

How To Use \$180 And Social Media To Travel The Country For A Year

by Amy Bugbee
photos: ayearatthewheel.com

My husband Shane and I set out on a yearlong road trip with \$180 in our pockets. We had no savings account, no credit cards, no back up. Our only safety net was the Internet. With our dog and turtle in the back seat of our Chevy Blazer, we left with a few blankets, a bag of baking gear, a suitcase full of clothes. Most importantly, one laptop computer, an HD Video camera and a donated digital audio recorder. The recorder was given to us by a supporter we met at a podcasting meeting we found on Meetup.com, so we were already putting social media to the test.

A journey like this is not for everyone, but for the adventurous few who dare, it is possible to survive for a full year on the road using nothing but technology-- and a little elbow grease. Our plan was to use the Internet to find work, shelter and conversation. In addition, we planned to give people an outlet to speak their minds in short videos we were posting on our website, therefore bringing



wanted to use couchsurfing.com. Unfortunately, two people with a dog and a turtle was a bit more than most folks wanted on their sofa. It would probably work much better for a single traveler than our hoard.

We contacted a variety of businesses and offered to promote their gear if they would send us samples. To this end we acquired shoes, clothing, baking mixes and even a waterproof laptop case from Otterbox.com.

Along the road other needs popped up, like car repairs, dog sitting and food. Typically with a quick web search and few emails everything was taken care of. In exchange for their services we made video commercials and posted them online. Once when we were nearly starving in St. Louis, we called a local BBQ stand

and asked to come in and film an episode of our internet TV show. The owner pumped us full of delicious meat and side dishes and then sent us off with a case of BBQ sauce and probably half a pig. We felt a little guilty about the royal treatment we'd received, but in the end the man was thrilled with the business our online video brought him, and he still emails us to this day!

To work our way across the USA we used the "Gigs" section of Craigslist. That's where people post for temporary odd jobs such as raking leaves or help moving and many of the people we worked for were supportive of our project and offered us food, shelter, gas, and even doggie vitamins. In the course of our trip I worked cleaning houses, mowing lawns and even spent a day at a gun show. Shane fixed plumbing in Knoxville, and we both worked as ranch hands in New Mexico and bottled rum in New Orleans. The other Craigslist section we used with great success was "Barter". There we posted "Will Trade Wife" or "Will Trade Husband". These were for non-sexual trades of labor, cookie baking and fix it help. Most people found these posts amusing and it lessened the fear of allowing strangers in one's home. Perhaps our most important Craigslist barter of all was in Portland, Oregon when we traded our Chevy Blazer for an old RV, in which I am currently writing this article.

For places to stay, we usually posted in the "Community" Section under "Local News", "General" or "Politics". Since our road trip was following the election year, we would ask if

anyone out there had an interest in being a part of an internet TV show about the election. We also stayed with many online pals. It was exciting to meet many of our "friends" in person for the first time and many of the people we met hooked us up with their friends all across the country.

On the days we had no money and no place to go, technology helped us in another way. We would find a Kinko's that was open 24 hours and take turns working and napping in the truck. Kinko's is a giant corporation built on computer technology. It is a great hub for small business owners to appear more legit via telecommunications, teleconferencing and digital copying and they seemed rather used to weirdoes milling about at all hours of the night. We could sit there for hours editing on our laptop or surfing the web for our next stop.

Technology is an ever-evolving matter, so one must also be willing to adapt to the changes. Much of what we began the year with changed drastically over the months. Our website upgraded three times, changing to Word Press templates that adapted to the crossover from more blogs to vlogs. The way in which we uploaded our videos changed too. We began the year using lulu.tv, who was paying us a small amount per month to post videos. After a few months they dropped out due to funding issues and we began manually posting on several websites, including Blip, Revver, and YouTube. About halfway through



more voices to the Internet, and promote any businesses willing to help us out.

The first rule of the road was craigslist.com. This is where we found the most work and the most support. Second was our "friends" on Myspace, Facebook and Twitter. I even used Ebay to auction my cookie baking service around Christmas and had a great time whipping up cookies all afternoon for a nice lady in the Chicago suburbs. We posted a donation button and offered "Buy A Day" or "Buy A Sticker" on the car. A surprising amount of people donated and one sweet gal even sent Cheyenne some dog bones off of our amazon.com wish list.

We also contacted other bloggers, vloggers, and various internet personalities that might be willing to barter some promotion. This garnered mixed results. Some were helpful and some were not-- and don't even get me started on the supposed "Podfather" Adam Curry! We really



our trip we discovered Tube Mogul, which automatically placed our videos on every website we chose with just one click.

During the year we also brought technology to other people. We set up an old chum in Chicago with streaming radio, convinced a gal in Mississippi to do a regular blog and got tons of friends to join various social and video networking sites. The rum distillery we worked at, bottling the best Cajun Spice Rum in the world, is now doing their own internet TV show. Even some of the subjects from our videos hooked up together from across town and across the country.

In the end, we made it the entire year by utilizing technology and the Internet. We lived below the poverty line for certain, but the dog and turtle didn't seem to notice and Shane actually put on a few pounds from all the great meals we shared with fine people. It brought us all a lot closer together, and we have a world of new friends from sea to shining sea, most of whom we manage to keep up with through email and social networks. It just goes to prove that there is nothing more broadening than travel and nothing so grand as technology.

Now it's your turn to get going!

Photos:

Top: Sofabed in Lubbock TX.
Left: Shane, Amy and Cheyenne outside the "New" RV.
Right: Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist.
Bottom: Revolutionary John Sinclair in New Orleans.