



Mike's Life

Being Extraordinary

## *Case Study*

*Taking a website from zero to a  
full-time income in one year*

*By: Mike Cliffe-Jones  
Mike's Life*

Thanks for choosing to get your free copy of this E Book. Please point people who you think might be interested in this to my site, so they can get a copy as well!

*Mike*

January 2010

## Case Study

### Foreword



I was already deep into the early stages of my own blogging career when my wife Julie made a decision. She realized she wasn't going to beat me, so she decided to join me!

We had owned the URL [www.lanzaroteinformation.com](http://www.lanzaroteinformation.com) for some time. I had notions of turning it into a kind of directory of businesses on the small, mainly tourist, island we live on, just off the Atlantic coast of Africa.

Julie decided to create a blog about the island, using the twin thrust of giving tourists great information about their destination, whilst at the same time providing news and topics of interest to the 10,000 other ex-pats who live here and who suffer from a lack of any decent English language press.

And so the website was born on 19<sup>th</sup> November, going live to the world a month later.

It's been an amazing year, and to use a cliché, a roller coaster ride. Some of the lows were:

- Putting in a 100 hour week and earning 87 Cents
- Moving the site to a dedicated server and messing up the formatting of every post, which meant 2 solid days of work
- Putting 20 posts on in a week and not getting a single comment

And there have been the highs:

- Being contacted by a major airline asking to advertise with us
- Overtaking a long established website in the same niche on the island
- Smashing through the 1000 visits in a day barrier

## **A Word of Warning**

If you're reading this in the hope of discovering the get rich quick secret to blogging, then you might want to stop here. We haven't discovered it. We wanted to create a blog that would generate a decent living income for one person inside a year, and we did it! We didn't discover how to get rich quickly and without hard work. This document will tell you what we did and how we did it.

If you're hugely impatient, here's the short version of what we did:

- Wrote 2-3 posts every single day, with good quality, original content
- Worked hard at social media to make connections with lots of people
- Commented often on other blogs in similar niches
- Stayed totally up to date with what's happening in relation to the niche
- Offered advertising on the site at sensible prices
- Worked hard at providing quality affiliate offers for our readers
- Created a membership program for our special readers

So that's the short version, but if you have time, stayed tuned for the full version!

**Let's start with a quick chronology, so you can see the milestones during the year:**



### **November 2008**

- Site is set up on Drupal and initial content posted to it
- First design is finalised

### **December 2008**

- Site goes live with 26 posts on it
- Around 10 visitors per day initially

### **January 2009**

- Daily visitors jumps to 70
- Site being indexed by Google
- Email list opened to big initial influx (77 in first week)
- Video used on blog for first time

### **February 2009**

- First earnings via AdSense – 87 Cents
- First affiliate programs put on site – flights, hotels etc
- 600 posts on the site so far

### **March 2009**

- Visitors averaging 175 a day

- Income from AdSense and affiliate breaks \$50 barrier for month

## **April 2009**

- Visitors climb to 240 a day
- Subscribers break through 250 barrier
- Living in Lanzarote book starts selling on site
- Monthly income breaks three figures

## **May 2009**

- Visitors now at 350 a day
- Logo and brand created with site redesign
- Officially covered first event as “press” - Ironman Lanzarote

## **June 2009**

- Visitors up to 440 a day
- Ironman triathlon coverage gets huge traffic for relevant posts
- Offered sponsorship by a printing company and accept

## **July 2009**

- Through the 500 visitors a day barrier
- Income breaks \$400 for the month
- Now 1000 posts on the site

## **August 2009**

- Advertising package produced for local and international businesses
- Subscribers now over 500
- Two weekly newsletter commenced to community
- Autoresponder sequence set up for subscribers. Value + selling

## **September 2009**

- First direct advertisers on board
- Daily visitors over 700
- Income breaks \$1000 for first time

## **October 2009**

- Contacted directly by an airline and a hotel chain to buy advertising

- Deal set up in partnership with car hire company for exclusive recommendation
- Over 1200 posts on site now

### **November 2009**

- Average 950 visitors a day
- Just under 10,000 page views a day – big ratio of views to visitors
- Chitika adverts added for search clients
- Now earning a genuine full time income

### **December 2009**

- 1000 + visits a day
- 1400 posts on site now
- Just over 1,000 subscribers
- Launch of membership site



## Now some narrative for you

### Content

#### Walk from Arrieta to Haría

Submitted by Jules on Sun, 24/01/2010 - 09:53. [Places](#)

On an impulse recently I walked back up to Haría from the lovely Arrieta beach, by road its a distance of 7km. I walked from the roundabout with the Manrique wind toy along the (LZ-10) road to Haría before turning off after the long straight – if you prefer you can start this walk from the beach, along a dirt track, please see the Google Earth image, both ways meet at yellow pin no 6.



Look for the tall Agave stick on the right hand side of the road, this marks the path for the next stage. The first part of the path is not clear, you walk up the barranco to the side of the small out building and then it is more clearly marked, this section cuts up between the road which sweeps round the bend before climbing again.

[Jules's blog](#) 1 Comment and 1 Reaction [Read more](#) 92 reads [Twitter](#)

Without a doubt, content, and lots of it, has been at the heart of the success. As you can see from the number of posts each month, the site has average almost four a day all year.

The posts are a mixture of long content – about attractions, things to do, places to visit, and short, “newsy” pieces giving people the latest information about the island and what's happening here.

We've tried video posts, but they don't seem to perform well, which suggests our demographic isn't into video. But posts with lots of photos in them do go down very well.

The wealth of content means the site ranks very well for all kinds of related terms, and as of today, 73% of traffic comes via search engines.

Interaction has never been good, with few comments, and we have come to the conclusion that the readers in this sector are not commenters, and prefer to read anonymously.

## **The Readers**



One thing we have noticed is that the readers of the site are very different to those on my own blog. They don't like RSS and they don't comment very much! They're more used to using the web in the web 1.0 style. In other words for getting information, rather than for having a conversation.

It has meant a change in style, but the readers are no less passionate, and no less inclined to spend their money with us.

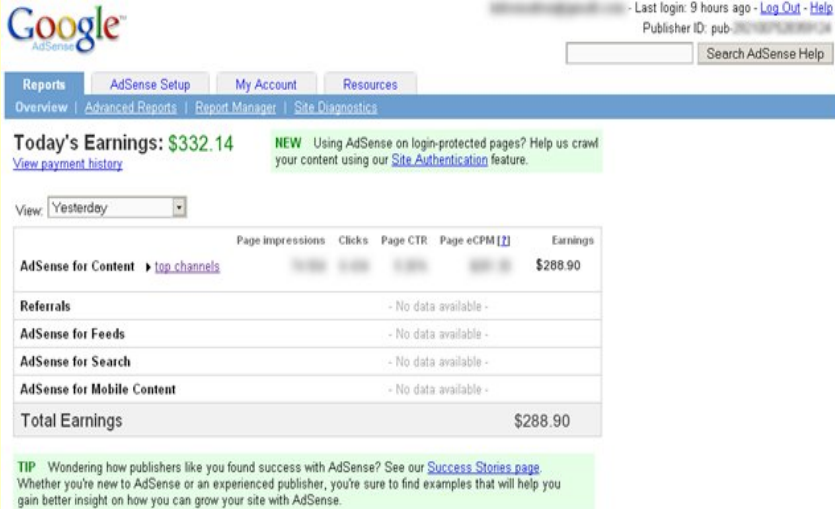
## **Income**



We set out with some clearly defined ideas to create income streams for the site, and we divided them as follows:

# Passive Advertising

## Adsense



The screenshot shows the Google AdSense dashboard. At the top, it displays the Google AdSense logo, a user profile with the text "Last login: 9 hours ago - Log Out - Help", and a "Publisher ID: pub-..." followed by a "Search AdSense Help" button. Below this is a navigation bar with tabs for "Reports", "AdSense Setup", "My Account", and "Resources". Under "Reports", there are sub-links for "Overview", "Advanced Reports", "Report Manager", and "Site Diagnostics". The main content area shows "Today's Earnings: \$332.14" with a link to "View payment history". A green notification box says "NEW Using AdSense on login-protected pages? Help us crawl your content using our Site Authentication feature." Below this is a "View:" dropdown menu set to "Yesterday". A table shows earnings by channel:

|  | Page Impressions      | Clicks | Page CTR | Page eCPM [?] | Earnings        |
|--|-----------------------|--------|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| AdSense for Content <a href="#">▶ top channels</a> | 10,000                | 1,000  | 10%      | \$288.90      | \$288.90        |
| Referrals  | - No data available - |        |          |               |                 |
| AdSense for Feeds                                  | - No data available - |        |          |               |                 |
| AdSense for Search                                 | - No data available - |        |          |               |                 |
| AdSense for Mobile Content                         | - No data available - |        |          |               |                 |
| <b>Total Earnings</b>                              |                       |        |          |               | <b>\$288.90</b> |

At the bottom, a "TIP" box suggests: "Wondering how publishers like you found success with AdSense? See our [Success Stories page](#). Whether you're new to AdSense or an experienced publisher, you're sure to find examples that will help you gain better insight on how you can grow your site with AdSense."

We put Adsense on the site from day one, and it immediately covered the hosting costs. Only just! But it did cover them, although payments didn't come through until we starting hitting the payment threshold.

The income from Adsense built slowly with the traffic, then increased dramatically around month nine. I don't know if we hit some kind of threshold, or if Google changed something, but it became quite lucrative.

I know there are various arguments against using Adsense, and I don't put it on my own blog, for example. The biggest downside is that you are effectively taking people off your site – but I figure that if someone does click an Adsense advert, then the chances are they didn't find what they were looking for on our page anyway.

The jury is still out on Adsense – we'll keep monitoring it, and may decide to take it off, but if the income keeps climbing? We'll see!

## Chitika

We discovered Chitika ads after about 7 months. These are ads which only appear to people who have arrived via search. And the ads served are based on their search. So if they arrived looking for “Flights to Vancouver” then they will see ads relating to that.

I was excited at first, as the click through rate was significantly higher than Adsense's. But the performance has really dropped away recently, and I may well

remove them in the near future. Performance lately is lacklustre.

## Active Advertising



We set out to be really different here, and this has paid off. We identified an issue with blog advertising generally. By putting adverts in the side bar on every page, you are severely limiting how many ads you can sell. Not only that, but it means ads are appearing that simply aren't relevant. For example, someone searching for “Disabled access in Lanzarote” is not likely to want to click an advert for “Off road trekking in Lanzarote.”

Our idea was to sell direct advertisers a package of ten graphic adverts, on ten pages of the site, backed up by a post about their business. The graphic ads then link to either our post, or, in most cases, their website. So a restaurant in Puerto del Carmen would have their advert appear on pages about food, Puerto del Carmen, drink etc.

We approached local businesses initially via email, which failed dismally. We didn't even get replies from them, and a new strategy was called for. So we called them and booked appointments, and this was really successful. Our close rate face to face is over 80% - the only limiting factor is having the time to contact more and more people!

We charge just €30 a month for the ten adverts, but because we have over 1000 pages on our site, we have an almost limitless resource to sell. We provide each advertiser with a report on views and clicks each month, and so far, we haven't lost a single

advertiser, despite the fact that we don't ask for any kind of contract.

This was all going well for us, and then something amazing happened in month 10. Two major companies contacted us, and asked to advertise with us, having read our terms. We must have suddenly come up on the web's radar, because this opened the flood gates, and since then we've been too busy processing the advertising requests to go out and sell more ourselves.

These direct adverts are a major part of the income, but I love the fact that as each payment is small, it won't hurt when some do leave us. Everyone pays the same and gets the same package.

## **Affiliate programs**



We signed up with a couple of major affiliate program providers in the early days, and went for the obvious ones like flights, hotels and travel insurance. We followed the process many bloggers do and plastered banners everywhere we could and sat back waiting for the money to roll in. Nothing happened!

It gradually dawned on us that banners just don't work as an affiliate, and that we were offering people too much choice. We embarked on an ambitious program of seeking out the best company in each sector to deal with, in terms of customer feedback from the web, ease of use of their sites and systems, and of course, the best commission deal for us.

Having identified the companies we were going to work with, we started each program with a simple post, containing text links, explaining the service and benefits. At the same time we added an autoresponder about the product or service into the email sequence to our subscribers. We then worked hard over a period of time to post regular links back into new posts. Over time, we started ranking well on relevant topics, and the income gradually increased.

One interesting thing we have found is that we don't earn much on each transaction, but that many clients buy multiple products through us. So one person might buy a flight, some accommodation and travel insurance, and overall we do OK. Selling these kind of low margin products is not a way to earn serious money, but affiliations do give us a few hundred dollars each month.

One area where we were really struggling was with car hire. We didn't like any of the traditional programs out there, and the prices were really uncompetitive for consumers. So we approached a local company who we knew offered a great range of cars (Audi TT anyone?) and struck a deal with them. They would become our "preferred partner" on car hire, and pay us a good commission, as well as giving our clients good rates and lots of special offers. Everyone benefits from this deal, and it's been fantastic for us, the car hire company and our clients. The only downside is that we had to put a form on our site, collect the enquiries and then feed them through, as they don't have any system in place for an affiliate program. But it's been worth while. Our conversion rate on enquiries is over 60% and our average commission is around \$22 per hire. As I write this in January, we're on for our best ever month of over \$800.

I think there's a lot of mileage in this type of "self designed" affiliate scheme with local businesses, and we'll be doing more of these this year.

## Membership site



The plan for the membership site took shape about half way through the year. We were looking for a way to give people with a special interest in the island a little bit more, and to be able to earn some money by doing so.

We did examine the idea of producing an E Book – something like “The insider's guide to Lanzarote” but discounted that as we felt we could offer much more with a member's site.

Working late into several evenings, we came up with a plan. The site would have four key areas:

- General, but additional content
- A Member's forum
- A Classifieds area
- Relevant web and social media feeds
- A special offers and discount section

### **General, but additional content**

This consists of more in depth posts and articles, some really amazing photos which Julie has shot and video footage of events around the island.

### **Member's Forum**

This works exactly like a normal forum, except membership is strictly limited to paying members. It means the forum is well behaved (no anonymous posters) and free from spam.

## **Classifieds**

We put a classifieds section onto the member's site. They can post as many adverts as they like, and people have put their properties up for holiday rent, cars for sale and all kind of things they want to get rid of. Although only members can post adverts, the whole world can see them. This has meant several people have joined purely to get this facility of posting adverts.

## **Web and social media feeds**

We have created a section where any Tweets relating to the island are fed in real time, and also where feeds from all the local newspapers and main web sites on the island appear. The Spanish ones are even be translated into English.

## **Special offers and discounts**

As the member's site is a no advertising area, we were able to negotiate special terms with our advertisers on the main site. So, for example, members get 10% discount on some accommodation, 5% discount on car hire or a free bottle of wine with a meal in a restaurant. It's easy for members to save more than their annual subscription on one trip to the island by using our preferred suppliers.

## **Pricing**

We wanted to make membership a complete “no-brainer” and set out to really leverage the power of the internet. Anyone joining gets one month free, so they can have a good look around, and then we charge them just €1.95 a month, which is just under \$3.

The result is that people don't hesitate to sign up, and we are quickly moving towards our objective of 1200 members for this year, rising to 3000 next.

## Own products



I briefly mentioned the idea of doing special E Book guides, and I suspect we will do something along those lines in the future.

We also sell the book I wrote about our move to the island on the site (via Amazon) and that ticks along with a few sales every week.



We opened an account with Zazzle to get T shirts for our own use. We simply uploaded our logo and created some excellent T Shirts and polo shirts. While we were doing it, we decided we might as well offer them to the readers, so we created a Zazzle shop, offering baseball caps, shirts, key rings and coffee mugs. We didn't imagine anyone would buy them, but they do! In fact one lady, leading up to Christmas, spent over \$700 with us! So this has been a good move.

We did also try a calendar of Julie's photos around Christmas time, but we only ever sold one of those for some reason.

## Pricing – Overall Strategy



I'm sure some of you reading this will feel that we have under priced everything, and if I'm honest, you may be right.

As I said before, we set out with the aim of making decisions a no-brainer for people, and so far we haven't lost a single advertiser or subscriber. Could we have charged more? Probably. But I also think we would have had to sell harder to do so, and that would have taken more time.

## Barter



As well as “Straight” sales, we've managed to do some great barter deals as well. All our printing is taken care of as part of a barter deal. Julie gets all kinds from beauty treatments in return for adverts, and we get to go on kayaking expeditions in return for writing about them.

## Other Benefits



As the blog has become well known locally, businesses have started to seek publicity from us. We get offered free tickets to attractions, boat trips, all kinds of things. We even went to a Christmas dinner menu tasting at an Italian restaurant! We're always upfront, and tell the owners we're happy to review what they have, but that giving us a free ticket does not guarantee a good review.

## Kudos



This is a small island, and we were already pretty well known here. But, having the blog has opened new doors to us. We get press releases from all local government departments and businesses, so we know what's going on. We get press invitations to all the sporting events – I even used my motorbike on a recent marathon to transport a photographer around. These kind of things are fun and make you feel a little special.

## Summary



So there you have it! It's been fascinating to watch the project bloom and grow over the last year. And where it once felt immature and new, the site now feels established and professional. It's currently the third most visited site of its type on the island, very close to being the second, and may even overtake the first this year.

*I can't over emphasise enough that all of this is based on the solid foundation of good and interesting content that Julie pushes out day after day. Everything else has come from that.*

## The Future



Our plans are to consolidate during 2010, to build the membership site to 1200, to optimise and make sure we are getting the best from our various affiliate programs, to add a couple of regular guest writers to the mix, who will be paid, and to keep putting out the great content!

The site now generates a genuine full time income for us. But I don't want you to go overboard on this. We are not earning a huge income from it – I'm talking only about a living wage here. The good news is that it's a steady and residual income – it basically grows every month. So our task now is to keep doing what we have been doing. And the best thing of all is that the income sources are well spread, so if any one thing stops “working” it isn't the end of the world.

Finally, we're pleased at what we have achieved in just one year, and want to concentrate on giving great value and polishing up our design and offering to our readers. There won't be any big launches or splashes in 2010, but 2011 may well turn out to be the time for a big push into new territory.

## What Next?

That's the end of this report. I'd really like to share this information with as many people as possible. So if you've enjoyed it, please feel free to quote it, review it, or tell your friends about it. Just send them to [http://mikeslife.org/content/case\\_study](http://mikeslife.org/content/case_study)



I hope you have enjoyed reading this as much as I enjoyed creating it for you. In order to get your copy, you joined the Mike's Life community, and I look forward to talking to you via that medium. Please also say hello to me on Twitter [@mikecj](https://twitter.com/mikecj)

I'm not going to pass up this opportunity to present you with a gentle sales pitch. If that's not your thing, feel free to stop reading now.

If this has inspired you to start a blog, or to take your own blog along the road to earning an income from it, then I'd like you to consider taking my course *The Beginner's Guide to Blogging*.

The course is 60 days long, and uses much of the learning from the case study above, to lead you through each aspect of achieving something similar with your own blog. The writing style is very similar to what you've been reading, as you would expect.

It can be bought as one (huge 250 page!) E Book, or you can choose to have it delivered one lesson at a time, via Email. Both are clear, straightforward and full of useful images and links. Almost 100 people have been through the course, and the

feedback has all been positive.

The course can be paid for in full, but you can also pay in instalments. In either case, I'd like to offer you a special discount of 25% off the normal price. To get the discount, simply insert the code CASESTUDY into the discount box when you get through to the payment page.

Please visit this link to find out more now: [The Beginner's Guide to Blogging](#)

