using mostly free tools, one can open a web business and delegate tasks to people thousands of miles away. It literally just takes a click of the mouse. Samsul contacts and instructs his workers by using e-mail and if the need to talk in real-time exists, he uses instant messengers on the Yahoo! & MSN networks.

Communication is instant.

## Personal Schedule

Other than managing a team, when a work-from-home system is involved, time management is a critical issue. Working from home blurs the boundaries of work & play, office & family. Samsul acknowledges that this problem exists but easily overcome with discipline. At the very beginning of his cyberpreneurship, he was a workaholic with little time spent on family. Now, he has normalized his time usage with a proper schedule set so as to juggle priorities.

**Here is a look at the daily life of a Malaysian webmaster:**

### ❖ 6.30 - 8.00 am

- ❖ After a bath and morning prayers, Samsul checks his e-mail and RSS feeds. He sorts e-mail by importance and priority using the 'labels' system in GMail. However, he replies to those messages that are urgent or need instant replies.
- ❖ In a day, he receives almost a 1000 feeds from the 200 blogs and websites that he subscribes to. With such a huge number, he scans through them, picks and sorts by interest before reading. Any articles which are of great interest or use to him, he compiles them into Microsoft OneNote.

### ❖ 8.00 - 8.30 am

- ❖ On a normal schooling day, he prepares his daughter for school. On non-schooling days, it's breakfast time.

### ❖ 8.30 - 12.00 afternoon

- ❖ If there are any orders for ad space, text links or directory bids, he handles them at this time. As a webmaster, there are certain sites that are on his 'must visit' list. These sites are mainly informational sites where he sources his content from and also e-commerce websites. Among these are [forums.digitalpoint.com](http://forums.digitalpoint.com), [www.sitepoint.com/forum](http://www.sitepoint.com/forum), [www.earningsforum.com](http://www.earningsforum.com) & [www.wangcyber.com](http://www.wangcyber.com)
- ❖ Visiting these sites take about an hour before updating work begins. Sites like [www.osx-e.com](http://www.osx-e.com) and his blog are updated daily.

❖ **12.00 - 1.30 pm**

- ❖ Samsul picks his daughter up from school before lunch and a quick rest before Zohor prayers.

❖ **1.30 - 5.00 pm**

- ❖ This is time for leftover work. He continues updating the websites that he hasn't done. He also checks for problems on any of his sites, something as minor as broken links to falling search engine rankings and traffic. He then continues his e-mail and RSS feed reading.

❖ **5.00 - 7.00 pm**

- ❖ After prayers, he does some sports and cleaning activities about his home. For example, car washing, cleaning the drains or jogging.

❖ **7.00 - 10.00 pm**

- ❖ After a bath, he prepares for prayers. Then, he watches the news before tutoring his daughter on her schoolwork. He takes a nap if needed. After Isya prayers, he watches TV with his family.

❖ **10.00 - 12.30 pm**

- ❖ If there are no further interesting programmes on TV, he uses this time for planning purposes. He uses Vitalist to list down tasks and work. He also thinks up of new articles to put into the site so that he only needs to update the next day.
- ❖ At 12 midnight, he will collate the amount of traffic to all his websites and analyze the keywords that his visitors use or which websites they came from. He uses StatCounter to record all visitor statistics.

## FINANCIAL

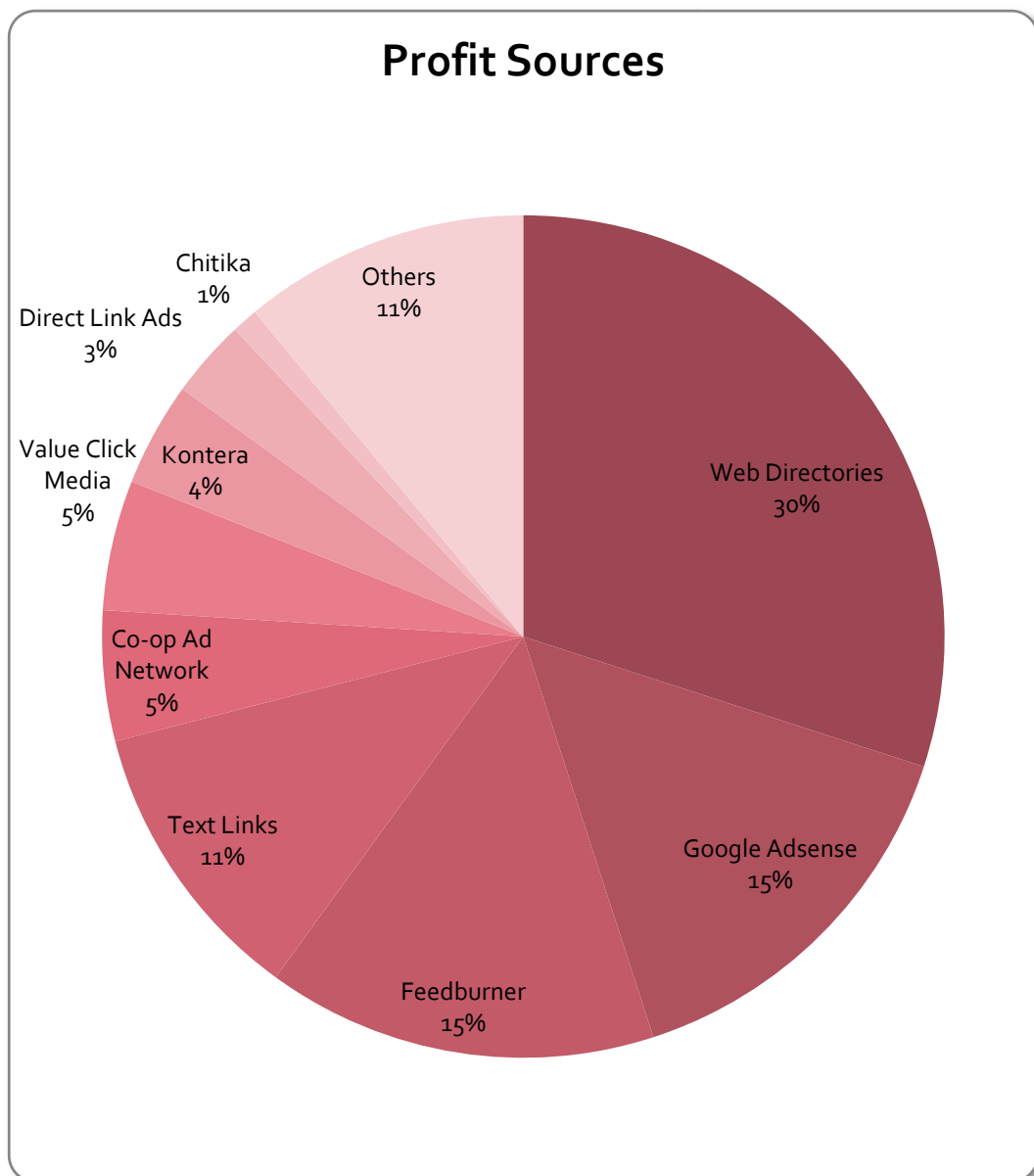
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*This section features financial issues of profit & cost for Samsul's  
online businesses*

## Profit

On average, Samsul makes RM 14,000 - 15,000 monthly. This amount is generally stable but may deviate between RM 3000 - 4000 in extraordinary circumstances.

His primary profit generation engine is his most popular website, *OSX-E* (US\$ 1500 - 2000) followed by his web directory site, *ventedoy* (US\$ 1000 - 2000). His directory of self-owned sites, *szab.net*, follows next (US\$ 600 - 700). His other sites average around US\$ 1000+ altogether.



As a side note, web directories generate instant profit for Samsul while blogs and review sites take a little longer at 3 months.

## Cost

Samsul's monthly business expenditures total about RM 4000 - 6000. There are two types of costs - fixed costs and variable (one off) costs. Below are the cost items in descending order:

- **Fixed Costs**
  - Server Rentals
  - Advertising
  - Internet Line Rental
  
- **Variable Costs**
  - Designers
  - Programmers
  - Bloggers/Writers (revenue sharing)

## RISKS

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*This section discusses risk management, business obstacles & experiences*

## Risks

Changing paradigms from employee to employer is often a frightful proposition. Unlike a worker where one receives stable pay and constant benefits, a hundred and one things may go wrong by being your own boss. There is no stable pay. Although the cost of running a business online is relatively low compared to a real world business, there are still risks involved.

For Samsul, the risk came when he reached the crossroads and he had to choose between employee or employer. On the one hand, was a stable job with a reputable company although the pay was not very good. On the other, a business which could bring in healthy profits and a whole new different life although the future was uncertain.

He felt uninspired at work, his capabilities and personality not suited to the job. So, he decided that he would first make a RM 10,000 monthly online before he would make the plunge. That day came in August 2005 and he left the rat race for good. He was now his own boss.

Problems did come a few months down the road as he was settling into a new work style. Mainly, no Internet service at his residential area and time management problems. Also, there were issues with people he hired. Being new at the business, he did some mistakes like hiring people without a background check. In that way, he lost US\$ 500 to a phony designer who ran away without completing anything. He also chose website topics that he later found were unsuitable for him. Those websites he later sold and one cost him a US\$ 200 loss.

However, the benefits of his risky decision certainly rewarded more than it took away. Today, he is his own master and can take care of the things that truly matter in life.

## Obstacles

A big part of being an entrepreneur is overcoming obstacles and solving problems. This is a small list of Samsul's obstacles in no apparent order:

- **No phone & internet lines in his residential area**
  - (he uses wireless internet)
- **Falling value of the US\$**
- **Google AdSense's Smart Pricing**
  - (Google used to pay sites on a fixed price system. The system now pays based on the commercial value of sites)
- **Visitor complaints**
- **Ad-Blocking**
  - (Firefox and similar browsers has a plug-in to block ads, disrupting income)

## OTHERS

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*This section deals with miscellaneous issues such as future plans and vision and also press features on Samsul*

### *On success*

- On a scale of 1-10, Shamsul rates himself a 7.

### *On future plans*

- RM 20,000 monthly
- author E-Books for sale
- conduct Live Internet Business courses

### *On cyberpreneurship pros & cons*

- **Pros**
  - i. flexi hours
  - ii. more time for family
  - iii. no work pressure/office politics
- **Cons**
  - i. motivating yourself everyday
  - ii. high competition
  - iii. requirement of constant stream of ideas

### *On internet business in Malaysia*

- Internet businesses especially those that are content based will grow in Malaysia, albeit at a slow pace. This is due to infrastructure (slow internet connections, affordability of PCs), negative press (present attention to political bloggers) & lack of exposure to international standards (Malaysian websites are badly designed)

### *On emerging trends*

- The web will grow more and more interactive, moving from a static model to a highly interactive one. Websites stressing on community involvement will boom.
- New forms of advertising will be created. For example, ads on videos (YouTube) and new kinds of ads on social websites (FaceBook, Friendster, MySpace)

*On advising those who wish to pursue Samsul's path*

- **Learn web programming**
- Web design has become simpler over the years but nothing beats having education on the basics of web development like HTML, CSS & PHP.
  
- **Join forums**
- Expose yourself to the community and its ideas
  
- **Start as a hobby**
- Start designing/developing sites as a hobby with low expenditures so as not to create a loss before you learn proper design.
  
- **Read**
- Read. A lot.
  
- **Anyone can build websites**
- Anyone with the proper attitude and aptitude can learn web design and the skills involved in Net business.

## Press

From hobby to a steady five-figure income

SAMSUL Zamzuri Abu Bakar, 32, gets puzzled looks whenever he tells people about his profession.

He blogs, but for most people, blogging is a hobby, not a job. The economics graduate also does marketing but his neighbours don't see him leaving home smartly dressed to meet clients with briefcase in hand, like most marketers.

In fact, Samsul Zamzuri is often at his home in Sungai Buloh. He is one of a small but rising number of Malaysians who earns an income solely through the Internet.

It started off in 2003 as a hobby for the technology enthusiast, then working as an internal auditor. His first website offered free downloads of software allowing Windows-run computers to have a Apple Macintosh interface. Both are rival operating systems.

"After a while, my friend suggested I put up advertisements there. I signed up with Google AdSense and my first US\$100 (RM350) cheque came six months later," said Samsul Zamzuri.

As he devoted more time online, traffic to his website soared and so did his income.

By 2005, while earning about RM2,000 from his day job, Samsul Zamzuri was already chalking up between RM7,000 and RM8,000 in advertising fees from his stable of websites and blogs.

In August that year, he took the drastic decision of quitting his job to focus on his online ventures.

Now, he owns more than 15 websites and earns a five-figure salary. Some of the websites are on gadgets like hand phones and digital cameras. He hires bloggers from countries like the United States, New Zealand and Ecuador.

Samsul Zamzuri bears the costs of running the websites and shares the profits with his partners. All his marketing (to get companies to advertise) is done online.

His top revenue earners are directory websites where companies pay to get listed, and are then ranked higher in search engine results.

His number two money-earner is his first website (www.osx-e.com), the one which got him hooked into online forays in the first place. Samsul Zamzuri claimed he had been offered up to US\$20,000 for the website, but declined the bid for sentimental reasons.

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His advice for those who want to follow in his footsteps?

***"When you start, don't think of making money first. Treat it like a hobby. Be patient and hard working. The rewards are sweet."***

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