



Seek Substance and Not Style

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

In analyzing her success and downfall, a recent article about Lindsay Lohan in *Vanity Fair* discussed how she really was a great actress but put herself into competition with those much lesser than herself in the Los Angeles social scene:

"She became infatuated with being in the press all the time like a Paris Hilton or a Kim Kardashian. It was like she forgot she actually had talent."

"Lindsay was on the A-list and it's like she was fighting to get onto the D-list," said the young woman.

What is so amazing about the [downfall of Lohan](#) is that it was largely a result of deciding to become part of a scene that was beneath her. In becoming part of this negative scene, she was dragged right down with it:

It affected her weight. "These girls were all in competition with each other to be the skinniest," said the former satellite member of the posse. A 2005 picture of an alarmingly thin Lindsay in a red dress stepping out with an even bonier Nicole Richie is still shocking. The inevitable anorexia and bulimia gossip followed. "I had a problem and I couldn't admit it," Lindsay said in a VANITY FAIR cover story in 2006.

She soon began developing other ailments connected with her partying. "She always had insomnia," said one of her friends. "I would always tell her, like stay in, watch a movie. She's afraid if she doesn't go somewhere, she'll miss something or people will forget about her."

As a great actress, Lohan had fame, admiration, and fortune. Instead of capitalizing on her talents, she felt a need to be part of a crowd where people like Paris Hilton became famous for appearing in sex tapes—and not great movies. In short, she was someone with incredible success who allowed herself to be dragged down to a lower level. Soon there were DUIs and jail, then problems getting good roles, and more.

Over the past decade, I have operated several businesses that are on the Internet. Based on the quality of the services and products they provide, these businesses receive millions of visitors online each month. Based on providing a good service and concentrating on the business, I have been able to build successful businesses that employ hundreds of people and do well year after year. I have managed to do all of this without ever taking any outside money and have simply concentrated on providing good service to people in the areas I operate.

Several months ago, I started receiving all sorts of e-mails from self-described [Internet gurus](#). Typically, these e-mails were being sent by guys who had no businesses other than telling other people without businesses (or very small businesses) how to start and run businesses. Often, these "Internet gurus" have never run a business and have no employees to speak of (or, if they do, they have only a few). These guys have online courses, do seminars, and have all sorts of information products that they are selling about how to make money and get Internet traffic.

For the most part, the information products these "gurus" sell provide little benefit to people other than showing them "tricks" to get more traffic from search engines, get more business, and so forth. None of these tricks that they teach are generally of any long-term value. For example, they may discover a trick to increase a website's ranking (and teach a course about it), but the tricks they teach will probably not work very long.

You may have heard of some of these "gurus"—guys like Frank Kern, Jeff Walker, Andy Jenkins, Brad Fallon, Mike Filsaime, Eben Pagan, John Reese, Mike Koenigs, Ryan Deiss, Brendon Burchard, John Carlton, Jeff Johnson, and several others. These guys all seem to work together promoting each other's products one after another. Each product pitch goes something like this:

"You may think what you are doing is working—but it's not! Take my course and I will show you how to increase your sales 500%, drive 10 times more business to your website, etc., etc., etc."

The pitches are always the same. Lately, led by a method being promoted by Frank Kern, these guys offer their best content upfront for free in a series of e-mails, then promise you even better content if you pay them a few thousand dollars to take their course. Generally, the course itself is of much less value than the free information they provide; however, people do not learn this until after paying the money to get in on the course. The courses are structured so that better and better information is promised in the future—and by the time the person realizes there is not a lot of substance to the course, the guarantee period has expired.

A lot of these courses appear as if they are filmed using Flip cameras in the home office of the "guru"—I saw portions of one by Jeff Walker like this and another by John Reese like this and another by Frank Kern like this. These guys appear to be filming in homes that are not worth more than \$500,000 to \$1 million and not what you would expect from someone who has just discovered the "secret" to world domination on the Internet.

I started getting e-mails from these guys around March of this year. When the e-mails started to come, I was intrigued. The more e-mails I received, the more I felt I must be doing something wrong and needed to learn more. Here's an example of one of them from Frank Kern:

Subject: Get My 23.8 Million Dollar Swipe File

Frank here with some cool news!

blueprint to all these launches!

Check it out:

List Control has been going so extremely well, I've decided to give one of

my most requested pieces of content out to anyone who buys it.

It's called the...

\$23.8 Million Dollar Swipe File

As you probably have heard, over the last few years I generated \$23.8 Million Dollars in sales over a combined 24 hour period.

Basically that just means I wrote the email series (and constructed the launch) for a bunch of big launches in various niches that brought in all that money.

Not just Internet Marketing launches either... Now, here's the cool thing:

If you're a list control customers, I'm going to GIVE YOU the complete

You'll get ALL the emails I sent out for each launch and can copy and paste all this stuff into your own websites!

Not only that, but you get the EXACT SEQUENCE of all my biggest campaigns, plus you get an audio walk through of how I structured everything and why.

...And it's super easy to model this same approach in your business :-)

I believe this Swipe File alone is worth more than the asking price for List Control ...but it's yours, free if you Join List Control here:

(If you've already joined then don't worry, you're getting it as well! Look out for a new tab in the members area soon :)

Talk soon,

Frank

P.S. - The feedback we've had during this List Control launch has been phenomenal! Thanks a ton for the over 2,000 comments we had on the content we gave out last week.

Frank Kern's offer for some reason sucked me in. I have no idea why I signed up for it but I did. I signed up on his website for some course about building lists. I did the online course and it was not very good at all. In fact, the course had such little content to it that I do not remember much of what it was about. From what I remember, he had taken a book by Seth Godin (a well-respected author and business owner) called *Permission Marketing* (that I had read years earlier) and without crediting Godin, he had built an entire course around Godin's principle of permission marketing (just applying Godin's ideas to the Internet).

The highlight of the Kern course was a three-day live seminar at the Hard Rock Hotel in San Diego, California, held in May. I brought my wife and two children down there. The conference was held just as local colleges were getting out. For the full three days of the conference, rock music blared until 1:00 a.m. every night in the courtyard of the hotel, and hundreds of people in bathing suits celebrated, screamed, and ran around drunk. We could not sleep—in fact, it was so loud we could not even watch television in our room because we could not hear the television over the rock music. Our children cried excessively because they could not sleep. My wife yelled at me. Marijuana from people smoking in their rooms permeated the hallways.

During the conference, Kern mentioned cocaine numerous times—saying stuff like “guys like me shouldn't spend all their money on blow!”--spoke about the love for hard liquor, gave away lots of liquor bottles to the audience, and provided very little content. Kern also mentioned about twenty-five times how he was friends with Anthony Robbins, and then had other people get up on the stage and talk about how Kern was friends with Robbins. Finally, Kern spent some time talking about how he had been in trouble with the FCC and seemed to deflect responsibility for this somewhere else.

Prior to the seminar, Kern sent everyone in his course a book called The Wolf of Wall Street, written by a guy named Jordan Belfort, who stole hundreds millions of dollars from people in a stock swindle, was a former drug addict (cocaine and quaaludes), was a former sex addict (he slept with thousands of hookers while married), and had gone to prison for several years for all sorts of felonies. I read the book with fascination because it talked in lucid terms about Belfort's activities. At the conference, Belfort was introduced as an “honorary speaker,” and he tried to sell everyone in the audience on attending a seminar he was holding a few months later for \$3,500.

At the conference, the first day I sat next to a 400-pound guy with bad skin who smelled like mashed potatoes and gravy, who ran a porn site. I discussed this with him and was uncomfortable—the site he ran had the name “teen” in it and the guy was looking to increase his business. When he started discussing in opaque terms being involved in “tryouts” of the teen girls who appeared in his sex videos, I formed an image in my head that made me feel physically sick. I moved at the intermission.

The rest of the people I met at the conference were trying to start online businesses selling e-books and various information products (things like “How to Stop Smoking in 5 Days” and other similar stuff). No one impressed me all that much. I did not meet anyone with a business of any substance--although there may have been some people like this there. Most of the people were trying to get ahead, and everyone I met was very nice. All I am saying, I guess, is that Kern is not catering to people with serious, established companies (at least that is what I got out of it).

After the conference, Kern sent me a few letters telling me he wanted me to pay \$100 or so to get on some teleconference where he would coach me about my business. I refused.

Over the next several months, day after day I started to receive e-mails from Kern and all of these other Internet gurus. Apparently still stoned from walking the hallways of the Hard Rock Hotel in San Diego, I allowed myself to be interrupted several times per day as one offer or another came over the computer. I began to feel I knew nothing about the Internet, or business for that matter. I watched online videos about marketing. I came to think I was doing something wrong. I started

changing my schedule to watch various videos coming over the computer.

Finally, I signed up for another one of these courses—this one by Ryan Deiss. He is a sharp kid, a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, who has fallen in with the wrong crowd and now spends his time associating with and learning from an older and more experienced Internet huckster, Perry Belcher. In addition to being an Internet guru with Belcher, Deiss is also trying to start real businesses. I spoke with him personally at a cocktail reception the last evening of the course and he told me he was planning his first trip to China to buy some bidets. I think he also told me he was selling hot dog carts and bug spray with Belcher over the Internet.

I took an employee of mine to the Ryan Deiss seminar, and for the few days of the seminar we sat next to a creepy-looking guy with long hair who told us he was going to make over \$200,000 that weekend doing a launch for his new product—a course called “The Female Liquid Orgasm.” He showed us a picture of the cover of his course, which had a picture of a woman with her legs spread and what appeared to be a fire hose of water coming from between her legs. Underneath this bizarre illustration, it said something like “She will gush over a cup of her liquid orgasm 10+ feet!”

I did not know what was going on.

It was one of the oddest experiences I have ever encountered. I still am not sure what the course was about.

After the Deiss course, I largely decided that I had “had it.” None of the people I met at the course had real businesses. None of the “gurus” (perhaps with the exception of Deiss) have ever had real businesses. They are, in effect, charlatans who hold themselves out as better and more knowledgeable than others, when they are in fact not.

- They are not people like Mark Zuckerberg (the founder of Facebook).
- Nor are they Jeff Bezos (the founder of Amazon).
- Nor are they people like Sergey Brin (the founder of Google).
- Nor are they people like Jack Welch (the former CEO of General Electric).

No ... most of these Internet gurus never even went to college. Prior to getting into the business, they were things like mortgage brokers (Eben Pagan) or just people running criminal enterprises (Jordan Belfort). I do not want to be too harsh about this because I hate saying anything negative about anyone—but, these guys are at a “C” level and not at an “A” level when it comes to running a business and giving advice. They are on the lesser rungs of society.

- They will not be showing up at the White House for a cocktail reception.
- They will not be giving speeches at Harvard Business School.
- They will not be selling their businesses for \$50 million-plus.

I highly doubt if people like Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian, or Nicole Richie will ever win an Academy Award either. I highly doubt that Frank Kern, Jeff Walker, or any of the Internet gurus will ever start a company anywhere near the importance of an Amazon.com or Google.

- Paris Hilton may get arrested for carrying cocaine again, but what else is going to become of her? Notwithstanding, she will continue to hold herself out as Hollywood royalty despite having no major acting credentials to speak of.
- Frank Kern may get in trouble with the FCC again, but what else will become of him? Notwithstanding, he will continue to hold himself out as an Internet icon and expert.

So what does all of this mean for your career and life?

I have realized that we are surrounded by people, places, and things that look very appealing but are simply beneath us. I operate companies that are much larger and more significant than any of the Internet gurus out there—why I allowed myself to be sucked in and listen to advice from ex-cons and other people with no experience is a mystery to me.

It must be my own insecurity.

It surely was also Lindsay Lohan’s insecurity that drove a great actress into the party scene and to a life that was beneath her. In the process, this life drove her right to the bottom of the barrel from the height of stardom.

You are surrounded by bad people and influences. We are all surrounded by them. People that you are better than will always try to court you and influence you with the idea that they are better than you, know more than you, have more fun than you, have a better life than you, and have more happiness than you. These people are all around you and they will influence you to try and become like them in every way they can. This is just how it works—and it will always work this way.

The key is to not allow yourself to be seduced by people who are beneath you. You can only resist people and influences beneath you when you are truly aware of your own strengths. You need to be aware of your strengths so that you are associating with people better than you who have something to really teach you—and not the opposite.

For someone like Lindsay Lohan, this might have meant being friends with someone like Gwyneth Paltrow, Jane Fonda, or Meryl Streep—and learning from someone like them instead. I am sure Lindsay Lohan could have easily pulled this off.

In the past few years I have met people who have started major Internet companies and have run major businesses. I would be much better off spending time with people like this than the Frank Kerns of the world. Why did I even bother?

I was seduced. In your life, no matter what stage you are in, you need to seek out people better than you and not the opposite. I mean people truly better than you. Not people with tricks up their sleeve, or who look appealing from a distance. I mean people who are truly better than you and who have achieved something of substance.

You should seek substance in your job. You should seek substance in your relationships. You should seek substance in your free time activities. Always seek substance and not style.

THE LESSON

Bad people and influences surround you, and try to influence you to become like them. Do not be seduced by people who are beneath you, but instead people who are better than you and who will help you develop an awareness of your own strengths. Seek substance in your jobs, relationships, and free-time activities.