

## The Million Dollar Homepage

Alex Tew's Million Dollar Idea and the Websites He Inspired



### We Turn One!

**OpenPosting.com**  
The College Start-Up



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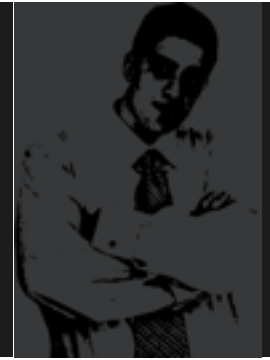
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# From the Editor's Desk:

A New Look

by Jonas Elmerraji



Last month was an important one for growFolio. Last month marked the first issue that we went out as an online business magazine. The transition from an investment publication has been, for the most part, pretty painless. It's been coming for well over six months, but now that we've reached our first year, some more concrete changes have been put into place. I hate to repeat what I said in this column last month, but - I will. If you've followed growFolio for a little while now, you may have noticed the transition in our content and our layout as this publication has matured. growFolio is still very much a garage magazine, but it's beginning to feel like it's much larger.

If you are in fact familiar with our past issues, you may have noticed some marked changes in the way growFolio looks this month. We're transitioning to a slightly modified layout style. I hope you like the look of it as much as I do. This issue very much embodies the idea of the online business magazine that was envisioned when we changed over to our new format last month. Much has stayed the same. Some has changed, and some still has yet to change.

So, you may now find yourself asking - "Who exactly is the new growFolio for?" Simply put, growFolio is the only online business magazine for the under 35 crowd. We're interested in putting business out there from a younger perspective than others currently do. We'll take a monthly look at what

people are doing in the business world, as well as what there is yet to do. Keeping articles focused on you, the reader, is paramount so if you have any suggestions, please drop us a line at [suggestions@growfolio.com](mailto:suggestions@growfolio.com) and tell us what you want to see.

This month, we've got some really cool stuff. The Million Dollar Homepage has become a real marketing success story, and the guys from OpenPosting.com are a great example of the now rare college start-up. I really suggest that you take a look at their respective sites. I hope I'll see you next month.

Best Regards,

**Corrections:** A couple of mistakes were made in last month's *Coollest Gadgets of the Year* list. The prices of the Xbox 360, TomTom, and Philips TV were incorrect when the issue initially went out. The problems have since been corrected. Happy buying!

**About growFolio:** growFolio (ISSN: 1555-8290) is an online business magazine for the under 35 crowd. New issues are generally published monthly, and are available on our website at [www.growfolio.com](http://www.growfolio.com). We've been in publication since January 2004.

**Content Suggestions:** If there's something you want to see in growFolio, or if you're an entrepreneur with a cool idea that we should profile in a future issue email us at [suggestions@growfolio.com](mailto:suggestions@growfolio.com) and let us know!

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eCost.com	ECST	\$-0.78	N/A	\$1.36	\$7.53	13
Lexar Media	LEXR	\$-0.95	N/A	\$8.64	\$5.01	13
Bank of Am.	BAC	\$4.15	11.22	\$46.57	\$44.50	13
Best Buy	BBY	\$2.12	22.16	\$47.05	\$31.54**	13
UnitedHealth	UNH	\$2.37	26.52	\$63.00	\$33.25*	13
LeapFrog	LF	\$-0.07	N/A	\$11.37	\$10.90	12
Avaya	AV	\$1.89	6.03	\$11.39	\$8.68	8

\*Price adjusted for 2:1 split

\*\*Price adjusted for 3:2 split

## Bring On 2006

What is there to say about the year 2005 from an investment standpoint other than the fact that there isn't much to say about the year. In the February 2005 issue, the *From the Editor's Desk* column talked about the January doldrums that we were experiencing at the time. Who would have thought that they were going to last all year. Major indexes like the Dow Jones only saw tiny increases (if any). While some of the TV personalities that talk about investments said that these increases were nonetheless real, the fact is that many of us saw a lot less upward movement in our portfolios than we otherwise wanted, with the "progress" essentially being worthless in its real-world applications. I needs to be said that the year wasn't a bad one. Really, it wasn't, but the gains were hard-earned and the losses were quick to come. So bring on 2006. I can't wait. We need a year of prosperity in the markets, a time when we can, once again, not feel the need to celebrate not losing our shirts. Because that's what we seem to be doing now. When I take a look at the TV pundits celebrating our stock market and the world's present financial situation, I can't help but miss a time when 10% gains were considered conservative. Not to say that well be minting money in 2006. Who knows what will happen. But the new year is a new chance for us to start off with a bang - January 2006 has so far been a nice little

boost to my positions, one that I hope won't end any time soon. So pick your glasses up and join me in a toast to success and prosperity in the new year.



The last 12 months of the Dow Jones Industrial Average  
Charts courtesy of StockCharts.com

# The Issues



## January 2005

Our first issue, full of investment analysis. Not so full of polish.



## February 2005

The big story about Apple Computer and Netflix vs. Blockbuster.



## March 2005

Taxes and Your Investments, A Guide to Jet Ownership



## April 2005

Mini-Issue focused on Social Security reform. Book review of *Blink*.



## May 2005

Finding the Perfect Company and Getting the Info You Need.



## Summer 2005

Ethical Investing, Podcasting, What's a Nickel Buy Today?



## November 2005

Aftermath and Analyzing Annual Reports



## December 2005

The Economics of the Holidays and the Year's Coolest Gadgets.

Remember that all of our articles, new and old, are available on the Read page of [www.growfolio.com](http://www.growfolio.com). If you'd like to see what was going on in any of the issues above, all you have to do is cruise over and download them.

# growFolio Turns One

Put your birthday hats on and get ready to sing, 'cause growFolio is turning one year old. There have been lots of changes over the months that we've been in publication, and it's been quite an interesting ride. Thanks to you for giving us a reason to keep working.



So you've been reading for a while, but now you're wondering what's going on with growFolio? What's with the changes, what's with all the talk? Put simply, the changes we're undergoing at growFolio are really important and really exciting. This issue is a pretty good example of the type of content we'll be featuring in the future. As the first online business magazine for the under 35 crowd, growFolio now has a broader scope that's going to allow us to feature more interesting content. We really hope that you like where we're going over the coming months.

Let's not forget that our website has undergone some very interesting changes as well. The design and usability have progressed throughout the year to bring you the [growfolio.com](http://growfolio.com) that you know and love today. Along that timeline, we've found some ideas that stuck (article archives), and some that didn't (discussion board). While we may bring back some of the older things, it seems to be looking pretty good right now. One of the things that we'd like to keep on top of better is updating the main page with news and commentary. Stay around in the near future and you may see us deliver on that.







## OpenPosting.com

The College Start Up

**T**he college start up has been nothing more than a distant dream for quite a few young entrepreneurs. Since the tech bubble burst five years ago, seed capital has been scarce for the dorm room corporations that made many an undergraduate millionaire in the late 1990s. But for Wan Hsi Yuan, 25, and Jason Servary, 22, a lack of financing just presents a new set of challenges for those willing to follow their dreams.

It all started in 2004 when Wan

Hsi, a newly enrolled graduate student at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) decided to create an online college community. "I wanted to do something with my life, I was laid off and wanted to go into the web design industry, I thought Craigslist was useful, but not perfect." It was then that Open Posting was born. The site

**"The site offers visitors a place to post classified ads of all sorts, with a special emphasis on college students."**

offers visitors a place to post classified ads of all sorts, with a special emphasis on college students. He met Jason at a meeting of the Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization (CEO).

"I'm just kind of helping him out with the business aspect of things, he's talented with the scripting and things like that, I'm here to develop and grow the business that he's already created. I was a founding member of CEO on campus, so that's one of the biggest things that I've done on campus here. Before that, my family owned a mailboxes etc. franchise, so I was able to work in the store and learn a lot about how businesses work, and learn the values of customer service and helping people, and learn the way the whole business process works. Even if Open Posting doesn't work out, I'll still be doing my own business." Jason told me. The two have been at it ever since, working tirelessly to create a tangible business.

Today's Open Posting website is really something. The site offers college students the ability to select their school and post or browse

classifieds specifically for their campus. If you're not in college, Open Posting has a site for you too. With everything from personals to blogs to job listings, the site truly is a place where you can easily spend hours just browsing around. While still relatively small in terms of userbase, Wan Hsi and Jason hope to grow their project to become a much more popular resource for internet users.

And creating and marketing a popular website is no easy task when you don't have cash to dole out on it. Said Jason, "We can only do so much as students, with no outside funding and very little ad revenues, we have many great plans for our marketing, but we can't really do them yet." Their approach to the business of the site, though, is definitely professional. On campus, they can frequently be seen putting up countless posters and going up to strangers, trying to raise awareness for Open Posting. "You have to market it, find out who your users are, keep them happy, keep them coming back, make it interesting - it's like having a

company can reach out to Open Posting's entire user base.

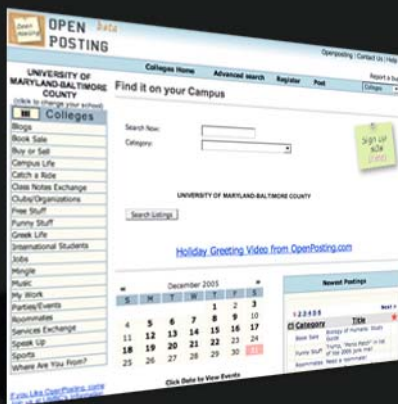
Open Posting's growing notoriety on cam-

**"Creating and marketing a popular website is no easy task..."**

pus is bringing up the question of what's next for the team behind the site. When you visit the Open Posting website, it's obvious that it was designed with a large scale in mind. After recruiting their fellow UMBC students to the site, they hope to expand their scope to local colleges, then to all the colleges in the US. Wan Hsi speculates, "... then maybe internationally, like to China."

The Open Posting team was born for business. When asked how they would describe themselves, each was quick with an answer. "I guess you can call me a dreamer, but I think the difference between a dreamer and me is that I'm a dreamer, but also a doer. When I think about dreamable things, I dream, but also I do them. I dream big, but also I do it, and hope that I get big. I think that if you combine both together, you can be a successful person." said Wan Hsi.

Jason had another take, "I think comprehensive optimist are the two words that describe me. I always have a positive outlook - and comprehensive - I always come up with a detailed solution and do it. Just try to stay focused and do what you've got to do."



The Open Posting website (openposting.com) is really a daunting undertaking. It's become an online community that people can turn to when they're looking for something online.

service business without a storefront."

Open Posting's business plan is advertising based, giving users free access to all the posting their hearts desire. Because the site is set up by zip code or college, advertisers are afforded the opportunity to reach out to specific demographic groups. A local mechanic might advertise in the car listings page for his zip code, while a national

# Sites to be Seen

There are tons of websites out there. We've sorted through the mess to find some sites that you should really check out!

## nPost.com CEO and Entrepreneur Interviews

nPost.com is a website that offers its visitors an opportunity to read a really impressive set of interviews with some of the most well known CEOs and entrepreneurs in the business world. Says Nathan Kaiser, the site's producer, "I try and identify companies that are doing something new, whether it is launch a new service or product. Serial entrepreneurs and CEOs are also featured on the site. Their experience and insights into business can be invaluable."

nPost.com is particularly useful because of the amount of information available from the site. New interviews are posted on a continuous basis.

Kaiser estimates that, "nPost.com features one to two new interviews per week. It is an ongoing process to identify new companies to feature as well as to put together all the research that allows us to really drill down into their business model."

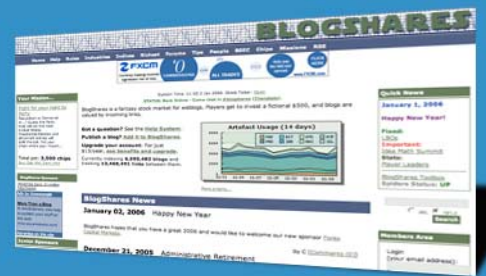
nPost.com is also expanding their scope with broader plans in mind. "nPost.com offers a job board focused on startup and small businesses. We have recently launched networking events in the Seattle area and plan to expand outside nationally over the next year." So the next time you're looking for a job, or just some business insight, have a look at nPost.com

## BlogShares.com Fantasy Stock Market Game

There are lots of stock market games online, but BlogShares.com is definitely different. It's a stock market simulator where weblogs are the companies that you buy and sell shares of. Jay Campbell, the guy behind BlogShares.com describes the typical user as, "... bloggers with an interest in either markets or the inter-connectedness of the blogosphere." The site had very scientific beginnings according to Campbell, "Veteran code monkey Seyed Razavi build the original game in 2003 to prove that a variant of the Power Law is in effect on the Internet:the popular get more popular. By tracking how sites link to each other and assigning a market-friendly valuation to each, we were able to unravel just how the Internet's superstars gained their lofty status." Now BlogShares.com is one of those superstars. With over 2 Million page loads every month, even Jay has trouble believing the success the site has seen to date.

"Of course one \*hopes\* that folks will come and enjoy the fruits of your labor, and we've been tickled at the community's response and involvement. The whole administration team is volunteer. Players spend untold hours a week playing the different levels of the game (blog stock trading, the bond market, etc) and all this activity has spawned several useful side projects." He did note the difficulties involved in creating Blogshares.com, "Our biggest hurdle has been scaling the code and the database servers to deal with millions of sites instead of thousands. We're still reworking parts of it so we can stop blocking some of the larger blog service providers." So if you find yourself in need of a new outlet for entertainment, head over to BlogShares.com, be careful, though, it just might become an obsession.

To check out all of our **Sites to be Seen**, visit <http://sites.growfolio.com>







# The Million Dollar Homepage

Ever wish you had a "million dollar idea"? Seriously, how incredible would it be to make one million dollars in a year. How about in less than six months? That's what Alex Tew, a college student in England did with his incredible website.

If you haven't heard of it, it's called the Million Dollar Homepage ([www.milliondollarhomepage.com](http://www.milliondollarhomepage.com)), and it's become one of the most amazing success stories on the internet. Hoping to raise some funds for his education, Alex created a web page that intended to sell advertising space for one dollar per pixel, with one million pixels of space to be sold. What happened next changed his life.

Things started off slowly, and gained momentum at an incredible rate. People started to get interested in what was a really novel idea. In a week, Alex had made well over \$5,000. About \$70,000 in less a couple weeks. Then it started to get crazy. By early October 2005 (a little over a month after the site's inception) he had made over \$300,000. Needless to say the attention was staggering.

Newspaper articles, TV reports, and magazine articles all came out about the site and its ingenious creator. The internet community had also been taking considerable notice, giving his site (and his advertisers) millions upon millions of visits.

The journey is coming to an end for Alex. As of this writing, he had sold 999,000 pixels, with the remaining 1,000 pixels of ad space being sold at auction on eBay for well over one-hundred thousand dollars. Alex joked about the auction, "maybe I could make another million dollars..."



Other online entrepreneurs and webmasters have taken notice of the site as well, offering their own takes on the million dollar homepage idea. The "copycat" sites can generally be divided into two groups - the exact copies, and the more original tribute sites.

The copies certainly are everywhere. After the initial success of the Million Dollar Homepage, sites like the Million Penny Homepage and the Million Quarter Homepage began to pop up, presenting essentially the same idea and design elements as the Million Dollar Homepage. And they have been successful. James Thomson's Million Penny Homepage was the first "pixel site" to sell all one million pixels, putting \$10,000 in James's pocket. Despite James's success, however, the majority of the copy sites attempt to be exact replica's of the original Million Dollar Homepage, copying everything from the idea to the various graphical elements and webpages that Alex came up with.

The more creative sites are the tribute sites that offer a new take on the Million Dollar Homepage. Sites in this vein include Million Dollar State, the Million Dollar Screenshot, and SmashMyViper.com. These websites took Alex's idea and ran with it, creating their own unique pixel factories.

The Million Dollar State ([www.milliondollarstate.com](http://www.milliondollarstate.com)), created by Stan Oleynick is a virtual city that sells hundred pixel "acres" of virtual property. Says Stan of the first time he saw the Million Dollar Homepage, "...I was skeptical at first, but then when I saw that this thing really works, I decided to do something more interesting and unique... I started to brainstorm the same day..." Stan plans to use money from his site to fund a business venture he's working on. Stan commented on what sets his site, Million Dollar State apart, "My project is different, because not only do I sell virtual property and build virtual buildings for businesses, creating the world's first virtual business park, I also offer the opportunity to have your real office building duplicated for [Million Dollar State] environment and placed on [Million Dollar State] as well as have your business name or website address written on your office building!"

The Million Dollar Screenshot ([www.milliondollarscreenshot.com](http://www.milliondollarscreenshot.com)) is another tribute site with a refreshing take on the original idea. Software engineer Guillaume Desnoix created a virtual desktop

that sells icons to businesses. The icons appear on his desktop, which is mirrored on the site. Said Guillaume of the success of pixel advertising, "I was surprised by the amount of people interested by pixel advertising. Searching for this kind of websites. I will consider this website to be successful when the paid icon will have received more than 10000 clicks. That should be soon." Like Stan of Million Dollar State, Guillaume intends to use the proceeds of his site to create a company.

Another interesting pixel website is SmashMyViper.com. The site capitalizes on a testosterone driven love of destruction. In exchange for buying space on the site, creator Jason Gunther offers advertisers the opportunity to make someone key, smash or drill any part of his Dodge Viper. Why, you ask? Because who doesn't want to cause damage to an exotic sports car without sabotaging their insurance premiums.

Alex Tew turned a new website into the marketing case study of the year. In the process, he inspired lots of other entrepreneurs, and made quite a bit of money. The moral of the story? If you have an idea that's a little far fetched, go for it - It just might make you a millionaire.



## Million Dollar State

Stan Oleynick's idea was one of the first original tribute sites of the MDHP.



## Million Dollar Screenshot

Million Dollar Screenshot is the only site that currently sells real pixels.



## Smash My Viper.com

SmashMyViper.com gives anyone the chance to destroy a beautiful car.

# 5 Rules for Successful Blogs

Blogs are becoming a pop culture phenomenon today. Everybody's getting one and big companies are pouring big bucks into getting corporate blogs online. There's a big difference, though, between Billy's blog detailing the trials and tribulations of the 10th grade and the really popular blogs that are actually making a living for their creators. So, you want to have a successful blog? Well, take this advice to heart, because I'm only going to say it once.

## 1. The Personal Blog: No One Cares [Unless You're Famous]

Let's be honest here. When I see a blog whose catch line involves "one man's interests and hobbies" I'm looking for the back button. Unless you're one of them beautiful people, the truth is, no one cares. I'd read Cory Feldman's personal blog, detailing all the excitement one gets once they reach that level of celebrity, but please, the last thing I need is a depressed yuppie talking about how Starbucks ran out of grande cups at lunchtime. (Not that any growFolio reader fits that description)

## 2. Only Talk About What You Know

So there's a fine line between the blogosphere and mainstream news media. Many bloggers are trying to make the jump (some are making it, others will surely fall to their deaths). One thing that has become increasingly controversial is the practice of some bloggers "reporting" not so factual news. Come on, just make sure it's true before you write about it. Unless you want a taste of the next rule...

## 3. Original and Interesting Stuff

Anybody can post links to their favorite websites or create a 38 part series featuring pictures of their cat. The lifeblood of blogs is interesting, original content. If you've got it, you actually stand a chance at gaining an audience who will go out of their way to visit your site. No one said it would be easy, but if you're actually trying to create a commercially viable weblog, you have to keep in mind that people get bored really, really easily. To keep them tuned on your site, you have to give them something that they can't get any-

where else. (Or in the absence of that, take the good stuff from everywhere else and put it together on your blog).

## 4. Watch Your Tail

Bloggers like to talk about controversial topics. Who can blame them? When it comes to the grey areas of fact versus fiction, however (see rule 2), you can be the target of a lawsuit if you don't make sure that you're not accidentally spreading lies. If you are, you might be sued - or worse - ridiculed for your ineptitude. Just make sure that you know that you are allowed to talk about, show, or post whatever it is before you actually do so. If you're fuzzy on the legalities of blogging, the Electronic Frontier Foundation has legal information for bloggers available at their site.

## 5. Give It A Reasonable Name

It's becoming all too common for blogs to have artsy names like "Bending Tree" or "Constipated Cat". Hey, we're sick of them. When you name your blog, think of something that will tell your visitors something, not make them think of fortune cookie anecdotes. Notice that Google's corporate blog is called the "Official Google Blog" and not "Thoughts about the life of an online entity vis a vis Google". Short and sweet usually wins.

Remember, when your blog does become popular, the rules no longer apply. That's when you whip out the pictures of you and Fluffy on vacation. Best of luck with all your blogging dreams. And hey, if you have a business related blog that's really cool, let us know!