



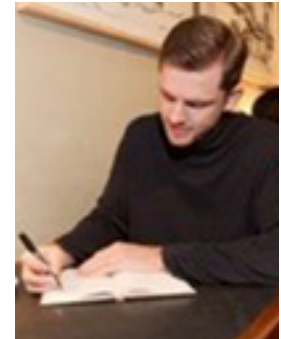
Challenging Authority
Since 1978

Perhaps no blogger's rise to success has been as quick and as impactful as that of Art of Non-Conformity blogger, Chris Guillebeau. Chris' project, the [*Art of Non-Conformity*](#) (AONC), has earned the praise and support of dozens of old media outlets, hundreds of A-List bloggers, and thousands of eyeballs across the world. Chris' is a remarkable story for other reasons too, as his mission is both inspiring and an exciting example of how many traditional boundaries can be broken if one has a sufficient plan and the dedication to pull it off.

He fashions himself as a world dominator, meaning that he's determined to prove that people don't have to live life like they are told to. To him, this means taking on traditional gatekeepers and either bypassing them by creating a new slice of the pie, or knocking them down by creating a small army to help you take the world by storm.

Although many people know Chris as the guy that travels to countries all over the world (sometimes in the same week), he's also a vegetarian, marathon runner, and dedicated husband. Even though Chris doesn't often talk about his wife Jolie, he says both her advice and her support are crucial to his success.

Chris spent two years in Asia as a child, but says he didn't start traveling until 2006, when he began a 4 year stint working for a medical charity in West Africa. It was during this time that, in his



Chris
Guillebeau

words, he gave “keynote speeches to presidents, hung out with warlords, and learned far more in those four years than anything I learned in college.”

From there, Chris toyed around with several online business models, including selling imported Jamaican coffee on eBay, AdSense arbitrage, and SEO services. Although he was fairly successful using these strategies, you get the feeling in talking to him that he wanted more from his life than the ability to just pay the bills. Yes, his primary motivation in creating an online business was, as he put it, to “avoid having to work for the man,” but he still felt like there was more to his story.

As of September of 2006, Chris had already decided he wanted to visit every country in the world, but until now he hadn’t created an action plan. Feeling compelled to make a change, Chris returned to the United States, where he attended the University of Washington, but more importantly, created a launching pad for his world travels. With amazing tenacity, Chris used his free time between quarters and on the weekends to plan his trips across the globe, and consistently visited over 20 countries per year.

It was during this time, as he started keeping journals of his travels, that he knew he might be on to something. So he began to turn his journal entries into essays online, and thus *The Art of Non-Conformity Project* was born. What began as an initial concept, and later a beta project

with a select handful of readers, eventually grew into a core readership of over 15,000, an income approaching six figures, and a lifestyle that, as of October 2009, helped him set foot on 119 out of the 197 countries in the world.

From there, Chris' story has been picked up by major media outlets, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, and MSNBC. He's inked a book deal with Perigee, writes for the *Oregonian*, among others, and his manifestos have been downloaded over 100,000 times from countries all over the world. Let's just say that Chris' star is bright, but it appears to be growing even brighter.

Although it might seem as if Chris found instant success online, we'd be doing his story an injustice if we gave you only the beginning and end, as it is the middle portion that is perhaps the most important, and the most beneficial to you.

Any time a blogger reaches the level of success it might look like it was easy, but the truth is that it is far from easy to duplicate this kind of success. This isn't to say that it cannot be done, but you can't do it without a plan. Fortunately for us, Chris has shared this blueprint, so let's get started.

While other bloggers might come up with a fancy name or title for their blog, Chris thought it would be important to use his own name as the brand, rather than the title of his project. This allows him to remain above the project, and promote his work as a publisher. It also allows him

to create a presence that doesn't rely on the *AONC Project*, meaning that now that his brand is successful, he can take his game to the next level, regardless of the state of *AONC*.

This point is important, because if you want to alter your path or change your brand at any time during the growth process, you will face difficulty unless your name is brand independent. It's not that it cannot be done, but it is certainly something to consider in the early planning phases of your project.

When I asked Chris about what it takes to become successful as a blogger, he had good news for all of us. Even if you are failing now, Chris believes that anyone can make a living as a blogger as long as they can successfully answer a few important questions:

What is your story?

Do you have a strong enough why?

Can you combine what you love with what your audience loves?

Although Chris was able to gain a sizable readership in around six month's time, he already had a great story to tell, which helped him significantly. He estimates that for most people, it should take about a year to build a business online, which is still an encouraging number. The problem is that far too many quit before they've put in the effort required to make it happen.

Although you might feel compelled to do the same, if you apply even a quarter of Chris' strategy, then I guarantee you'll see enough progress to give you the motivation to continue.

Let's start with your story. Chris believes that all of us have a compelling story buried within, but in order to make it attractive to our readers, we must frame it in a manner that strikes a chord with others. For example, Chris' story probably wouldn't have the same effect if he blogged about his travels from an elitist perspective. The part of Chris' story that compels people to follow along is that he makes it easy for anyone to do the same by sharing his knowledge via his weekly essays.

Had Chris' blog been just a travel blog and not an example of knocking down gatekeepers and creating your own path of world domination, he wouldn't stand out among the thousands of already existing travel blogs. It is the way that he ties in his entrepreneurial experience with his remarkable goal of visiting every country in the world that ensures people are inspired by him. He tells you not only what he does, but how you can do the same.

This brings us to the question of asking yourself how your readers can benefit from reading your blog. Chris says that if you don't spend enough time answering the "what's in it for me?" question, then you'll have a very difficult time gaining any traction. If you're doing all the right things but find that you just can't get your readers to hang around, then this might be your issue.

The way that Chris answered it was twofold:

1. By coming to his blog, his readers can live vicariously through his adventures or they can learn how to do the same by reading his book, essays, and manifestos.
2. Readers can take it a step further by joining his “small army,” which is a cleverly crafted way of saying they can join his tribe, where they’ll receive the support of a community and the benefit of feeling like they are part of the experiment.

Although the first answer is probably the most useful, the truth is that emotion is the primary driver for many human behaviors. People generally show up to Chris’ site hoping to learn something about travel hacking or life hacking, but the reason they stick around is because they feel drawn to the atmosphere of the community. It is in this sense that Chris functions as a tribe leader, possibly more so than any of the other bloggers in this book.

The third question is perhaps the most important, and rightly so, as not understanding the needs of an audience can be any bloggers downfall. Whether you are a seasoned pro-blogger or a novice, forgetting about the needs of your audience can and will put you out of business.

To answer the third question, it might help to make a list of what you love to do. Use a mind-mapping tool if it helps, but try to list everything that you do on a daily basis, love

talking about, and spend most of your time thinking about. From there, take a look at the Amazon best seller list and try to get an idea of what kind of questions people have and topics that people are reading about. Do a Google blog search on your favorite topics and read some of the most popular blogs in those niches. Look through the posts and the comments and you'll start to see recurring themes. From there, you'll have a good idea of what people want. The next step then is to find a way that you can do it better or do it differently. This might mean going deeper into the niche or spreading out in order to combine some of your favorite topics.

Although Chris' niche might seem brilliantly obvious to you, don't think that Chris figured it out overnight. He created his *AONC* concept over the course of many months and took the time to plan his approach before he implemented it.

For those of you that think that Chris just happens to have what it takes or that being able to start your own tribe is as easy as saying you are open for business, don't be fooled. There are a lot of things that go on behind the scenes in order to allow this to happen, which is what we'll talk about next.

Design

The starting point for the *AONC* experience, and Chris will agree, is the first impression his site makes when they arrive on the site. Although many bootstrappers will tell you that getting started, regardless of practicality, usefulness, or attractiveness of the design is the most important step in opening up shop, the truth is that you only have around 3 seconds to make a first impression with a new reader. If your design detracts from your site in any way, then that reader is probably lost for good.

This is why Chris took on the search for a design and branding professional that understood his game (in this instance it was the fabulous designer [Reese Spykerman](#), whom he met in Malaysia). This is also why he hired a professional photographer for the photos on his 1st generation website. Chris' savvy understanding of design impact and branding is one that probably cut months off of his growth curve. If you visit his website now, you'll notice that the design has been improved a 2nd time. I believe this to be an example of how a blogger has never finished evolving and should always be looking to the next level.

Content

Aside from the design, you can tell that Chris spends a great deal of time crafting his brand. Everything from his post titles, the quality of his writing, and the published editorial schedule do their part to tell the reader that this blog is for real. His essays are often over 1,000 words long and you can tell immediately upon visiting his site that he is not doing this “just for fun.”

Sure, we’ve heard the “content is king” line no less than a thousand times, but most simply give lip service to the idea. Chris, on the other hand, believes his content to be the lifeline of his business, which is why he busts his ass to make sure he delivers each post on time and with consistent quality. If you take a look at his average post, you’ll find that it is a case study for effective writing. He chunks his content to make it scannable by effectively using headings, subheadings, and bullets. It might not be noticeable to the unknowing reader, but it certainly impacts the user experience.

Creating Viral Content

Where many marketers might try to nickel and dime their audience until they either buy or go away, Chris strongly believes that it is more important to create a platform to spread your message than a store in which to sell it. Although he does offer a list of various

products on his website, he has an anti-marketing strategy, which is evident in the number of free products he gives away.

One could argue that he should have charged for his most recent manifesto, 279 Days to Overnight Success, but the truth is that when he gave it away for free, without so much as an email required, he was able to gain far more reach than he could through blogging alone.

Major A-Listers, such as Seth Godin, spread his message for him and soon his popularity skyrocketed once more. For most people, it's tough to do that even with free content, but because Chris treated the release as a major launch, actively recruiting other bloggers (affiliates) and creating an email campaign long before the release date, he was able to blow up virtually overnight...again. True testament to the power of quality free content and the product launch strategy.

Reaching Out

Another lost art, and again something that Chris firmly believes was paramount to his success, was reaching out to media outlets and A-list bloggers from the minute that he launched his blog. Sure, it's hard to gain the confidence required to send an email to Seth Godin or Chris Brogan, but the worst they can say is no. There's no harm in that. In our experience, we've found that most bloggers will be more than happy to help in any way they can, so long as you aren't asking for too much and you approach them in the right manner.

Chris got help early on by paying popular consultants Chris Garrett (also featured in this book) and *Men with Pens* to critique his blog and help him perfect his design. This does two things:

1. The publicity you get from being featured on an A-list blog can bring a lot of traffic to your blog. You also get a link to your site, something that Chris believes is more important than making money.
2. You get honest feedback about how to improve your site in order to make it more attractive. Just make sure that you actually implement the changes as soon as you can afford to.

As far as reaching out to media properties and bloggers goes, building these relationships

might take time, but will pay off for you down the road. Darren Rowse might not be able to pitch your product right now, but he'll remember your name. You never know when they'll send some love your way.

Aside from that, don't forget to do the same for the people below you. The little things that Chris does, like responding to 100 emails per day, commenting back on his blog, and replying to fans on Twitter helps him seem like one of us. If you become the guy or gal that isn't approachable, then you will have a hard time building relationships.

Chris calls these actions his "5 Daily Marketing Actions," but he tries not to stop at 5. Here are some other daily actions that he recommends pro-bloggers take to expand their reach and build their influence:

- Send out review copies of your products

Always be thinking about the next phase of your plan

Compose at least 1 guest post per month for another A-List blog

Become proficient in as many skills as you can in order to improve your brand and marketing efforts

Spend time building links, the "currency of the Internet"

Track your stats on a spreadsheet so you can see what you are doing well and where you have room to improve

Comment on other blogs

Spend time on other social networks, such as Linked In and Facebook

- Always be co-creating and working with others in order to leverage your time and your abilities

Although the look and feel of Chris' journey might inspire you to follow suit, Chris wanted to stress that you shouldn't copy him. Instead, you should be following your own vision and doing your best to be you. This means you need to discover your own distinct brand and travel on your own distinct journey.

At the moment, upon the release of his latest guide "Yoga for the Social Web – Using Social Media as a Force for Good," Chris says that he is earning around \$5,000 to \$8,000 per month, most of which is profit, without having to sacrifice his travel time. He is working hard on his upcoming book, which is set to publish in September of 2010. As for getting that book deal, Chris said that he worked hard to find a literary agent that believed in him, and even harder to create a book proposal that was finally approved by the publisher.

As for Chris' future...it looks bright. He expects to be making over \$10,000 per month consistently by the early portion of 2010, at which point he wants to focus on scaling his business to the next level. Although he was quiet on what he has to offer, knowing Chris, you can expect to be impressed.

Yearly Traffic Analysis

