There are a lot of guides out there on StumbleUpon that are quite in-depth and detailed. However, the majority of these guides are a few years old and in the social media space that is quite an eternity. I've wrote a few articles on StumbleUpon myself, such as analysing the top 50 users and even an interview with a top stumbler.

With this guide, however, I want to share more information on the site than I ever have before, a guide not just for marketers but anyone who wants to get the most out of the great service. That could be a lot of people, seeing as my ‘spy’ access into StumbleUpon’s statistics tell me they now have 7.5 million active users.

What is StumbleUpon

StumbleUpon is a system that allows you to find new and interesting websites based around your favourite subjects. The more you use the service, the more the system ‘learns’ about your interests and can show you web pages that interest you.

This is a new, social based model of finding content rather than searching for what you want in a major search engine and finding results generated by a computer. With StumbleUpon, it’s all about the users and the content that the community enjoys.

How to Use the Service
Traditionally, StumbleUpon utilises a toolbar that you install in a browser such as Internet Explorer or Firefox. More recently however, they have came up with a toolbar that you don’t need to install, and shows at the top of the pages you are viewing.

I prefer using the toolbar option and here is how it looks in your browser (note that my version has been tweaked based on my preferences):

![Original StumbleUpon Toolbar](image)

**New Web Toolbar**

The three main buttons that you should be aware of here are the ‘Stumble’ button and the up and down thumbs. The Stumble button will load a new page in your browser that has been based around your interests, the thumbs up button signifies that you like this page and of course the down thumb signifies that you don’t like it.

There are two aspects of this thumbing up and down that effect the system. The first aspect is that StumbleUpon learns about what type of content you like and what you don’t, and then tries to show you more of what you do like when you click Stumble. The second aspect is that they learn what pages the community like, and tend to show them to more people.

With over 7 million active users on the site, that means that there is a lot of potential for certain content to get viewed thousands of times. In fact, a blog post I wrote recently received over 100,000 views from users of the service. Instead of trying to explain how the system works, I’ve drawn this small graphic which should help explain things:

![Very Basic Guide on How StumbleUpon Works](image)

**Becoming an Active User**

If you’ve never used the site before, I’m warning you now, it can become very addictive and turn into a huge time waster. In fact, images that have said “Stop Using StumbleUpon” and shown up while browsing with the
toolbar have become a thing of humour because people know how fun the service can be.

The following points are applicable whether you are just starting out in the service, whether you’ve used it and want to get more out of it or you’re an internet marketer looking for website traffic. Either way, it’s good to take full advantage of all the features available and become a genuine, helpful user of the community.

**Define Your Interests**

When you sign-up to StumbleUpon you will be asked what topics you are interested in. Of course, it’s important that you tell them what you are actually interested in so that you can get the most out of the service. When I signed up I entered ‘web development’, ‘internet’ and ‘self improvement’ as my favourite topics.

![Select your interests and stumble!](image)

What this means is that whenever you hit the Stumble button, you will be shown a page that has been tagged as relevant to one of these categories, and you won’t see pages about random subjects.

**Choose a Profile Picture**

This is something that I think everyone should do, no matter what your reason is for wanting to use the site. Your profile picture will of course show on your profile, but it will also show on any reviews of pages that you comment on and it may show on review pages which show which people liked the content.

Here are some examples of popular avatars in the social media space:

![Avatars examples](image)

It is up to you whether you want to use an ‘avatar’ style picture like this or a
picture of your face, both are acceptable and about as popular as each other.

**Writing Your Profile Description**

Every user on StumbleUpon gets their own profile, yours will be located at http://username.StumbleUpon.com - of course, substituting username for whatever username you chose. Your description is there simply to tell the world a bit about yourself. I recommend that you fill this out and be honest; the friending feature of StumbleUpon is used a lot and this will help you connect with other users.

A nice touch in the description section is that you can add a link to other websites so if people like your Stumbles they may check out the links to see what you are about. I’ve made some great relationships through StumbleUpon and turned many of my ‘friends’ on the site into blog subscribers, Twitter friends and even Facebook buddies.

**Add People to Follow**

I’ve already mentioned that when you sign-up you get to pick your favourite interests, and then the Stumble button will show you relevant website pages. The Stumble button is not the only way to find great content on the site though, you can find it through your connections.

When you Stumble upon a page, you will be able to see the user who submitted it via the toolbar like so:

If you like what they are submitting you can both add them as a friend and subscribe to their submissions. This means that when you go to your home page on the site (http://username.stumbleupon.com/home/) then you will see all the recent reviews by your friends. My own profile has 142 people subscribed to my updates.

**Create Your Own Shortcuts**

Once you start really getting into the site, you’ll notice that you want to speed up certain aspects of the features available. My current set-up goes like this:
I let Stumbleupon *prefetch* the pages it is going to show me
- If I click ‘Thumbs Down’ then it automatically loads a new page
- CTRL + Left Arrow on my keyboard shows a new page (Stumble Button)
- CTRL + Up Arrow on my keyboard gives a page a thumbs up
- CTRL + Down Arrow on my keyboard gives the page a thumbs down

This means that I can browse around and find great new content without having to keep clicking on the toolbar with my mouse. You can change your shortcuts by going to Tools >> Toolbar Options >> Shortcuts. If you like the idea of auto loading a new page when you click the down or up thumb then you can change that in the configuration tab.

**Getting Traffic from the Site**

If you are not a webmaster and simply want to find awesome content, then the information above should be more than enough for you to get started. However, this is an internet business blog after-all, and StumbleUpon is one of the best ways to drive traffic to your websites.

StumbleUpon is known to have the ability to send thousands of visitors to a page over a few day stretch. I remember the days when the traffic would only have a 30% bounce rate, and while it’s around 70% now, visitors from the service still leave comments and sign-up to RSS feeds which is what most people want them to do.

Just to show you the potential of the service, here are the traffic stats for one of my sites for the month of March, 2009.

![Traffic Chart](image)

**Note:** I wanted to share a more realistic example of similar results you can hope to achieve. However, I have also seen StumbleUpon send this site over 80,000 visitors to a single page, this one.

So, how do you get all this traffic from StumbleUpon? Before we find out, I want to say that it’s clear these days it’s no longer about having a powerful profile or a huge network of people you can send your page too and ask them to Stumble it. Now, it’s largely about the content (and that’s a good thing, especially for those of us that genuinely want to help people).
Now, let’s find out about that traffic should we...

**Write Creative Titles**

Although your content should be good, it isn’t nearly as important as the title of your page. The title of your article or blog post is the first thing people see, and if it doesn’t entice them to read on then they aren’t going to stick around. Great title ideas include:

- List / Resource Posts
- Something that is humorous
- Something that is relevant and fills a need
- Something that is shocking and against the norm

A title like ‘Some snails in London get painted’ is nowhere near as interesting as ‘Graffiti Artist Uses Snails as His Canvas’ which was in fact, an article. Don’t write a great title if you don’t have the content to back it up, and make sure the title is relevant. But remember, the title is without a doubt the most important factor of whether people will read your content or not.

Want proof? Look at the top rated pages in any category and they will all have great titles. Or, test it out for yourself.

**Create Viral Images or Videos**

Text isn’t the only type of content that works well on StumbleUpon. For a while last year I ran a motivational pictures blog and each day I would receive thousands of visitors from the toolbar. Remember, most StumbleUpon users are just browsing around the web, looking for something interesting and pictures and videos are great ways to catch their attention.

However, it’s important to note that while images or videos can be great at getting a surge in traffic from the site, it’s far less likely to convert in a way you want it too compared to text content. Unless of course, you’re trying to increase the view count of your videos ;).

**Enter Relevant Submission Information**

It’s important that you do not simply keep submitting your own content to the site as I’ve noticed a lot of people do as this is a fast-track way to get your account banned or have your site banned. Even a huge blog like ProBlogger was removed from the service and while the domain was allowed back into the system after a huge uproar, it does show that nobody is exempt from their heavy hand.

You can submit a new page to the system by simply clicking ‘I like it’ and if the page has not been discovered before, a pop-up box like this one below
If the title of the current article is catchy then leave it, otherwise you can tweak it to help it along. For a description I sometimes just copy the introduction of the article, or you can write your own short review. It’s important that you pick an appropriate category for the submission. If you choose a sports category for a financial article, nobody who it is shown to is going to like it and it will quickly drop off the queue.

**Send the Page via a Re-Direct**

I mentioned earlier that it is no longer effective to send a page to all of your friends and ask them for a stumble. In the past this kind of activity would guarantee you thousands of visitors but now it is rarely the case. Thanks to my friend [Marc](http://www.pluginhq.com/stumbleupon/), I’ve noticed that if you do want to use this method, it is far more effective to send visitors through a StumbleUpon Re-direct.

```
http://www.stumbleupon.com/click_redir.php?t=49e34c6117e3f&src=url&u=YOURURLGOESHERE
```

This reason this works is that StumbleUpon are clearly not sending a lot of traffic when you click the ‘I like this’ from a page you are already on. However if you go through the re-direct, or keep stumbling and land on a page then vote it up, it looks a lot more natural and like a genuine recommendation.

**Look at What Is Hot**

A good way to get traffic from any social media website is to look at what is hot and is working well in the community. After-all, it makes sense if you find out what people on websites enjoy and send them more of it, they are going to stick around on your site.

A good way to check what is hot on StumbleUpon is to check the top rated
pages for each category. As an example, PluginID is in the Personal Development niche and the closest related category to that on StumbleUpon is self-improvement. So what I would do now is head on over to the self-improvement page (you should do the same for whatever category is most relevant to your niche) and look at the top-rated pages.

You can quickly see the type of content in your industry that is doing well and getting 50 reviews or more. As an example, in the self improvement niche I have written 3 of the top 50 highest rated articles ever. All of these have received over 50,000 visitors from StumbleUpon and this one even received 110,000.

**In Conclusion**

StumbleUpon is without a doubt one of my favourite websites. Not only does it allow me to find content I wouldn’t have found otherwise, it’s also been a site that has allowed me to make some great connections. A lot of the information in this article, while simple, is enough to ensure you understand the site and how it works.

If you are an internet marketer, please, for obvious reasons, do not abuse the system. I see so many voting rings on forums that say ‘if you stumble me then I’ll stumble you’ which only brings down the quality of the service for anyone who uses it. I don’t see any harm in asking for a bit of help in promoting quality content, after-all I see a lot of information rarely getting the content it deserves, while blatantly made for adsense sites show up on my browsing.

Let me know what you think of this guide, it is almost 2,500 words but I think creating long, in-depth posts like this can be helpful as a one stop resource in getting started.

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22 Comments »

*Comment by [Christopher Ross](mailto:christopherross@pluginhq.com)*

Great post, thanks! I have a lot of clients who are new to the Internet and being able to point them to such a comprehensive StumbleUpon piece will be a huge asset.
Comment by Glen

Thank you Christopher, it took a while to put together but I think it was worth it!

Comment by Niels

Thanks for this great introduction to StumbleUpon.
Subscribed to the RSS feed to keep up-to-date.

Comment by Zak Nicola

Good guide to the basics Glen.
What do you think of the group feature on the site?

Comment by Glen

Thanks Zak. To be completely honest I haven’t used the feature much. Feel free to share any of your own observations.

Comment by Terry

Great post, thanks for the information and direction.

Comment by Catherine Lockey

Thanks for taking the time to blog about StumbleUpon. Special thanks for the sending a page through a redirect suggestion.

Comment by Glen
You’re welcome Catherine, thanks for the comment.

Comment by **alex redmond**

Good article. I personally find that once I have bookmarked a site in StumbleUpon, it shows up quicker in my stats than any other social bookmarking site, inc Digg & Delicious. Good traffic and the site also feels as if you are part of a community which I like and makes me want to visit more.

Comment by **Arafat Hossain Piyada**

Thanks for this great content. I read it and learn it. I also get banned earlier on last of 2008 but now I am doing good by following similar rule.

Comment by **Alex - Unleash Reality**

i like how you explain the redirect how it’s a more genuine seeming stumble if they land there off another stumble than hit it up and thumb it up - never thought about it like that. clever glenzo.

really like the shortcuts too, just set it up to see if it works well and wow, lot easier. specially not having to hit stumble after i thumbs up or down, just automatically stumbling over again.

i have one question though - when you stumble do you either thumbs up or thumbs down every page or do you sometimes do neither and just stumble to another page? and is it better to be harsher on the thumbs down and give less thumbs up so they have more weight?

thanks for awesome guide
alex

Comment by **Glen**
Hey Alex.

Regarding the first question, yes I sometimes do that. Sometimes I just want to skip over a page without feeling the need to pass my judgement. That is usually for something I just don’t want to read, rather than feeling it deserves a thumbs down.

As for the second question, I wouldn’t worry about that too much and instead just do what you do 😊

Comment by Melvin

This is a helpful post to me because I really don’t do well with getting traffic from stumbleupon. There is one time it gave me 200 uniques in one night and unfortunately that was the only time I got over 100 uniques from stumbleupon...

Comment by Louis

Good guide!

But is bookmarking sites really effective?

I mean how often non-savvy web users bookmark a website or blog?

I really can’t see a promising future for bookmarking sites.

Comment by Glen

Hey Louis,

StumbleUpon has over 8 million members, it’s not just for us technical folk.

Comment by Ibrahim | ZenCollegeLife.com
Hey Glen! How is it I’ve known about pluginID since it’s beginning and yet I just found out about pluginHQ today!?!? Where have I been? btw, things look great here!

Comment by Srinivas Rao

Thanks Glen. This was really useful. I’m planning on using it quite a bit more than I have in the past.

Comment by Mike

Nice thanks! This definitely helps me gain an understanding of Stumbleupon and how to use it to my advantage.

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E-mail (required - never shown publicly)

URI

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