**How Does Affiliate Marketing Work?**

If you’ve been selling affiliate products for a while now, then you probably think you have a fairly good handle on how the process works. It’s all quite simple: you get given a link, you promote a product using a said link, and you then get a commission on all the sales that come from that URL.

But do you know how this all works? Do you know how the product creators know the link came from you? And do you know how to protect your links? Let’s take a closer look at the nuts and bolts.

**Cookies and Referrers**

What’s happening when someone clicks on an affiliate link is that a cookie is being left on their computer. This then means that when they go to buy the product, they can be identified as having been sent by you.

This is why some affiliate schemes can still pay-out even if someone clicks on your link, goes away, and then comes back later to buy the product.

Whether or not that will happen for you though will all depend on how long the cookie lasts – most have an ‘expiry date’. Likewise, it’s worth bearing in mind that someone could click on a second affiliate and then get a new cookie from another marketer. Whether or not this replaces your cookie will depend on the system being used: whether it’s ‘the first click’, ‘last click’, or ‘lifetime referrer’.

Meanwhile, some potential buyers might try and sidestep your affiliate link altogether and go directly to the website to buy the product. This is called ‘link bypassing’ and it’s the reason that smart affiliates will use another strategy called ‘link cloaking’ to protect their earnings. This essentially means using a referral to disguise the link, though there are numerous ways you can achieve this. Something to think about!

**Legal Aspects**

Many people never question how things like affiliate links work, but by understanding the basics, it’s possible to make sure that you do everything right and maximize your earnings. Likewise, you should also think about the legal aspects of affiliate marketing. For example, the fact that you are using cookies means that you need to show a disclaimer to comply with EU laws. Likewise, it is law in the US that you must announce that you are earning a commission. You can do this easily with a plugin showing a small message at the bottom of the page, and likewise, there are plugins to help you become automatically compliant with EU GDPR laws.