SEJ
EBOOK

LINKBUILDING GUIDE

HOW TO ACQUIRE & EARN LINKS THAT BOOST YOUR SEO

C O N T E N T

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Leveraging proprietary technology and a database of relationship to scale link building with in-article contextual links.

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CONTENT

LINK BUILDING
MADE EASY

OUR PROCESS:

- Custom Campaigns
- White Hat Guest Posting
- Content-Driven Link Building
- Strict Partnership Qualifying
- Dedicated Outreach Team

CLAIM YOUR FREE LINK

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> "In 1999, I started this company with the mission statement: "We will work toward bringing in the greatest amount of relevant traffic to our clients' websites using the most ethical methods available." That mission remains true today.

Jim Boykin, *CEO & Founder of Internet Marketing Ninjas*

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✔ All work completed by our 50 person in-house team
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✔ Regular SEO Recommendations, Monthly Reports & Campaign Reviews with Jim Boykin

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✔ Services start at $7,500

At the end of 2019, the average client's *Google Organic Traffic* was:

⬆ 65% After **3 Months**

⬆ 47% After **6 Months**

⬆ 102% After **12 Months**

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A
LINK BUILDING
CHECKLIST
TO EARN MORE
& BETTER LINKS

AUTHOR **Anna Crowe**

If you want to rank well in organic search, **you need links.**

Google has told us as much, revealing that links are one of the **top 3 ranking factors.**

Quality links increase the overall authority and trustworthiness of a page.

Quality links to multiple pieces of content regularly can increase domain-wide rankings with time.

Not too long ago, creating links went through a few dark seasons where almost every link we built was boring and spammy. No personalized email, content not needed, and only a dab of brand mentions.

Link building was all about **quantity instead of quality.**

But then the term "link building" began to transform.

We heard new terms like **link earning**, link giving, link acquisition, and relationship building.

Link earning is about building relationships, being a part of a community, and developing content ideas that are actually worth sharing.

This emphasis on quality, meaning, and engagement has restored balance to the link building universe.

But you also need a **diverse link profile.**

That's where this link building checklist comes in.

What follows is a recap of everything we will discuss in our link building guide so far, with tasks broken down by month and week.

Rather than rehashing all the same information again, I've provided links to the relevant chapters of the guide so you can get more detailed information about whichever topics interest you the most.

Happy link building!

Do Not Pass Go Without Technical SEO

Ask yourself these questions:

- What happens when you build links to a poorly built website?

- Can you rank a website based on backlinks alone?

This might be a me problem, but I'm willing to bet that I'm not the only one that leans to "nothing" and "no."

The colossal pool that is search engines fills up with fast, mobile-friendly, clean websites.

Will Google rank your poorly designed website with high-quality backlinks?

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Or, will Google rank your fast, mobile-friendly, clean website with high-quality backlinks?

Do the technical SEO work before you start to worry about backlinks. Or, work in tangent to get both done at the same time.

Plus, a webmaster is more likely to link back to your website naturally if it's technically sound with a clean user experience.

Breakdown of Link Building Activities

I created this handy yearly calendar of all the link building activities listed in the chapters below.
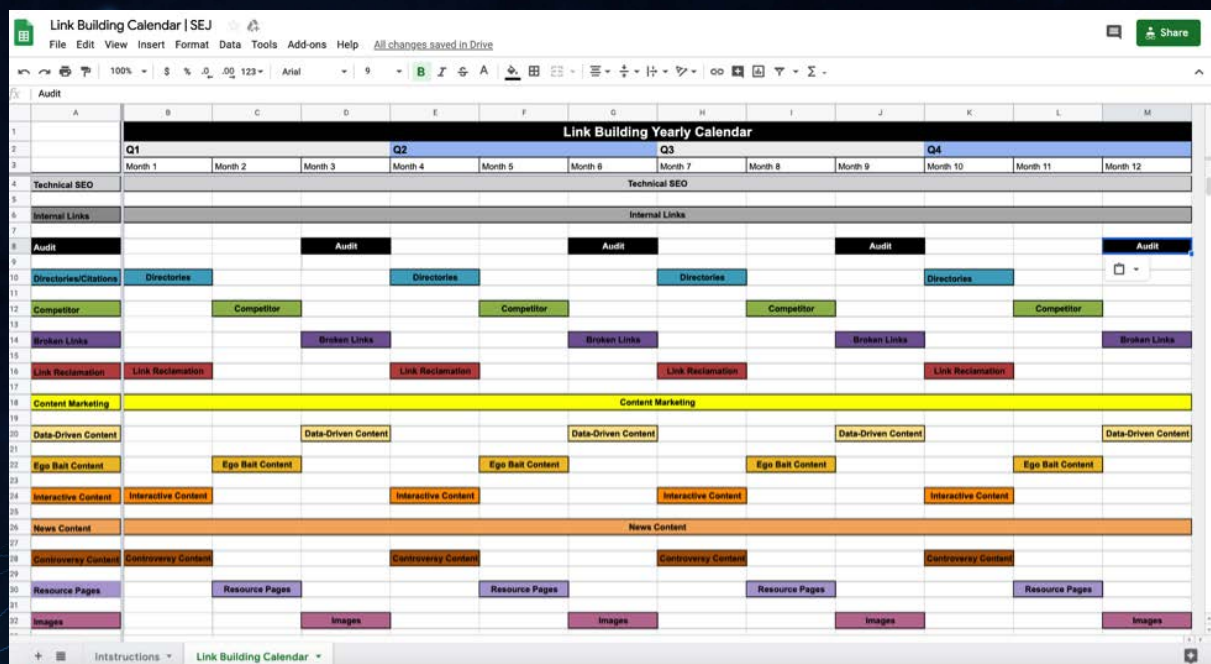
Here is a link to the template. Please make a copy for yourself to edit.

QUARTERLY

Here are the link building tasks I complete monthly:

◼ **Backlink Audit**

Export a full list of your backlinks from Google Search Console. Then, begin to manually review the sites, adding irrelevant, low-quality sites to your disavow file.

◼ **Update Disavow List**

I always review my disavow file quarterly. It's a good chance to remove sites or add more to the list.

◼ **Competitor Backlink Analysis**

Every quarter, I pull the backlink data for three of my top competitors. I analyze the data and build a list of sites that would be good for my clients.

MONTHLY

These are the link building tasks you should plan to do every month:

◼ **Email Outreach**

Depending on the size of the site, I aim to pitch at least 10 new sites per month along with maintaining my ongoing editorial relationships. This also includes emailing websites I've mentioned or linked to in my articles.

◼ **Brand Mention Monitoring**
Set-up Google Alerts or mention tracking to review competitor mentions, brand mentions, and even your CEO's mentions are a good place to start.

Guest Blogging

Writing authentic, high-quality guest blog posts is a great way to earn links. The goal is to build ongoing content relationships with editors to maintain a monthly contribution.

Content Syndication

If you've for really amazing content, like Larry Kim-worthy style content, you can work with publishers to syndicate content that you've already written. Win-win!

Testimonials & Reviews

Testimonials and reviews are an untapped link building activity that is easiest done monthly. If you provide a testimonial for another brand, you could gain a link back to your website. Spread the love!

Directories

Directories are not so outdated when it comes to gaining foundational links. After you've submitted your site, you still want to continue to monitor the NAP.

Affiliate Links

Growing a loyal, affiliate audience is another awesome way to start building links. Plus, your backlink'ers will add a little coin to their bank too!

Broken Link Building

An oldie, but a goodie! Broken link building is one of the quickest and easiest ways to gain backlinks. Finding a broken competitor link is like finding a burrito with your name on it!

■ Content

As we all know, content still reigns supreme. But, using ego bait, controversy, or data to create quality content that will generate backlinks naturally, is one of the best ways to use content to build links.

■ Charities & Events
Charities and events are another good way to build backlinks. By donating your time or money to charity, you'll get lucky with a .org or .gov backlink. And, with events, you could co-sponsor an event. Plus, you'll gain access to other sponsors that make for quick wins.

Breakdown of Weekly
Link Building Activities

WEEK 1 & 2

Link builder runs an internal backlink audit and competitor backlink audit to identify topics for different verticals of link building.

WEEK 3

Brainstorm article titles for creating content.

- Send article titles to the client for approval.

WEEK 4

Prospect link opportunities.

- Build out email templates for client approval.

- Find opportunities for co-citation.

- Outreach to 50 high-quality prospects.

WEEK 5

Start writing

- Get the client to review content.

Here is an example of my favorite link building spreadsheet.

Why & How to Tackle Technical SEO Before Link Building

When you consider a link building campaign, you may not be completely reaping the benefits of your SEO efforts if you ignore technical SEO.

The best results happen when you consider all the points of your website's SEO:

- **Technical SEO.**

- Content.

- Links.

AUTHOR **Brian Harnish**

In fact, there are situations when you must tackle technical SEO before ever thinking about getting links.

If your website is weak in technical SEO areas, or extremely confusing for search engines, it won't perform as well regardless of the quality and quantity of backlinks you have.

Your top goals with technical SEO is to make sure that your site is:

- Easily crawled by search engines.

- Has top cross-platform compatibility.

- Loads quickly on both desktop and mobile.

- Employs efficient implementation of WordPress plugins.

- Does not have any issues with misconfigured Google Analytics code.

These five points illustrate why it's important to tackle technical SEO before link building.

If your site is unable to be crawled or is otherwise deficient in technical SEO best practices, you may suffer from poor site performance.

The following chapter discusses why and how you should be tackling technical SEO before starting a link building campaign.

Make Sure Your Site is Easily Crawled by Search Engines

YOUR HTTPS SECURE IMPLEMENTATION

If you have recently made the jump to an HTTPS secure implementation, you may not have had the chance to audit or otherwise identify issues with your secure certificate installation.

A surface-level audit at the outset can help you identify any major issues affecting your transition to HTTPS.

Major issues can arise later on when the purchase of the SSL certificate did not initially take into account what the site would be doing later.

One thing to keep in mind is that you must take great care in purchasing your certificate and making sure it covers all the subdomains you want it to.

If you don't, you may end up with some issues as a result, such as not being able to redirect URLs.

If you don't get a full wildcard certificate, and you have URL parameters on a subdomain – using absolute URLs – that your certificate doesn't cover, you won't be able to redirect those URLs to https://.

This is why it pays to be mindful of the options you choose during the purchase of your SSL certificate because it can negatively affect your site later.

NO ERRANT REDIRECTS OR TOO MANY REDIRECTS BOGGING DOWN SITE PERFORMANCE

It's easy to create an HTTPS secure implementation with errant redirects.

For this reason, an eagle eye's view of the site's current redirect states will be helpful in correcting this issue.

It can also be easy to create conflicting redirects if you don't keep watch on the redirects you are creating.

In addition, it's easy to let redirects run out of control and lead to tens or many more redirects per site URL, in turn, leads to bogging down site performance.

The easiest way to fix this issue moving forward: make sure that your redirects are all created in a 1:1 ratio.

You should not have 10-15 or more redirect URLs per URL on your site.

If you do, something is seriously wrong.

Redirects should be simple, and mostly done in a 1:1 ratio.
They should not have more than 2-3 redirects per URL.

EXAMPLE

https://www.sitename.com/page1 ➡ https://www.sitename.com/page1a

NOT

https://www.sitename.com/page1
https://www.sitename.com/page2
https://www.sitename.com/page3
https://www.sitename.com/page4 ➡ https://www.sitename.com/new-
https://www.sitename.com/page5   amazing-page/
https://www.sitename.com/page6
https://www.sitename.com/page7
https://www.sitename.com/page8
https://www.sitename.com/page9

If you have this many redirects across your site, you may have
a major problem.

CONTENT ON HTTPS & HTTP URLS SHOULD NOT LOAD AT THE SAME TIME

The correct implementation is that one should redirect to the other, not both.

If you have both of them loading at the same time, something is wrong with the secure version of your site.

If you type in your site's URLs into your browser, try and test https:// and http:// separately.

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If both URLs load, you are displaying two versions of your content, and duplicate URLs can lead to duplicate content issues.

To make sure that you do not run into this issue again, you will want to do one of the following, depending on your site's platform:

■ Create a full redirect pattern in HTACCESS (on Apache / CPanel servers)

■ Use a redirect plugin in WordPress to force the redirects from http://

Instead, this is an example of exactly what we want to display to users and search engines:

HOW TO CREATE REDIRECTS IN HTACCESS ON APACHE / CPANEL SERVERS

You can perform global redirects at the server level in .htaccess on Apache / CPanel servers.

Inmotionhosting has a great tutorial on how to force this redirect on your own web host. But, for our purposes, we'll focus on the following ones.

To force all web traffic to use HTTPS, this is the following code you will want to use.

You want to make sure to add this code above any code that has a similar prefix (RewriteEngine On, RewriteCond, etc.)

```
RewriteEngine On
RewriteCond %{HTTPS} !on
RewriteCond %{REQUEST_URI} !^/[0-9]+\..+\.cpaneldcv$
RewriteCond %{REQUEST_URI} !^/\.well-known/pki-validation/
[A-F0-9]{32}\.txt(?:\ Comodo\ DCV)?$
RewriteRule (.*) https://%{HTTP_HOST}%{REQUEST_URI}
[L,R=301]
```

If you want to redirect only a specified domain, you will want to use the following lines of code in your htaccess file:

```
RewriteCond %{REQUEST_URI} !^/[0-9]+\..+\.cpaneldcv$
RewriteCond %{REQUEST_URI} !^/\.well-known/pki-validation/
[A-F0-9]{32}\.txt(?:\ Comodo\ DCV)?$
RewriteEngine On
RewriteCond %{HTTP_HOST} ^example\.com [NC]
RewriteCond %{SERVER_PORT} 80
RewriteRule ^(.*)$ https://www.example.com/$1 [R=301,L]
```

Don't forget to change any URLs in the above examples to what is the correct implementation on your domain name.

There are other solutions in that tutorial which may work for your site.

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WARNING: if you do not have confidence in your abilities to make the correct changes at the server level on your server, please make sure to have your server company/IT person perform these fixes for you.

You can screw up something major with these types of redirects if you do not know exactly what you are doing.

USE A PLUGIN IF YOU ARE OPERATING A WORDPRESS SITE

The easiest way to fix these redirect issues, especially if you operate a WordPress site, is to just use a plugin.

There are many plugins that can force http:// to https:// redirects but here are a few that will help make this process as painless as possible:

- **CM HTTPS Pro**

- **WP Force SSL**

- **Easy HTTPS Redirection**

Caution about plugins – don't just add another plugin if you're already using too many plugins.

You may want to investigate if your server can use similar redirect rules mentioned above (such as if you are using an NGINX-based server).

It must be stated here: plugin weight can affect site speed negatively, so don't always assume that the latest plugin will help you.

ALL LINKS ON-SITE SHOULD BE CHANGED FROM HTTP:// TO HTTPS://

Even if you perform the redirects above, you should perform this step.

This is especially true if you are using absolute URLs, as opposed to relative URLs, where the former always displays the hypertext transfer protocol that you're using.

If you are using the latter, this is less important and you probably don't need to pay much attention to this.

Why do you need to change links on-site when you are using absolute URLs?

Because Google can and will crawl all of those links and this can result in duplicate content issues.

It seems like a waste of time, but it's really not. You are making sure the end result is that Google sees exactly the site you want them to see.

One version.

One set of URLs.

One set of content.

No confusion.

EXAMPLES OF LINKS THAT SHOULD BE CHANGED

http://domainname.com/blog/post-name-1

Should be changed to

https://domainname.com/blog/post-name-1

http://domainname.com/blog/post-name-2

Should be changed to

https://domainname.com/blog/post-name-2

http://domainname.com/blog/post-name-3

Should be changed to

https://domainname.com/blog/post-name-3

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NO 404S FROM HTTP:// TO HTTPS:// TRANSITIONS

A sudden spike in 404s can make your site almost impossible to crawl, especially if the links between http:// and https:// pages exist.

Difficulty crawling a site is one of the most common issues that can result from a spike in 404s.

Also, crawl budget wasted due to too many 404s showing up, and Google not finding pages that it should.

Why this impacts site performance, and why it matters:

While John Mueller of Google **mentions** that crawl budget doesn't matter except for extremely large sites:

"Google's John Mueller said on Twitter that he believes that crawl budget optimization is overrated in his mind. He said for most sites, it doesn't make a difference and that it only can help really massive sites.

John wrote "IMO crawl-budget is over-rated." "Most sites never need to worry about this. It's an interesting topic, and if you're crawling the web or running a multi-billion-URL site, it's important, but for the average site owner less so," he added."

A great **article** by Yauhen Khutarniuk, Head of SEO at SEO PowerSuite, puts this perfectly:

"Quite logically, you should be concerned with crawl budget because you want Google to discover as many of your site's important pages as possible. You also want it to find new content on your site quickly. The bigger your crawl budget (and the smarter your management of it), the faster this will happen."

It's important to optimize for crawl budget because finding new content on your site quickly should be the priority, while discovering as many of your site's high priority pages as possible.

HOW TO FIX ANY 404S YOU MAY HAVE

Primarily, you want to redirect any 404s from the old URL to the new, existing URL.

Check out Benj Arriola's Search Engine Journal article for more information on **404s vs. soft 404s, and how to fix them.**

One of the easier ways, especially if you have a WordPress site, would be to crawl the site with Screaming Frog and perform a bulk upload of your 301 redirect rules using the **Redirection WordPress plugin.**

Otherwise, you may have to create redirect rules in .htaccess.

Your URL Structure Should Not Be Overly Complex

The **structure of your URLs** is an important consideration when getting your site ready for technical SEO.

You must pay attention to things like randomly generating dynamic parameters that are being indexed, URLs that are not easy to understand, and other factors that will cause issues with your technical SEO implementation.

These are all important factors because they can lead to indexation issues that will hurt your site's performance.

MORE HUMAN-READABLE URLS

When you create URLs, you likely think about where the content is going, and then you create URLs automatically.

This can hurt you, however.

The reason why is because automatically generated URLs can follow a few different formats, none of which are very human-readable.

For example:

- /content/date/time/keyword
- /content/date/time/string-of-numbers
- /content/category/date/time/
- /content/category/date/time/parameters/

None of these formats that you encounter are very human readable, are they?

The reason why it's important is that communicating the content behind the URL properly is a large part of user intent.

It's even more important today also because of accessibility reasons.

The more readable your URLs are, the better:

- Search engines can use these to determine exactly how people are engaging with those URLs vs. those who are not engaging with those URLs.

- If someone sees your URL in the search results, they may be more apt to click on it because of the fact that they will see exactly how much that URL matches what they are searching for. In short – match that user search intent, and you've got another customer.

- This is why considering this part of URL structure is so important when you are auditing a site.

Many existing sites may be using outdated or confusing URL structures, leading to poor user engagement.

Identifying which URLs can be more human readable can create better user engagement across your site.

DUPLICATE URLS

One important technical SEO consideration that should be ironed out before any link building is duplicate content.

When it comes to duplicate content issues, these are the main causes:

- Content that is significantly duplicated across sections of the website.

- Scraped content from other websites.

- Duplicate URLs where only one piece of content exists.

Search engines will rarely show the same piece of content twice, and not paying attention to duplicate URLs dilutes their ability to find and serve up each duplicate.

This can hurt because it does confuse search engines when more than one URL represents one piece of content.

AVOID USING DYNAMIC PARAMETERS

While dynamic parameters are, in and of themselves, not a problem from an SEO perspective, if you cannot manage your creation of them, and get consistent in their use, this can become a significant problem later.

Jes Scholz has an amazing article on Search Engine Journal covering the basics of **dynamic parameters and URL handling** and how it can affect SEO. If you are not familiar with dynamic parameters, I suggest reading her article ASAP before proceeding with the rest of this section.

Scholz explains that parameters are used for the following purposes:

- Tracking
- Identifying
- Searching
- Reordering
- Pagination
- Translating
- Filtering

When you get to the point that your URL's dynamic parameters are causing a problem, it usually comes down to basic mismanagement of the creation of these URLs.

In the case of tracking, using many different dynamic parameters when creating links that search engines crawl.

In the case of reordering, using these different dynamic parameters to reorder lists and groups of items that then create indexable duplicate pages that search engines then crawl.

You can inadvertently trigger excessive duplicate content issues if you don't keep your dynamic parameters to a manageable level.

You should never need 50 URLs with UTM parameters to track the results of certain types of campaigns.

The creation of these dynamic URLs for one piece of content can really add up over time if you aren't carefully managing their creation and will dilute the quality of your content along with its capability to perform in search engine results.

It leads to keyword cannibalization and on a large enough scale can severely impact your ability to compete.

SHORTER URLS ARE BETTER THAN LONGER URLS

A long-held SEO best practice has been shorter URLs are better than longer URLs.

Google's John Mueller has **discussed** this:

"What definitely plays a role here is when we have two URLs that have the same content, and we try to pick one to show in the search results, we will pick the short one. So that is specifically around canonicalization.

It doesn't mean it is a ranking factor, but it means if we have two URLs and one is really short and sweet and this other one has this long parameter attached to it and we know they show exactly the same content we will try to pick the shorter one.

There are lots of exceptions there, different factors that come into play, but everything else being equal - you have a shorter one and a longer one, we will try to pick the shorter one."

There is also empirical evidence that shows that **Google ranks shorter URLs** for more terms, rather than long and specific.

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If your site contains super long URLs everywhere, you may want to optimize them into better, shorter URLs that better reflect the article's topic and user intent.

Here are some examples of overly complex URLs vs. ideal shorter URLs

Overly Complex URLs

https://www.example.com/page&410924-82374-2*#402

https://www.example.com#971239utm97294utmtwitter7@somethingelse7@$&*9829888utmfacebook

https://www.example.com/blog/category/date/time/post-name-name-name-name-name-name-name

Ideal Shorter URLs

https://www.example.com/page4/

https://bit.ly/*******

https://www.example.com/blog/category/post-name-here

Make Sure Your Site Has Top Cross-Platform Compatibility & Fast Page Speed

Site glitches and other problems can arise when your site is not coded correctly.

These glitches can result from badly-nested DIV tags resulting in a glitched layout, code with bad syntax resulting in call-to-action elements disappearing, and bad site management resulting in the careless implementation of on-page elements.

Cross-platform compatibility can be affected along with page speed, resulting in greatly reduced performance and user engagement, long before link building ever becomes a consideration.

Nip some of these issues in the bud before they become major problems later.

Many of these technical SEO issues come down to poor site management and poor coding.

The more that you tackle these technical SEO issues at the beginning with more consistent development and website management best practices, the better off you'll be later when your link building campaign takes off.

POORLY CODED SITE DESIGN

When you have a poorly coded site design, your user experience and engagement can suffer and will be adversely affected.
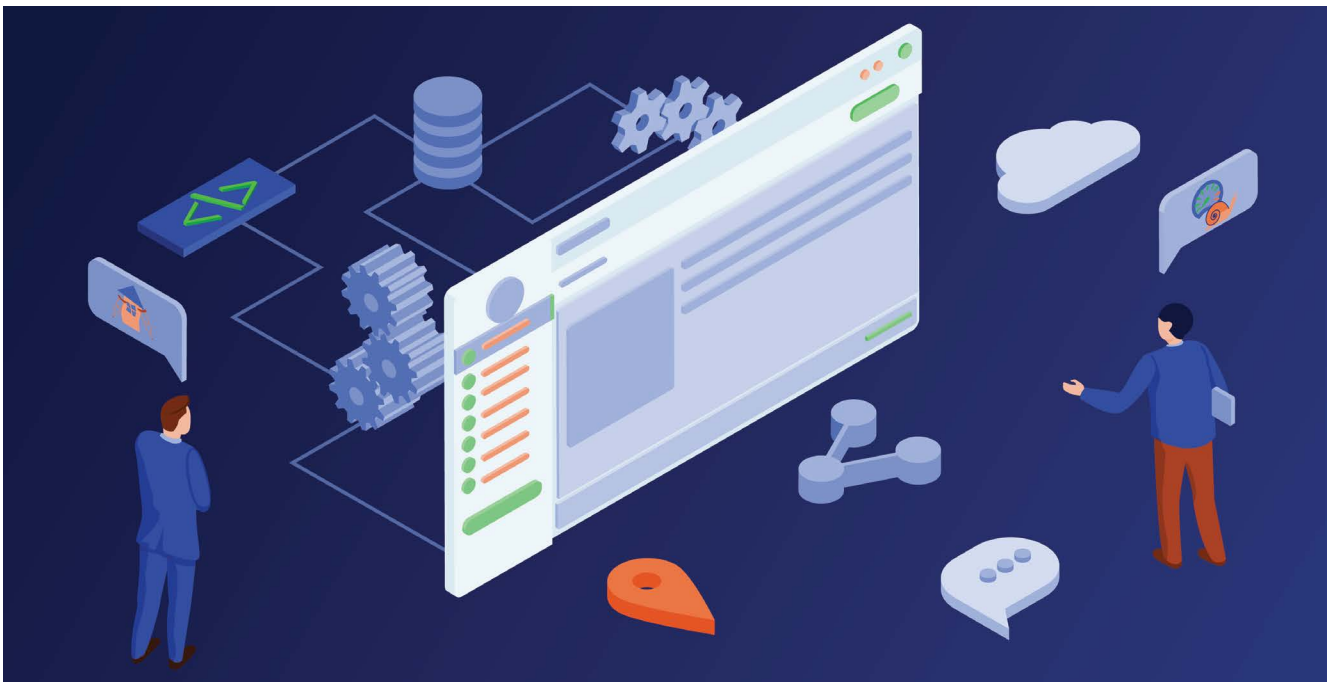
This is yet another element of technical SEO that can be easily overlooked.

A poorly coded site design can manifest in several ways with:

- Poor page speed.

- Glitches in the design appearing on different platforms.

- Forms not working where they should (impacting conversions).

- Any other call to actions not working on mobile devices (and desktop).

- Any tracking code that's not being accurately monitored (leading to poor choices in your SEO decision-making).

Any of these issues can spell disaster for your site when it can't properly report on, capture leads, or engage with users to its fullest potential.

This is why these things should always be considered and tackled on-site before moving to link building.

If you don't, you may wind up with weaknesses in your marketing campaigns that will be even harder to pin down, or worse – you may never find them.

All of these elements of a site design must be addressed and otherwise examined to make sure that they are not causing any major issues with your SEO.

PAGES ARE SLOW TO LOAD

Since July 2018, Google rolled out page speed as a **ranking factor in its mobile algorithm to all users.**

Slow loading pages can affect everything, so it's something that you should pay attention to on an ongoing basis, and not just for rankings.

But for all of your users also.

What should you be on the lookout for when it comes to issues that impact page speed?
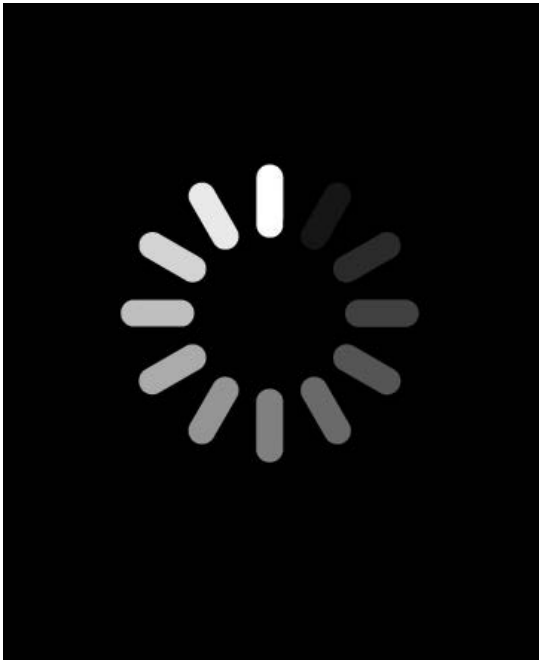
SLOW LOADING IMAGES

If your site has many images approaching 1 MB (1 megabyte) in file size, you have a problem.

As the average internet connection speed approaches **over 27.22 Mbps** download on mobile, and fixed broadband approaches over 59.60 Mbps download, realistically, this becomes less of an issue, but can still be an issue.

You will still face slower loading pages when you have such large images on your site. If you use a tool like GTMetrix, you can see how fast your site loads these images.

Typical page speed analysis best practices say that you should take three snapshots of your site's page speed.

Average out the three snapshots, and that's your site's average page speed.

It is recommended, on average, for most sites, that images should be at most 35 – 50K per image, not more. This is depending on resolution, and pixel density (including whether you are accommodating the higher pixel densities of iPhones and other devices).

Also, use lossless compression in graphics applications like Adobe Photoshop in order to achieve the best quality possible while resizing images.

Efficient Coding Best Practices

Some people believe that standard coding best practices say that you should be using **W3C valid coding.**

Google's Webmaster Guidelines recommend using valid W3C coding to code your site.
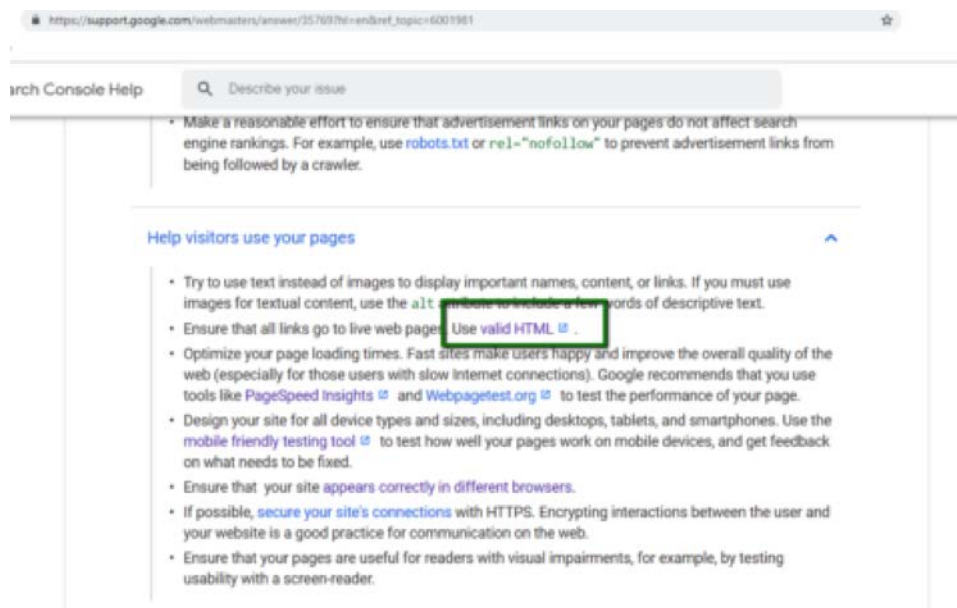
But, John Mueller (and even Matt Cutts) have mentioned in the past that it's not critical to focus on W3C-valid coding for ranking reasons.

Search Engine Journal staff Roger Montti discusses this conundrum in even further detail here: **6 Reasons Why Google Says Valid HTML Matters.**

But, that's the key word there. Focusing on it for ranking purposes.

You will find at the top of Google, for different queries, all sorts of websites that ascribe to different coding best practices, and not every site validates via the W3C.

Despite a lack of focus on that type of development best practice for ranking purposes, there are plenty of reasons why using W3C valid coding is a great idea, and why it can put you ahead of your competitors who are not doing it.

Before any further discussion takes place, it needs to be noted from a developer perspective:

- W3C-standard validated code is not always good code.

- Bad code is not always invalid code.

- W3C validation should not be the be-all, end-all evaluation of a piece of coding work.

- But, validation services like the W3C validator should be used for debugging reasons,

- Using the W3C validator will help you evaluate your work more easily and avoid major issues as your site becomes larger and more complex after completion of the project.

But in the end, which is better, and why?

Picking a coding standard, being consistent with your coding best practices, and sticking with them is generally better than not.

When you pick a coding standard and stick with it, you introduce less complexity and less of a chance that things can go wrong after the final site launch.

While some see W3C's code validator as an unnecessary evil, it does provide rhyme and reason to making sure that your code is valid.

For example, if your syntax is invalid in your header, or you don't self-close tags properly, W3C's code validator will reveal these mistakes.

If, during development, you transferred over an existing WordPress theme, from say XHTML 1.0 to HTML 5 for server compatibility reasons, you may notice thousands of errors.
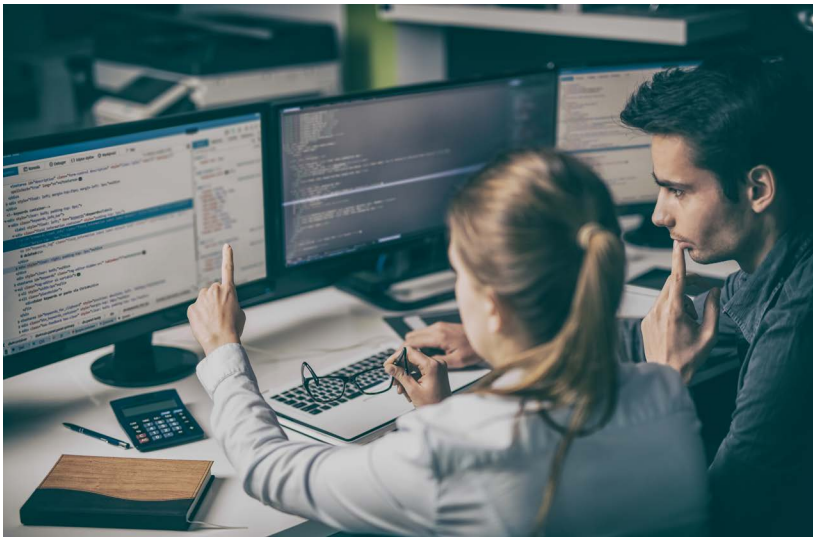
It means that you have incompatibility problems with the DOCTYPE in the theme and the language that is actually being used.

This happens frequently when someone copies and pastes old code into a new site implementation without regard to any coding rules whatsoever.

This can be disastrous to cross-platform compatibility.

Also, this simple check can help you reveal exactly what's working (or not working) under the hood right now code-wise.

Where efficient coding best practices come into play, is doing things like inadvertently putting multiple closing DIV tags where they shouldn't go, being careless about how you code the layout, etc.

All of these coding errors can be a huge detriment to the performance of your site, both from a user and search engine perspective.

Common Ways Too Many WordPress Plugins Can Harm Your Site

USING TOO MANY PLUGINS

Plugins can become major problems when their use is not kept in check.

Why is this? How can this be – aren't plugins supposed to help?

In reality, if you don't manage your plugins properly, you can run into major site performance issues down the line.

Here are some reasons why.

EXTRA HTTP REQUESTS

All files that load on your site generate requests from the server or HTTP requests.

Every time someone requests your page, all of your page elements load (images, video, graphics, plugins, everything), and all of these elements require an HTTP request to be transferred.

The more HTTP requests you have, the more these extra plugins will slow down your site.

This can be mostly a matter of milliseconds, and for most websites does not cause a huge issue.

It can, however, be a major bottleneck if your site is a large one, and you have hundreds of plugins.

Keeping your plugin use in check is a great idea, to make sure that your plugins are not causing a major bottleneck and causing slow page speeds.

INCREASED DATABASE QUERIES DUE TO EXTRA PLUGINS

WordPress uses SQL databases in order to process queries and maintain its infrastructure.

If your site is on WordPress, it's important to know that every plugin you add will send out extra database queries.

These extra queries can add up, and cause bottleneck issues that will negatively affect your site's page speed.

The more you load plugins up, the slower your site will get.

If you don't manage the database queries well, you can run into serious issues with your website's performance, and it will have nothing to do with how your images load.

It also depends on your host.

If you suffer from a large website with too many plugins and too little in the way of resources, now may be the time for an audit to see exactly what's happening.

THE OTHER PROBLEM WITH PLUGINS: THEY INCREASE THE PROBABILITY OF YOUR WEBSITE CRASHING

When the right plugins are used, you don't have to worry (much) about keeping an eye on them.

You should, however, be mindful of when plugins are usually updated, and how they work with your WordPress implementation to make sure your website stays functional.

If you auto-update your plugins, you may have an issue one day where a plugin does not play nice with other plugins. This could cause your site to crash.

This is why it is so important to manage your WordPress plugins.

And make sure that you don't exceed what your server is capable of.

This Is Why It's Important to Tackle Technical SEO Before Link Building

Many technical SEO issues can rear their ugly head and affect your site's SERP performance long before link building enters the equation.

That's why it's important to tackle technical SEO before you start link building.

Start with a thorough technical SEO audit to reveal and fix any on-site issues.

It will help identify any weaknesses in your site, and these changes will all work together with link building to create an even better online presence for you, and your users.

Any link building will be for naught if search engines (or your users) can't accurately crawl, navigate, or otherwise use your site.

Any technical SEO issues can cause significant drops in website performance long before link building ever becomes a factor.

PURELINQ
CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION

BASE
SEARCH MARKETING

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Month 1, 2, 3 and every quarter

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

1-4 months after implementation

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Screaming Frog
- Ahrefs (or Moz)
- DeepCrawl
- Google Search Console
- Google Analytics

B E N E F I T S :

- Technical SEO will help you get the maximum performance out of your links.
- Technical SEO like a clean site structure and understanding of PR flow is very key for internal link placement.

Affiliate Link Building: How to Do it the Right Way

2

Affiliate link building is like **commissioned sales** for the 21st century.

The concept is simple: With an affiliate marketing program, brands and businesses select leading influencers to promote a service or product by using a unique affiliate link.

Affiliate link building provides businesses an opportunity to earn additional sales through user-generated content. Profits are shared with influencers based on the number of links clicked or purchases made.
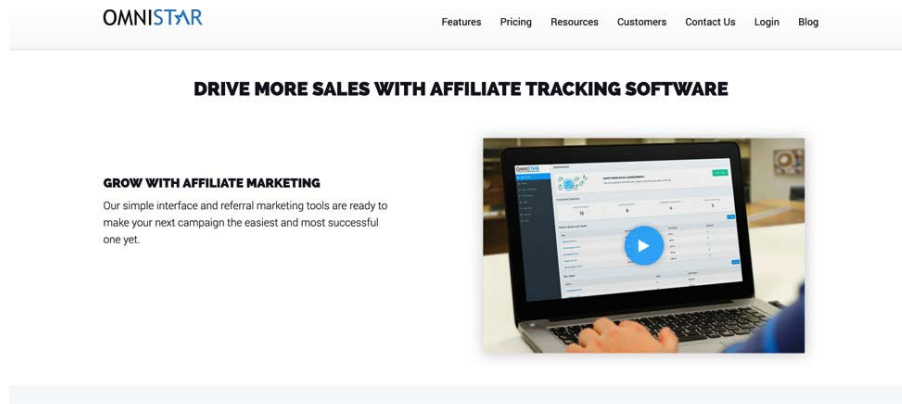
AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

3 Benefits of Affiliate Link Building

Affiliate marketing is an effective way to gain exposure, drive traffic, boost conversions, and increase sales.

Let's take a look at the three main reasons your business should be using affiliate link building strategies.

1. EASY TRACKING

Affiliate marketing tracking software monitors the affiliate program and tracks links. When your company joins an affiliate network, the network's program tracks the numbers for you.

Being able to track the effectiveness of each campaign or influencer is an essential part of an effective affiliate marketing strategy.

Some affiliate marketing programs provide detailed reports based on different marketing tools used, such as text links or banners.

2. TARGETED ADS

If your business is running an in-house affiliate program, you have the freedom to accept influencers to join your program based on their reach and relevance.

When your business is partnered with an influencer through an affiliate network, there are steps in place to ensure that the influencer will reach your target audience through their content.

When an influencer creates new content using their affiliate link, their campaign (your advertisement) has the potential to reach your target audience in high volumes through channels like social media and the influencer's website.

3. COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Affiliate link building can boost conversions and increase sales with minimum effort and investment.

When setting your business's marketing budget, consider these four costs for affiliate marketing:

PLATFORM

Will you be running an in-house program, or joining an affiliate network?

Running an in-house program may be more expensive and take more time initially, but is lower-cost in the long run.

It gives your business full control over every aspect of the affiliate program and enables you to communicate directly with your influencers.

Joining an affiliate network is much cheaper to begin with, but might not be as cost-effective in the long run, since the network itself does take a fee.

This means a lot of the initial work is done for you, including selecting influencers, tracking, reports, and even issuing payments.

CREATIVES

Whether you choose to run an in-house program or join a network, your affiliate marketing program will require creatives.

That is, graphics and images for banners, copy for text links, videos and flash content, and any other tools that your influencers may use to promote your service or product.

PRODUCT FEEDS OR LANDING PAGES

If you're running an in-house program, provide a detailed product feed to your influencers, including product names and descriptions, prices, categories, and creatives associated with the product.

The product feed serves as a resource for influencers when they're preparing a new campaign.

If your business is selling a service or has a limited number of products, another option is to set up a unique landing page for each influencer.
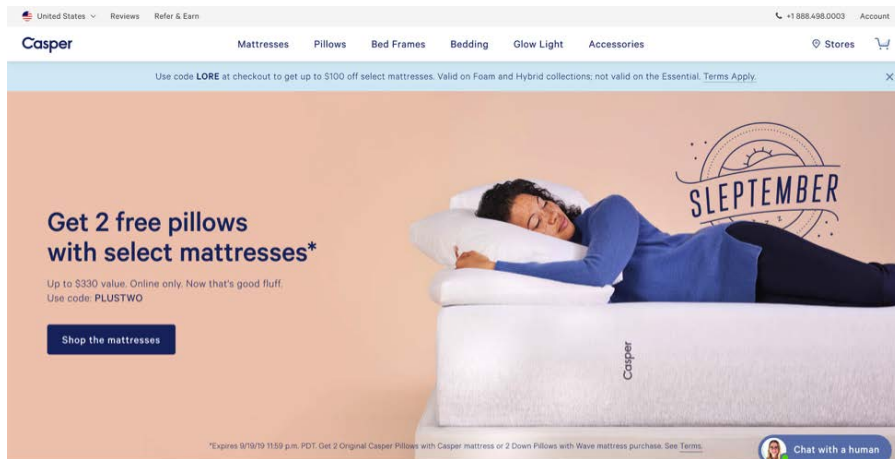
PROGRAM MANAGEMENT & COMPENSATION

Your business will need to hire an Affiliate Marketing Manager to:

- Recruit and onboard influencers.
- Create and monitor rules and policies.
- Communicate with affiliates (or with the network).
- Regularly update and optimize the affiliate program.
- And more.

And you'll need to compensate your influencers!

Profits are shared with influencers based on the number of links clicked or purchases made, at a rate that you choose.

Keep in mind that if the commission rate is too low, many influencers may opt-out.

How to Start
Affiliate Link Building (Correctly)

Keep in mind that like any other marketing tactic, there's a right way – and a wrong way – to start affiliate marketing.

Now that you understand why your business should be using affiliate link building strategies, let's take a look at how to implement affiliate link building strategies.

1. HAVE A PLAN

Your first step is to get organized.

Implementing any new marketing strategy without a plan of action is a recipe for disaster, and it isn't any different for an affiliate marketing strategy.

Plan your budget, decide which platform you'll use, determine how you'll select influencers, and set your commission rates.

Create a timeline and a content calendar, design your creatives, and watch your competitors. The time you put into planning your strategy is invaluable and will set you up for success.

2. COMMUNICATE CONSISTENTLY

Your Affiliate Marketing Manager should be an expert communicator.

They need to:

- Be willing to reach out to your influencers personally.

- Always keep your influencers updated on new products or campaigns.

- Provide current copy and creatives.

Many companies use forums or private Facebook groups to communicate with their influencers.

3. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

The Affiliate Marketing Manager needs to be willing to assist your influencers and provide support when needed.

Asking your affiliates questions and sending polls to request feedback will let them know that your business can be trusted, you're listening, and you want to work with them.

When you begin affiliate marketing, your influencers are partnering with you. Their voice is your asset.

4. BE OPEN TO CHANGE

Monitoring and checking numbers and metrics is crucial to the success of an affiliate marketing program.

You need to be able to understand what works and what doesn't, and you'll have to make decisions based on new information about your KPIs and ROI.

Follow each campaign with a keen eye. Run some A/B tests with different campaigns and different influencers.

Using affiliate marketing doesn't mean a business gets to sit back and watch while their numbers increase. Get involved and be open to making changes to your strategy.

It's Time to Build Your Affiliate Marketing Strategy

Affiliate link building is a growing and ever-evolving channel of marketing that more brands and businesses are integrating into their overall marketing strategies.

There's a lot of freedom with affiliate marketing: you decide which strategies to implement – and which influencers you want to work with – for your content and exposure.

Affiliate link building is about performance marketing, with a focus on content that is going to reach your target audience naturally, benefiting both your business and your affiliates.

PURELINQ
CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION

BASE
SEARCH MARKETING

S U M M A R Y

TIMEFRAME:

Month 8, then ongoing monthly

RESULTS DETECTED:

4-12 months

AVERAGE LINKS PER MONTH:
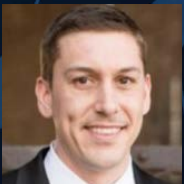
30

TOOLS NEEDED:

- Affiliate marketing platform

- Affiliate marketing tracking software

BENEFITS:

- Easy tracking
- Targeted Ads
- Cost-effectiveness

3

Broken Link Building: What You Need to Know to Get Links

AUTHOR **Adam Heitzman**

Link building tactics have a tendency to go in and out of style.

Broken link building is one such tactic.

It was once a convenient, **scalable** tool in a link builder's toolbox. But then folks started saying it wasn't as effective as guest posting (which, you know, is supposed to be dead in its own right).

The reality, of course, is somewhere in the middle.

A modern, comprehensive link building strategy requires a variety of different tactics to achieve your goals.

When used appropriately, broken link building still rocks. It's scalable, reliable, and should be a staple you turn to when you need to put together a link building strategy.

Time has changed how an SEO should go about building broken links, though.

Here's what you need to know to successfully build broken links today.

What Are Broken Links?

A broken link is a link on a website that no longer leads to the content that it's supposed to be referencing. Instead, you get one of these big, unpleasant 404 graphics:

A broken link can happen in a myriad of ways. The website might have made a mistake when linking to outside content, for example, or the linked website has removed the page in question.

The big issue with this is that broken links hinder the user experience for anyone browsing your website. In fact, too many broken links can even **hinder the linking site's SEO.**

That is where broken link building comes into play.

With any sort of link building, an SEO has to ask themselves this question:

Why is this site better off by including the link that I'm asking for?

When it comes to broken link building, that question is extremely easy to answer.

By pointing out a broken link to a webmaster, and offering a convenient replacement, you're providing value. You're helping the webmaster improve their site quality and making their lives easier.

In theory, at least.

The circumstance mentioned above is fairly idyllic. And, to be fair, if you're dealing with a new webmaster or one servicing a website that doesn't generate a massive amount of traffic, it might actually be that easy.

However, the vast majority of webmasters see requests like this all the time. They know the game that's being played.

And that means broken link building is harder than ever before.

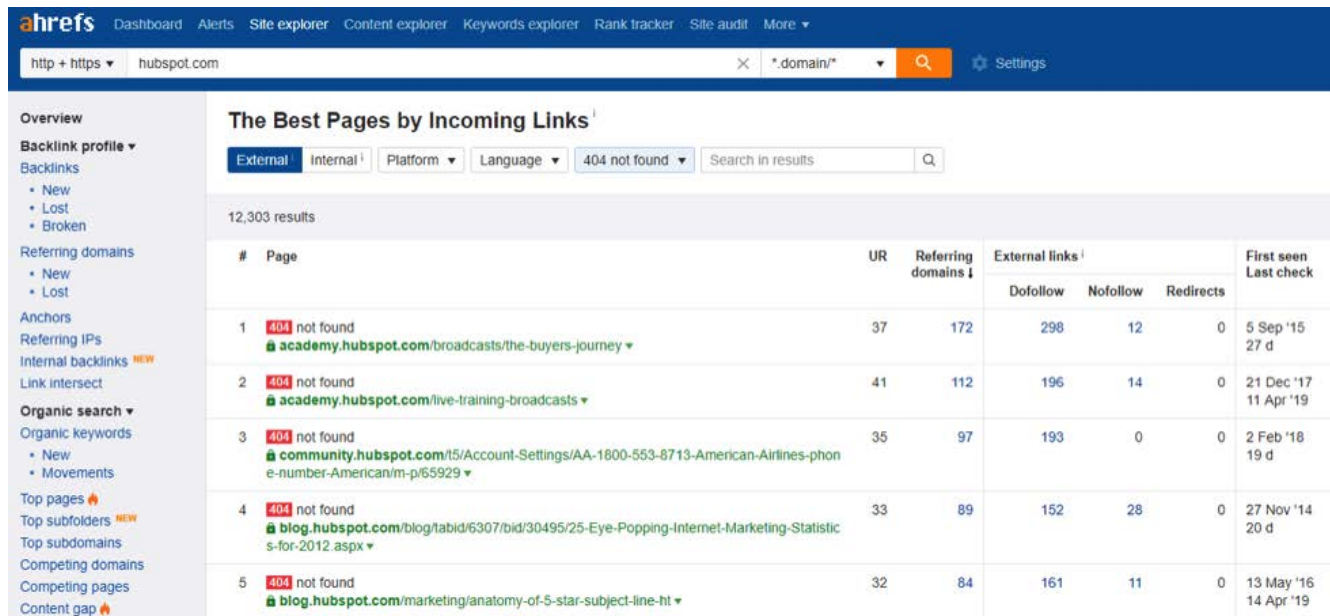# How to Find Relevant Broken Links

Luckily, the process of finding broken links isn't all that hard.

In fact, it's one of the reasons so many people tout broken link building for its scalability. There are a variety of different ways to look for broken links.

The most straightforward method would be to start by running backlink checks on websites and competitors in your niche.

Let's look at HubSpot.com as an example.

HubSpot is an awesome resource for marketing information – but more importantly, they're also a popular website that will give you an idea of how broken links can be found.

Using Ahrefs as our broken link checker, we can look at every **404** that currently exists on HubSpot. And not only that, a tool like Ahrefs provides information on which pages are currently linking to these broken pages.

If you're running a marketing website and had a piece on the buyer's journey, for example, you now have 172 leads to go after broken links.

The fun doesn't stop there, either. It's a pretty good bet that those 172 sites care about marketing, right? So you can also check to see if they have any broken links that you could pursue as well.

See why this strategy is so great for scaling?

There's another conventional method for finding broken links: scraping resource pages. With this method, an SEO uses advanced search terms in Google or another search engine to find resource pages relevant to their niche.

So what does that look like in practice?

Let's say you're trying to promote a marketing website. You would type things like this into Google:

- marketing intitle:links

- marketing intitle:resources

- online marketing inurl:links

- online marketing blogs inurl:resources

From there, you pursue the SERP results that look promising, and manually check that all the resources they list have working links.

If you come across a broken link, toss it into Ahrefs or a similar tool to see who else might be linking to the broken page.

Here's what finding broken links looks like in action. If we enter "marketing intitle:resources" into Google, we get the following SERP:

Marketing Resources
https://www.marketingresources.us.com/ ▾
Marketing Resources, Inc. The Producer's Resource for Life – Annuity – Health. Superior Products - Exceptional Service - Top Compensation.
Carriers & Products · Training Academies · Social Media · Upcoming Events

That "50 Content Marketing Resources" link looks promising; there has to be a decent chance that one of their links no longer works, right?

- KISSMetrics – "The Beginner's Guide to Content Marketing"

- Blue Glass – "The Content Marketers Guide to Web Content"

- TopRank Online Marketing Blog – "TopRank's Guide to Content Marketing & Optimization" [opt-in required]

- QuickSprout – "A Quick and Dirty Guide to Content Marketing"

- Vocus – "The Vocus Online Content Marketing Expert Guide"

- Optimist – "Content Marketing Strategy: The Complete Guide for 2017"

Clicking on this we found that the Blue Glass one is broken:

Error 404 - Page Not Found

Checked Ahrefs: 12 referring domains, including a really nice link from Moz.

The Key to Converting Broken Links Into Wins

Finding these links is easy, nowadays. There are plenty of **backlink tools** that can show you which websites are referring to broken pages. To name a few:

- Ahrefs' Site Explorer.

- Screaming Frog.

- Moz's Link Explorer.

But now we've reached the hard part – asking a webmaster to replace a broken link with one to your own website.

Outreach is difficult, no matter what link building strategy you're using. However, that's actually one of the advantages of broken link building.

In theory, helping a webmaster to identify broken links and fix them is something that could help you to establish a working relationship.

By being helpful and sincere, they might be more willing to help you out and add your link.

PURELINQ   CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION

BASE   SEARCH MARKETING

In reality? Oftentimes, link builders take the scalability of broken link building a bit too far. They'll send out emails that look like this:

Hello [webmaster],

My name is ___ and I'm an avid fan of your website [insert URL here]. However, I came across a broken link today that I thought you might like to know about. The link is in this post [insert page here] and here's the anchor text in question.

I actually have a similar guide you could use if you wanted to replace the link. Here's the link to my version: [insert your own link here]

Thank you!

Link Builder

Now, is that necessarily bad? No.

The main advantage of this email is that you can use it as a template and really speed up the process of your outreach. It even includes some spots where you can customize the email to suit the webmaster you're reaching out to.

The problem, however, is that webmasters get requests like this all the time, especially if you're trying to reach out to a popular blog or website.

If they've seen this tactic before, they know the game. They know you're in it for a link and not their website's success. And so the success rate of these templates falls dramatically.

So what should you do?

- **Contact the right individual:** An info@website.com or sales@ website.com email isn't going to cut it if you want to earn a link. Do the research to find the proper contact.

- **Build a rapport:** Focus on building a rapport with the webmaster rather than immediately asking for a link. In fact, you could use the first email to introduce yourself and to talk about their website. Building that relationship and learning about the webmaster will give you a much more beneficial relationship and increase the chances of earning a link.

- **Keep things simple:** No one likes long emails. Not one person. And it's easy as a link builder to feel as if you have to sell the person you're contacting on providing a link, but honesty will get you much further. Take the following subject line as an example: "I found a broken link on your site." It's straightforward, easy to understand, and doesn't require too much back-and-forth. You've got a much better chance of getting a reply with this than a subject line that gets too creative.

- **Give value and show appreciation:** If you've reached the point where a webmaster is responding positively to you, return the favor. Let them know how much you appreciate their efforts and do whatever you can to make it worth their time.

- **Go the extra mile:** This is especially helpful if you're reaching out to webmasters who get a lot of web traffic. Go the extra mile by learning more about them before you first contact them. Do they have social media pages? Do you have common interests? These can be great conversation starters and get the ball rolling in the right direction.

It's easy to start thinking too clinically with outreach, as if you're attempting to make a transaction. But that's just not a winning formula for link building.

Strive to be affable and easy to work with, while also providing webmasters with a reason to work with you.

Final Tips to Win Broken Links

Broken link building is still a fantastic tool for earning meaningful links.

In fact, it even has significant advantages over link building staples like guest posting. And as long as you use it in the correct manner, you will see results.

Don't assume that simply having a replacement resource will be enough, though.

Webmasters get emails and pitches all the time; for you to stand out in their inbox, you need to communicate quickly, effectively, and give them a reason to work with you.

The best way to do that is to lean into your own personality to make your emails friendly, helpful, and approachable.

The longer you work at it, the more you'll improve. All forms of link building take some trial and error.

The nice thing about it though is that you can track what emails work the best. Over time, you can change your style to generate even more wins.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Monthly

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

4-12 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   P E R   M O N T H :

6

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Ahrefs
- Moz Link Explorer
- Majestic
- Google SERPs

B E N E F I T S :

- Broken link building provides you with a solid strategy to get quick wins for links from relevant webpages that had been linking to content that is no longer active on competing websites. As long as you have a great piece of relevant content, webmasters are incentivized to switch out the dead links because they won't want dead links on their webpages.

- Broken link building increases your SEO authority by obtaining links for your website from highly relevant webpages. Often times, if it was a popular resource page that has now gone dead, you will be able to pick up several high authority links for your piece of content.

PURELINQ CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION

BASE SEARCH MARKETING

How to Spy on Your Competitors to Capture Similar Links

4

AUTHOR **Kristopher Jones**

They say an individual's digital footprint can never be erased. Companies can harness user data to learn more about an individual than their therapist.

User behavior, demographics, and what we're likely to order on our next purchase are all available to advertisers at the click of a button.

If we can uncover this amount of data on users, imagine what we can do if we applied these techniques to spy on our competitors.

By understanding how and where competitors acquire links from, you can find opportunities to build relationships with people relevant to business.

Even if you are not invested in link building, tools like SEMrush, Ahrefs, and Majestic arguably provide the greatest insight into competitor performance available (outside of their own Google Analytics data).

Link building is tough.

Fortunately, competitive link analysis can provide a roadmap available for you.

Anything you can do, I can do better!

What Is Competitive Link Analysis?

Competitive link analysis involves the use of highly sophisticated software to uncover competitor backlink data.

Link builders sort this data by opportunity to find websites that are likely to link to their website.

There are really two ways to approach competitive link building:

■ Create a better webpage than your competitor's and reach out to the referring domain asking to link to your page instead. (Similar to the **Skyscraper method**).

■ Find links to dead or redirected pages on your competitor's website and let the referring domain know that they are linking to a dead or redirected page. Offer a relevant page on your website as an alternative.

Competitive link analysis involves a lot of manual outreach and typically have different success rates depending on the nature of the link.

Link builders can also uncover other link building strategies to replicate in their own campaigns, including:

■ Resource link building

■ Guest posting

■ Guestographics

■ Roundups

■ PR link building

The Benefits of Competitor Link Analysis

There's a reason that competitor link analysis is often the first strategy conducted by many link builders.

Depending on the industry vertical, some business will have to rely more heavily on resource content or their products for link building.

Discovering how competitors have compiled links in a given industry provides a roadmap moving forward to increase one's organic visibility online.

Chances are, if a website has linked to a similar piece of content in the past, it will do so again. Not only are these links easier to acquire, but the links themselves should be highly relevant.

Furthermore, these websites can provide business opportunities moving forward. Discover partnerships and other relationships that your competition has formed and reach out to begin planting your own seed.

Finally, competitive link analysis can be a valuable strategy for filling the keyword gaps between you and the competition.

By understanding what pages have a high correlation between keyword rank and backlinks, SEO strategists can assess whether building links to a certain page or not justifies its budget.

How to Acquire Links Using Competitive Link Analysis

1. EXTRACT COMPETITOR BACKLINK PROFILES (SEMRUSH OR AHREFS)

Using your preferred software program, you can extract competitor backlink data and download it as a CSV.

For this example, we used a local based client with a specialized trade. To get started we needed to look at their competitors to even know where to look.

SEMrush provides important information, such as anchor text, the date it was first indexed, and the status of the URL code.

Ahrefs provides the most comprehensive link analysis tool, allowing webmasters to organize data by the total volume of backlinks and unique referring domains separately.

8 Tips for Buying Energy-Efficient Appliances | Ygrene 🔒 ygrene.com/blog/8-tips-buying-energy-efficient-appliances ▾ EN	70	19	13	12	31	35	112
BBB Business Profile | The Eco Plumbers | Reviews and Complaints 🔒 www.bbb.org/centralohio/business-reviews/plumber/the-eco-plumbers-in-hilliard-oh-70016317/reviews-and-complaints ▾ EN	93	15	N/A	10	12	N/A	N/A
Moved Permanently goo.gl/FHwAWa ▾	96	15	N/A	1	1	N/A	N/A
BBB Business Profile | The Eco Plumbers | Descripción 🔒 www.bbb.org/centralohio/business-reviews/plumber/the-eco-plumbers-in-hilliard-oh-70016317 ▾ EN	93	15	N/A	10	16	N/A	N/A
Plumbing Fixtures, Parts, Supplies - Used - Powell, OH Accredited Businesses www.bbb.org/centralohio/accredited-business-directory/plumbing-fixtures-parts-supplies-used-powell-oh/ ▾	93	14	N/A	15	26	N/A	N/A
4 Winter Plumbing Problems Florida Doesn't Have – Medium 🔒 medium.com/@columbusblog/4-winter-plumbing-problems-florida-doesn-t-have-4b80edd0b061 ▾ EN	93	14	N/A	2	4	N/A	N/A
18 Best Columbus Plumbers | Expertise 🔒 www.expertise.com/oh/columbus/plumbing ▾ EN WORDPRESS	83	14	1	22	52	28	67
6 Myths about Plumbers — Medium 🔒 medium.com/@columbusblog/6-myths-about-plumbers-16558f51774b ▾ EN	93	14	N/A	2	3	N/A	N/A

2. ORGANIZE YOUR SPREADSHEET BY OPPORTUNITY

Export the CSV from either of these programs and upload it to Google Sheets. Depending on the client, you may have thousands of backlinks to pour through.

To help make organization easier, you can filter your spreadsheet by link type, domain rating, or traffic, for initial opportunities.

Once you find links that are relevant to your business, you need to gather the contact information for outreach.

3. BUILD OUT SIMILAR CONTENT THAT IS DRIVING COMPETITOR BACKLINKS

When organizing your spreadsheet and using your tools, you'll notice that certain URLs will tend to attract more links than others.

Analyze these landing pages and the referring links to see what value they provide for the referring landing pages.

These pages will also tend to have higher keyword rankings and be featured prominently on other channels, such as social media.

Work with your content and design team to create new and compelling content that serves as a better resource. Ideas include:

- Creating similar content with greater detail.

- Repurposing content into an infographic.

- Creating similar content with quotes or authorship from an authoritative source.

4. REACH OUT TO THIRD PARTY WEBSITES TO ASK FOR LINK OPPORTUNITIES

Once content is created, it's time for the tedious process of **manual outreach.**

When composing an email it pays to be courteous and straight to the point.

For example, an email template could explain how that domain is linking to a dead link and that this impedes upon user experience and could even affect their own site's rankings.

On the other hand, if you're trying to replace a link to live content, your email pitch will need to be more persuasive.

Most webmasters are skeptical of link building so offering a product at a cheaper price or a better resource often won't be enough.

Some additional ideas for persuasion include:

- Debunking a fact or claim listed in the competitor article.
- Explaining how your article is updated with more recent information.
- Appealing to your own brand's authority over a competitor's.
- Citing any recognizable thought leaders listed in your article.

Once you send out the initial email, it's time to sit back and wait. It's always good practice to follow up in a week or two if you don't receive a response.

Depending on your email template and your underlying strategy, results may vary.

PURELINQ BASE SEARCH MARKETING

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Quarterly

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

1 month - 4 months

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

■ SEMrush   ■ Majestic

■ Ahrefs   ■ SpyFu

B E N E F I T S :

■ Enlighten your campaign about other link building strategies that are working for competitors.

■ Bridge the gap between competitors by acquiring many of the same links.

■ Build relationships with websites that specialize in or link to similar content.

5

How to Use Controversy to Get High-Quality Links

AUTHOR Tony Wright

Controversy gets links.

Brands that understand their audience can take advantage of **taking controversial stands.**

If you know how your audience feels about a particular issue, taking a stand on that issue only reinforces your brand's relevance to your target customers.

Savvy Brands Take Stands

Brands like Ben & Jerry's, Patagonia, Heineken, Starbucks, and many others have successfully parlayed arguably controversial social stands into thousands of links from high-quality sites.

And the links have come from not only relevant sites that cater to the brands' supporters, but from high-quality sites that cater to those opposed to the brands' social positions.

In other words, they get links from their supporters and their detractors.

Stats Show Taking a Stand Can Be Beneficial

A **recent study** by the public relations juggernaut, Edelman, states that more than two-thirds of worldwide consumers would buy or boycott a brand based on its social stance.

Consumers are increasingly aware of brands' social stances and they are acting based on their own beliefs.

The Edelman study is conducted every year. In the latest study (2018), the increase in consumers that cared about a brand's social stance increased by 13%, the highest increase in the history of the study.

More than half of the people surveyed in the study believed that brands play a more powerful role in social change than the government.

Increasingly, consumers are going to want to know what the social stance of a brand is. And that will affect not only SEO, but sales and the bottom line.

Controversy Breeds Links

Obviously, if your brand takes a stand, the benefits (or, in the case of mistake, fallout) goes far beyond SEO and link building.

But make no mistake: links flow to brands that are willing to stick their neck out and take a stand.

When I was a journalist, the saying was "if it bleeds, it leads."

Our job was to sell papers, and we knew that a car wreck or an accident would make the papers fly off the shelf.

The same is true in today's modern journalism.

> The journalist doesn't really care which, as long as the clicks come in.

Journalists look for brands to take stands – particularly bold stands – either hoping for a trainwreck or a triumph.

And the best links come from journalists and online influencers.

The saying "I don't care what you say about me, just spell my name right" has never been truer than in the battle for high-quality links.

But You Must Know Your Audience

In order to employ this tactic successfully, you must **know your audience.**

If you don't know how your audience thinks, you stand to lose a lot more than a decent search engine presence.

If your core audience turns on you because of a social stance, you could lose your business.

I'm not just talking about merely understanding your audience demographics and buying patterns.

You need to understand:

- How your audience thinks.

- How your audience votes.

- The issues that are important to your audience.

Understanding your audience does not happen by following your intuition.

There is plenty of data out there to help you understand your audience from a macro level, but if you can ask your audience directly what they think, that is always the best.

Think of yourself similar to a political pollster, trying to figure out the issues that are important to your constituents. Because, essentially, that's what you are doing.

Work to create a statistically valid sampling of your audience and poll them.

If you must, incentivize the audience to tell you what they think, do it.

Understand incentivizing can skew results, so best to hire someone who knows what they are doing when it comes to polling if you can afford to.

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If You Don't Know Your Audience, Don't Take a Stand

If you don't understand your audience, don't take a stand. Period.

Just ask the folks at the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, who are still recovering from their controversial decision to stop funding Planned Parenthood almost a decade ago.

You stand must also be authentic to your brand.

The buying public, as well as the gatekeepers of links, know when a brand is jumping on a social stance bandwagon.

It's easy to see through a brand's thinly veiled effort to ride the wave of the social consciousness theme of the month.

Just ask Pepsi about the backlash it received from a commercial that never actually aired on broadcast television.

A commercial in which a "woke" Kendall Jenner walked through a nebulous youth protest, only to share a Pepsi with a handsome police officer waiting to restore order.

This commercial garnered a ton of links – but I think Pepsi would rather it have never aired based on the headaches it caused for the brands.

But if you know your audience, be vocal about the causes that are important to them.

Don't be afraid to take a stand that your audience will appreciate.

Downsides of Taking a Stand

Taking a stand can be somewhat exhausting.

Trolls are real.

There will be those who oppose your stance that will work to harm you online.

If you have extremely limited resources to combat your detractors, taking a controversial stand might not be feasible, no matter how well it will play with your target audience.

But if you can **fight the trolls**, the links you can garner from taking a stand are well worth the risks.
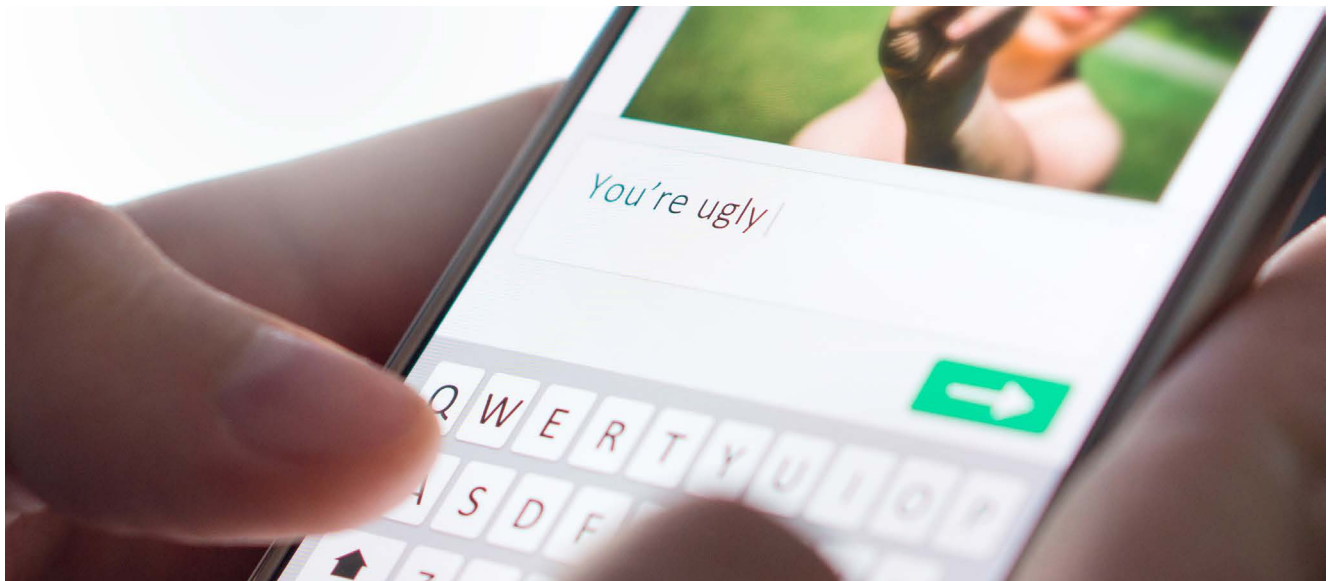
So You Took a Stand, Now What?

Once you have taken a stand, you aren't done.

You need to create a campaign to let folks know about your stand.

Just like in the last tactic, you need to make sure that the important folks know about the stand you've taken.

Again, don't play a numbers game with your outreach.

Find the most important folks, and make sure they are aware of your stand.

This list will most likely be different from your other lists, as you'll want to find the influencers that are particularly interested in the stand you take.

In Conclusion

There is no way to understand how many links your brand will obtain by taking a stand.

As with anything, your mileage may vary.

One thing I can promise – taking a well-thought-out public social stand will boost your audience loyalty as well as your links.

Taking a stand isn't for the faint at heart.

You have to plan it right, and most of all, know your customers and audience.

You have to be cognizant that trolls are inevitable, and you'll need to deal with them.

But in the end, the results are worth the effort.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

This tactic is campaign based.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

In many cases, results are immediate.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

No way to know how many links – varies greatly across issues and verticals.

T O O L S :

No specific tools needed, but audience research tools are recommended.

B E N E F I T S :

■ Controversy and social stands will build quality links if done correctly. Taking a stand, if you know who your audience, is one of the fastest and most effective ways to build highly relevant, quality links.

■ Brands that understand their audience and take appropriate social stances will increase not only their search engine presence, but engender brand loyalty and see increased in the bottom line.

PURELINQ CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION

BASE SEARCH MARKETING

6

11 Ways to Build Links Through Content Marketing

Let's face it: link building is tough.

And it's only getting harder.

Long gone are the days when you can get away with **buying links**, yet links remain one of the **top 3 ranking factors.**

If you want to **rank in 2020,** you need a great link profile pointing to your domain.

However, given the fact that **earning links** isn't getting any easier, it can often be hard to know where to focus your efforts to gain maximum returns.
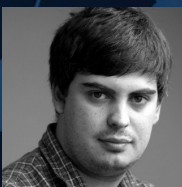
AUTHOR **James Brockbank**

Say Hello to Content Marketing

For those running SEO campaigns in the majority of industries, your best approach to earning links is going to be through content marketing.

However, on its own, that can mean many different things.

To some, content marketing means nothing more than running an ongoing **guest blogging** campaign.

To others, using **data-driven studies** or even **infographics** is what first springs to mind.

Content marketing is a minefield.

SEJ Search Engine® Journal

But the good news?

You can approach it in so many different ways and still drive success in terms of link acquisition.

No two SEO professionals are likely to handle their content-led link building campaigns the same way.

However, to inspire you to try your hand at a new tactic, here's a look at 11 ways to build links through content marketing, categorized by the budget required to undertake the approach.

(Note: 'Budget' refers to the amount needed to produce the content, not in terms of buying links, something which is strongly discouraged.)

Low-Budget Content Marketing Techniques

Are your link building efforts limited by your available budgets?

Perhaps you're a startup who understands the benefits of **SEO**, yet don't yet have the budget to go all out and hire a whole team of your own?

On the other hand, maybe you're an agency that is looking at ways to grow the link profile for a client without needing to ask them for any extra monetary investment?

Here are five content marketing techniques which only need a minimal budget to execute, with the main resource requirement here being time and knowledge with the availability of a graphic designer to add extra visual appeal to content ideal if available but by no means essential.

1. CASE STUDIES

If you're doing great work, why not tell the world about it?

Others love to hear how their peers go about their work and there's a lot which can be learned from a well put-together case study.

Once you begin to share a case study across social media and within your networks, your insight into the processes becomes valuable and you typically won't struggle to utilize these to earn links from industry publications.

Once published, so long as a case study is insightful, data-driven and detailed, by all means, go ahead and forward to the editors of a number of publications within your space – those who are always on the lookout for experts to share their advice and guidance.

2. EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS

At least one expert works at every business. Many businesses have multiple experts to draw expertise from.

Experts are one of the most valuable assets which can be used from a content marketing perspective.

Too many marketers assume that a linkable asset has to be "something" (e.g., an infographic, a blog post, an ebook), when in fact, people can be one of the most attractive to publishers.

Journalists typically aren't subject experts, however, they need to utilize specialists to add weight to their articles.

Using the likes of Help a Reporter Out (HARO) or by monitoring the **#journorequest** hashtag on Twitter, you can connect with journalists looking for specialist advice and input on a topic.

3. EXPERT ROUNDUPS

Although expert roundups might not be quite as effective as they once were, they remain a cost-effective way to earn links from bloggers and specialists.

This form of "ego-bait" works because everyone loves to share something about themselves. If you can encourage 10, 20, 50 or even 100 "experts" to contribute a piece of advice to a roundup, there's a good chance they'll link back so long as they've got an 'As seen in' or 'In the press' page.

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For maximum link earning using this technique, assess whether a blogger or expert is actively linking out to resources which feature themselves while pulling together a list of prospects to touch base with regarding contributions.

A word of warning here: for the best results when using this approach, don't waste time responding to requests which you're not a specialist in. This happens all too often and rarely results in coverage. Stay specialist, however, and it's a cost and time effective way to land top-tier links.

A top tip here, however, is to ensure you actually are speaking with experts. This shouldn't be a tactic which you abuse attracting contributions from anyone even remotely connected to the topic.

4. INTERVIEWS

While interviews can be time-consuming to arrange and pull together, if you're able to interview complementary industry experts and host on your blog, this can be a great way to earn links.

When running an interview, focus your questions on topics which you know your wider audience are genuinely interested in.

Are you able to encourage the expert to share specialist insight and advice, top tips, and guidance?

If so, again, you've got something of value which you can outreach to other relevant publishers to earn links.

Notice the trend of adding value here?

You don't need to be securing the likes of Gary Vaynerchuk to interview, however. Start small but talk to a specialist.

5. LONG-FORM GUIDES

Whether you're in B2B or B2C, long-form educational guides (referred to by some as "power pages") can be a great way to earn links from both resource pages and contextually.

Why?

You guessed it: because longer content typically adds value to a topic and contains information that others want to link to.

The first step here is understanding the questions your audience is asking – forming a basis for guides which you can develop to answer these better than any other resource out there (take a look at those which rank in top 5 positions).

Use the likes of AnswerThePublic, Quora, and even Google Autocomplete to begin to understand the questions being asked in your industry and act as seeds of inspiration to write guides around.

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Mid-Budget Content Marketing Techniques

If you're lucky enough to have a budget available for content marketing of a few hundred dollars per month, or the availability of senior-level, in-house designers and PR experts, your arsenal of techniques can begin to expand, and you'll be in a position to explore additional ways to earn links through your content campaigns.

6. COLLABORATE ON A CONTENT CAMPAIGN

If you're looking to earn links from new audiences and double up on resources, consider collaborating with a complementary (not competing) brand on a content campaign.

Let's say you're doing SEO for a bed retailer. How about teaming up with a road safety charity to raise awareness on the risks of drowsy driving?

You're able to highlight your expertise through stating the importance of getting a great night's sleep while the charity is able to add insight into the wider dangers and stats.

With two marketing teams promoting the content, in many cases to very different audiences, this can be an effective way to maximize the success of a campaign.

7. INFOGRAPHICS

Even though high-quality **infographics** still can be great for link building, the reputation of infographics has taken a hit in recent years.

The reason?

So many low-quality infographics did the rounds a few years back.

Today, publishers want to see something that truly stands out before they'll ever consider covering it and linking out.

The main thing to consider here: what's the story?

Simply producing a listicle in infographic format probably won't cut it anymore.

That said, a unique infographic which contains actionable takeaways can still an attractive asset for publishers and a fantastic way to earn links from both top-tier publishers and bloggers.

8. LOCAL PR

Even if you're a national or an international brand, don't turn your back on local publications.

Local newspapers and online publications (as an example, Lancashire Business View, an online and print publication which connects businesses in the county of Lancashire, UK) are typically great places to do one of two things:

- Land news coverage.

- Contribute expert advice and guidance through a regular column.

What must be remembered is that in many cases, local publications are stretched for resources. This means they, in many cases, welcome high-quality content and stories for two reasons:

■ They're geared up to share local success stories.

■ It's typically easy work for them to take a well-written press release or article, make a few small edits, and publish as is.

It's easy to overlook these opportunities as you reach out to the bigger publications, but local links are typically much easier wins while still retaining a great level of authority and relevancy to a business.

9. WHITEPAPERS & RESEARCH PAPERS

If you're in a position to conduct research of your own and put together a whitepaper, this can be a fantastic way to earn industry-specific links.

Why? Because you're adding value and giving a fresh insight into a topic.

Now, in many cases, this is more relevant to B2B companies than B2C, however, that doesn't mean it isn't possible.

Why not consider teaming up with a local university and conducting research into a topic relevant to the products which you sell?

Whether that's kitchen gadgets and you're considering research into food and nutrition or, going back to an earlier example, a bed retailer conducting research into sleep habits.

Working with university students often sees little financial investment required from your end, simply time, on the grounds that they will likely be doing it as part of their studies.

Once complete, reach out and promote to industry-relevant press and so long as there's a real story, data, and insight available, it can be a great way to earn fantastic links in significant volumes.

High-Budget Content Marketing Techniques

If you're one of the few who has higher budgets available to allocate toward content marketing campaigns (typically, we're talking more than $2,000 per campaign or a large team of in-house resources), you can drive some great results by doing things a little differently and thinking **more akin to PR** than SEO.

Don't forget, here, that ideas are everything and, when working with higher budgets, it's more important than ever to fully sanity check and analyze your ideas before putting them into production.

10. BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BRAND & BECOME THE 'GO TO' EXPERT

Being totally honest with you here, this isn't for the light-hearted.

Building a personal brand and establishing yourself as the 'go to' expert in an industry isn't easy. It takes time. Lots of time.

But, when done right, can be very effective, yet not something which most would consider an SEO tactic.

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Think of it this way:

If you've taken the time to build an audience who consider you as one of the thought leaders in your industry, that's a fantastic pull.

■ Offer to write a guest post or monthly column for a publication? If you're a known expert, they'll snap your hand off.

■ Respond to a HARO request as an already respected industry figure? You can almost guarantee that it'll be your response which is used.

■ Reach out to a journalist on a news topic and offer your insight and comment? Again, you'll stand out way above your competitors doing the same.

A personal brand is valuable and is an amazing asset from a link building perspective.

Take the time to study what the likes of Gary Vaynerchuk, Social Chain's Steven Bartlett or MobileMonkey's Larry Kim have done to build their personal brands through a combination of video content, social media, column writing, and public speaking.

You'll soon start to get some ideas as to how you can do this for yourself, looking with a longer-term view of using your brand to land links.

11. SURVEYS

Surveys can cost big bucks to conduct, but they give you something which no one else can get – unique data.

If you're able to pull together stories backed by your own data, collected through a survey, you're positioning your content as highly attractive to newspapers, industry publications, and the like.

That said, the stories and results of the survey must be interesting.

Before jumping in and investing in a survey (don't forget you ideally need at least 2,000 respondents for the press to consider it a fair piece of research), take the time to read **8 Tips for Creating PR Surveys.**

One final note on surveys: be prepared to follow up outreach with a **link reclamation campaign** as this approach will often result in large numbers of unlinked brand mentions.

Conclusion

Content marketing remains one of the most effective (and potentially scalable) ways to earn links to support your SEO campaign.

You just need to focus on one main thing, regardless of the tactics which you use:

Ensuring you're adding value at all times!

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CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION   SEARCH MARKETING

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Every month

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
2-6 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
20

T O O L S :

- Google Trends
- **A survey maker**
- BuzzSumo
- HARO
- Google Analytics

B E N E F I T S :

- Content marketing can work for you, no matter your budget. Great content increases brand awareness and authority and should bring benefits long after its publishing date. Plus, it is and will continue to be a top Google ranking factor for a long time to come.

- As long as you know what your target audience wants and needs, you should be able to create assets that drive traffic, rankings, links, and (hopefully) conversions.

How to Use Data-Driven Content for Link Building

AUTHOR **Anna Crowe**

Whoever coined the term "content is king" didn't warn us that all of the steps needed to create **link-worthy type of content.**

It's easy enough to write your copy, post it to your blog, and call it a day, but the "king" part only comes when you structure your content to get found in the SERPs.

I've worked with a lot of brands to create data-driven content.

One, in particular, was an education company based in New York City. I worked with the editorial team for 3 months to create a long-form piece of **ego bait content.**

Not only did it gain 52 backlinks in one month, but it generated more than 100 press mentions and drove over 100,000 people to the website.

Learn how to create and use data-driven content for your link building strategy below.

Be the Source

Creating your own data for an article is typically one big headache.

If you've ever tried to survey customers, you know what I'm talking about.

But, as Search Engine Journal's founder Loren Baker **says,** "Be the source."

When you create your own data, people will want to link back to the place they cited.

Using tools like **Google Trends** (you can also **subscribe to Google Trends**) and **Google Consumer Survey**, you can search for trending topics and build your own data.
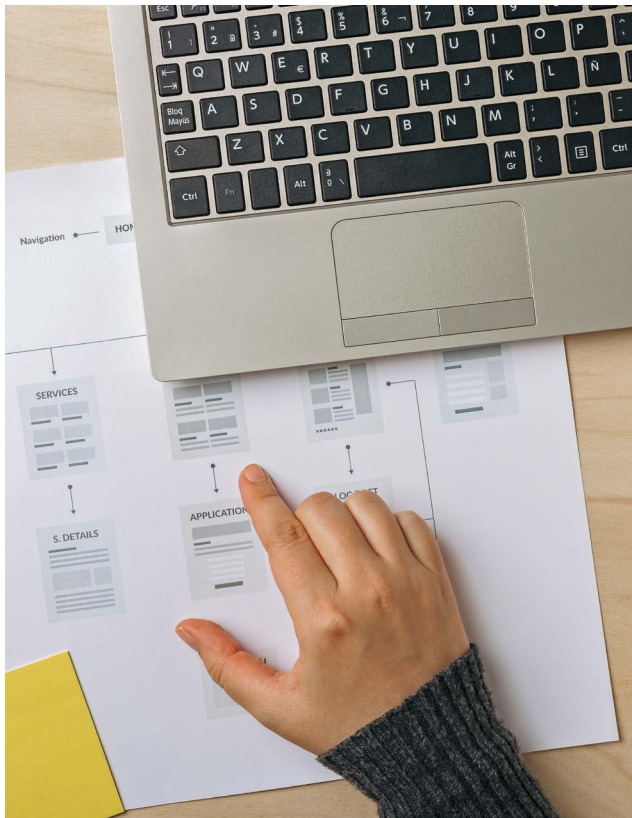
Take **Echelon Insights, for example.**

They leveraged Google Consumer Surveys to understand the Republican Primary Electorate. Echelon Insights found that Donald Trump was leading at 32% going into the first Republican Primary Debate.

This study generated links from top sites like Wired, The Washington Post, The Observer, and many more.

Pick Your Topic

Good data doesn't always equal good content.

You have to figure out how to tell a story with the data you have.

First, you must decide what your content is going to be about.

With data, this can be a chicken and egg situation – do you use the data you have to form your topic or do you choose your topic and then collect some data around it?

It may depend on whether you have pre-existing data or whether you already have a subject matter in mind that's newsworthy or trending.

When researching what topics I may want to cover, I'll start researching with Google Trends and BuzzSumo. These tools are built for research and exploring trends.

Gather Your Data

The first step to creating data-driven content is to collect the data.

I begin to gather my resources of data, whether I'm surveying users or if I'm using my own data.

Important note: When building content with your own proprietary data, it's not about quantity.

For example, Shutterstock uses its proprietary data to create a genuinely useful piece of content with its **2017 Creative Trends infographic.** This infographic generated more than 50 links.

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Traditional content strategy suggests more content equals more leads, but that's not true. You only need one major piece of killer content to achieve your goals.

Conduct Surveys

The go-to place for collecting fresh data, surveys are a fantastic way to gather information and to get statistics and data around subjects that you specifically want to focus on.

Think carefully about your questions before asking them. You want to get the best results possible to generate a variety of angles for you to use in your content.

Make sure your questions will support your story and limit the number of open-ended questions you ask. Like what I did **here** with our SEJ survey for an article I was working on:

What Would You Like to See in the 2020 Marketing Calendar?
Feedback for Search Engine Journal

I will go through every response to learn more about you so I can provide the most value SEJ readers. Your responses will be used to create next year's marketing calendar. Thank you for taking the time to share! :)

Let's do this!   press ENTER

Include a variety of demographic questions so that you can cross-reference answers given with details about the respondents. This will allow you to create multiple sub-stories and angles to push out to the local press.

ASK YOUR COMMUNITY

Do you have your own community of customers or fans?

Then **ask them a few questions, survey them** or send out a questionnaire to turn that data into content.

Like Moz does with their survey.

You can see the **survey questions here**. And, the **results of the survey here.**

The results alone drove 32 backlinks.

If you work for a bigger brand and have forums where your customers come together to discuss a range of different topics, this is a great place to start a conversation about the topic you want to create content around.

Many businesses also have a large database of customer contact details and some regularly send out newsletters.

An easy way to obtain data is to send this database a set of questions, survey or form to fill in via email and reward them with a discount code or entry into a prize drawing once they have returned their answers.

If you have a large social media following, you can use Facebook and Twitter polls to gather data.

Or simply run a competition on your site to find out the information you need using a data capture system as a form of entry.

USE YOUR OWN DATA & REPORTS

Many SaaS companies don't realize the amount of data they are already sitting on.

You likely have some analytical tools to track the success of your own website and marketing efforts. These tools could be used to give you useful insights and data you could use as part of your content marketing strategy.

Google Analytics is a good place to start, as you can look into different consumer demographics such as their age, gender, and location of your customers, along with the industries they work in, what they buy, what devices they use, and more.

You can also carry out your own tests and experiments to generate data and insight that will interest others in your industry or your customers.

Look for Interesting Angles

Once you've got your data, you need to analyze it and pull out the angles you want to use to tell your story and make your content as newsworthy as possible.

Analyzing data isn't always easy, especially if you find yourself staring at a huge spreadsheet of numbers and stats.

Try and highlight any key points and statistics that support the storyline or headline you want to use and pull out any compelling insights into your results.

If you don't get the answer or result you were hoping for, don't force it — put it to one side and focus on a different angle.

Use conditional formatting and create pivot charts to find correlations between different data sets.

Once you have some strong data in front of you, segment your results demographically. This will help you find a range of local angles you can pull out for your content based on gender, age, location, etc. – perfect for pushing out to regional press and publishers for extra coverage.

Visualize Your Data

The way you present your data is key to the success of your content.

Data visualization is the first step in making your content engaging and shareable. But it isn't easy.

Ideally, you should work with a designer to visualize your data. But if you don't have access to one (or don't have the budget), you can make it yourself using a data visualization tool.

This is one of my favorite **visuals that came from data by Podio.**

Once you've created your visual, you need to make sure there is still some content around it to tell your story and make your data come to life.

Always keep in mind how you want your readers to digest your content and that it needs to be responsive on mobile and tablet devices.

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SEARCH MARKETING

How to Structure Your Content Support Activities

If the content is truly a unicorn, as **Larry Kim** would say, you need to do all the supporting activities around this piece.

Here's how I structure my content support activities:

- Collaborate with the PR team to create a strategy. PR teams develop some of the **highest-quality link opportunities**, but they leave a lot of opportunities on the table. This is where link builders come in to do the **manual outreach.**

- Conduct manual outreach to industry blogs for backlinks and **guest blogs.**

- Partner with other companies on a **webinar** to discuss the data.

- Create a blog post series to give further context to the data and optimize for new search terms.

- Use the data in **presentations at conferences.**

- Recreate the data in **infographics,** charts, and graphs.

Awesome Examples of Data-Driven Content

Here are a few pieces of data-driven content to inspire you:

The Guardian has really taken the lead with data visualization and has a **whole section on their site** dedicated to it. It's a great place to go for inspiration on how you can shape your data into eye-catching graphics.

Here's another really cool example of some data visualization based on **A Day in the Life of Americans:**

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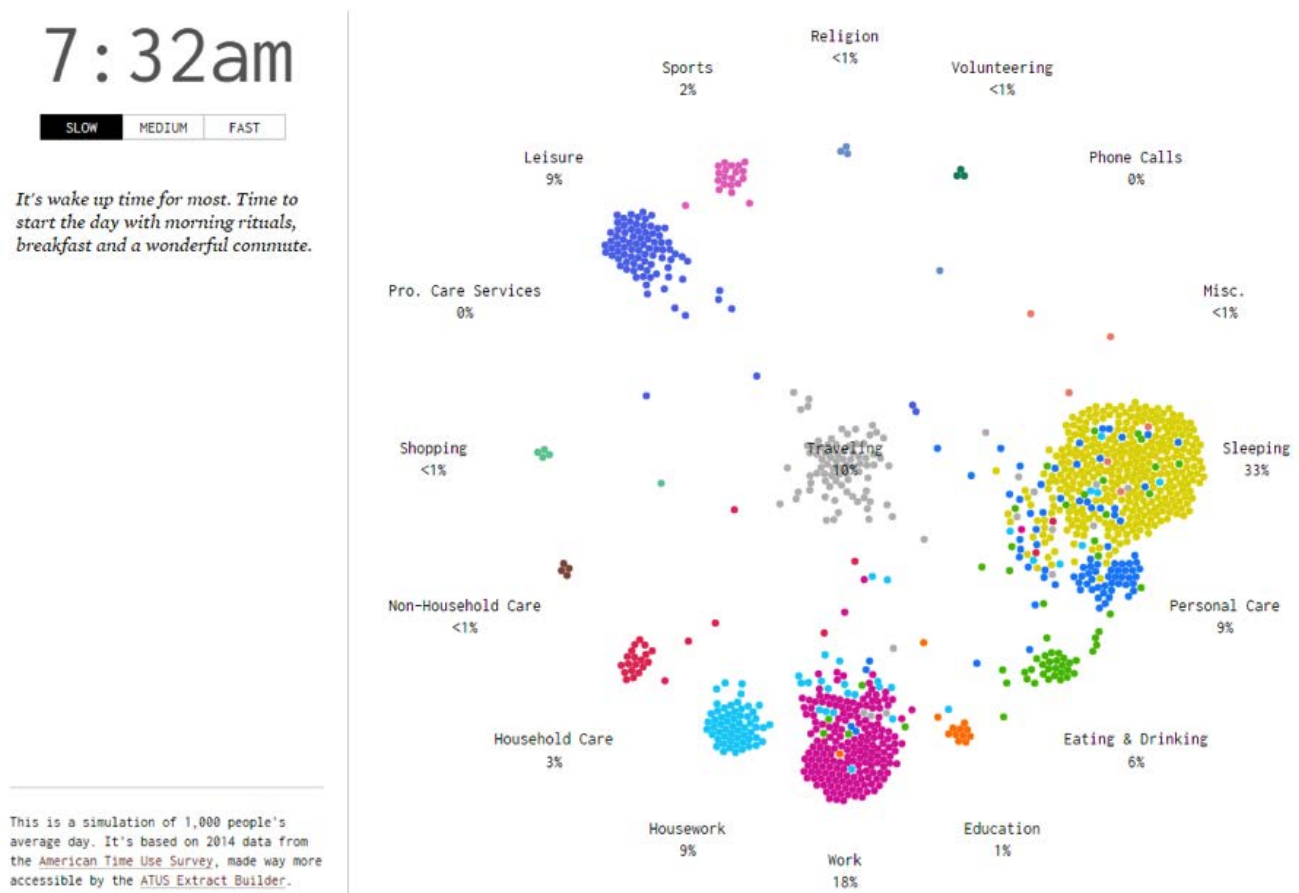
Don't Have Any Data?

Don't have time to collect data yourself?

No problem!

There are plenty of data sources you can use and combine to make a whole new data set.

For example, you could take two similar data sets that were created 10 years apart and then compare and contrast them.

Or, you could analyze someone else's data and pull out some new angles that haven't been used yet.

Here are some other resources to find some interesting data to use in your content or as a starting point for a bigger piece of data journalism:

- **Pew Research Center**
- **Wikipedia**
- **Google Scholar**
- **The Office for National Statistics**
- Reddit's **Data is Beautiful** subreddit

You can also simply type into Google "[keyword] market research" or "[keyword] data sets" to find a range of different information available online.

Read this article for a case study and even more ideas: **Building Links with Data-Driven Content (Even When You Don't Have Any Data)**

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Every 3 months

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
2-6 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
60

T O O L S :

- Google Trends
- BuzzSumo
- Google Consumer Survey
- Google Analytics

B E N E F I T S :

- Great content has no shelf-life. With high-quality content, you will see a spike at the beginning and again 6 months later as you start to rise search rank.

- Data-driven content always works because you created something people want. If you did your research right, you should have a powerful piece of content.

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SEARCH MARKETING

8

How to Use Relevant, Targeted Directories for Link Building

AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

Do you remember *the phone book?*

I know... it's practically an ancient artifact. But it was useful, in its time.

Not only could you close your eyes, open to a random page, and blindly point at a number to prank call (not that I would know anything about that), but you could also flip to the back of the book – to the "yellow pages" – to search for local businesses.

Now, phone books are practically obsolete. You search online for the product or service you need, and when you include your location, you can find a nearby shop within minutes.

This is exactly what you did with the phone book, just... without all the paper cuts.

According to Google, **80%** of consumers in the U.S. use search engines to find local businesses:

> *"Consumers are searching for local information everywhere, on every device, at every point in the purchase process."*

What we learned

Consumers are searching for local information everywhere, on every device, at every point in the purchase process.

What does this tell you?

You want your business to be found online.

Even if you're not SEO savvy, or if building links isn't in your wheelhouse, don't worry...

There's a **web directory** for that.

3 Benefits of Using Online Directories

Online directories – also known as business directories or business listings – are an easy way for businesses to build links and draw traffic to their site.

Here are three benefits of using an online directory:
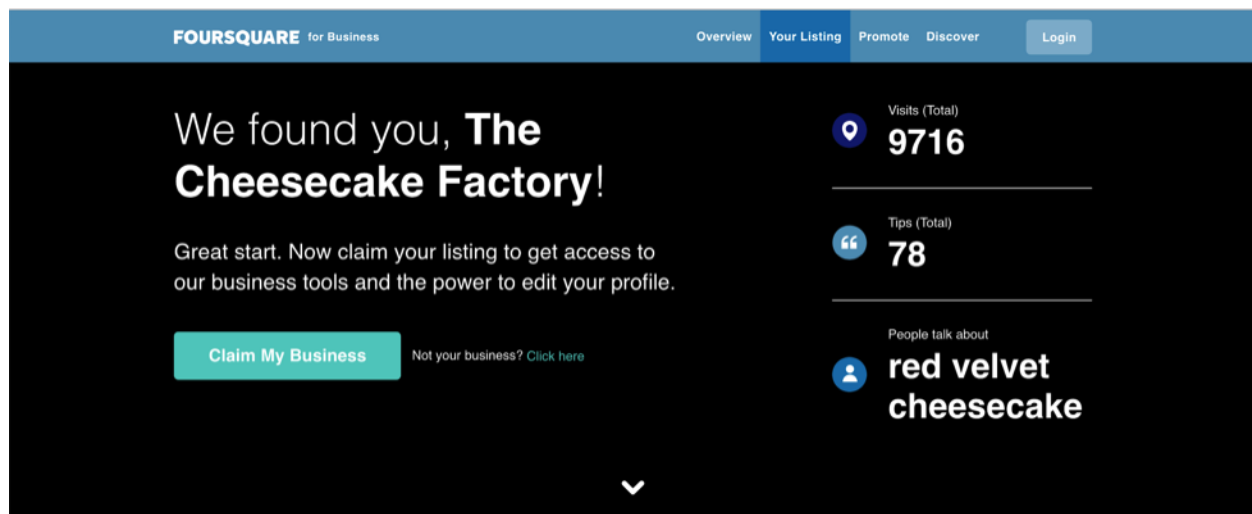
1. TARGETED AND RELEVANT REACH

Directories typically index businesses by niche, location, or category, and often include reviews.

When a person uses an online directory, they want to locate a business that is relevant to their needs – to what they're shopping for at that very moment.

A directory makes it very easy for consumers to cut through the (marketing) noise.

By having your business listed in a directory, you're increasing your site's visibility, which increases the chances of sales, too.

2. TRUSTED LINKS

Boosting your site's SEO and rankings is a nice byproduct of having your business listed in an online directory. Online directories are trusted sources and are typically high-ranking sites, themselves.

Adding your link to an authority site seems like a no-brainer, especially if it means improved visibility and reach, and the possibility of improved SEO and site rankings.

3. COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Many online directories – for example, **Bing Places**, **Yelp**, and **Foursquare** – allow businesses to submit their information to their index for free. Some online directories, on the other hand, do charge a listing fee.

It may be worth it to add your business information to a paid directory, though. After all, trusted, high-authority links are a marketing investment.

3 Ways to Find the Right Directory for Your Business

There are many types of online directories out there. For example, you can find general directories, business listings, local listings, and niche directories.

Choosing the directory – or directories – that you want to be listed on isn't like throwing spaghetti against the wall and seeing what sticks.

As with all other marketing tactics, you need to have a strategy for link building on web directories.

Here are a few things to consider when you're developing your strategy:

1. RELEVANCE

Relevance – and reaching your target audience – is crucial to getting the most out of an online directory. Relevance is also a factor that search engines consider when they crawl sites.

Are you a travel agency in Texas who specializes in road trips within the continental U.S.?

Then don't add your business to a listing for international travel sites.

It isn't relevant, you won't reach your target audience, and even if someone clicks on your link, they'll only be frustrated to find that you don't offer international travel services.

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If you're not an international travel business, you don't want search engines to associate your website with international travel. And yes, that can hurt SEO!

Choose a directory that is relevant to your niche, and the chances of reaching your target audience and boosting your SEO will be much higher.

2. DOMAIN AUTHORITY

When you're deciding between online directories, consider domain authority.

It can be more helpful to get an inbound link from a site with high domain authority (but not always – learn more in **The Truth About Domain Authority: What Every SEO Needs to Understand).**

You can check whether you're listing your business on a trusted, well-established directory by checking the domain authority using a tool like Ahrefs, Alexa, or Moz.

The higher the domain authority of a website, the more likely it is to rank on SERPs. So, shoot for the stars.
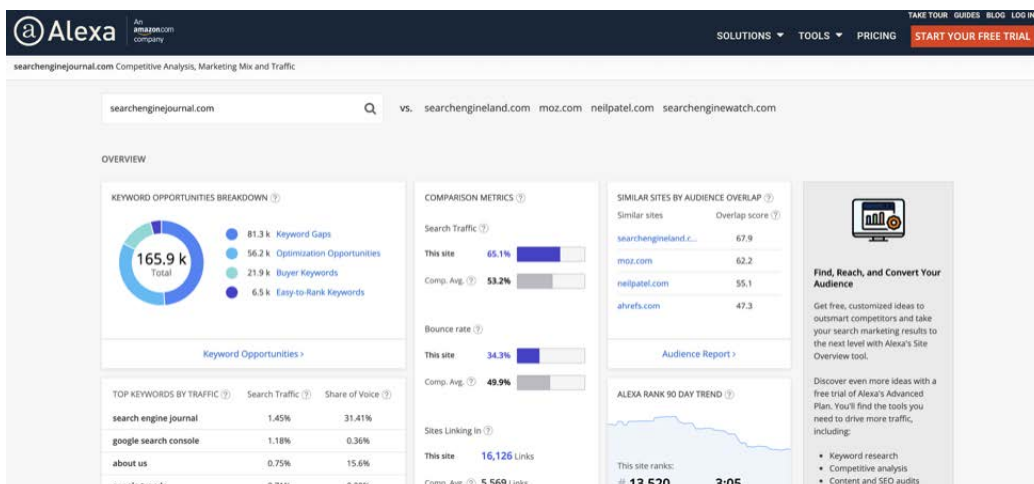
3. FIND THE RIGHT FEATURES

Some online directories go into more detail than others, and it's up to you to decide whether you want a simple NAP+W listing (name, address, phone, and web URL), or a listing that features photos, reviews, and ratings.

For the sake of reaching your target audience, taking advantage of directories with more features will be worth the extra effort.

By listing your business on a directory with added features, you'll encourage your customers to provide feedback and ratings as well, which is helpful to **boost site authority and SEO.**

Stay Consistent

No matter which online directory you choose, the key is to stay consistent with your information and updates.

If you list your business on more than one directory, make sure that every bit of information – down to the last detail – is accurate, on-brand, and **consistent across each listing.**

Not only is this crucial to the success of your link building strategy, but it's also important for the **reputation of your business.**

While the use of web directories may be easy to overlook in favor of other, "sexier" marketing trends, listing your business on a relevant online directory is one of the best – and easiest! – things you can do for your business and website.

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S U M M A R Y

TIMEFRAME:

Month 1-3

RESULTS DETECTED:

4-12 months

AVERAGE LINKS SENT PER MONTH:

6

TOOLS:

◼ Relevant web directory

◼ Domain authority checker (e.g., Ahrefs, Alexa, Moz)

BENEFITS:

◼ Targeted and relevant reach

◼ Inbound links from trusted, high-authority sites

◼ Cost-effectiveness

9

How to Use Ego Bait Content to Attract Links & Generate Leads

AUTHOR **Jessica Foster**

Who doesn't like a little ego boost?

When it comes to attracting high-quality links to your website, it may feel like you have tried everything in the book.

From mammoth evergreen content to good ol' cold outreach, if you are running out of ideas (or simply aren't seeing the results that you want), it may be time to get creative.

Fortunately, there's a link building strategy that relies more on human psychology than it does SEO technique.

Enter **Ego Bait Content** – a smart, imaginative way to both attract quality links and generate new leads for your business.

Here's how to create content that catches the attention of influencers in your niche and entices them to engage with your content like never before.

What Is Ego Bait Content?

As the name implies, the success of ego bait content involves "stroking the ego" of whichever influencer or website owner you want a link from. In a sense, it's content that says "If I scratch your back, you'll scratch mine".

While many **link building** methods aim to create content that appeals to a wide audience, ego bait takes a highly targeted, more personal approach.

The key here is creating content that oriented around a specific person, business, or group of people.

HOW DOES EGO BAIT CONTENT WORK?

Ego bait content is an example of how human psychology and marketing can intertwine to bring in some pretty amazing (and lucrative) results.

Influencers and website owners alike want to be recognized for their accomplishments, products, and skills. By sharing these with your audience, you inspire them to share your content with their own audience and even link to it from their website.

This content can take the form of commending them for their work, including them in a "best of" post, featuring them in an interview, or anything else that says, "You're awesome. Here's why.".

In fact, there are many types of ego bait and the approach you take both depends on whose ego you are trying to bait and whether your goal is to generate backlinks, leads, or both.

Types of Ego Bait Content

The most important thing to keep in mind before jumping into creating ego bait content is that it should put the recipient – not link building – front and center.

While this may seem backward, it's just too easy to slip into the mindset of link building that aims to reach a wider audience in hopes of attracting as many links as possible.

Successful ego bait content is personal, focused, and intentional.

That's why choosing the right type of ego bait content will depend on who you are trying to target.

The main types of ego bait content are:

- **Interviews**
- **Listicles**
- **Awards**
- **Round-Up Posts**
- **Directories**

Below is a quick summary of each type of ego bait content. Later on, you'll learn how to pick the right type of content for reaching your SEO goals.

1. INTERVIEWS

A featured interview is one of the best ways to get influencers to share and link back to your content. Interviews allow you to put them in the spotlight – which is a huge ego boost.

By taking the time to ask them questions, highlight their expertise, and share their story with your audience, you build a relationship that encourages mutual benefit. They'll be happy to share their own interview across social media and even link back to it from their own site.

Interview content is also easy to put together. Simply reach out to the influencer or business owner to make sure that they're on board, send them a list of questions, and then publish the questions and answers on your site.

No need to spend hours researching and writing a mammoth piece of content. With this type of ego bait, you can create quality content quickly and generate traffic and links potentially overnight.

2. ROUND-UP POSTS

Much like interviews, round-up posts feature experts in your industry and share their expertise or stories with your audience.

The difference here is that a round-up post features several influencers and typically includes shorter quotes rather than extensive interview questions.

When creating a round-up post, you'll first want to think of a topic that's of interest to your audience.

For example, if you are a family law attorney, you may want to call on experts that help people cope with divorce, such as psychologists, motivational speakers, and authors.

Then, you will build out a piece of content that allows the participants to share their top tips or stories on the topic. For the example above, that could be "10 Experts Share How to Get Over a Divorce" or "How These 8 Divorcees Found Love Again."

Once published, you'll want to reach out to participants to encourage them to share the post and link to it from their own content.

3. LISTICLES

A listicle, or list article, is a piece of content that typically highlights the "best of" for a certain niche, or creates a comprehensive list of resources, products, or influencers for users to read/buy/follow.

An example of a listicle could be "10 Best Meditation Apps", "50+ Ways to Grow Your Business in 2019", or SEJ's **140 Top SEO Experts You Should Be Following in 2019.** These kinds of articles are highly informative and beneficial to users.

In an ego bait listicle, you will be referring to multiple influencers or business owners in order to stroke their egos and get them to engage with your content.

The goal is to create content that they would feel honored to be featured in. That's why your content should be well-researched and irresistible.

Again, you will want to choose a topic that's of interest to your audience and will attract links from quality websites in your niche.

Then, you'll reach out to webmasters before and/or after you feature them to encourage them to share or link to your content.

4. DIRECTORIES

Believe it or not, directories can be a type of ego bait content as well. Not only are directories helpful to users, but they're a way of highlighting other businesses in your industry.

Directories can also be a great source of lead generation for your business.

For instance, if you often generate business from local contractors, you may want to create a directory of contractors in your local area.

That way, you can build partnerships with these contractors and help them generate traffic through your directory. Then, you can reap the rewards through referral business.

Of course, you may not want to give too much limelight to direct competitors, so be careful in choosing who to feature in your directory. It's best to create a resource of businesses that will send leads your way and won't be put out by linking back to your website.

5. AWARDS

Nothing is quite as enticing when it comes to ego bait as giving awards to those businesses you value the most.

Awards can be an authentic way of calling attention to amazing organizations, thought leaders, and businesses in your industry.

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To be effective as a link building strategy, you will want to take the time to research each recipient and take note of what makes them unique. Highlight their years of experience, how they have served their local community or the results they have gotten for their clients. Put them in the spotlight.

The award may be as simple as a featured post on your website or could include a custom-designed graphic to commemorate the moment. Just be sure that the award fits with what your business values and benefits the recipient as well.

Note: Don't use awards simply to generate a backlink. Most businesses will be able to see right through your efforts. Instead, see it as an opportunity to grow your network and bring attention to businesses that are doing great work.

When executed correctly, this type of ego bait content is likely to drive traffic to your website and even attract some backlinks in return.

Using Ego Bait to Attract Links & Generate Leads

Once you familiarize yourself with the different types of ego bait content, it will be easier to determine which type makes sense for your goals and the influencers you are trying to reach.

But, before you get to writing, it's worth taking the time to create a list of contacts that you want to "bait" and developing a strategy on how you are going to generate shares, links, and leads.

STEP 1: MAKE A LIST

It's not in your best interest to reach out to influencers or webmasters that will have no interest in your content or won't benefit your site in some way. You will want to choose websites that are strong SEO-wise (high ranking, high authority, niche related) and that have an audience that is likely to engage with your content

As with any link building effort, you want to be sure that you are targeting high-quality, niche-related websites.

You can use SEO tools such as Ahrefs and SEMrush to find websites that are worth targeting in your ego bait content.

Some things to factor in are what keywords they are ranking for, how much traffic they get, whether their site is relevant to your industry, and how authoritative their site is in the eyes of search engines.

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Once you have made a list of websites to reach out to, you can move on to pick the topic of your content and the type of ego bait you want to create.

STEP 2: PICK YOUR TOPIC

You should already recognize some trends and similarities in the websites you have included on your list. This will help you determine which type of ego bait content will be most effective.

For instance, if most of the websites on your list are those of industry experts, you may want to create a series of interviews or build out a round-up post.

If, however, most of the websites are businesses, sell products online, or feature tools and apps, it makes sense to create a listicle or directory to feature several websites at once.

Next, you will want to choose a topic that both makes sense for your own website and the websites you are targeting.

The topic should be of interest to your audience and enticing enough to encourage participants to link back to and share your content. You may also want to do keyword research to make sure the topic is conducive to generating organic traffic.

STEP 3: REACH OUT

By this point you should:

- Have a solid list of contacts to reach out to.

- A killer ego bait content idea.

Depending on the type of content you chose, you will want to reach out to those contacts in order to get more information from them. This is also a way to break the ice and encourage them to link back to your content later on.

If you have decided to conduct an interview, reach out to potential participants to confirm that they are onboard. Then, follow up with the interview questions and collect their replies.

For round-up posts, directories, and listicles, you may require additional information from participants. This could include collecting their "best tips" for your chosen topic, an image for their bio in your article, or contact information for their business.

Also, it's worth giving them a heads-up on what the content piece is about, when it will be published, and how you would appreciate them engaging with your post.

This could be as simple as saying, *"Once the article comes out, we would love it if you would share it with your audience or mention it on your website!"*

STEP 4: CREATE YOUR EGO BAIT

Ego bait content is a form of content marketing, so it makes sense that much of its success depends on the content itself.

If you are creating an interview or round-up, much of the work will have already been done for you after you collect the responses from participants. I also recommend including an engaging introduction, some high-quality images, and short summary at the end.

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Other types of ego bait content will be more involved – requiring you to write much of the content yourself, sourcing images, or building out a directory. Because this content aims to serve multiple purposes, it's worth taking the time to do it right.

If you need help writing content or marketing your content, consider hiring a **professional content writer** or content marketing expert to make your ego bait content top-notch.

STEP 5: FOLLOW UP

If you gave participants a heads-up before creating your content, they should already be expecting you to follow up after the content is published. This should be your final attempt at **asking for a link** or a share.

To help you out, here is a simple email template to ask websites for backlinks and social shares:

Hey [Name],

Thanks again for participating in our [article/directory/ interview series], [name of article/directory/interview]. Our readers have loved it so far!

We couldn't have created this amazing resource without you – and think that your audience will benefit from it as well.

Please feel free to share [link to content] on social media or link to it in your own content. We would appreciate and we're sure your readers will too!

Let us know if there's anything else we can do to help you out in the future. We are all about connecting with amazing [people/businesses] in the [your industry] industry.

Thanks so much!

Finally, follow up with businesses that are featured in your directory to see if they have any referrals to send your way. This is a great way to build a lasting partnership that's a win-win for both of you.

Bonus tip: Ego bait content is a great way to grow your professional network. Even if you don't end up getting a link from a website, it opens the door to future partnerships and collaborations. Keep your eyes open to the opportunities and discuss how you may work together in the future.

Conclusion

Ego bait content isn't simply meant to be an ego "boost" to business owners. It can serve many purposes and can, in fact, be mutually beneficial to both you and the people you are trying to target.

The success of your ego bait content depends on creating content that puts the participant front and center – highlighting their accomplishments, sharing their expertise, and telling their stories.

Not only is ego bait content interesting to your own audience, but it entices participants to share your content like wildfire and link to it from their own websites. Plus, it can open the door to future partnerships, collaborations, and more.

Get creative with your content and use ego bait to attract links and generate leads for your business.

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S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Every 2-3 months

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
Often immediate or up to 6 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
3 per month
(varies widely depending on how many people are featured)

T O O L S   N E E D E D :
■ SEMrush   ■ Google Trends

■ Google Forms   ■ Ahrefs

B E N E F I T S :

■ Relationship building can be mutually beneficial, both in terms of SEO and collaboration opportunities. It is a great way to generate links and grow a potential referral network.

■ Publishing ego bait content presents multiple opportunities to circulate content across a variety of platforms and a wider audience. The content marketing benefits can be 4-fold: links, traffic, authority, and brand visibility.

10

Link Building with Local Charities & Events
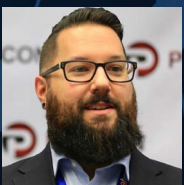
AUTHOR **Jesse McDonald**

Link building can be a rather daunting task.

The rules of the link building game have changed so dramatically over the years that it can be tough to figure out how to approach the concept.

On top of how much it has changed, it's a time-consuming task with the potential to yield few results.

This is especially true when looking for new opportunities at a local level.

One way I have addressed this difficulty in the past is by making local charities a large part of my link building strategy for the sites I've worked with.

Benefits of Local Charities & Events

Local charities allow you to put on your traditional marketing hat and think outside the box a bit.

The reason why link building with local charities is such a valid strategy is that it works from multiple perspectives of marketing.

For example, let's say you are a business working to fundraise with a local charity. These types of charities are always looking to get as much exposure as possible to help attract more donations for their cause.

At one of the previous agencies I worked at, we would partner every year with Extra Life to raise money for a local children's hospital through a 24-hour video game marathon.

The hospital then did a large write-up on our efforts that got covered by a few different local news outlets, which included links to our site.

This approach works almost like more traditional PR. A good deed that was meant to help a cause we believed in also yielded a lot of exposure to our business.

Another option for this type of link building comes in the form of local sponsorship.

For example, let's say a local children's hospital in your community hosts an annual marathon to raise money.

By sponsoring an event like this, not only do you have the potential to get a relevant link to your site but you also have the secondary value of having your business' name on promotional materials related to the marathon.

In both of the previously mentioned scenarios, one of the biggest goals is to help build awareness for your business within your community.

The links you build through these efforts will send signals to search engines about your attachment to the community you are working in. You are also putting your name in front of potential future customers.

Prospecting Local Charities

The process of prospecting these types of links can be incredibly time-consuming – especially if you live in a larger metro area.

Not only will there be a lot of information to sort through but not every opportunity you find will have options that work for you.

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To make things a little easier and more efficient, I highly recommend actively using **search operators** when looking for these types of opportunities.

Search operators will allow you to narrow your search results – increasing your odds of finding something that works best for your needs.

I always like to begin my prospecting with the city I am working in and specifying what exactly I'm looking for.

If I was working with a client in my hometown and wanted to find them sponsorship opportunities, my search would look something like [austin events "sponsors"].

This will display any sites in the Austin area that are holding events that actively highlight sponsors. You could modify this to show "sponsorships" or event.

Use the inurl operator to find a specific page that houses the sponsors of the event.

When using these search operators, I knew that I wasn't wasting time as I worked to qualify these sites because I knew they contained exactly what I was looking for.

When prospecting local charities and events, I highly recommend creating some sort of database for your findings.

While something you find now might not be right for your current clients, they might be perfect for a future project. This also allows you to create a quick-reference resource for future efforts.

Qualifying Potential Opportunities

The best part of these types of links is that they are hyper-relevant to a specific area.

Sometimes these domains can even contain the area's name directly in the URL, which is incredibly valuable but usually doesn't give very high scores in some **tools**. It's because these links are much more niche.

This brings me to my next point: there is more to a link's value than just **domain authority!**

DA is just one metric to look at to help determine the **quality of a link.** I always recommend looking at **multiple metrics** to determine if you want to move forward the link you are prospecting.

One of the first things I always do is put the site through a tool like SEMrush or Ahrefs to see how this site has specifically performed over time.

Due to this ranking dip on the site you are prospecting, you would probably want to disqualify this link as it will hold way less valuable link equity.

If you see a huge drop in the number of keywords a site has ranked for, it's a pretty safe assumption that the site has been hit with some form of devaluation.

In addition to the equity flow your site will receive from this initiative, it's also good to look into estimated visits the site you are prospecting gets.

One way that I have always qualified links is by determining if they would help drive more traffic to my site.

Building Relationships

Through the years as I've taught **SEO newbies** about link building, I've always framed the concept more as **relationship building**, especially in the local space.

> The key when building these relationships is to be genuine.

Think of it as an awareness campaign for yourself. The more people are aware of you and understand what your goals are the more likely they will be to want to work with you.

Help make a difference in your community and make more people aware of your customers.

Take the time to get to know the people you are trying to partner with. In some cases, this can lead to even more advantageous opportunities.

Making Communities Better

When you incorporate local charities and events into your link building strategy, you can take a step back and know that you are helping to make your community a better place.

Putting your time and marketing dollars towards these types of initiative doesn't just help your site rank better, it helps **make your community better.**

In my book, that makes it worth it.

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SEARCH MARKETING

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

This is an evergreen local link building tactic that can be worked on as often as you dedicate time to link building.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

It depends on how quickly the page that contains the link get crawled after it was built.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

There are many factors that that can determine how many links can be built with this tactic. I always set my goal to build at least one to two of these every couple of months for my sites.

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

Any tool that can show you performance data on a particular site and page such as:

- SEMrush
- Brightedge
- Link Research Tools
- Ahrefs
- Kerboo
- Etc.

B E N E F I T S :

- This is a link building tactic that utilizes local charities and events to help build authority and improve SEO performance for local businesses.

- This is a valuable tactic because it helps improve authority and awareness to a local business while sending hyper-local signals to search engines.

How to Use Guest Blogging for Natural Link Building
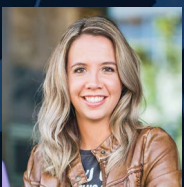
AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

What's better than a box of chocolates for a content creator?

You guessed it – the byline.

Nothing gives me a fuzzier, beyond roses-and-chocolatey feeling than this: by Julia McCoy.

It gets even more romantic when my blog and name are featured in a prestigious site.

That's what guest blogging is all about. Fame. Reputation. Success.

But it's more than that. In fact, you can use guest blogging as a powerful strategy in your link-building toolkit.

Ready to dive in?

The Rocky History of Link Building Through Guest Blogging (How NOT to Do Guest Blogging)

Guest blogging started out beautifully.

It was like having a famous singer appear at your local theater or having a highly acclaimed author write the introduction to your book.

But like a ton of other SEO practices, things went awry.

People began jumping on guest blogging as a spammy tactic to gain coveted backlinks.

Here's an email Google's Matt Cutts **received** in 2014.

My name is XXXXXXX XXXXXXXX and I work as a content marketer for a high end digital marketing agency in [a city halfway around the world]. I have been promoting high quality content in select niches for our clients.

We are always on the lookout for professional, high class sites to further promote our clients and when I came across your blog I was very impressed with the fan following that you have established.I [sic] would love to speak to you regarding the possibility of posting some guest articles on your blog. Should you be open to the idea, **we can consider making suitable contribution**, befitting to high standard of services that your blog offers to larger audience.

On my part, I assure you a high quality article that is–
– 100% original
– Well written
– Relevant to your audience and
– Exclusive to you

We can also explore including internal links to related articles across your site to help keep your readers engaged with other content on your blog.
All I ask in return is a **dofollow link or two in the article body** that will be relevant to your audience and the article. We understand that you will want to approve the article, and I can assure you that we work with a team of highly talented writers, so we can guarantee that the article would be insightful and professionally written. We aim to write content that will benefit your loyal readers. We are also happy to write on any topic, you suggest for us.

This email shows you exactly what went wrong with guest blogging.

Also, it tells you how not to do it.

Guest blogging isn't about slapping your name onto a piece of sloppily written content just to get those quality backlinks.

So, what is good about guest blogging today?
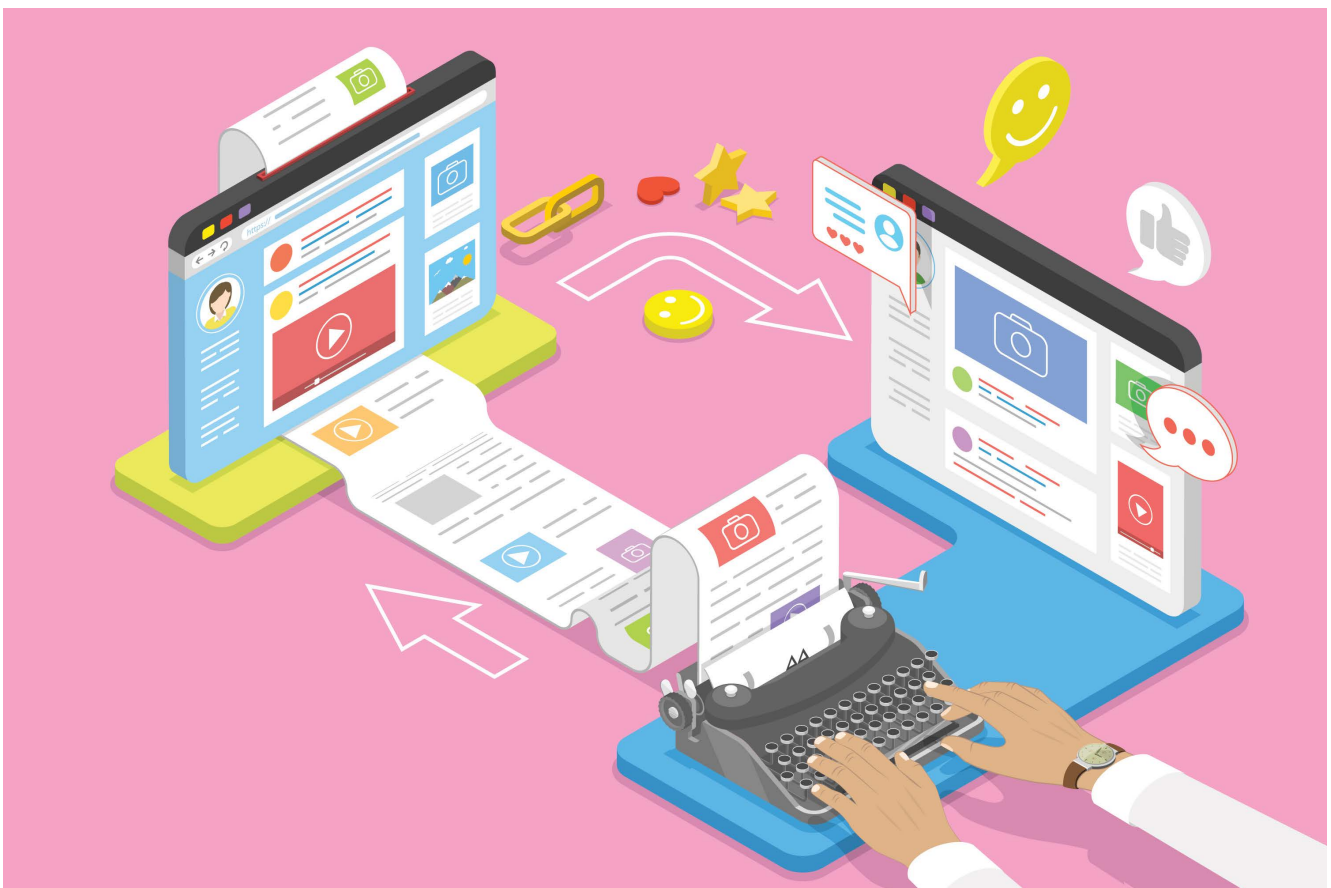
The Secret of Getting Quality Links Through Guest Blogging

Let's go back to the concert analogy.

You're a rising singer with spectacular talent and a unique style.

However, there's a problem: not many people know about you.

How do you get people to notice you?

The answer is by singing as a guest at a famous singer's concert. You get an invite.

You go and wow the crowd with your vocal acrobatics.

After you've impressed them, you subtly ask them if they want to see your own concert.

Singing as a guest does two things for you:

■ It connects your name to the prestigious singer the crowd already loves.

■ It gives people the chance to glimpse the beauty and magic you can bring into their lives.

Guest blogging is no different.

When you write an authoritative, high-quality post in a well-known blog with thousands of followers, people will notice you. They'll even start coming to your own blog.

But it doesn't end there. When people discover your blog and see that you're doing something they've never seen before?

They will link to you.

Here's some inspiration before we dig into the how of guest blogging.

Larry Kim posted **40 Amazing Places to Learn Something New Every Day** on Inc. If you look at the post, it's useful, inspirational, and downright enjoyable to read.

The result? It got more than 40 backlinks.

So now, let's dive into how you can become the next star guest blogger and earn yourself your own collection of quality, holistic links.

How to Guest Blog for Successful Link Building

Guest blogging isn't about making a list of the most successful sites today and pitching to all of them.

If you want success, you need to follow the correct guidelines.

1. BE SELECTIVE ABOUT WHERE YOU PITCH

Pitching to one authoritative site that's right for you is better than pitching to 100 authoritative sites that are wrong for you.

Here's how to narrow things down.

CHOOSE A SITE IN A SIMILAR NICHE

If you are in the content marketing niche, it'll do you no good to guest blog on a fashion site.

Yes, readers will enjoy your post if it's well-written and entertaining. But they don't need your services.

So, the chances that they'll check you out online are slim.

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REVIEW THE SITE'S PERFORMANCE

After you've narrowed your search down to a select number of sites within your niche, check to see how well each one is doing online. These pointers indicate the site may be a good choice for your guest post:

- **Domain authority** of over 50.

- 10,000 or more social followers.

- Considered an industry leader.

- Has engaged, long-term readers.

MAKE SURE YOU'LL GET A FEATURED BIO

Even if you've been a huge fan of a site for years, never pitch for a guest post if you won't get a featured bio.

You want your byline, a headshot, and a link back to your site for readers to follow. If you find out that you'll be posting as a ghostwriter or simply a "Guest?" Run.

Unless all you want is bragging rights, of course.

2. CRAFT A PITCH THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE

Imagine yourself pitching to a magazine like The New Yorker.

According to **The Write Life,** you have a 0.0000416% chance of getting published in the magazine!

So, what do you do?

You do all the required research, then create a pitch the editor can't ignore.

It's easier to get a guest post at a prestigious site than to get your story into the New Yorker. Still, it requires the same work ethic and skill.

Follow these steps to increase your chances of winning that guest post.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Spend quality time on the site you want your guest post to appear. Take note of the kind of blogs they post. Which topics get the most attention? Is there anything missing that you feel you can address in a blog of your own?

PITCH TO A PERSON INSTEAD OF A WEBSITE

If you sound impersonal and generic, you will be ignored. Guest blogging is a relationship. It's connecting with real people and forming lasting ties.

For example, I started my column at Huffington Post by directly emailing Ariana Huffington!

DIG IN DEEPER

Check out who else is guest posting on the site. Read their posts and visit their sites. Become a detective.

DON'T IGNORE THE GUIDELINES FOR PITCHING

Not paying attention to guidelines will get your pitch deleted without being read.

BE DIRECT

Get straight to the point with the owner or editor of the site. Don't bombard them with a cartload of details they don't need. Instead, outline what you can give them in a few concise, succinct sentences. Show them you value their time.

TELL THE EDITOR OR OWNER ABOUT YOURSELF

Listing your own site's credentials is a good idea. No one wants links to low-quality sites on their blog. Also, blog editors and owners want to know who they're working with.

3. WRITE A GUEST BLOG THAT'LL HAVE READERS FLOCKING TO YOUR SITE

Creating your pitch is tough but writing the guest post itself is even tougher.

Here are some tips that'll make your writing resonate with readers.

KNOW WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE NEEDS

People don't read for fun (unless it's literary fiction, of course). They read because they need something. Maybe they need information they can take action on, a service that'll make things easier for them, or an inspiration to impact their dull, boring lives.

Your mission is to find out what that need is. When you do, you'll be able to craft a guest post that'll suck your readers in and have them chasing your site's link.

Take a look at this example article in **International Living.**

SAMPLE MAGAZINE   By Marsha Scarbrough | January 1, 2019

How Expats Can Beat the Banks (and Brokers)

"You are breaking a federal law," screamed my financial advisor, as we Skyped between Madrid, Spain, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. "You must return to the United States immediately!"

My alleged crime? Taking disbursements from my IRA account.

People read International Living because they want to get insider tips on retiring abroad in style. One problem many of them face is trouble with banks and brokers. So, when they see this article? They read it.

People will read your post if you address their needs. It's that simple.

CATCH READERS WITH YOUR HEADLINE

When people read your headline, they decide whether or not they'll continue with your post.

Look at these examples of two headlines that address the same topic.

Headline number one:

How to proofread your own writing - denise cowle editorial ...
https://www.denisecowleeditorial.com › blog › how-to-proofread-your-ow... ▼
Jul 4, 2016 - So you've written **your** blog, or **your** new landing page, or **your** latest marketing **copy**. You're pleased with it. It reads well. It gets **your** message ...

Headline number two:

Proofread Your Way to Perfection: 6 Essential Steps to Polishing Your Copy to a Glossy Sheen
AWAI member Bruce Midgett gives six steps to making sure your copy is error-free.
www.awai.com/2006/10/proofread-your-way-to-perfection

As a reader, you'd likely pass over headline one and click headline two.

Why?

Headline one is generic and uninteresting. The lowercase letters rob it of professionalism.

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SEARCH MARKETING

Headline two, on the other hand, has a huge promise for you. When you click, you'll learn six essential proofreading skills. Plus, it uses power words like perfection, polish, glossy, and sheen.

If these words don't make you picture clean, shining, perfect writing, I don't know what will.

GO IN-DEPTH WITH YOUR CONTENT

Your content shows your readers who you are. When you guest post, don't merely scratch the surface of your topic. Dive in and dive deep. Show your authority and expertise.

Here are some tips to help you dive deep into your topic.

- Keep your post up to your readers' knowledge, expectations, and education. If you're writing as a business expert, for instance, make your writing strong and statistically driven.

- Pick your ideas apart. Come up with initial research and then make a list of the questions that spring out of what you find. Answer those questions in your post.

- Back up all of your claims with credible sources. Add links to these sources for readers to dig in even deeper.

- Create an interesting angle. Think out of the box. Make it your goal to write something in a way that's never been done before.

■ Drive all your content towards a goal. What's the main purpose of your blog? To teach readers a new skill? To inspire them? To make them understand a difficult concept? Keep this goal at the forefront of your writing and make every paragraph flow towards it.

■ Be benefit-oriented. Before you sit down to write your post, list down at least six benefits people will get from reading it.

■ Proofread exhaustively. Examine each paragraph one by one. If you find a paragraph that doesn't contribute to your big idea? Weed it out.

PROVIDE CONTENT THAT'S EASY TO DIGEST

The average reader will run when met with a long block of unbroken text. Since you don't want that, follow these three steps for easily digestible content.

■ Divide your blog into sections. Even serious readers won't want to scour through endless blocks of text. It's a good idea to divide your topic into sections, then subdivide those sections. Keep each division below 300 words. Numbered lists work wonderfully in keeping reader attention.

■ Use visuals. Images bring your blog to life. Also, they help you illustrate points and explain concepts in an easily digestible and enjoyable way.

■ Keep paragraphs short. Don't go over six sentences for any paragraph. Break the paragraph in two if it's over that number.

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4. FUNNEL YOUR READERS TO AN OUTCOME

When you guest post, you'll be given space in your biography section to add a link. Although you might be tempted to link to your homepage, don't do that.

Instead, think of the outcome you want to achieve through the link. Do you want readers to sign up for your email newsletter? Check out your online store? Follow your blog?

Choose the best way you can get your product or service out there. Then, link to the page that gives you that outcome.

5. REPLY TO COMMENTS ON YOUR POST

Guest blogging isn't putting your content out there and then forgetting about it.

It's engaging with people on a real, personal level.

So, when readers comment on your post, leave them a reply. Answer their questions and engage with them.

By showing you're active, you'll be able to increase your conversion rates and put yourself front and center in readers' minds.
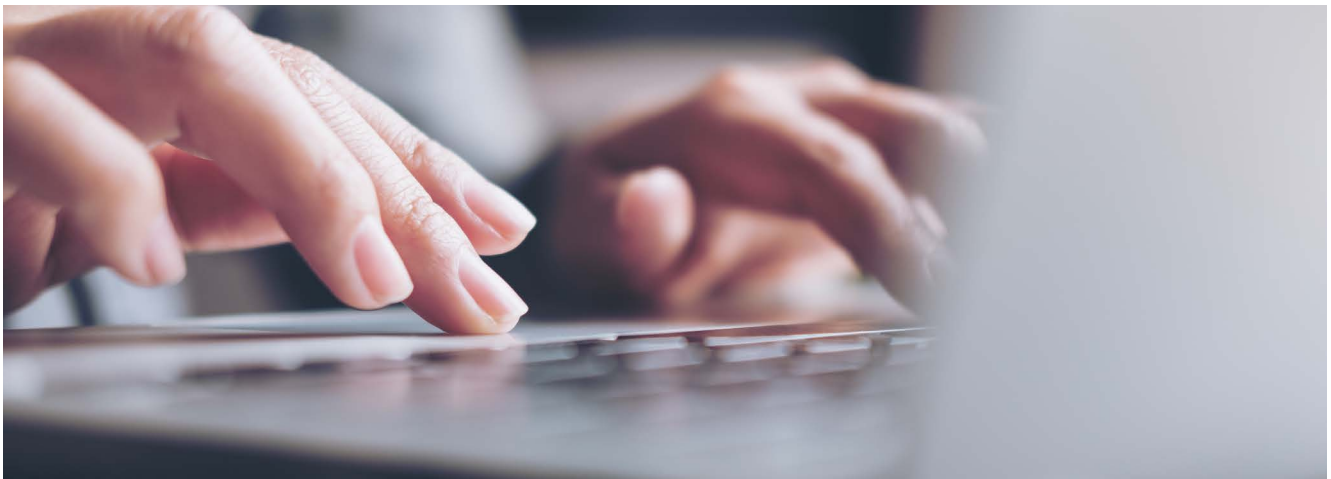
Guest Blogging: The Secret to Indirect Link Building

Once your beautiful, well-polished content shines on a site with thousands of followers, the results are easy to predict.

Readers will come flocking to you. You will be recognized as an authoritative expert. Your blog will gain its own crowd of followers.

And of course, you'll gain your own quality backlinks.

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S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Ongoing starting month 3

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
4-12 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
4

T O O L S :
- BuzzStream
- BuzzSumo
- Alexa

B E N E F I T S :
- Get attention from readers of prestigious blogs.

- Establish your authority and expertise.

- Build links indirectly.

- Improve brand awareness.

- Increase traffic and leads.

Giving Back to Get: 5 Ideas to Build Links by Helping Others

AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

You already have a strategy in place for link building, right?

Your plan probably includes at least one of the following link building tactics:

- Regularly fixing **broken links**

- Requesting links for **unlinked mentions**

- **Reclaiming lost links**

- Creating **link-worthy content**

- Adding your site to **web directories**

The above tactics aren't enough, though.

If your link building strategy feels like it's missing something, that's because it is missing something.

Interacting with real human beings – being a part of a community and helping others – is always good for business, and should be a part of your link building strategy.

Here are five ideas to build links by giving back.

1. Be a Guest Writer

Guest blogging is one of the most obvious ways to build links.

While it does require a little more effort than other link building tactics (You actually have to write something! Gasp!), it is **an effective way** to increase site traffic and boost SEO.

HOW IT WORKS

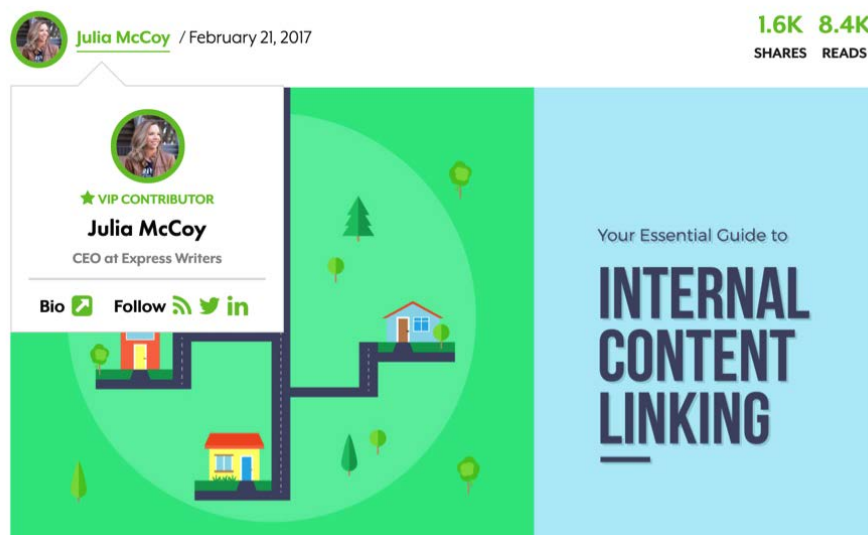It's simple. Guest blogging – also known as guest writing or guest posting – is when you write or share your own content on other relevant websites.

As you're **writing your guest post,** incorporate a link to your website into the text, if backlinking has been approved.

You should also add a link to your site in your author or contributor byline.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Keep in mind that backlinks from websites with a low domain authority might do more harm than good.

Before you agree to guest post or before you pitch your content to another site, do a background check.

Make sure you're writing for a trusted site by checking their domain authority on a site like Ahrefs or Alexa.

2. Get Involved in a Greater Cause

Whether you're planting trees, volunteering at a local shelter, contributing to scholarships, or hosting an online business seminar, your **involvement in the community** or your contribution to an impactful cause is important to your brand's reputation.

You may find it surprising though that it can also drive traffic to your site and increase conversions!

HOW IT WORKS

Get involved with a project in your community, or even with a national or worldwide project.

Many causes will have their own website, an email list, or pamphlets or flyers listing businesses including yours who are contributing to their campaign.

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Share your involvement with your customers and prospects by publishing blog posts, updating your website, sharing on social media (don't forget to use appropriate hashtags!), and using email campaigns.

By encouraging your customers and prospects to get involved, or by raising awareness of the cause you're working for, you'll establish yourself as a trustworthy company that has the community's – and the world's – best interests at heart.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Understand that you'll need to volunteer time and resources, and possibly money, products, or services.

Always remember the real purpose of your involvement with the project you choose.

While ultimately good for business, involvement in impactful causes is more about creating connections and benefiting your community than it is about earning a backlink.

3. Offer Free Resources

Everyone loves free stuff, especially useful free stuff that they can access with one click.

By offering free online tools and resources, your business will have an excellent opportunity to earn some quality backlinks.

HOW IT WORKS

Create – or hire someone on your team to create – a valuable resource such as an ebook, a printable list or cheat sheet, an email course, a stock photo gallery, **or a calculator.**

These freebies are often offered as opt-ins, accessible once someone signs up for your email list.

Users will often mention your free resource without being asked (if it's useful enough to be mentioned!).

Encourage user-generated content by requesting that your audience share posts or photos of your freebie in use in exchange for a feature, often in the form of a retweet, a regram, or a shout out on Facebook.

Get 4 FREE Lightroom mobile presets. Click to learn more! **Presets, please!**

BLOG ⌄ PROGRAMS ⌄ LIGHTROOM MOBILE PRESETS ⌄ CONTACT ABOUT 🔍
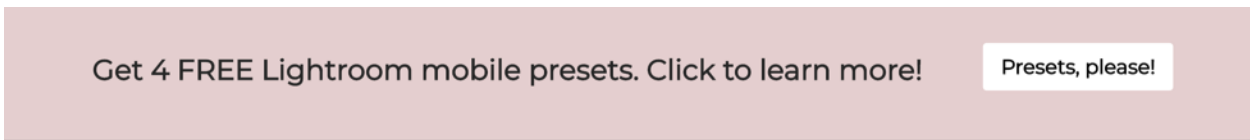
WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Be open to updating and tweaking the design and functionality of your resource to keep it relevant and useful.

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Also, keep in mind that your audience may not be interested in sharing or promoting your tool or resource.

You'll still need to promote your tool online using standard marketing tactics. Promoting your free resource should become a part of your overall marketing strategy.

4. Share Reviews & Testimonials

Sharing reviews and testimonials for services or products you use may be just as helpful as receiving reviews and testimonials for services or products you offer.

Newer companies, especially, are trying to build credibility and site authority, so they will be glad to feature your review or testimonial which includes a backlink on their site.

HOW IT WORKS

If there's a service or product that you use and love, write a review or testimonial.

Send the review, including your business name and a link to your site, giving the company permission to use your review on their website.

Reviews and testimonials are often linked 1-2 clicks away from a website's homepage, so they carry a good deal of weight.

"Trello is an online tool for managing projects and personal tasks. That may sound rather prosaic. But this increasingly popular app often inspires the sort of passion usually reserved for consumer apps like Pinterest or Instagram. It's the kind of business software that slips into businesses through the backdoor, just because individual employees like how it works."

WIRED

"It reminds us of the early traction that Dropbox…and other apps up there had that have grabbed individuals and caused them to start using it and bring it to work and convince teams and colleagues to use it and it's gradually taken over organizations," said Index Partner Neil Rimer

WALL STREET JOURNAL

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Even if a company posts your testimonial on their site, you're not guaranteed a link.

Also, remember that inbound links from websites with a low domain authority could do more harm than good.

Find the company's website domain authority on a site like Ahrefs or Alexa.

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5. Ask & Answer Questions

Participating in forums or leaving thoughtful, relevant comments on other blog posts are valid ways to improve authority and increase traffic to your site.

HOW IT WORKS

Your customers are on Quora and Reddit. Join the conversation there.

Ask and answer questions and share thoughtful feedback.

These forums are great places to **market your website** and build relevant links.

Likewise, regularly posting comments on other blogs who are speaking to your target audience is a great way to build links and lend authority to your site.

It's also a community-building tactic that'll pay off in the long run.

Raksha Rao, Travel and Adventure Blogger at The Roving Heart
Updated Sep 7, 2018

This answer is derived from my travel blog The Roving Heart. Find the full article here .

Whether you are using a DSLR or a simple phone camera, here are the top travel photography tips I wish I knew when I first started shooting three years ago.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Links shared in forums **and blog post comments** are typically **"nofollow"** links.

These links are not ideal, but keep in mind that your link profile should be diverse anyway, which will include nofollowed links.

Customize Your Strategy

High-quality, trusted backlinks will boost your site's visibility and authority and are a huge help to SEO efforts.

Link building doesn't have to be complicated.

When you're giving back and helping others in the process, building links can even be fun and meaningful.

Some tactics will work, and some won't. **Test different methods** to determine which is best for your business.

S U M M A R Y

TIMEFRAME:
Month 8, then ongoing monthly

RESULTS DETECTED:
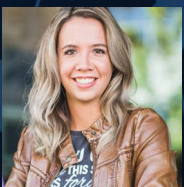4-12 months

AVERAGE LINKS PER MONTH:
10

TOOLS NEEDED:
■ Domain authority check
■ Content (guest posts, reviews, and testimonials, blog post comments, forum participation, etc.)
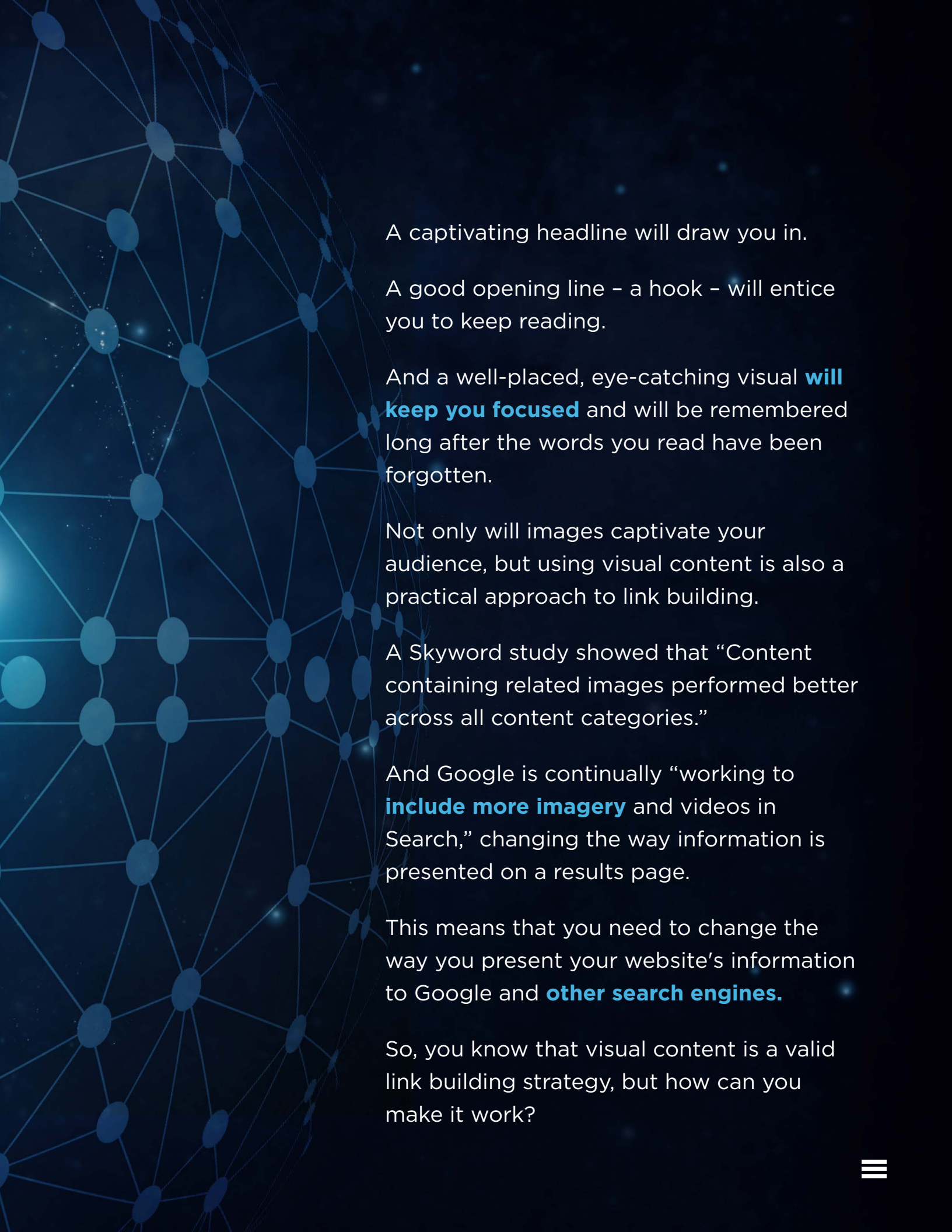
BENEFITS:
■ Improve trust and site authority
■ Attract diverse links
■ Community-building

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Image Link Building: How to Use Visual Content to Earn More Links

AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

A captivating headline will draw you in.

A good opening line – a hook – will entice you to keep reading.

And a well-placed, eye-catching visual **will keep you focused** and will be remembered long after the words you read have been forgotten.

Not only will images captivate your audience, but using visual content is also a practical approach to link building.

A Skyword study showed that "Content containing related images performed better across all content categories."

And Google is continually "working to **include more imagery** and videos in Search," changing the way information is presented on a results page.

This means that you need to change the way you present your website's information to Google and **other search engines.**

So, you know that visual content is a valid link building strategy, but how can you make it work?

7 Types of Visual Content Used to Build Links

First, it's important to understand the different kinds of visual content out there.

Here's a quick run-down of some of the key types of visual content you can use to build links to your site:

1. INFOGRAPHICS

Some people think **infographics are overused**; some people swear by them.

Using eye-catching infographics with useful information that readers can understand is still a great way to earn some links though, whether you love 'em or hate 'em.

2. GOOD USAGE OF LOGOS

Yes, your brand's logo is visual content!

It's already in multiple places on your site, and it may show up on other websites if you've ever written a guest post, been featured, or contributed to a community page.

Keep track of the places your logo shows up on the web, and make sure it's linked back to your site.

3. PRODUCT PHOTOS OR A BRAND PHOTOSHOOT

If you're an ecommerce site or you have an online shop, use your product images for link building.

Always use high-quality, original photos, and ensure that all steps have been taken to optimize each image for SEO (more on that later).

Don't have products to take photos of?

Try a brand photoshoot from a professional photographer, where it's you working at your computer.
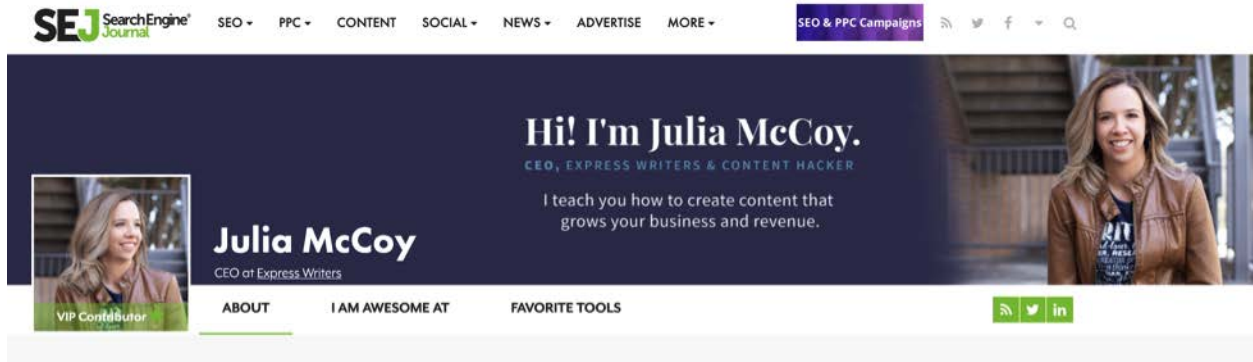
If you're an author, show off your books in the photo shoot, too.

You can use your brand photos in so many ways.

For example, I've even used one of mine in my own **Search Engine Journal author header.**

4. COMPANY OR EMPLOYEE PHOTOS

Yep! Even the photos from your last company retreat or the employee photos on your team page can be used for link building.

Again, make sure these images are high-quality, and please – spell your employees' names right!
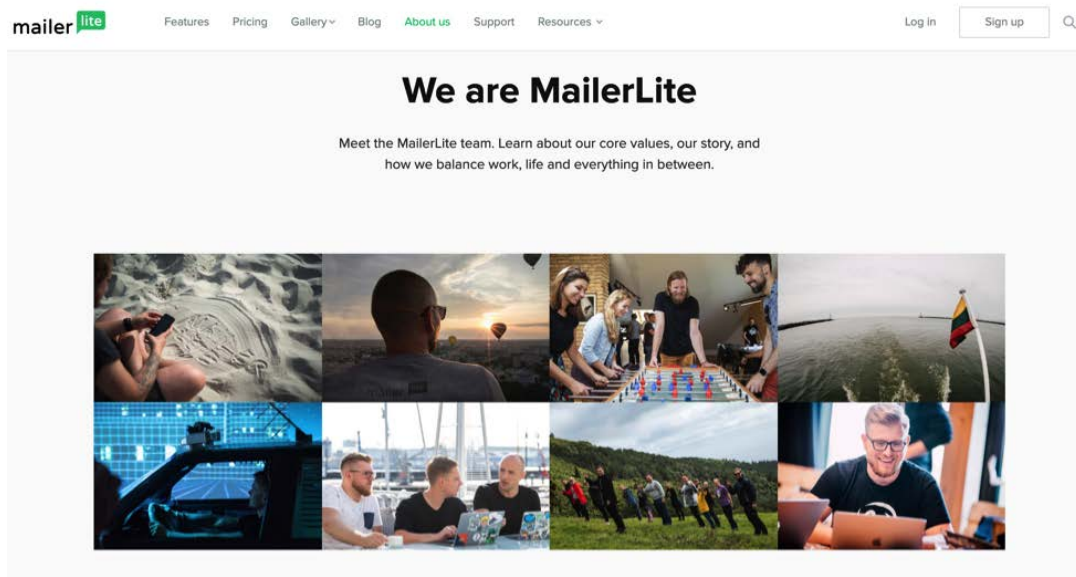
5. STATISTICAL CHARTS, GRAPHS & MAPS
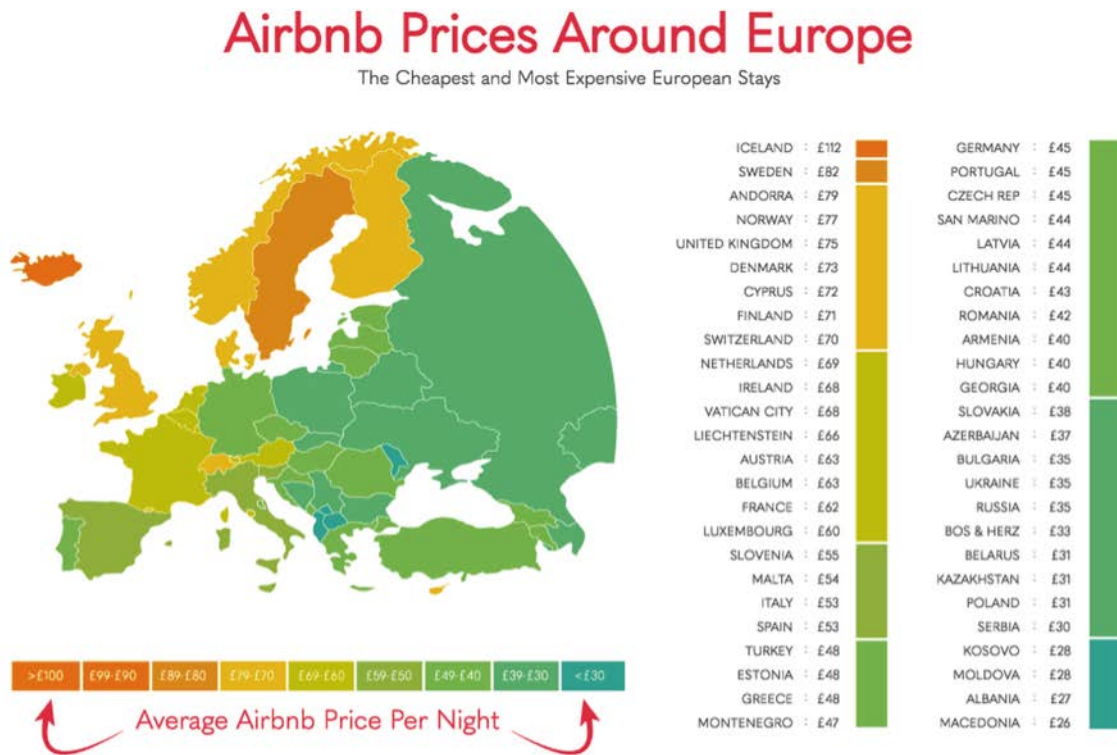
Also known as data visualization, charts, graphs, and maps are a great way to generate links.

You can even pull these from leading statistics or research.

Make sure the information displayed is useful and easy for readers to understand.

Even without creating an original chart, graph, or map, you can run a report from a third-party site, take a screenshot of the results, and share it as an image in your content.

Remember to share the source of the report if you go this route, but the image itself – the screenshot – can be attributed to you.

6. MEMES & GIFS

Memes and GIFs aren't going anywhere.

If you aren't using them in your content already, it might be time to try.

Use them tastefully and use them well, because people love to share a good meme, which will mean plenty of inbound links for you.

To make things really fun and original, you can generate your own memes for free at **Meme Generator.**
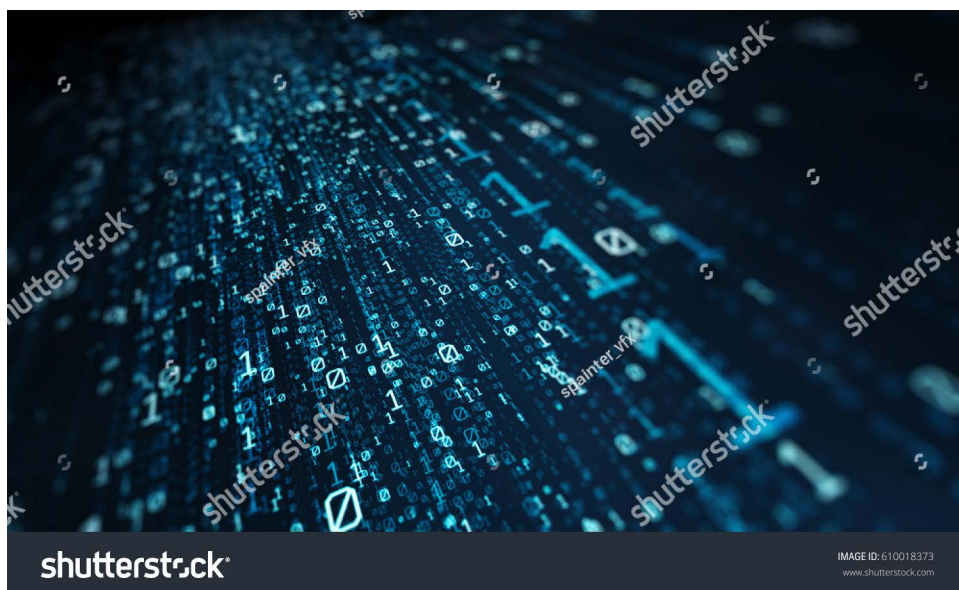
7. CREATIVE STOCK PHOTOS

Another type of visual content that is often overused (and sometimes wrongly used), **stock photos** can still be useful for link building when done right.

Just don't use any stock photo.

Choose a high-quality, tasteful photo that's relevant to your message and adds to the content.

3 Ways to Optimize Your Images for SEO

OK. You've got some ideas for images.

Now, let's talk about optimizing those **images for SEO** so that you can get the full benefits of your visual content.

1. ADD CAPTIONS

Adding descriptive captions to your images is often overlooked, but surprisingly, "captions get 16 percent more readership than text," according to the **PRSA.**

An image caption differs from the image's file name or alt text. It is the text that appears below the image, briefly explaining the picture.

Many relevant images are understood without captions, but that isn't always the case.

Captions add additional context to an image, helping both readers and search engines process the information on your page.

2. OPTIMIZE IMAGE FILE NAMES

Creating keyword-rich file names for images is vital to **SEO optimization.**

Your image's file name helps describe the image to search engines.

File names should be short, relevant descriptions of the image, and should include primary and secondary keywords.

3. INCLUDE ALT TEXT

Alt text is the text that appears in place of an image when an image can't be rendered, for whatever reason.

Image alt text should be similar to your image's file name: a short, relevant description of the image, including keywords.

Adding alt text to your images can boost your site's rankings by associating your images – and therefore, your site – with the keywords and descriptions used.

Reverse Image Search

Sometimes your image will be shared on another site without a link back to your site, or with the wrong link.

There are a couple of tools to help you locate these images, like **Google Images** and **TinEye.**

Use these tools, and when you discover your images, contact the publication or blogger that's using them and request that they link back to your site as the source.
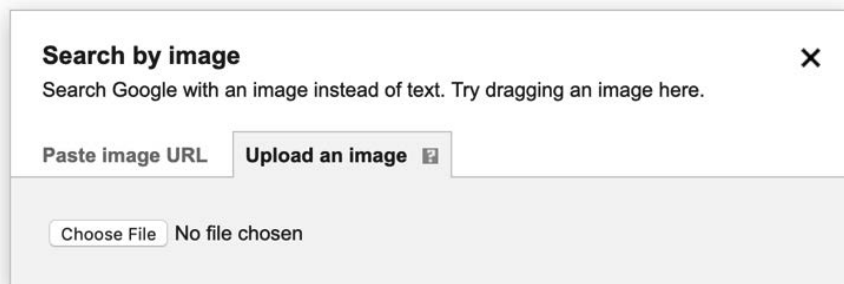
Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Links?

Visual content gives your readers a clearer picture (pun intended) of what your message is all about.

As you put your content together, think of which visuals to include to clarify and enhance your message.

Try using different types of visual content as a part of your overall content marketing strategy and watch your link profile grow.

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S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Include images in your content right away

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
3-6 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   P E R   M O N T H :
5

T O O L S :
- Creatives (images, visual content)

B E N E F I T S :
- Improve site rankings and SEO

- Earn links

- Enhance text content for readers

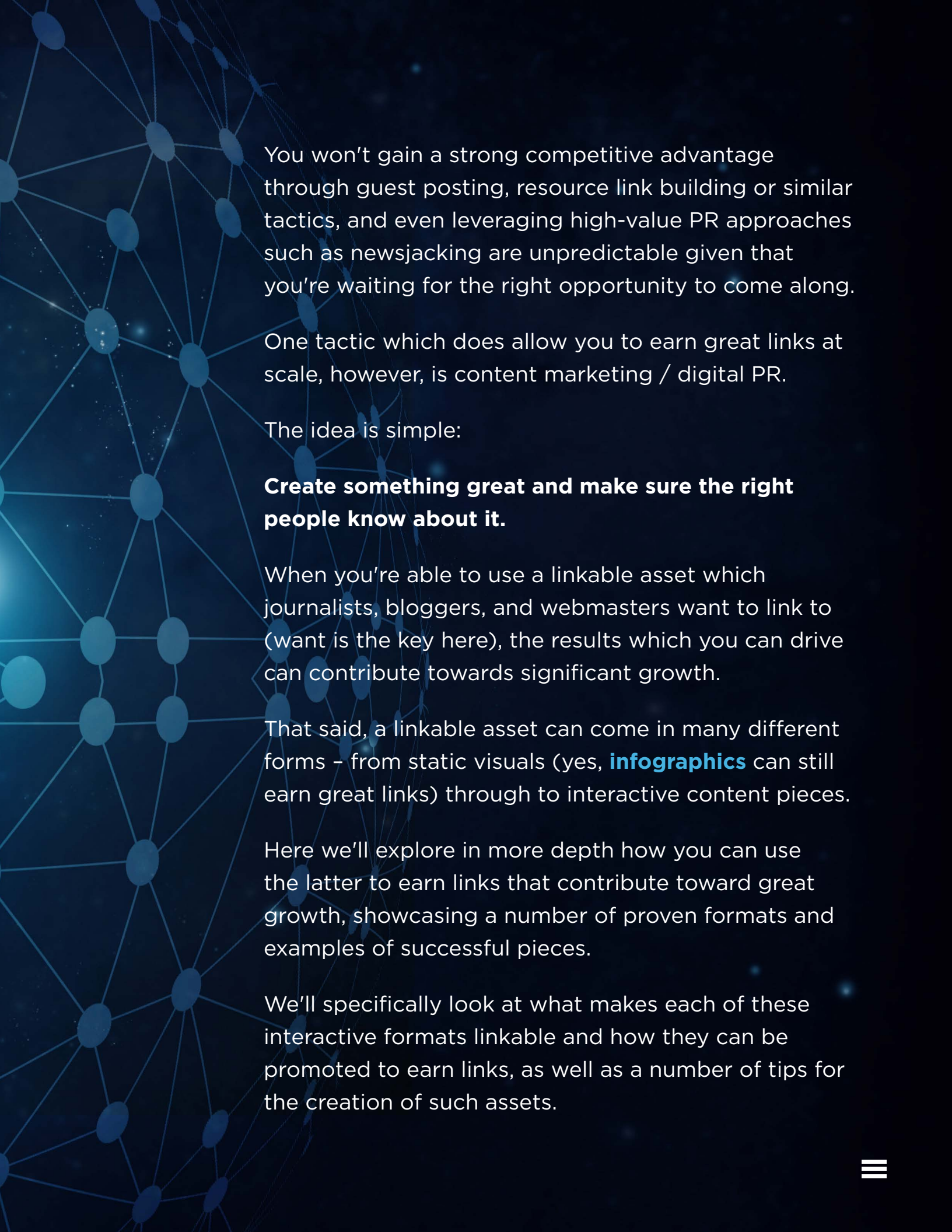# 5 Types of Interactive Content to Attract Valuable Links

If you want to gain a competitive advantage from your link building efforts, you ultimately need to develop a strategy that sees you earn the links that your competitors can't or at least those which they'll struggle to replicate.

That means doing something different.

AUTHOR **James Brockbank**

You won't gain a strong competitive advantage through guest posting, resource link building or similar tactics, and even leveraging high-value PR approaches such as newsjacking are unpredictable given that you're waiting for the right opportunity to come along.

One tactic which does allow you to earn great links at scale, however, is content marketing / digital PR.

The idea is simple:

Create something great and make sure the right people know about it.

When you're able to use a linkable asset which journalists, bloggers, and webmasters want to link to (want is the key here), the results which you can drive can contribute towards significant growth.

That said, a linkable asset can come in many different forms – from static visuals (yes, **infographics** can still earn great links) through to interactive content pieces.

Here we'll explore in more depth how you can use the latter to earn links that contribute toward great growth, showcasing a number of proven formats and examples of successful pieces.

We'll specifically look at what makes each of these interactive formats linkable and how they can be promoted to earn links, as well as a number of tips for the creation of such assets.

1. Tools & Calculators

Tools and calculators, when done well, are perhaps the most effective way to earn quality links at scale.

However, in many sectors, simple ideas have been done to death and offer nothing new.

Today, you need a truly unique concept for tools and calculators to drive success.

Be sure to ask yourself when coming up with ideas for this format what value it would add to users (and others as a citeable resource) and check, double-check, and triple-check where anything similar already exists.

Let's look at a quick example.

If we take this **mortgage calculator** from Money Saving Expert, we can see that, according to Ahrefs, it's earned links from 337 unique domains.

Not bad at all and for sure a contributing factor to the tool ranking prominently across lucrative search terms.

It's a great piece of content and deserves the links it's earned, citing it as a practice and useful tool.

But how could it be improved?

Likely, it couldn't be.

As such, it's unlikely that a newly launched tool that offered anything similar would be effective at earning links.

However, let's not lose focus here.

Tools and calculators have the potential to drive big results. Just remember the need to launch a tool that:

- Is unique.
- Adds value.
- Gets people talking.
- Hasn't been done to death.

You need to be asking yourself how you'd pitch it out to link prospects: what makes your tool linkable?

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Don't let this put you off from using the format, however. Take the time to ask yourself what your audience may find useful to be able to do themselves in tool or calculator format.

Just a few examples of highly successful tools from a link perspective (both in terms of useful assets and those a little more on the entertainment side0 are:

- **SJD Accountancy's Contractor Salary Calculator** - Earned links from 47 unique domains.

- **Inkifi's Instagram Earnings Calculator** - Earned links from 218 unique domains.

- **Adobe Colour** - Earned links from 21,088 unique domains.

These examples go to show that there are so many different ways you can launch tools, ranging from simple yet entertaining through to complex assets that complement your core product offering.

Focus on adding value and creating something new.

You can truly drive outstanding results with this format.

When it comes to pitching out, don't forget to reach out to articles and content resources which already talk about the problem which your tool solves. Pitch it in as a value-adding asset for their readers.

2. Games & Quizzes

Want to have a bit of fun when producing an interactive piece of content?

Get your thinking cap on and brainstorm ideas around fun games and quizzes which you could launch to drive engagement from your audience, alongside earning links from other publications who share the asset.

The only downside to using games and quizzes as linkable assets is the fact that they're typically resource-intensive to produce; therefore increasing both the time to launch and the investment required.

Perhaps more suited to B2C than B2B brands, games and quizzes bring the fun factor to content marketing and can also drive impressive results across social, email sign-ups and more, but where do you start?

The recommendation is to begin brainstorming the topics your audiences know you for. What is it that they'd typically associated with your brand?

From there, you can begin to develop ideas and concepts on how you could challenge these individuals and launch an engaging interactive that captures their attention.

The only limit really is your imagination here.

Make sure to sanity check your concept with members of your target audience (that could be friends, colleagues not involved in the project or even journalists in your network) before diving deep into production.

Just a few examples of exciting games and quizzes which have driven great results from a link perspective are:

- **JustPark's Reaction Time Test** - Earned links from 679 unique domains.

- **Who Can Fix My Car's Alloy Quiz** - Earned links from 112 unique domains.

- **Lenstore's 'Can You Spot It' Quiz** - Earned links from 84 unique domains.

Focus on the angle which you'll pitch out to prospects to encourage them to talk about, and link to it.

In many cases, "Brand X Launches Game Y" isn't a headline for a publisher.

But, imagine if you collected the data of those who played the game or took part in the quiz? The headlines you've got available suddenly become a whole load more exciting.

A headline of "Only 2 in 5 Can Correctly Identify These Must-Know Road Signs" is a very different headline to "Car Dealership Launches Road Sign Quiz."

Start to think about the angles you can take to press before you enter production and you'll ultimately drive far more value as you'll start to see angles to help create a buzz.

3. Interactive Maps

Why make a map interactive?

For a simple reason:

Static maps are one of the most difficult to consume formats of content, especially on mobile devices.

Maps are a great way to display data that is broken down by country.

This is a proven and effective content format that can help you to earn great links.

However, unless you want your users to have to zoom in and move the map around using finger pinches on mobile devices, the format is rarely user-friendly.

Turn a map into an interactive asset, however, and you suddenly have the capability to allow users to zoom in and move around far easier; as well as being able to add further data on hover (or click) of countries.

Why do maps work so well as a content format focussed upon link acquisition?

The simple reason that we all love to compare ourselves to others across the world combined with the fact that there's typically an angle you can take to the majority of countries featured.

Here are some exciting and engaging interactive map-based assets which performed well and can inspire you to launch your own:

- **GoCompare's What Powers The World?** - Earned links from 256 unique domains.

- **Expedia's Mythical Creatures** - Earned links from 131 unique domains.

- **Travel Supermarket's Where The World Wants To Go On Holiday** - Earned links from 80 unique domains.

It's perhaps no coincidence that interactive maps are popular amongst travel brands.

However, interactive maps have been proven to work across a whole host of sectors; from automotive through to finance.

The challenge you need to address is where to find interesting data sources, comparable across a country, continent or globally, in which interesting trends and comparisons can be pulled from.

Conquer this challenge and you'll likely end up with a fantastic campaign that meets your goals and earns fantastic links.

4. Indices

If you truly want to drive success in terms of quality links from top-tier publishers, there's a good chance you're going to need to use **data-driven content** to achieve that.

You see, when you take data and use it to create an interesting story, you ultimately end up with multiple angles; especially when that's done in the index format.

We're not talking listicles here; far from it. We're talking data-driven studies that you can literally pull story after story from.

When it comes to coming up with concepts for indices, start to explore data sets and think about how you could use these to combine factors to produce a ranking in index form.

Now you're probably thinking you could launch this as a static format – an infographic perhaps or even simply as a blog post.

However, the great advantage of launching an interactive version is that users can:

- Explore the data themselves.

- Sort rankings.

- Engage with maps.

- Etc.

There are so many different ways you can take an index and make it interactive and engaging.

Want to see some great examples? Here's a series of fantastic interactive indices which have performed well from a link acquisition perspective:

- **TomTom's Traffic Index** - Earned links from 2,827 unique domains.

- **The Cosmetify Index** - Earned links from 72 unique domains.

- **Compare the Market's Global Broadband Index** - Earned links from 48 unique domains.

5. Interactive Infographics & Reports

Some say infographics are dead, however, the reality is that you can't blame the format.

A great story and headline will succeed regardless of the format used to present it and, even in 2020, infographics can still be the right approach for campaigns.

However, what's often more effective is to launch an interactive infographic or turn a static report into something a little more engaging; adding elements of interactivity.

For the simple reason that interactivity allows you to:

- Enhance user experience.

- Present data in unique ways.

- Really create an awesome piece of content.

You've got the flexibility to do so much more than you can with a static asset.

In many ways, this is interactive content in its most simplistic form – a step above static assets and relatively light on resources.

It gives you the flexibility to focus on:

- Being creative.

- Presenting data in the right way.

- Above all else, delivering a responsive asset that looks as awesome on mobile as it does on desktop devices – overcoming one of the most common challenges when working with static visuals.

Want to feel inspired?

Here are just a few fantastic simple campaigns based around interactive infographics and reports:

- **Podio's Daily Routines of Famous Creative People** - Earned links from 885 unique domains.

- **Tide's Pioneering Women** - Earned links from 119 unique domains.

- **Slotsia's Time To Fist Million** - Earned links from 97 unique domains.

If you're yet to launch an interactive piece of content as part of your link acquisition efforts, perhaps a relatively simple interactive infographic or report is the way to start testing formats.

As we can see from the three examples shared here, even simple interactive assets can earn links in significant numbers. So long, of course, that there's a great story behind them.

Over to You

Are you feeling inspired to go and test out interactive content of your own?

There are few better ways to earn quality links, at scale, and so long as you concentrate on ensuring there's a great story behind the asset, you'll continue to look for ways to push the format and launch bigger and better campaigns.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Quarterly

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
3 - 6 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
25+

T O O L S :
- Ahrefs

- A media database (not required but useful) such as Gorkana, Cision, Vuelio, etc.

B E N E F I T S :
- You'll earn high authority links, at scale, which give a competitive advantage as those earned through PR-driven tactics to outstanding assets are difficult for competitors to replicate.

- Aside from link acquisition, other tactics of using interactive content to earn links include increased brand awareness, referral traffic, and opportunities to reach new audiences.

Everything You Need to Know About Internal Link Building

AUTHOR **Andrew Dennis**

In the SEO industry, when you hear the term "link building," you probably assume the person is talking about external links or backlinks.

This makes sense. After all, backlinks from other websites are a strong signal to search engines and a driving force behind organic search rankings.

But there is another type of link building that is also important: internal link building.

These are the links you build on your website that point to other relevant pages on your site.

While internal links aren't necessarily what we think of first when we discuss link building, they are an integral part of successful SEO. They even play an important role in deliver-ing ROI from external link acquisition.

Directing Link Equity
with Internal Links

The most significant benefit of **internal links** – in terms of SEO – is their ability to direct link equity throughout your website.

External links bring equity and trust to your website, and specifically, to the page they point to.

The page that is directly linked will benefit the most from a backlink, but through internal linking, you can pass along some of that equity to other pages.

While the SEO value is slightly diminished the further you get away from the externally linked page, internal links can provide an option for growing the authority and trust of your lower-funnel, less linkable pages.

While not impossible, it's typically difficult to secure links to converting or "money pages" because these pages usually offer little value and cater to a small audience (those who are ready to buy your product).

However, you can overcome this challenge and support organic visibility for these pages through internal links from your **link-worthy pages.**

The best part of this strategy is you only need to build the one internal link and your converting page will continuously, and progressively, benefit from each new backlink you earn to your linkable asset.

Just remember that internal links still need to be relevant. Your internal link should make sense contextually on the page you place it.

Internal links are a great way to support new pages as well. Before you launch an external link acquisition campaign for a new page, search your site for other relevant pages and build some internal links to give your page an initial boost.

Use Internal Linking to Signal Your Most Important Pages

Internal links can also be leveraged to highlight your important pages.

Site structure plays a key role in how search crawlers navigate and understand your website and they use internal links to measure which pages are the most important and most closely tied to your brand.

The more internal links you point to a page, the more important search engine bots will think that page is.

This can influence which keywords and phrases they will associate with your pages – when there are multiple pages that cover a similar topic, search engines will use internal links to decide which page is most important and should show in their search results.

You want to make it easy for search crawlers to understand your site and which pages are most important to you, and internal link building can help them better identify your key pages.

PURELINQ CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION **BASE** SEARCH MARKETING
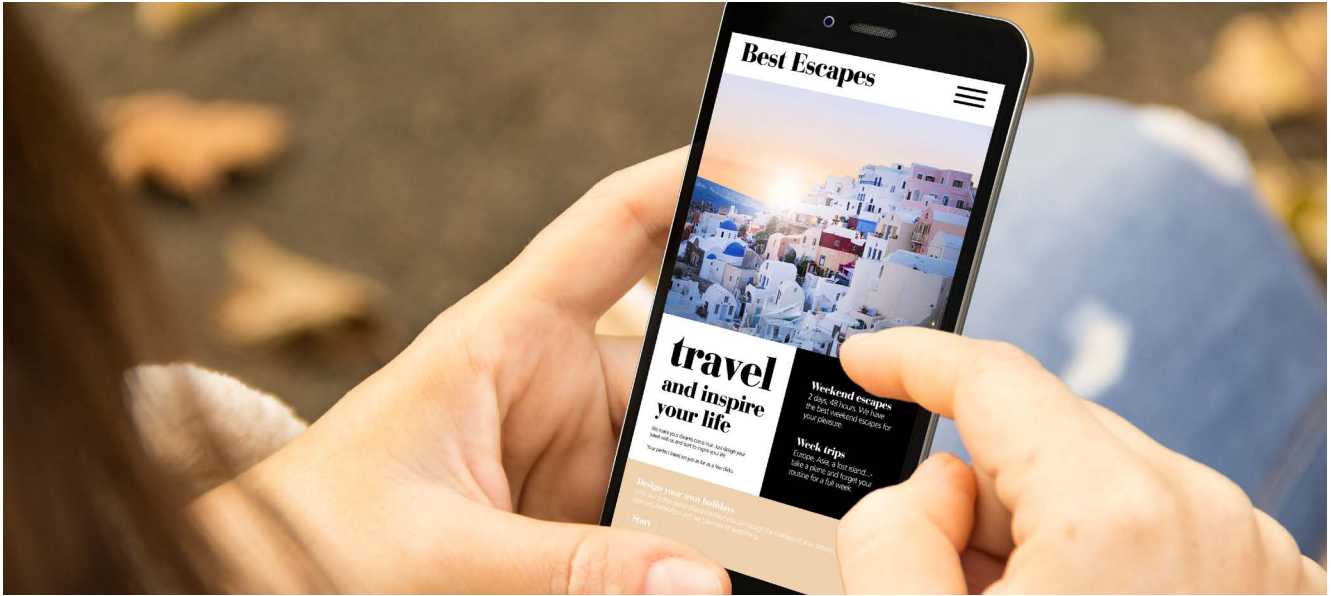
Internal Links Help Visitors Navigate Your Site

Spiders aren't the only ones trying to navigate your site – you can use internal link building to make it easier for human visitors to find the right pages.

Not only will internal links boost the organic visibility of your converting pages, but they can also get actual people to those pages to convert.

SEO benefits aside, internal link building is critical to ensuring you're providing a solid UX and keeping visitors on your site.

Consider the various entry points people have to your site and use internal links to map out a journey that moves them through your site.

There should always be a next step or desired action for users – at least until they purchase or convert – and optimized internal linking will help them reach the next destination.

Internal Link Building Best Practices

There are many benefits of internal links, but what does internal link building look like in practice?

To help you implement a successful internal link building campaign on your site, let's walk through some of the best practices and common strategies for internal linking.

USE LINK TOOLS

You may want to invest in some tools to help you assess your internal linking structure and guide future internal link building.

Screaming Frog is a great tool for getting a better understanding of your top internally linked pages. Using Screaming Frog to crawl your website, you can filter by "Inlinks" to organize URLs by those with the most internal links.

You can also use Screaming Frog to filter by pages that include a specific term, which is extremely useful for identifying internal link building opportunities.

For example, if you are trying to build links to your page about internal link building, you can use Screaming Frog to find all pages that mention "internal links". To do this, you would click Configuration, Custom, and then Search.

This will bring up the Custom Search menu where you could enter your term (e.g., "internal links").

Then you just re-crawl your site and navigate over to the sidebar and scroll down to Custom, where you'll see how many pages include your selected term.

Clicking on 'Custom' will take you to a list of URLs that include the term, which can be easily exported to Excel. And voila, you now have a curated list of internal link building targets!

Link tools (e.g., Majestic, Moz, Ahrefs) can also be useful as you plan internal link building. These tools will tell you which pages on your site have the most external backlinks, so you'll know theoretically where your most powerful internal links could be built.

You can also manually review pages on your site, as well as internally link based on customer journeys, without tools. However, investing in these tools can help you optimize your internal link structure to receive maximum benefit from your internal link building efforts.

OPTIMIZE YOUR ANCHOR TEXT

Another aspect of internal link building that should be considered is the anchor text.

Traditionally, SEO professionals shun exact match anchor text because it can have a negative, manipulative effect with external link building.

However, with internal links you want to be as clear and specific as possible about the page you're linking to, making exact match anchor text ideal (with natural variation included).

Furthermore, these links help search crawlers understand your site, so you want to use anchor text that is directly related to the content of the page being linked.

Optimize internal link anchor text to ensure humans and bots understand where the link is pointing.

DON'T OVERDO IT WITH INTERNAL LINK BUILDING

Internal links are valuable for multiple reasons, but that doesn't mean you should internally link every page to one another.

While there is no set number for the appropriate number of internal links on a given page, simply use your best judgment for what would be beneficial to someone reading the page.

If there is an opportunity to place a relevant internal link that would benefit the reader by providing more information or leads them to a page that is the next logical step in their journey on your site, then place that link!

Depending on the length of the given page, somewhere between five to 10 internal links typically makes sense – again, use your discretion and do what aligns with the best user experience.

Final Thoughts

Most people think of external links when they hear the term "link building."

However, internal link building is an integral part of successful SEO as well.

Optimizing your internal link structure will help your site in terms of improved navigation, clearer content hierarchy, and boosted authority for pages that struggle to earn backlinks.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Monthly/ongoing – as new content is published; you need to account for internal links.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

For fresh content, you could see results within a few days or weeks with internal links from your most popular pages.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

This number depends on how frequently you publish new pages.

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Screaming Frog (Optional)
- Moz (Optional)
- Majestic (Optional)
- Ahrefs (Optional)

B E N E F I T S :

- Internal link building is the process of linking internally from one page on your website to another. Internal link building is a critical function of SEO and managing a high-functioning website.

- Internal links provide a number of benefits, including:

- Directing link equity throughout your site to support pages that can't earn links otherwise.

- Helping search engines better understand which pages are most important and which keywords are associated with them.

- Guiding visitors through your site to help them reach a desired destination or action.

16

Link Gratitude: Give Some Thanks After Someone Links to You

AUTHOR **Anna Crowe**

What do you do after someone links to you?

Loren Baker has found the answer. And it's pretty genius.

You shower your link devotees with a motherlode of thanks.

Baker has coined this action "link gratitude."

How Can You Show Your Link Gratitude?

It starts with you emailing the webmaster to say thanks for the link.

Then, you could offer to:

- Conduct an SEO audit for them.

- Help them with their SEO (e.g., fix their 404 errors or an external broken link).

- Read, follow, and share their stories.

Everyone benefits from link gratitude.

- For the site linking to you: They're getting free help on their SEO. Or, their content is getting exposed to a brand new audience: yours.

- For you: The better these websites perform that already link to you, the more valuable that link becomes. Getting the link is just the start of the relationship.

And, really, so much of link building starts with building relationships.

While you may not see the return immediately, it's something the webmaster will always remember and you'll be top of mind the next time that webmaster needs an external source.

Link gratitude is also a link building tactic I've used in the past when working with bloggers. If a blogger wants to work with me, but I can't afford the price, I'll provide an SEO audit of their site along with tips they can use to help their site rank better in the future.

SUMMARY

TIMEFRAME:

Once every quarter

RESULTS DETECTED:

4-12 months

AVERAGE LINKS SENT PER MONTH:

10

TOOLS NEEDED:

■ BananaTag (or Yesware)

BENEFITS:

■ Link gratitude opens up an opportunity for you to grow your relationship with a webmaster for long-term results.

■ Link gratitude gives you a chance to build a relationship outside of the link that can lead to more exposure on multiple marketing channels.

17

What Is Link Reclamation & How to Regain Lost Link Value

AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

Link reclamation is an integral part of an effective SEO strategy, but it can seem intimidating if you don't understand what it is, or why it's important.

Building links isn't an easy task, so when your hard-earned links suddenly vanish or when you find a broken backlink, it can be frustrating, it devalues your SEO efforts, and it's damaging to your site's overall credibility.

Learning how to reclaim lost links will help to:

- Regain link value.

- Build your link profile.

- Improve your site's SEO and overall authority.

What makes link reclamation even better is that it's a process you can start right away, at little-to-no cost.

Claiming Unlinked Mentions vs. Link Reclamation

Unlinked mentions and broken links – while similar – are not the same.

Claiming **unlinked mentions** is generating new backlinks from online mentions, citations, images, or other references to your brand or company that aren't already linked back to your site.

Link reclamation is finding, fixing, and replacing online content where your brand or company has been improperly linked.

Lost or broken links – also known as "dead links" – typically occur when a website removes pages, or when URLs change during a site redesign or rebranding.

In even simpler terms:

Unlinked mentions are online references to your brand or company that are not linked to your site. They present an opportunity to claim new links.

Broken links are previously existing links or backlinks which are now lost (broken). These links need to be found and reclaimed.

For this article, we'll focus on reclaiming lost or broken links.

The requested URL was not found on our server. Go to the homepage »

404 ERROR

I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

Dorothy, *The Wizard of Oz (1939)*

How to Reclaim Lost Links

FINDING BROKEN INTERNAL LINKS

Fixing internal links is a crucial step to optimizing your site's usability and is the first step in the link reclamation process.

To find broken links on your own site, you have the option to use paid tools like the Ahrefs Site Explorer and DeepCrawl, or to take advantage of free tools like Google Analytics and Screaming Frog's SEO Spider. The SEO Spider will crawl up to 500 URLs with the free version, but you can pay to upgrade if you have a more significant site to crawl.

This example shows Screaming Frog's free SEO Spider in action on a sample site:

Follow these steps for your own website:

- Click on the Response Codes tab from the top menu

- Filter by Client Error (4xx)

- Sort the Status Code column in descending order

- Click to highlight a web address with a 4xx code

- Click on the Inlinks tab the bottom to locate internal links leading to that page

If you have a long list of URLs with 4xx codes, you have the option to export the list as a CSV file.

FIXING BROKEN INTERNAL LINKS

The next step is to fix your broken links!

Go to each page on your site with broken links, and update or replace the URLs.

Keep in mind that if you find an old link that can't be fixed – or if you find a link that was forgotten during a web redesign – you may need to remove the link entirely.

FINDING LOST EXTERNAL BACKLINKS

After you've cleaned up the broken links on your own site, finding lost or broken backlinks is your next step.

Reclaiming backlinks can be more challenging than fixing internal links because you don't have control over external links – whether you can reclaim lost backlinks is up to the other site owner.

To find broken backlinks to your site, you can use paid tools like Majestic or the Ahrefs Site Explorer, or you can use the Free Backlink Checker from SEO Review Tools.

You're able to see up to 100 broken backlinks to your site on this report from SEO Review Tools. The trick is that after you reclaim those first 100 backlinks, you can rerun the report for another 100 backlinks, and again, and again!

RECLAIMING LOST EXTERNAL BACKLINKS

Now that you have your list of broken backlinks, reach out to the site owners to give them the correct links to your website.

They'll most likely appreciate hearing from you and will be glad to update their page with the correct URL. After all, this is helpful to them, too!

Reclaiming backlinks this way is an excellent opportunity to improve SEO and build your backlink profile without having to build brand new links.

Reclaim Lost Links (& Claim Unlinked Mentions) with a Reverse Image Search

Images are common sources for backlinks.

Unfortunately, images are often another cause for broken backlinks and unclaimed mentions.

Find images to claim using reverse image search tools like TinEye or Google Images.
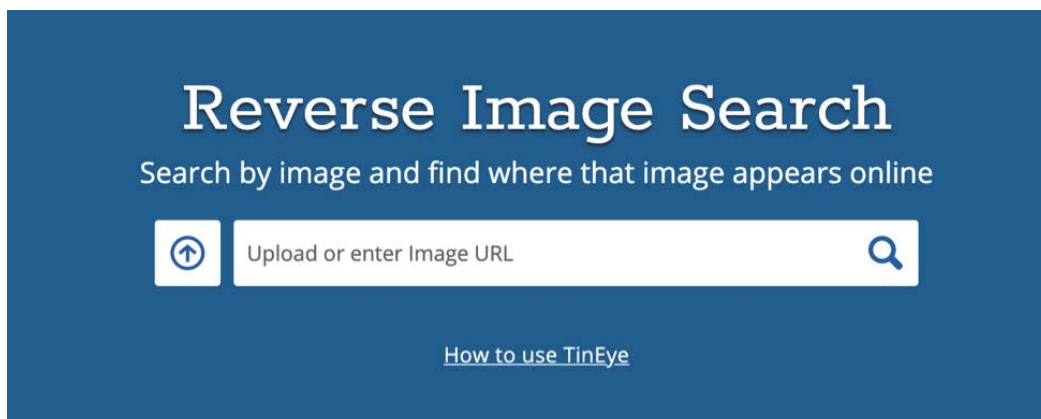
When you upload an image – or search by the image's URL – a list of matching images appears from sites all over the web:
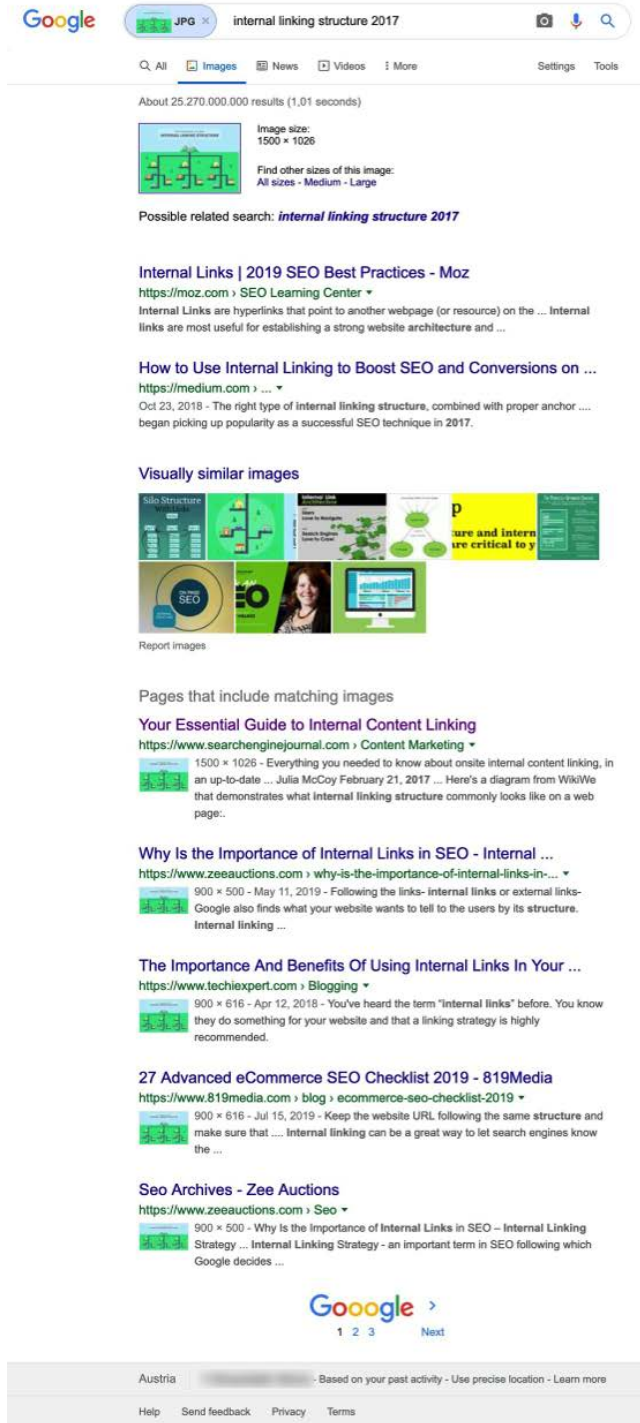
You can then check each page in the results to see if the image correctly links back to your site.

If it does, then no further action is needed – that's a quality backlink!

If the image doesn't link back to your website or has a broken link, contact the site owner and provide them with a link to attach to your image.

Develop a Strategy

If you've never used link reclamation as a method to improve your backlink profile and boost your SEO, start now.

As it turns out, it isn't too complicated!

Develop a marketing strategy that includes link reclamation to regain lost link value, and improve your site's credibility and authority.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Implement right away and run quarterly

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

4-12 months after implementation

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

5-10

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Ahrefs Site Explorer
- DeepCrawl
- Google Analytics
- Screaming Frog
- Majestic
- SEO Review Tools
- Tineye
- Google Image Search

B E N E F I T S :

- Regain lost link value, which can increase rankings and improve your link profile.
- Improve SEO and overall site authority.
- Cleaning up and reclaiming old links is a cost-effective link building method.

Want Links? Here's How to Create Link-Worthy Content

18

AUTHOR **Anna Crowe**

Creating link-worthy content takes a lot of time, planning, and strategy.

The types of links you really, really want – editorially-given links (i.e., **natural links**) – are typically the hardest to get.

Editorial links are the best kind of links, the kind Google wants you to build.

But anything worth having is worth working for, right?

So let's talk about how you can start creating link-worthy content.

What Is Link-Worthy Content?

Link-worthy content is, simply, useful content. Link-worthy content typically comes in four forms:

- **Informational:** This is typically the latest news.

- **Inspirational:** Any content that inspires people to take action, such as self-improvement or supporting a cause.

- **Educational:** This type of content teaches people something that's new to them.

- **Entertaining:** This type of content typically provides amusement and plays on the emotions of consumers (e.g., happiness, fear, anger, sadness, surprise).

Ultimately, you want your content to be the best answer to a question being asked by someone in your target audience.

If you're like me, when you're writing content, you have no intention to creating a final product that nobody wants to link to.

However, there's no denying there's a lot of mediocre content on the web. Most content fails to gain any traction – few (if any) views, shares, or links.

Content, Content, Content

Creating awesome content that attracts links isn't easy.

This is quite sad considering that **71.9%** of marketers are focused on creating content, according to Search Engine Journal research.

The content competition is fierce. You're competing with blog posts, infographics, videos, and so many more types of content for attention and clicks.

All too often, great content fails or is outperformed by something inferior.

Why? Because it wasn't marketed properly.

Think of content as an asset. Just like a rental property or stocks, your content has the potential to generate valuable links that will help your SEO.

But creating link-worthy content is only half the battle.

Establish Relationships with Influencers

If a piece of content is published on the web, but nobody links to it, does it make a difference?

You can create and publish amazing content, but if nobody can find it, it's all wasted time and effort.

Unfortunately, great content doesn't guarantee you links.

That's why you need to establish relationships with **influencers.**

When you work with influencers, you aren't just adding one more person to your network. You're also adding their entire network.

Any influencers you work with should be a natural fit. It makes sense for your audience, and the influencer's audience.

A recommendation from a true influencer can instantly make your content more appealing to a whole new audience.

Influencers may have a loyal following on social media (Twitter, Instagram, etc.). They may run a blog or website. Or they may be a journalist.

When it comes to identifying influencers, think in terms of quality, not quantity – just as you would with links.

How to Create Link-Worthy Content: 11 Ideas

The concept of linkable content has existed for more than a decade.

Creating something that is engaging, relevant and link-worthy takes time, skill, and money.

Here are some tactics to make your content more worthy of links. Try one or two out and see what happens!

1. CREATE EVERGREEN CONTENT

News content has a short shelf life. You might be better of focusing on topics that are more evergreen.

Think of evergreen content as a resource that remains useful and relevant long after it's published. It rarely changes and is always in-demand from your audience (and searchers).

This could be:

- Guides
- How-to posts
- Explainers
- Ebooks
- Lists
- Checklists

Do you best to give it sexy (but optimized) title to attract lots of clicks.

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2. START A PODCAST

Guess how many links **SEJ's The Search Engine Journal Show page** has?

Ready?

More than 900 links   .

A **podcast** will naturally attract links because every time you interview a guest, they will likely link to your page. Plus, you'll attract links from other industry sites and blogs if your podcast earns a great reputation.

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3. CREATE A RESOURCE CENTER

In addition to publishing and promoting your content, you have to organize it in a way that will make sense for your audience as well as new visitors. A content resource center might be the perfect solution for you.

Creating guides, case studies, webinars, whitepapers, and checklists is a lot of work. Some people would rather just link to your resource center rather than invest the time and budget creating their own.

Read more: **How to Get Backlinks with Resource Pages**

4. BE A THOUGHT LEADER

Even if you aren't considered a thought leader right now, start writing like one.

Do things to make you stand out, get you into people's heads, and help establish you as an expert in your field.

- **Be confident.** You know your stuff. Demonstrate it!

- **Be original.** Don't just rewriter or regurgitate the same old tired ideas. Lead, don't follow.

- **Be authentic.** Just be you. Show some personality.

- **Be interesting.** Demand people's attention with your ideas and insights. Never be boring.

Read more: **How to Become a Thought Leader in Your Niche & Build Your Brand**

5. EXPERT ROUNDUP

Content Marketing Institute's **50 Best Social Media Tools From 50 Most Influential Marketers Online** is a great example of a link-worthy (851 backlinks!) article.

The post features a squad of well-known marketers, using quotes from the marketers.

Why?

Instead of the author having to gather all the content himself, he used quotes from these thought-leaders to generate buzz with their name. Naturally, these marketers will share and link back to this article.

It's pretty magical. This example from the Content Marketing Institute is just one way to create link-worthy content.

Read more: **The Easy Guide to Creating Expert Roundup Posts**

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6. PARTNER WITH ANOTHER BRAND

In a world where it's all about who you know, it's easy to wonder: Should I partner with another brand?

The answer is yes.

Co-authoring through your partnerships exposes your piece of content to a new community/audience. It's time to share the link love.

I like to think of co-authoring as the SEO equivalent to ride-or-die BFFs – they never disappoint.

But it doesn't end there.

When I co-author a piece of content, I work paid amplification into my contracts. Meaning, both parties agree to spend equal cash flow on paid amplification.

PURELINQ   BASE
SEARCH MARKETING

By utilizing both teams for paid amplification, we're utilizing different target audiences with our content syndication partnerships, social ads, and native ads.

If the article takes off, then consider repurposing your content into a video, webinar, or infographic to continue riding that trend.

7. TARGET & OPTIMIZE FOR RELEVANT KEYWORDS

Take a page from Larry Kim. In an **interview** with Conductor, Kim discussed how he built WordStream by creating content based on relevant keywords:

> *In the early days of WordStream, we mapped out a taxonomy of tens of thousands of keywords that we thought were relevant to our company.*
>
> *And we created content around those groups of keywords. Today, our blog does millions of views per month from organic search, which proves that this approach works.*

8. ADD VISUAL CONTENT

Images. Infographics. Data visualizations. GIFs. All of these visuals can help tell your story.

Rather than recap what others have said already here on SEJ, I'll point you to some great resources:

- **6 Types of Visual Content That Get the Most Links & Shares**

- **Visual Content Marketing: 10 Brilliant Examples**

- **6 Ways to Master the Art of Visual Content Marketing**

9. FORMATTING MATTERS!

Nothing is more off-putting to readers than a blog post that looks like a giant block of text. Use:

- Subheadlines (H2s and H3s) to break up text.
- Short, simple sentences.
- Bulleted lists.
- Block quotes.
- Bolding and italics.

10. WHAT'S YOUR ANGLE?

What makes your content unique from all the others published on the topic?

Can't answer this question?

Well, hate to tell you, but you may not have link-worthy content.

Rework your content until you find your own angle.

11. WOULD YOU LINK TO YOUR CONTENT?

This is probably the ultimate test.

You know your audience, your industry/niche, and what they want, right?

So – would you honestly link to your own content?

If you wouldn't link to it, why would you expect anybody else to?

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Every 3 months

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

2-6 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   P E R   M O N T H :

40

T O O L S :

- Google Trends
- BuzzSumo
- Google Consumer Survey
- Brand partnerships

B E N E F I T S :

- Link-worthy content attracts more links in the short term and long term.

- Link-worthy content builds positive relationships inside and outside of your community. It positions you in a thought-leadership role.

19

A Guide to Local Citation Building

When was the last time you performed a local online search?

When you want to find a product or service in your area, do you dust off the ol' phone book, or do you turn to your favorite search engine?

Think about it: Say you live in Seattle, and you need to take your dog to the groomer, make dinner plans with your friends, and check movie listings.

AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

Oh, and you have got to take your coat to the dry cleaner.

Will you search for:

- A) dog groomers
- B) Mexican restaurants
- C) movie listings
- D) dry cleaners in Seattle Ballard

I hope you chose option D.

According to a **Google consumer study,** "4 in 5 consumers use search engines to find local information."

If you're like 80% of the rest of the world, you're probably looking for local information online, too.

Turn the tables, now.

You're a business owner – for this example, let's say you own a dry cleaning business.

Your business has an address, a phone number, an email address, and even a blog where you share tips and tricks for taking better care of clothes. Go you!

You offer a valuable service that you know everyone needs. You've done some on-page optimization to help get your website discovered.

You're doing everything right!

But for some reason, the customers are barely trickling in.

How can you fix that?

Consumers search with their location and proximity in mind
- 4 in 5 consumers use search engines to find local information.
- They search on smartphone and computer/tablet for: store address, business hours, product availability and directions.

Local searchers take action
- 50% of consumers who conducted a local search on their smartphone visited a store within a day, and 34% who searched on computer/tablet did the same.
- Local searches lead to more purchases than non-local searches. 18% of local searches on smartphone lead to a purchase within a day vs. 7% of non-local searches.
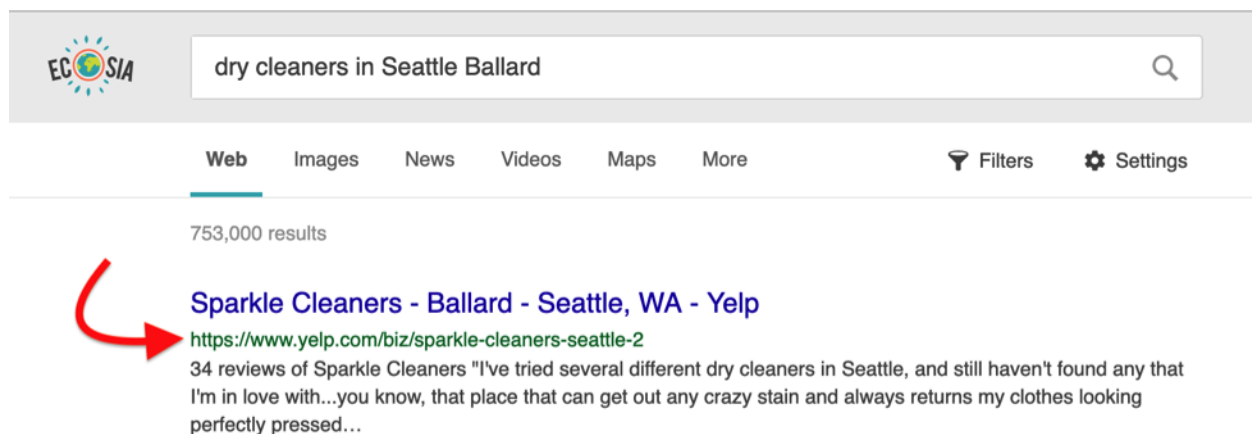
What are Local Citations?

Local citations are online mentions of your company – linked or unlinked – which include your business address, contact information, and in some cases, your website.

An example of this is a business listing on Yelp.

Take a moment to search "dry cleaners in Seattle Ballard," and note the top organic result.

Spoiler: It's probably Yelp.

Citations can be incredibly beneficial to local businesses, particularly for local SEO.

TYPES OF CITATIONS

There are two types of citations: structured and unstructured.

Structured citations are like what you'd find in a local business directory. You have control over these citations. You can submit your business details, and update the information when necessary.

Some examples of structured citations can be found on:

- Yelp
- Yellowpages
- Facebook
- Foursquare
- Maps (Google, Apple, MapQuest, etc.)

Here's an example of a structured citation on Yelp:

Unstructured citations are when your business information shows up on a site that's not specifically a business directory. You can find unstructured citations on magazine or newspaper sites, blogs, social media, review sites, and the like.

Here's an example of an unstructured citation on a local news site:

3 Ways Local Citations Can Help with Link Building and Site Visibility

1. IMPROVE LOCAL SEO RANKINGS

Local citations have a massive impact on your local SEO efforts and on whether your company will show up in the SERPs.

Local SEO and citations help search engines verify your business's information.

They're two of the ways search engines keep tabs on your site's authority and prominence, so the more often your company's info appears online, the more prominent your site appears to search engines.

2. INCREASE SITE TRAFFIC

An improved local SEO ranking means increased visibility in local search results, and more visibility in search results means increased site traffic.

Even **unlinked citations** can drive traffic and improve local presence, but they also provide an opportunity for claiming new links and building your link portfolio.

3. IMPACT CUSTOMERS

Local citations help your company establish trust with search engines and **with customers.**

If you have multiple websites, especially high-authority, trusted websites that are citing the same information about your business, it tells search engines and your customers that your site and your business can be trusted.

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How to Build Local Citations

WHITESPARK

Whitespark's curated list of **citation sources by country** is a great starting point.

Just work your way through their list to manually build your citations.

Whitespark also offers a helpful Local Citation Finder tool, which offers plans for every business — from Starter (free) to Enterprise ($80/mo).

Top 50 Citation Sources in the United States

#	Source		#	Source		#	Source
1	Google My Business		18	Local.com		35	Tuugo
2	Apple Maps		19	Yellowbook		36	Yahoo! Local
3	Facebook		20	ChamberofCommerce		37	DexKnows
4	Foursquare		21	Merchantcircle		38	n49
5	Bing Places		22	BOTW		39	GetFave
6	Yelp		23	Opendi		40	Angieslist
7	TomTom		24	HotFrog		41	Thumbtack
8	Yellowpages		25	Brownbook		42	Infobel
9	Infogroup		26	Cylex		43	eLocal
10	LocalEze		27	InsiderPages		44	BizJournals
11	Factual		28	EZLocal		45	B2BYellowpages
12	D&B		29	Tupalo		46	ThreeBestRated
13	BBB		30	CitySquares		47	MyHuckleberry
14	CityGrid		31	2FindLocal		48	SaleSpider
15	Superpages		32	Fyple		49	ShowMeLocal
16	MapQuest		33	Here		50	Yasabe
17	Manta		34	BizVotes			

DATA AGGREGATORS

According to **Advice Local**, "data aggregators are data mining systems that spread business information online. They collect and share business data with a multitude of sources, including search engines like Google."

In other words, data aggregators gather information on businesses and then feed that information to other sites.

Some popular data aggregators are:

- Infogroup
- Foursquare
- Factual

LOCAL DIRECTORIES

Google's consumer study says that "local searchers are ready to act. Many visit a nearby location within a day and complete purchases at a higher rate than consumers who conduct non-local searches."

This is why it's so important for you to get your business listed in **local online directories.**

What we learned

Local searchers are ready to act. Many visit a nearby location within a day and complete purchases at a higher rate than consumers who conduct non-local searches.

Some directories will generate their listings based on information received from data aggregators.

Check your local directories to see if a listing already exists for your company, and make sure the information is accurate.

You can also submit new listings if one doesn't yet exist for your business.

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REVIEW SITES

Review sites can be valuable sources for citations. Check review sites for existing information on your company, and ensure that your business information is accurate, including the address, contact information, and website.

Customer reviews are a ranking factor that search engines take into account when examining for site authority.

Some examples of customer review sites are:

- Influenster

- ConsumerReports

- Amazon

SOCIAL MEDIA

Having a social media account for your business not only boosts customer engagement, but it also provides an opportunity for citations. Former Googler **Matt Cutts** said:

"Facebook and Twitter pages are treated like any other pages in our web index, and so if something occurs on Twitter or occurs on Facebook and we're able to crawl it, then we can return that in our search results."

So get a couple of social media accounts set up for your business, and make sure your address, phone number, email address, and website are correct.

Staying Consistent

Keep important information consistent across citations. Make sure your listings have the correct business name, contact information, and website.

However, keep in mind that small differences here and there are nothing to fuss over. For example, search engines will recognize "Search Engine Journal" and "search engine journal" as the same name.

As Whitespark **states it**, "put a little trust in the algorithm."

Develop Your Local Citation Profile

Still not convinced?

Consider this: Google's consumer study found that 18% of local smartphone searches led to a purchase within one day. One day!

Developing a strong citation profile for your business is one of the most practical and cost-effective ways to optimize your local SEO.

Implement citation building as a part of your digital marketing strategy.

S U M M A R Y

TIMEFRAME:

Month 1-3

RESULTS DETECTED:

4-12 months

AVERAGE LINKS PER MONTH:

6

TOOLS:

- Struction Citation Sources
- Unstructured Citation Sources
- Whitespark
- Data Aggregators

- Local Directories
- Review Sites
- Social Media Accounts

BENEFITS:

- Improve local SEO rankings.
- Increase site traffic.

- Impact customers and establish trust.
- Cost-effective.

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How to Earn Links by Doing Something Truly Newsworthy

AUTHOR **Jeremy Knauff**

Public relations and link building go together like chocolate and peanut butter. But in order for PR to play an effective role in your link building efforts, it requires the right approach.

That means you need to first have a story that, from the audience's perspective, is worth telling.
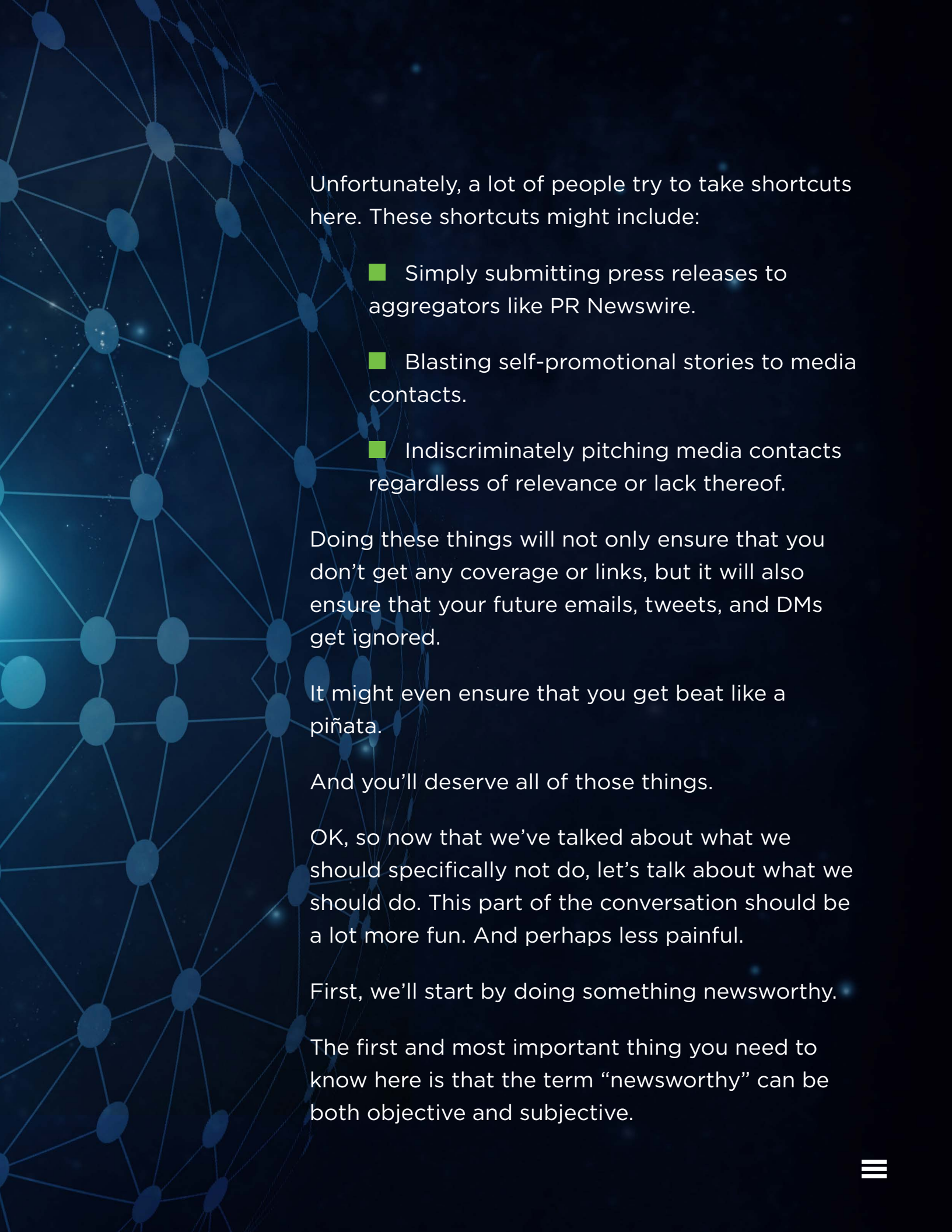
BUT just because you've got a great, newsworthy story, it doesn't mean that you'll earn links.

In fact, many news publications make it a rule to use the nofollow attribute or even not to link out at all in some cases.

This isn't a reason to not use this approach though, because coverage in trusted publication, especially one with a large audience, carries value that goes beyond the potential link.

As a result of other people seeing the story there, you may earn valuable links from other publications. And we already know that search engines often **ignore the nofollow attribute.**

That being said, once you have a newsworthy story, you'll have to pitch it to the right people at the right time in a way that makes the value to their audience immediately and clearly obvious.

Unfortunately, a lot of people try to take shortcuts here. These shortcuts might include:

- Simply submitting press releases to aggregators like PR Newswire.

- Blasting self-promotional stories to media contacts.

- Indiscriminately pitching media contacts regardless of relevance or lack thereof.

Doing these things will not only ensure that you don't get any coverage or links, but it will also ensure that your future emails, tweets, and DMs get ignored.

It might even ensure that you get beat like a piñata.

And you'll deserve all of those things.

OK, so now that we've talked about what we should specifically not do, let's talk about what we should do. This part of the conversation should be a lot more fun. And perhaps less painful.

First, we'll start by doing something newsworthy.

The first and most important thing you need to know here is that the term "newsworthy" can be both objective and subjective.

Think Big

So what makes something newsworthy?

The criteria might depend on:

- What's going on in the current news cycle.

- The publication or the location.

- Being the first, the biggest, or a particularly good or bad story.

In other words, like most things in the SEO world, it depends.

But for the sake of example, some things might include:

INVENTING SOMETHING USEFUL AND/OR INTERESTING

The iPhone, when it first came out, was a perfect example. Tesla was another.

But you don't have to invent some cool new high-tech gadgets to leverage this approach.

In fact, your invention can be boring and low-tech provided that it solves a specific problem.

Roof max recently did this when they **announced their invention** of a solution, that when sprayed on a roof, extends its life.

While inventions like this aren't generally seen as cool compared to those in the tech world, they are definitely newsworthy because they solve a big problem for a lot of people.

To get the most from this approach, you'll need to invent something that solves a specific and important problem. Ideally, for a lot of people.

DOING SOMETHING THAT WILL IMPACT A SPECIFIC GROUP

People are tribal. You need to look no further than a typical debate on Facebook to see that.

But this isn't anything new.

People have this mentality because it has played a critical role in our survival. That makes leveraging tribalism a powerful way to earn media **coverage** and often, links.

One great example of this is the annual Military Influencers Conference, which gets a ton of media coverage because it provides an opportunity for veterans to network, while both learning from and mentoring, fellow entrepreneurial-minded veterans.

There are several ways to specifically impact a specific group

- Hosting events for a specific group of people.

- Lobbying for or against a particular law.

- Making a sizable contribution to a particular nonprofit organization.

- Launching a nonprofit to serve a specific group.

- Taking political action for a particular **cause.**

Just know that when you take this approach, you will turn some people off. That's OK, though, because that's an important part of building a passionate audience.

ACHIEVING A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE

The thing is, in order for anyone to care, it will have to be something objectively significant.

A milestone could be a lot of different things:

- Revenue.

- Number of employees.

- The size of a deal.

- Partnerships.

Like the largest real estate deal ever in your city, the greatest number of people employed in your industry, or the fastest growth in the country.

One example is Sourcetoad, which was recently included on the INC 5,000 list. That's a significant milestone in and of itself, but the fact that it's a relatively small local company helps to **get local media particularly excited.**

The downside to milestones is that they get old pretty quickly.

You can only yammer on about your achievements for so long before people start to tune out. Or worse yet, start to cheer for your failure.

Think Small

Doing something that's truly newsworthy isn't going to happen overnight.

Anything that would warrant positive media coverage will generally require a fair amount of work to achieve. That means weeks, months, or even years of work.

But that's OK because it also means fewer of your competitors will put forth the effort.

There are also a lot of smaller things you can do in the meantime that can result in publicity, which may lead to links. This might include:

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CONTRIBUTING TO CHARITIES

Remember the Ice Bucket Challenge?

Just about five years ago, you couldn't go anywhere on social media without seeing someone dousing themselves with ice water in increasingly ridiculous ways.

The ALS Association used this to generate awareness and encourage donations to help fight ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis). This earned them countless media mentions, social posts, and an enviable number of links.

While you may not have the budget, media contacts, or as powerful a story as The ALS Association, you can still leverage an event – physically or digitally – for charity, which you can use for your PR and link building efforts.

The key is to find a charity that you are actually passionate about because there is no faking authenticity.

Next, you'll need to genuinely help them to raise money and donate money yourself. We talked about authenticity earlier, so you'll have to put your money where your mouth is.

Examples

- **Bunker Labs: On a mission to help veteran entrepreneurs**

- **Local distillery teams up with specialty sauce maker to raise money for tornado relief**

- **Bay Area celebrities fight lung cancer in the Lip Sync for Lungs Live Battle**

OFFER A SCHOLARSHIP

I've seen many military organizations do this for children of veterans. But you can offer a charity based on any criteria you want. That might include:

- Family or personal income

- Overcoming challenges (Kids who grew up in the foster system or worked to get out of gang life.)

- Choice of major (Science, engineering, education, etc.)

- Industry (Could be based on the industry they're leaving, or going into.)

And the scholarship doesn't have to cover the entire tuition. Personally, I would aim for a few thousand per recipient.

When you offer less, it's not really going to help anyone and it's obvious that you're doing it for self-serving reasons.

Examples

- **Special Operations Warrior Foundation's Scholarship Program**

- **Codeup's Women in Programming Scholarship**

- **Mike Rowe Works Foundation's Work Ethic Scholarship Program**

OFFER A SPECIAL PROMOTION

This can be created for or tailored to certain groups of people in the same way I described in the section on scholarships.

It's important to actually provide substantial value here, though.

A mistake I commonly see is offering a trivial discount just to tie the promotion to a particular group, such as veterans, teachers, or law enforcement.

I don't know about you, but when I see a restaurant offering a 5% discount for veterans, it doesn't make me say "Oh, they must really love us – look at the discount they're giving just because I served!"

On the contrary. Even as bad as I am at math, I can immediately see that the discount here is nothing to be impressed by.

If you want to really get people's attention – and the attention of the media – make a bold offer. Something like "Veterans eat free on Veterans Day!"

That's the kind of thing that the local, and in some cases, national media love to cover.

And it doesn't have to be a discount. A promotion can take a variety of forms.

Examples

- **South Carolina Ford dealer offers car buyers a Bible, a flag and a $400 gun**

- **Free entry in Brothel to men who have its name tattooed**

- **Buy a Hyundai car and if you get fired, send it back**

HOST A KID-FRIENDLY EVENT

If you're a parent, you already understand the madness that comes with Halloween.

Excited kids, revved into a sugar-fueled frenzy by every kind of candy imaginable, are roving the streets in search of even more candy.

Add to that the fact that it's nighttime and these kids are often wearing masks that make them oblivious to what's going on around them, and you can see why some parents would love an alternative.

Churches, daycare facilities, and some other local businesses have been known to host a Halloween "trunk or treat" where kids can more safely trick or treat in their parking lot.

These events also typically have bouncy houses, games, and other entertainment to wear the kids out and ensure they have a good time.

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It's important to make sure your business is relevant, or at least appropriate for kids, though.

No matter how pure your intentions might be, holding this type of event in a strip club parking lot probably isn't going to earn your business any positive media coverage or links.

Examples

- **Lowry Park Zoo's Fright-Free Zoo Boo KIDS**

- **Christmas Town comes to life as Busch Gardens rolls out holiday lights**

- **Next Level Church to Hold Helicopter-Egg Drop**

Let's Find the Right Outlets

Once you've done something newsworthy, the next step is to find and pitch the right people at relevant publications.

"Wait – you mean people aren't going to sing my praises for my valiant effort?"

In a word, no.

I'm sorry, but 90 times out of 100, no one is paying enough attention to your company to notice anything you're doing, so it's up to you to get your story in front of the right people.

That means pitching contributors, editors, producers, and other relevant media contacts.

Everyone wants to be featured in large national media, including news networks like CNN or Fox, or business publications like the Wall Street Journal, Entrepreneur, and Business Insider, but that generally isn't going to happen.

For many businesses, it's generally going to be more effective to approach smaller publications first. These publications might include:

- Local news publications
  - Television
  - Radio
  - Magazines
  - Newspapers
- Local blogs
- Industry / trade publications
- Industry blogs

For television and radio, you'll generally want to pitch your story to the producer – not the anchors or hosts. But it's important to find the right producer for the program you want to be featured on.

While this information may sometimes be difficult to find, there are a few ways to dig it up.

In some cases, the producer's name may be mentioned in the program or listed on the website.

In other cases, you may need to fire up a search in Google or LinkedIn. And a third option is to simply call and ask.

It's often easier to track down a contact at print publications and websites since the editor and contributors are usually listed prominently.

Editors are typically listed at the front of magazines and can be found somewhere on most websites, while contributors' names, and often contact information, are included right in the article.

The Pitch

Once you know who you need to pitch, you'll need to craft your message in a way that makes you stand out.

There's a fairly easy way to stand out:

Care about the audience.

A lot of people make the mistake of pitching their story from their own perspective, rather than from an editor's, producer's, or contributor's perspective, which all come down to the audience's perspective.

If you put your own needs first, you're almost certain to be ignored.

On the other hand, if you can demonstrate why their audience would find your story valuable, they'll be significantly more receptive to your pitch.

You'll also need to keep your pitch short. Everyone today is busy, and they aren't going to read a long email from a random stranger.

Skip the fake compliments and elaborate stories about how you stumbled across them. It's disingenuous and they'll see right through it.

Instead, explain why your story will appeal to their audience within a few sentences.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

This could take just a few hours, or it might take significantly longer. It just depends on how elaborate your plan is. For example, inventing a new product might take years, while offering a scholarship is instantaneous. Then you have to factor in your time to find and pitch the most appropriate people at relevant publications, follow up, and track your results.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

Links can start to show up immediately, but it may take anywhere from a few minutes to a few days for Google to find them. They may begin impacting ranking just as quickly, depending on the topics you want to rank for, and the authority and relevance of the websites the links are on, but in most cases, you should expect to see a lag time of several months.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

Stories with a niche or regional interest might acquire only a few links, while stories with a broader interest could generate hundreds or even thousands of links. And in some cases, despite your best efforts and a great story, you can still fall flat. That's just the nature of the beast—you can't control the news cycle, nor can you control editors, producers, or contributors.

S U M M A R Y

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- SEMrush

- Google or Bing

- Email

B E N E F I T S :

- Links will often be from highly-relevant and authoritative sources, making them generally more valuable than links from many other sources. These types of links can have a significant impact on ranking and referral traffic, and they are difficult for your competitors to replicate.

- Publicity is another benefit of this approach. We all know that getting your brand in front of more eyeballs is always a good thing, and this is a great way to do that.

- Since your company will appear in trusted publications, this will also boost your authority, status, and the trust people have in your brand.

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How to Build Links via Non-Traditional Email Outreach
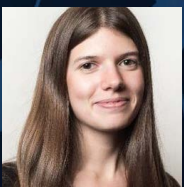
AUTHOR **Alexandra Tachalova**

Email outreach has quite a prominent presence today.

It seems that nearly every business has heard of this link building strategy before (even though the majority get it wrong about 100% of the time).

Don't believe me?

Then open your mailbox spam folder and read through all these email outreach gems!

For instance, look at what I got only a few hours ago:

Hello,

_____ here on behalf of _____ the industry's leading automated marketing platform for financial professionals. I _____ is an all-in-one integrated suite of marketing tools to help build an online presence, nourish client relationships, and drive new business.

Before going any further, I wanted to let you know that we are fans of the content on pageonepower.com. It's very well written and informative. I wanted to explore the opportunity of us contributing a quote to your site, perhaps for an upcoming piece that you are writing.

_____ is able to comment on topics such as but not limited to:

- The benefits of inbound marketing
- Top Inbound Marketing Trends in 2019
- Automating Your Inbound Marketing Efforts

If any of these would work, or if there is a particular quote you are looking for, please let me know and we will make it happen. I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have. Feel free to contact me by replying to this email!

Thank you in advance for your time! I look forward to hearing from you and collaborating on a piece.

Cheers,

Am I an expert in the finance niche? Absolutely not!

It's no surprise that such emails mostly go straight to the spam folder, but it's astonishing how many emails never get any recipient's attention at all.

Recently, Brian Dean teamed up with Pitchbox to analyze 12 million outreach emails, and one of their discoveries was that the average email response rate is **8.5%.**

Just think about it! Less than 10% of emails get a response with the vast majority of 90% remaining unanswered.

If you don't want your emails to add up to that pile, it's crucial to keep mastering your outreach techniques and explore new approaches.

In this post, I want to do exactly that: show you a non-traditional email outreach approach that can guarantee the highest response rate for each email you send.

What Is Non-Traditional Email Outreach?

Email outreach is one of those activities that has to be scalable, which is impossible without templates and automation.

However, to deserve your reader's attention, your emails must also be 100% authentic and personalized – all the things that don't work well with automation.

So, what's the workaround?

For me, it's the non-traditional email outreach. This approach relies on two main components:

- 100% original templates.

- Using a unique brand voice.

Simply put, non-traditional outreach means using original templates that are crafted in a unique way to represent your specific business.

Not only does it guarantee a higher response rate, but it also allows your emails to stand out and create a positive attitude towards your brand.

Here are a few examples to back up my words:

G2 STARBUCKS/AMAZON CARD

The guys from G2 placed a unique spin on their brand by offering a free $10 Starbucks card in exchange for leaving a review on their site.

Do you think this idea might work well for your business?

If so, use this strategy as inspiration and adjust it for your business needs accordingly.
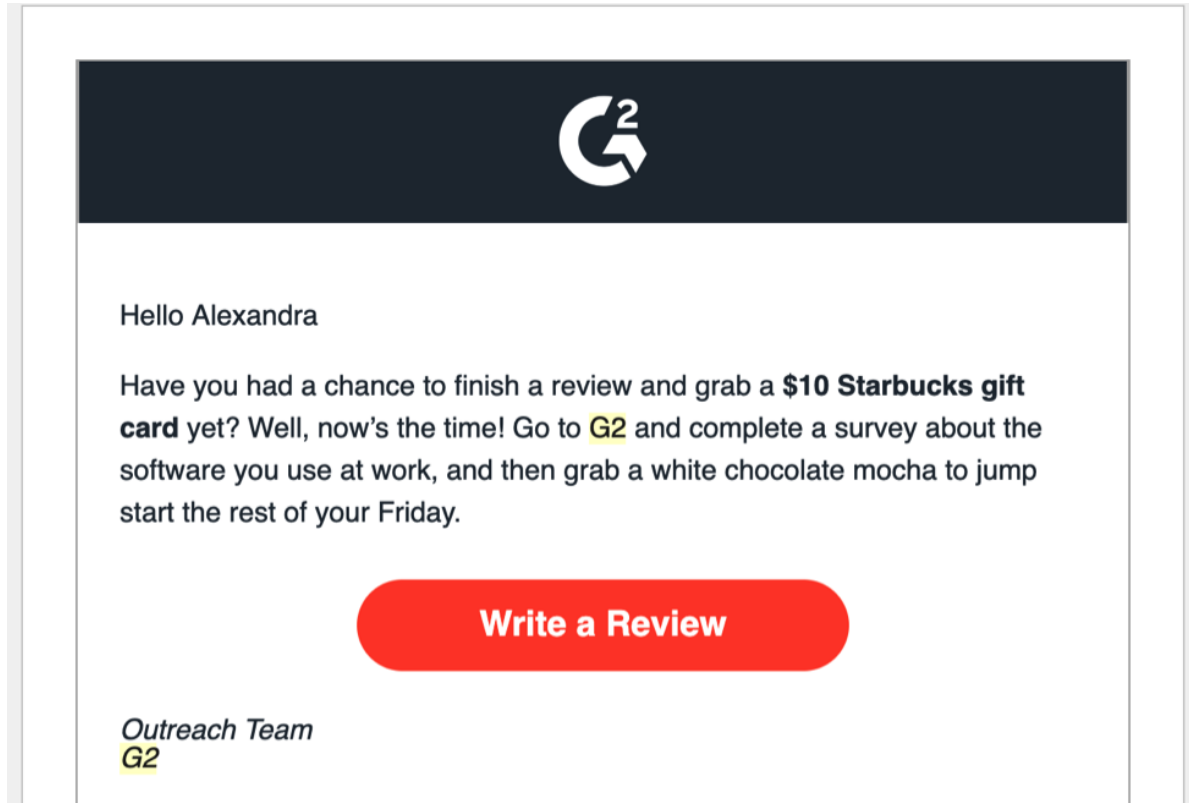
ROBBIE RICHARDS' ROUND-UPS

When you hear Robbie's name, the first thing that comes to mind is an expert round-up.

I had the honor of being invited to contribute to his most recent **round-up,** where I shared my favorite WordPress SEO plugins along with 49 other experts.

How did Robbie pull this off?

All through email outreach.

Let's deconstruct his approach to see exactly how it works.

To start off, Robbie reached out to well-known experts that regularly contribute to their own and external blogs:
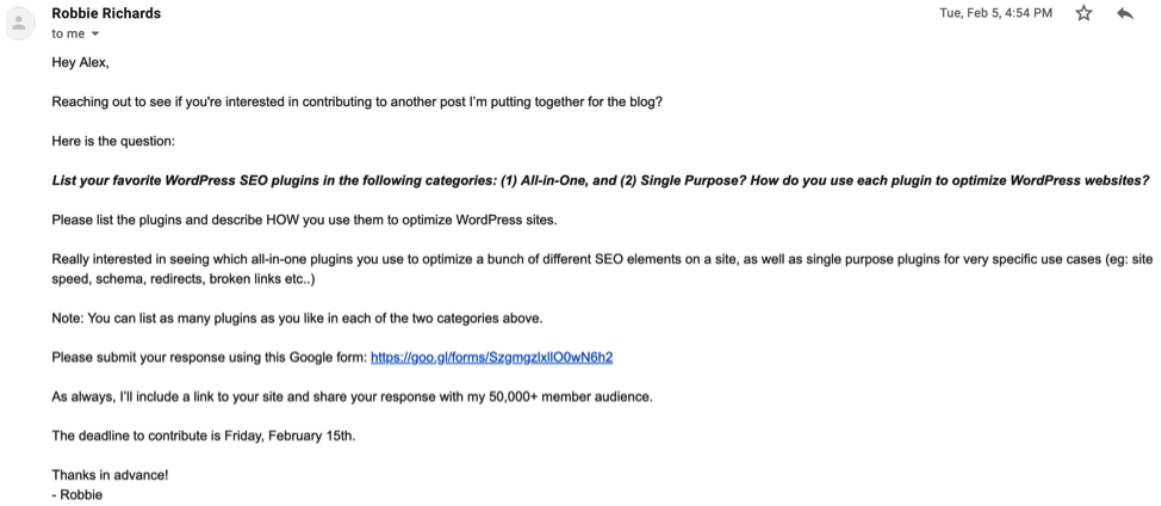
As a next step, when the post goes live, Robbie asks the experts once again if they are willing to link back to it.

This approach allows him to get links faster since the experts are automatically motivated to share content to which they contributed.

All this would be impossible if the G2 and Robbie Richards started their outreach emails with

"Hi, I've recently read your blog post and it was amazing! Link swap?".

But besides avoiding standard templates overused by spammers and your competitors, there are a few other steps that will empower your next outreach campaign:

   ■   Spend enough time during the link prospecting stage to ensure that you're pitching your content to the right people. This might sound obvious, but the majority of marketers neglect this step and don't really bother to double-check that their pitches will be hitting the right mailbox.

■ Find ways to establish relationships with your link prospects. Do they love coffee? Send them a Starbucks gift card. Is your company a well-known brand? Reach out to them with an offer to contribute to your blog! They'll be honored.

Use These 3 Hacks to Get There

I know for a fact that things are much more complicated in reality. This is especially so for companies that haven't established any solid brand awareness within their niche yet.

A common question they have is where to start so that they don't encounter the scenario where all their outreach attempts are rejected.

In my agency, we immerse solely in email outreach link building and this has resulted in the development of our own unique approach to this process.

Hence, I would like to share with you some tried and tested tactics that will help you acquire links in a few days and sometimes even hours.

1. START WITH PITCHING TO PEOPLE THAT ALREADY TRUST YOU

The most time-consuming part of the email outreach process is establishing trust.

But you're past that point when you're reaching out to people who already know you, who are aware of your business and have a positive attitude towards it.

You can find those people in the following groups:

- Your clients and users that are subscribed to your newsletter.

- Your partners and industry friends.

- People who have already mentioned you in their content. There's a high chance that they're writing for other websites, too. To find all the websites to which an author contributes, you can use BuzzSumo and search by the author's name.

- Your current social media followers. For instance, Followerwonk can help you quickly download a list of your company's Twitter account followers.

2. REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON WITH YOU

There are several ways to find and engage with people with particular interests. The system that I often use looks like this:

- I find people through Facebook groups.

- Research their interests on social media.

- Engage with them through comments.

Here's how it works in a more elaborate way.

There are plenty of closed groups on Facebook to accommodate any interests whatsoever.

A big benefit of those groups is that they allow you to see the list of users that are members of that group even when you're not friends with them. So, just search for groups within your niche and join them.

After this, scan for users that are part of those groups and reach out to those who are also running blogs for their company.

Use comments as an ice-breaker. Find posts that have already gained a lot of attention (in terms of engagement) and leave a comment there.

After this, you can write to users that were also leaving comments under this post and let them know that you have interacted with them before.

Finally, find out what they were sharing on their blogs or social media that you're also a big fan of.

Cats and dogs? Horses? Or maybe burgers and craft beer?

This phase is truly time-consuming, but the results are really worth it.

3. MAKE YOUR EMAIL A BIT AWKWARD

Excuse me, what?

That was my reaction when I first found out that awkward emails are super effective.

But this idea is reinforced by psychologists who confirm that awkward or clumsy behavior is a **well-known conceptual move** that helps them gain people's trust much quicker.

However, email outreach doesn't involve face-to-face communication where you can drop a pen or spill a coffee. So, how exactly can you do that?

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You can do this by telling your recipient a short story of your professional failings, or purposely spell their name wrong and then fix it in the second sentence. Here's how I did it one time:

Basically, anything that makes them feel that a real human being is reaching out works.

Another quick trick is to use custom-made GIFs about your life or even yourself. Once I used a GIF of my horse to pitch content:

Final Thoughts

Non-traditional email outreach involves putting a distinctive spin on the marketing of your business.

By using the three hacks mentioned above, which are:

- Reaching out to people who are already familiar with your business.
- Approaching people with common interests.
- Making your emails slightly awkward.

...you appeal to their human side which makes getting a response much more likely.

So get out there and craft your next big outreach email!

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Ongoing

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

4-12 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

40

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Buzzstream
- Boomerang for Gmail
- Yesware
- Muckrack

B E N E F I T S :

- Email outreach creates a rare opportunity for you to develop a personal connection with an influencer or brand to sustain and grow a long-term relationship.

- Email outreach can increase your network not only from a linking perspective, but social media as well.

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How to Use Podcasts for Link Building

Podcasts have gone from relative obscurity less than a decade ago to one of the fastest-growing marketing channels available today.

But the power of podcasts isn't limited to reaching people who are listening.

When properly leveraged, podcasts can have a powerful impact on organic search, too.

AUTHOR **Jeremy Knauff**

There are two main reasons for this.

- Podcasts can drive people to search for a person's or company's name. This type of branded search can send positive signals to Google that can influence search suggestions, as well as improve ranking overall.

- Most podcasts are also available outside of aggregators like iTunes and Stitcher – most often, on someone's website.

This typically leads to links in both directions.

The website hosting the podcast will usually link to their guest's website from the post for that episode.

The guest, and in some cases, their fans, will link to that episode on the podcast website.

In other words, both having a podcast and being a guest on other podcasts can be an effective way to earn quality links.

Often, these links will also drive valuable referral traffic, too.

Hosting Your Own Podcast

Hosting a podcast is a great way to get your name out there while building a loyal audience.

It's also a great way to develop meaningful relationships with people in your industry. I speak from first-hand experience.

I launched my podcast about a year ago and quickly realized that it made reaching out to strangers a lot easier and significantly more effective.

We aren't going to get into how to launch a podcast. That goes far beyond the scope of this article, and frankly, even though I launched my own, I don't consider myself an expert on the topic.

If you need guidance on that, I encourage you to check out John Lee Dumas's **guide** to starting a podcast.

Our focus in this article will be on how to use your own podcast to earn high-quality links.

You might employ a monologue format, or as most people seem to do, it an interview format.

The choice is yours, but interviewing others is generally a more effective path to earning links.

It's also a lot easier.

My very first podcast episode was a monologue.

> The first step, once you have all of the technical details sorted out, is to create something people actually want to listen to. This means sharing useful information, rather than blathering on about how awesome you are.

It was just me talking about the importance of differentiating your company from competitors. The topic was useful, but I was alone in my office basically talking to myself – and I felt like a complete jackass.

On the other hand, interviewing someone or having a co-host makes it a lot easier and more natural. It's just a conversation, rather than a weirdo alone in a room talking to themselves.

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Some great examples of this format in our industry are:

- **The Search Engine Journal Show**, hosted by Brent Csutoras, Danny Goodwin, and Loren Baker

- **Webcology**, hosted by Dave Davies and Jim Hedger

- **SEO 101**, hosted by John Carcutt and Ross Dunn

Whichever format you choose, the key is to consistently put out original and valuable information.

From here, it's a relatively simple matter of reaching out to people you'd like to interview. People who have something useful to say that other people want to hear.

In many cases, if you interview someone, they'll link to their episode as soon as it goes live without any prompting. But you can avoid the uncertainty and simply ask them to do so.

A good time to do this is right after you've finished interviewing them, while they're still on an emotional high.

Obviously they won't be able to do so until it goes live, but you'll have set the seed, making it more likely when the time comes.

You can also ask them to encourage their audience to link to it.

Be a Guest on Other Podcasts

Being a guest on other podcasts is a great way to create publicity for both for you and for your company, but it can also be a great way to earn links. That's because most hosts will link to your website from the episode post.

The key here is to pitch from the perspective of their audience, rather than your own interests.

Most podcasters who follow an interview format are always looking for interesting and knowledgeable guests. This means that if you have a particular skill set, unique knowledge, or an interesting opinion, it should be relatively easy to be a guest on relevant podcasts.

That's assuming that you can pitch your story in a way that makes the host care what you have to say.

Popular podcasters typically receive a barrage of emails asking them to interview people. Many of those emails are ignored because they are purely self-serving.

You need to figure out what their audience really cares about, and then send a pitch that explains why your story will appeal to them.

And while you're at it, skip the fake compliments and fluff about how you happened to stumble across their podcast. Everyone knows the compliments are fake and they don't care how you found their podcast.

Instead, just keep the pitch short and to the point.

And don't waste your time with constant email follow-ups. If they're interested, they'll reply. The only thing you'll accomplish by harassing them is making sure they never interview you.

And if you're particularly aggressive, they might even tell other people, hurting your chances of getting on other podcasts.

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If you have a large audience of your own, maybe from social media, a column at a large publication, or a podcast of your own, it may help to mention that, but don't go overboard – a brief mention is enough.

When you ramble on endlessly about yourself, you'll turn the host off and kill your chances of getting on the podcast.

WHICH PODCASTS SHOULD YOU TARGET?

It may be tempting to compile a list of podcasts, and sort their websites based on one of the myriads of SEO metrics.

Don't.

While there may be some merit to targeting high-traffic websites, you're far better off sorting them by relevance because the hosts will be more likely to interview you.

Beyond that, you may want to sort them based on engagement, which you can identify based on reviews and social media activity.

An added benefit is that their audiences will be more interested in what you have to say. This means they'll be more likely to listen, click through, link to your website, and even buy your products or services.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

This is a fairly simple and straightforward process –
compile a list of relevant podcasts and pitch them on
you (or your client) being a guest. This could take as
little as an hour depending on the niche and how many
podcasts you want to pitch. Some niches may have
only a few.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

You could begin earning links within a few
weeks, but some podcasts are booked out
months in advance, so it may take a lot
longer. They may begin impacting ranking
just as quickly, depending on the topics
you want to rank for, and the authority and
relevance of the websites the links are on, but
in most cases, you should expect to see a lag
time of several months.

S U M M A R Y

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

This will depend entirely on how many podcasts are in your niche, and how many you can fit into your schedule. After all, there are only so many hours in the day and you can't spend them all being interviewed on podcasts. Most niches will have at least a dozen or so podcasts, but certain niches, like business or digital marketing, could have hundreds.

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Google or Bing
- Email
- Thick skin (You'll probably be told "no" a lot.)

B E N E F I T S :

- This can be an effective way to earn the kind of high-quality, relevant links that can dramatically improve ranking. Often, these are links that your competitors may not have considered, giving you an advantage over them in search.

- Podcasts tend to have highly-engaged audiences, which means that these links are more likely to generate referral traffic.

- This tactic goes beyond SEO by creating positive publicity. And as more people hear about your brand, branded search will also increase, which can be a positive signal to Google.

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The PR Process That Drives Hundreds of Links Times After Time

AUTHOR **Tom McLoughlin**

Links remain one of the strongest currencies in SEO, despite many years of people claiming otherwise.

But **getting ones that carry value** is becoming increasingly difficult as Google continues to get better at understanding which links are manipulated purely for SEO.

So it's becoming more important to get good links that will move the needle on your performance.

How do you do that?

By not thinking about links at all.

If you take a step back and approach your link building activity with a more general marketing hat on, then you start to look at ways that naturally drive links along with it.

We use **traditional PR approaches** to gain coverage for clients on top publications, which then drag links along with them even without it being the first thought.

And we've come up with approaches that work time after time to build strong, sustainable link profiles for clients that drive SEO performance over the long term.

Want to know how?

What Is a PR Campaign?

We carry out a variety of PR approaches for clients, from press releases to reacting to journalist requests that land in our inbox.

But the thing that allows us to gain hundreds of links in one fell swoop is our creative PR campaigns.

These involve coming up with creative ideas that make our clients stand out, pitching them to relevant journalists, and watching the coverage roll in.

One of the key difficulties many people have with their PR is that they just pitch the regular qualities of their client which don't make them stand out from all their competitors who do exactly the same thing.

To get coverage, you need to offer something unique or new that warrants being written about.

What if your client doesn't have anything new or unique to write about? That's where we come in.

Brainstorming

So how do you come up with ideas that journalists **are going to love** and write about?

Well, you look at what they're already writing about!

It's as simple as that. Identify the publications that you want to be featured on and then scour them to get familiar with the kinds of stories they cover.

It might be:

- New product launches.

- Money-back guarantees.

- Free trips for students.

- Competitions to go on free trips.

- Anything else that offers a slight break from the norm.

The main thing is that it sets you apart from what others are doing, while still following the pattern of stories that the publications like covering.

Implementation

Once you've come up with your idea you need to implement it so you have something to show when you reach out to a journalist.

They can smell a PR stunt a mile off, so this needs to feel genuine, even if it is created with PR in mind (and if your stunt is good enough then they'll cover it anyway).

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For us, this might mean adding a new quirky tour to a client's website, publishing a blog post with details of a competition and how to enter, or creating a page on our website with the results of a study we've done.

This is important for two reasons:

- You can direct journalists to a page on your website with all the information, without having to jam it all into a press release.

- The journalist has somewhere to link to as the source of the story.

You didn't really think we weren't considering links at all, did you?

Step 2 here is the crucial part in increasing your chances of getting links from your campaign.

If you give them a URL which readers have to visit to enter, has T&Cs or includes key information that needs to be read, then they are far more likely to link to it.

Otherwise, you're just hoping they link to your homepage as the source.

And I hate hoping.

Once you have your content in place it's time to put it in the right hands.

Promotion

Outreach is where SEO professionals become better at PR than PR people.

Many people believe PR is all about your little black book of contacts.

Ignore them.

PR is about giving the right journalists the right story at the right time.

It doesn't matter if they've never heard from you and don't know you from Adam.

If you give them a great story, they will cover it.

So how do you find those people if they're not in your little black book?

You use **link tools** of course!

Remember when you were scouring your target publications for story ideas?

Well if you take those story examples and put the source into your favorite link tool then it will tell you exactly where the story was covered (and who covered it).

Do this for a variety of different stories with the same theme and you'll end up with a long list of extremely targeted writers who have written about something similar so are highly likely to write about you.

The Results

Once you've been through and **sent your story** to journalists, it's time to sit back and watch the coverage roll in.

But be realistic. Each one won't hit the mark.

You might only get a few bits of coverage, or even none at all.

You can't control the news cycle and even the best researched and planned out pieces don't land.

However, if you stick with it and carry out this process multiple times I would bet my house on it bringing in great results for you.

Some examples to give you an idea of what you can achieve:

- This **Game of Thrones-inspired competition** drove more than 300 pieces of coverage and more than 100 with a Domain Rating 50+ (not to mention actual bookings).

- This **Instagram Boyfriend tour** drove 265 pieces of coverage and more than 8,000 referral visits.

- This **Global Wildlife Travel Index** drove 57 pieces of coverage including Lonely Planet, Travel + Leisure and MSN.

This shows you the process works.

There are many more like this. All you have to do is follow it.

Key Takeaways

- Scour your target publications and identify what works.

- Come up with an innovative take on the themes you see getting coverage.

- Create a page on your site that houses key information.

- Run the successful examples you found through a link tool and make a list of outreach targets where they got coverage.

- Contact those journalists and tell them about your story.

It really is as simple as that.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

We carry these processes out over a quarterly period for clients which is a reasonable timeframe to have in place, though it could be done more quickly if it was in-house for example.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

Links acquired immediately, ranking impact seen around 1-2 months after coverage started to come in.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

In this example, we gained around 150 links but this can vary from project to project. Some do fantastically well, others bring in 10-20 links, and sometimes they don't take off at all.

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Ahrefs

B E N E F I T S :

- It allows you to get a large amount of links in a short period of time, as well as being able to get links on top-tier sites that wouldn't otherwise be achievable through more traditional SEO approaches.

- Links on top-tier publications are extremely powerful and can have a significant impact on ranking performance over the long term. If you carry out projects like this regularly you will develop an extremely powerful link profile that allows you to rank for competitive phrases.

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How to Build Links Using Q&A Sites
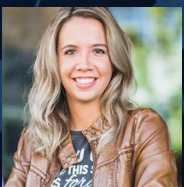
AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

Opinions vary among SEO experts about whether adding links to question-and-answer sites is a valid link building tactic.

It depends on how you approach Q&A sites though, and how much you depend on these forums for driving traffic.

The thing is, people typically use **long-tail queries** to conduct searches now, and are asking questions rather than searching by generic keywords.

Asking a specific question usually returns more accurate and relevant results on SERPs.

This is where Q&A sites or forums come in.

Q&A sites are widely used platforms for people to discover new information on a variety of subjects. They act like search engines – returning results on a query – but the results could come from any member of the forum.

People are turning to sites like Quora and Stack Exchange to find answers to questions ranging anywhere from **"Did anyone from your high school become famous?"** to **"Is adding my business link to local business directory/listing good or bad for SEO?"**

4 Benefits of Using Q&A Sites

1. DIVERSIFY YOUR LINK PROFILE

Using Q&A sites as a method of building links helps to diversify your link profile.

Although external links on Q&A sites are typically nofollow, these backlinks **shouldn't be discounted.**

Be sure to use Q&A sites with relatively high Alexa rankings.

Take Quora, for example, which is ranked #233 in global internet engagement:
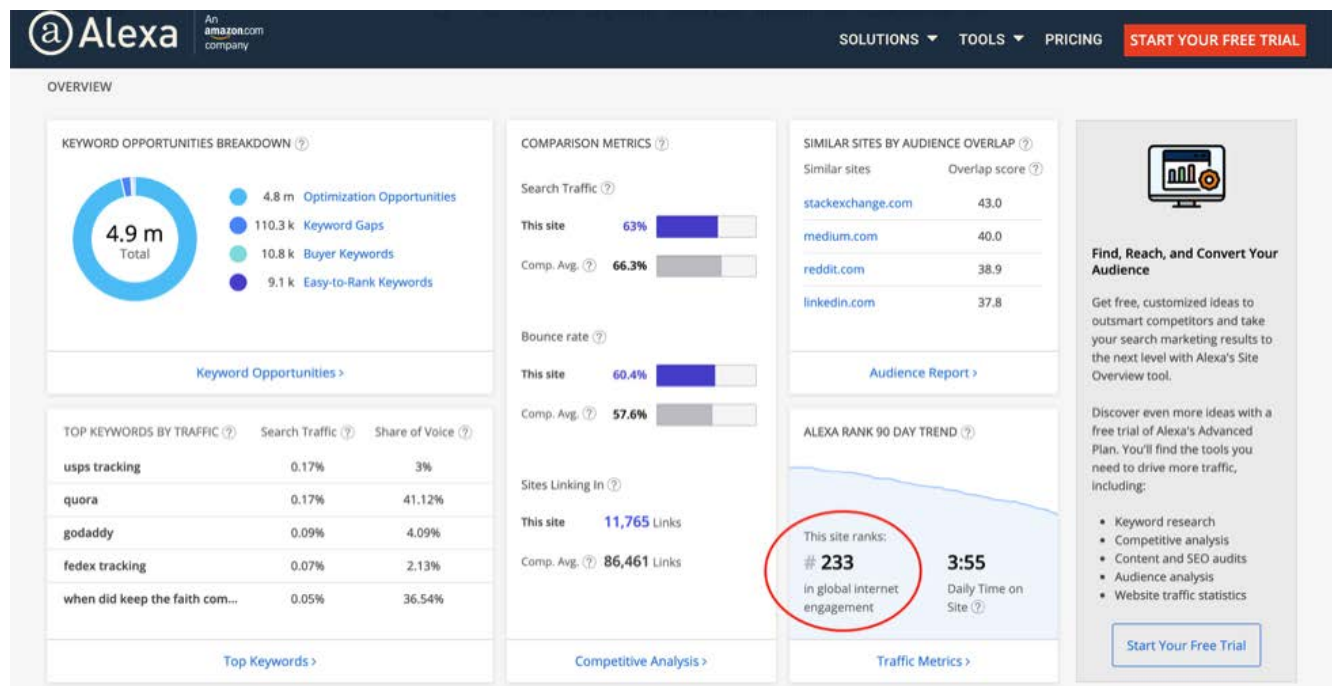
2. DRIVE TRAFFIC TO YOUR SITE

Provide informative answers to community questions and include a link to relevant content on your site.

The key here is relevance.

If you continually add links to unrelated content, you'll lose members' trust and may be viewed as a spam account.

Keep in mind that you're not required to include a link in your answers.

To maintain trust, if you don't have a relevant link, don't include a link at all.

You can also include a link to your website in your user profile.

Present yourself as an expert – or at least a trusted resource – so that when a member views your profile, they'll be inclined to check your site.

3. ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY & TRUST

Q&A sites were created to solve people's problems – much like your product or service, which solves a customer's problem too, right?

Answer questions and engage with topics in your niche market.

Build relationships and **gain credibility** by being honest and helpful.

Treat Q&A sites like community forums rather than marketing platforms.

Most Q&A sites allow members to rank profiles and answers, so it's important to provide useful solutions and to authentically and respectfully engage with other members.

4. IMPROVE SEO

As Q&A sites continue to grow and gain more authority, some questions and community conversations from these sites will appear on the first page of SERPs.

When you ask an engaging question – or provide a helpful answer – and it gets upvoted, you're bringing traffic to that post on the Q&A site.

If you happen to include brand keywords and a link to your content, it can help boost your site's overall authority and SEO.

3 Ways to Build Better Links with Q&A Sites

In the spirit of diversifying your link profile and improving SEO, here are three specific ways to build better links with Q&A sites:

1. EXPAND KEYWORD RESEARCH

Using **keyword research tools** is an excellent way to increase the chances of your content ranking on SERPs.

Adding Q&A sites to your keyword research toolbox can help you reach your audience through more specific keywords and phrases.

Look at the difference between the keywords and phrases that turn up when you search for "cortado vs flat white" on Google (with the **Keywords Everywhere extension**), and then in Quora:

Using these additional keywords and phrases, you can engage more effectively on Q&A sites and provide more relevant links back to your own content.

2. DEVELOP A CONTENT STRATEGY

Use popular searches from Q&A sites relevant to your brand's keywords and phrases as a part of your overall **content strategy.**

You can utilize Q&A sites for content strategy in the same way you use them for keyword research.

Develop a content calendar based on search results, and then generate new content that answers specific questions found on Q&A sites.

Then, return to the forums to engage and answer questions using your new content links.

3. DISCOVER POTENTIAL COLLABORATORS

In addition to performing specific keyword research and developing unique content ideas, Q&A sites can also help you find potential collaborators or guest bloggers.

Stay updated on questions and conversations that are in your niche, and request notifications when there is new content related to your brand's keywords and phrases.

Interact with members who deliver content similar to yours and develop relationships with potential collaborators.

Guest blogging and collaborating with partners are excellent ways to diversify your link profile and to earn potentially high-authority backlinks.

Popular Q&A Sites

As Q&A sites grow in popularity, you'll most likely find new sites all the time.

Search for popular Q&A sites, or even for Q&A sites that are specific to your industry or niche.

Try a few out to determine which will be the most beneficial to your brand and your particular link building strategy.

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Here are a few of the most popular Q&A sites out there, currently:

- Quora

- Yahoo Answers

- Answers

- Stack Exchange
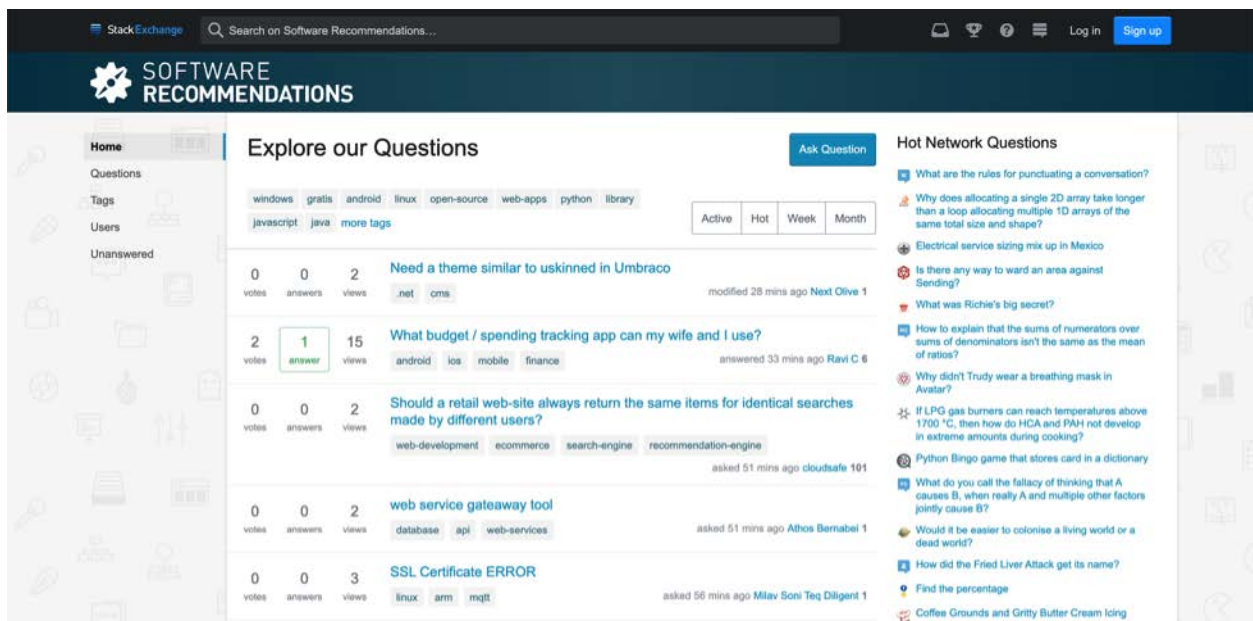
Think Beyond SEO

When contributing to and engaging on Q&A sites, think beyond SEO.

You can do more with Q&A sites than build links and increase traffic.

Use Q&A sites to develop a more effective content strategy, increase brand awareness, build relationships with potential clients and collaborators, and establish your brand as an expert in your niche.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Start at month 6, and interact monthly after that

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
6-12 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
5-10, but this depends on the frequency of engagement

T O O L S   N E E D E D :
■ Q&A sites

B E N E F I T S :
■ Diversify your link profile.

■ Drive traffic to your site.

■ Establish credibility and trust.

■ Improve SEO.

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iHeartLinks:
How to Get
Some Link Love
from Radio Stations

AUTHOR **Anna Crowe**

You say radio, we say **podcasts** – but whichever way you swing it, the fact of the matter is that there is a hell of a lot of link building potential.

I'll admit it: The decision to not reach out to radio stations because you're working with a PR firm implies a sort of laziness that true link hustlers would capture.

Because if you don't try all the link building strategies, how will you ever know which is really The One?

These types of questions keep me up at night.

At some point, I'm going to have to admit that it just isn't possible (or financially sustainable) to test and email every single radio station on the market worth its salt – and I'll grieve accordingly.

So, let's start with local radio stations first.

To be fair, this is not a new idea, but it is one that link builders often forget.

And, it's so simple: Email your top 20 radio stations, ask to collaborate either on-air, send products, or get featured on their blog.

It's insanely versatile, because you can blend offline and online marketing to give your client a new type of backlink result.

It's more than a link building hack – it's like having three different link building opportunities in one hit.

I emailed a local radio station with a full technical SEO audit of their site and they mentioned my name and website live on air. It was a life-changing moment in my career and for my website's local SEO.

I've also done a similar tactic for clients by mailing products to the radio station's hosts with a handwritten letter followed up with an email. This has typically positioned me to work with them from a contract position, it's hard to get these ones for free.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Every 3 months

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
4-12 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
1

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

■ Manual search using **search operators** like intitle:"local radio station"

■ Buzzstream (or Pitchbox)   ■ BananaTag (or Yesware)

B E N E F I T S :

■ Similar to podcasts, radio stations increase your overall brand awareness connecting the dots between online and offline exposure.

■ Radio stations usually have a domain name that's been around for a long time, therefore, increasing the value of the link from their website to yours.

Reciprocal Links: Do They Help or Hurt Your SEO?

AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

Using reciprocal links – sometimes referred to as "traded" or "exchanged" links – was a popular method of link building in the early 2000s but has decreased in popularity in recent years.

Reciprocal links are still a relatively common occurrence. They're a natural byproduct of owning a website, after all.

However, the way reciprocal links appear on sites today is different from 20 years ago.

In my research for this article, I found an insightful **link building study** done by Ahrefs, which states – and I must agree! – that developing relationships through authentic outreach, and linking to sources without expecting anything in return, are the most proper and natural ways to build reciprocal links.

This graph shows that only 26.4% of the authority domains used in Ahrefs' study are not using reciprocal links:

How common are reciprocal links?

Based on a study of 140,592 random domains with at least 10k organic visits/month

Average reciprocal links: **11.16%**   Median reciprocal links: **6.45%**

Source: https://ahrefs.com/blog/reciprocal-links/
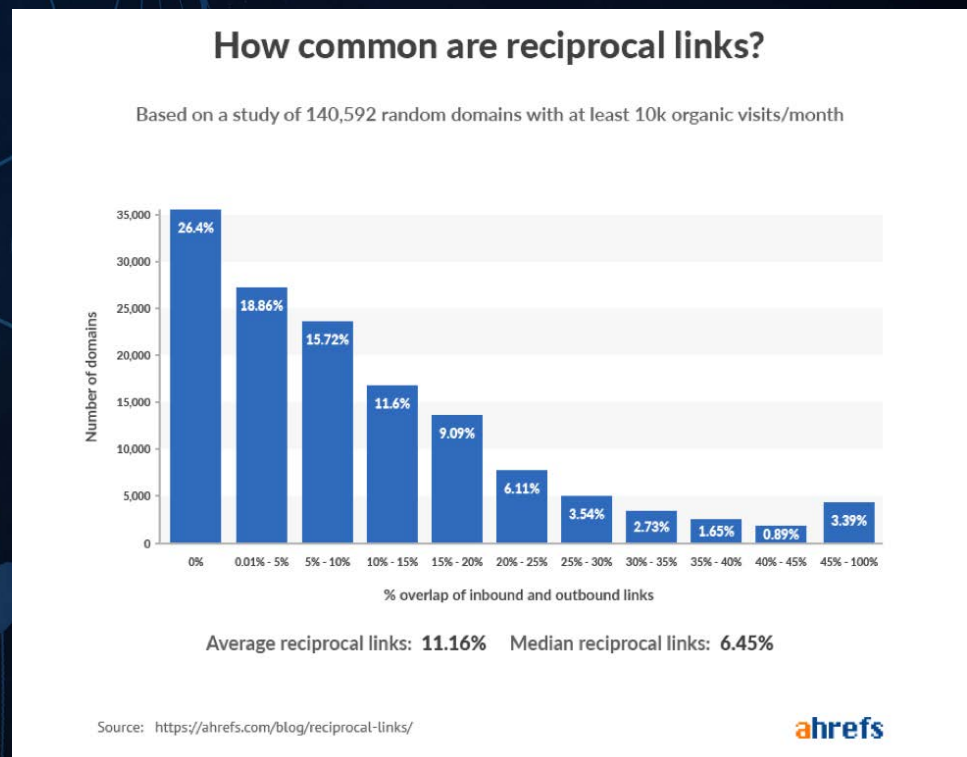
So, yes, reciprocal links are still quite common.

But the question still begs an answer: Do reciprocal links help or hurt your SEO?

What Are Reciprocal Links?

A link exchange occurs when an agreement is made between two brands to trade links to boost SEO and site authority by essentially saying, "you link to me, and I'll link to you."

In essence, a reciprocal link is a quid pro quo, or a "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" situation.

Does this sound shady?

Maybe.

Is it shady?

It could be. That all depends on how – and how often – you're using reciprocal links on your site.

In the third paragraph of this article, we linked to Ahrefs. The link sets us both up for a helpful, naturally occurring reciprocal link situation. Whether Ahrefs chooses to reciprocate by linking back to this article is entirely up to them.

Now let's take a look at the other end of the spectrum.

Here's an example of a shady link exchange offer, found on a site that exclusively hosts link exchanges:

text link exchange SEO

You own a website in text link exchange category ? Here you can easily make its SEO. With our tags system you can increase the position of your website on google for the query text link exchange and you can add others (10 max for each website). As each tag (like "text link exchange") get its own page, the SEO is more efficient : websites from common thematic in the same page + a links network which increase position on Google. Great SEO !
[NEW] You can add 3 max. deeep links to your website for a better SEO :-)

Not very appealing, is it?

Are Reciprocal Links Good for SEO?

If you want to grow your authority and rankings (and reduce the risk of penalties from search engines), the key is to focus on less risky strategies and tactics.

Above all else, your link building methods should **enhance your customer's experience** on your site.

Rather than focusing on SERP rankings and your website's link profile, focus on providing something of value to your readers and customers by producing high-quality content.

Including **some external links** on your site can be helpful to SEO, but they aren't the driving force behind your site's ranking.

HOW TO USE RECIPROCAL LINKS TO HELP YOUR SEO

Linking to quality sites that are relevant to your content enhances your reader's overall experience on your website.

Content is king, and consistently delivering original and valuable information to your readers will earn your site a spot on the throne.

When you link to high-value content, you can establish your site as a trusted source of information. In this case, if the other site reciprocates the link, consider it a bonus – the content matters first.

If you're going to request reciprocation, check the site's SEO metrics to ensure that you're exchanging links with a high-authority website.

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When reciprocal links occur naturally between authority sites, **both sites may benefit.**

Here are a few things to consider before you pursue a link exchange:

- Could the external site potentially improve your site's traffic?

- Does the site produce content and share information related to your niche?

- Is the brand or business a direct competitor? (The answer to this one should be no!)

One example of reciprocal linking that is almost always OK is the use of **online directories.**

Ensure that the directory is related to your industry or niche and include a link back to it on your own site.

Here's an example of a link exchange between **Feedspot,** a popular directory for blogs, which are categorized by niche, and travel blogger **Euro Travel Coach.**
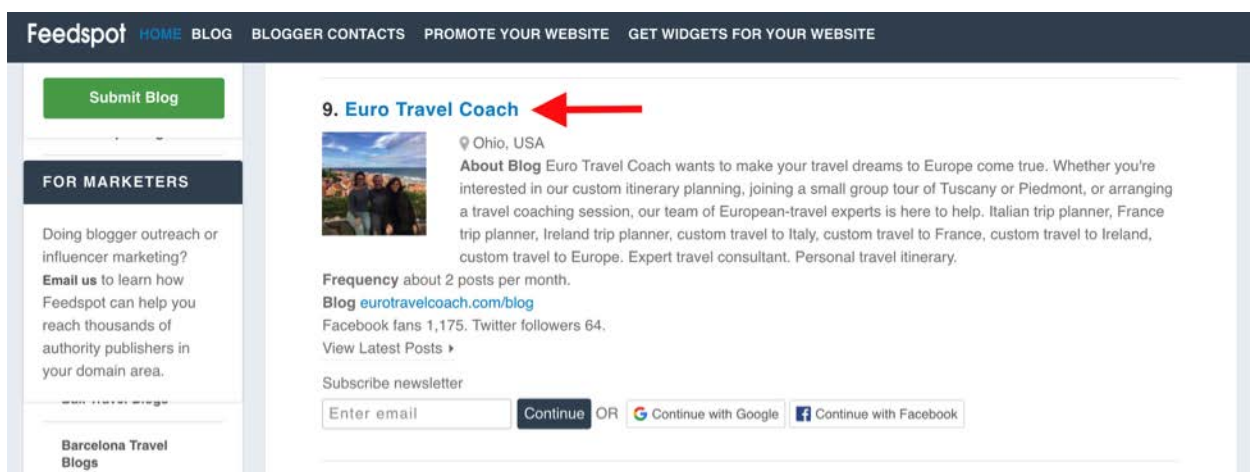
Feedspot links to Euro Travel Coach

Euro Travel Coach links to Feedspot

4 Ways Links Can Hurt Your SEO

There are some benefits to naturally occurring reciprocal links, but when you don't use common sense, exchanging links can harm your site's authority and rankings. Here are four ways that links might actually hurt your SEO:

1. SITE PENALIZATION (MANUAL ACTION)

Simply put, reciprocal links are against **Google's Webmaster Guidelines.**

If your site is abusing backlinks – if you're trying to manipulate search results by exchanging links – your website runs a high risk of being penalized by Google.

2. DECREASE IN SITE AUTHORITY & RANKINGS

If you're linking to external sites that aren't relevant to your content, your page might experience a drop in site authority or SERP rankings.

Before linking, ensure that the content is relevant, and check the site's Alexa ranking.

In some cases, it's OK to link back to low-authority sites, but excessively linking to these sites will not improve your own website's authority.

3. BOOSTING SEO FOR DIRECT COMPETITION

When linking to sites with the same target keywords and phrases as your website, your chances of having that link reciprocated are low.

As a result, you're only boosting your competition's SEO, not your own.

Link exchanges or reciprocated links should be between sites with similar content and themes, and not between directly competing sites.

4. LOSS OF TRUST

You never want to lose the trust of search engines. But reciprocal links can cause this to happen in two ways:

- Your site has a ridiculously high number of 1-to-1 links

- Your link's anchor text is consistently suspicious, or unrelated to your content.

Developing Relationships Is Key

Building relationships in your industry is a crucial part of any effective link building strategy.

Linking to relevant, trusted resources is an excellent way to build trust and authority and develop relationships with brands in your niche.

By linking to authority sites, your site has higher chances of being seen by those site owners, which could lead to links from them in the future.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Start at month 6

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

12 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

1-2, but this depends on the frequency of engagement

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Alexa Site Info

B E N E F I T S   O F   R E C I P R O C A L   L I N K S :

- Enhances reader's experience on your site

- Establishes your site as a trusted authority

- Increased site traffic

- Relationship-building

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Relationship Building: How to Earn Trust & High-Quality Links
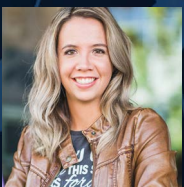
AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

Building trust with your audience is an essential component of any content marketing strategy.

When you build trust, you build authority simultaneously. And, when you check off those two elements, you forge connections that lead to long-term, mutually beneficial relationships.

"Mutually beneficial" includes peers, followers, customers, and fans linking to your content. If you provide real value, they will repay you in turn – it's that simple.

The question is, how do you start building trust and connections in the first place? What should you do off the bat?

Read on.

1. Refocus on Creating Link-Worthy Content

If you want to build links to your site, first concentrate on creating pieces that are **link-worthy.** This is content people turn to as a known resource for their questions and problems.

It sounds simple, but it's harder to pull off in practice.

That's because few people understand what you need to create **high-quality, backlink-worthy content.**

Consider these questions and you'll get what I mean:

- What are you going to write about? Have you vetted the topic with research into your audience's interests, questions, and problems?

- Will you target keywords in the content? Which ones? Have you done **keyword research?**

- What **goals** do you want the content to accomplish for your brand?

- Who's going to write it? Who's going to edit it? Will you include branded images or infographics?

- Most high-quality content needs research and references to relevant stats. Who's going to pull those?

- When will you publish?

- How will you promote the post?

Now take these questions and multiply them by the number of posts you want to publish monthly.

That's a ton of work, planning, scheduling, and strategizing.

However! The sooner you get comfortable with the fact that link-worthy content takes hard work, the sooner you can lay down workflows, processes, and practices to make it easier.

Strive to become a known resource that people know, like, trust, and link to. This takes time and commitment.

@JuliaEMcCoy
#SEJThinktank
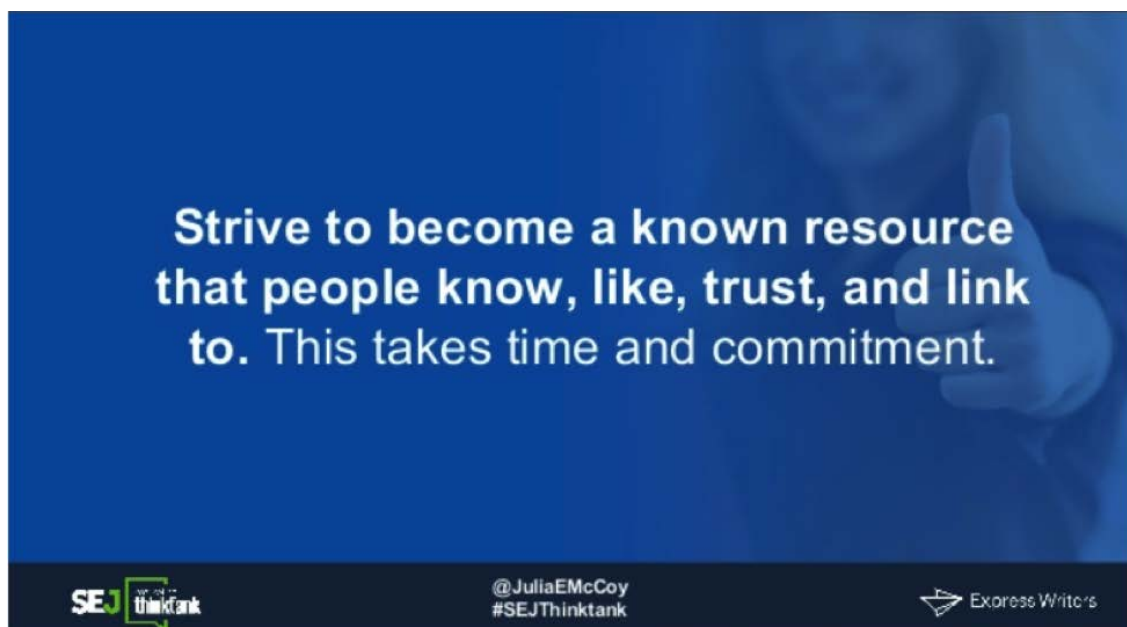
Remember, high-quality content covers all of these areas:

- Audience-relevant

- Well-written and well-researched, with references to trusted sources

- Organized with clear, informative **headers**

- Showcases originality of thought

- Entertains, educates, informs, or delights the audience

For an example of link-worthy content, look at Oli Gardner of Unbounce. He has written masses of great content to grow their brand.

The best example is a mega-infographic, **The Noob Guide to Online Marketing,** which clocks in at over 13,000 words and 15 million pixels. This single, massive piece has earned **thousands of links** and over **150,000 downloads** to date.
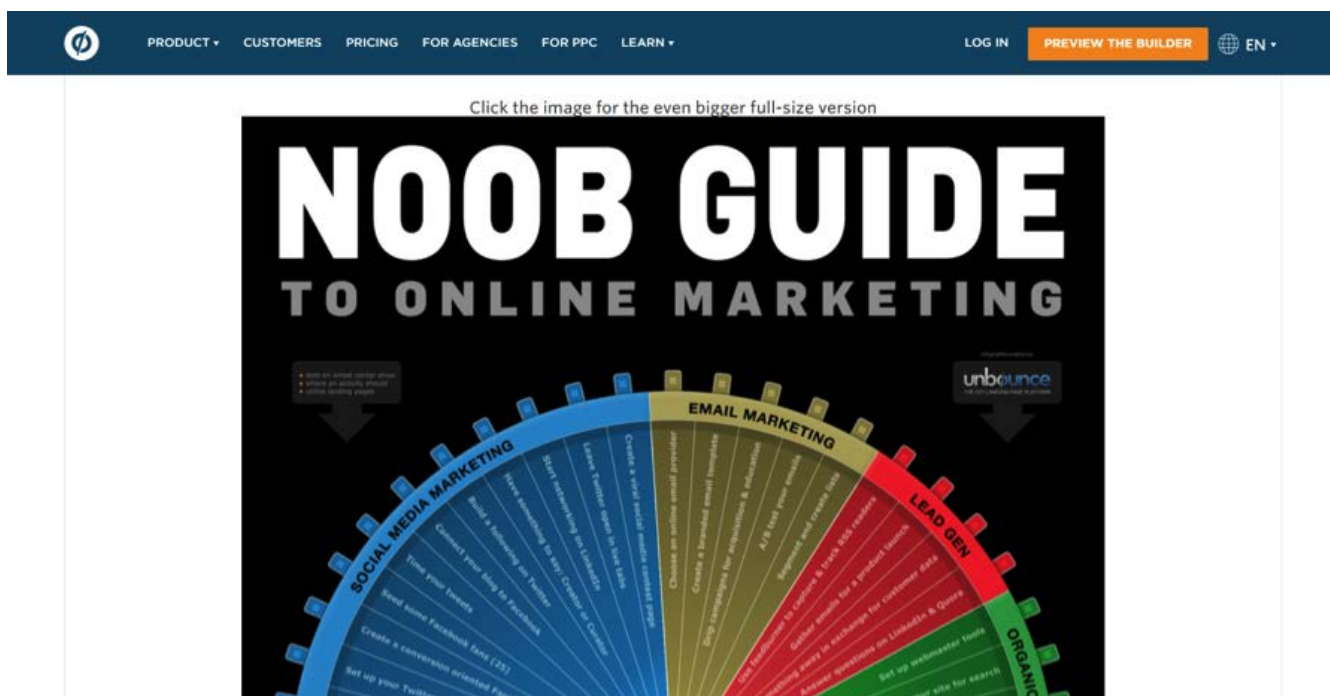
The sheer mountains of work that go into content pieces like this pay off in spades.

2. Respond, Engage, Interact

Posting incredible content isn't enough to earn readers' trust.

If you're a silent presence that emerges to post blogs, only to retreat into your Fortress of Solitude, you'll never get anywhere.

Instead, you need to be responsive, present, and engaged online.

- When readers post comments and questions, reply. Be conversational.

- Maintain active social media profiles. (You don't have to be on every platform – just one or two that make sense for you/your brand.)

- Post comments to others' content and blogs. Engage in authentic discussions!

- Share/like/retweet posts, and @ people in your network when relevant.

3. Show You're a Real Person

This point ties into point #2. Showing you're a real, living-and-breathing human being is essential to **trust-building** and relationship-forging.

People want to know there's a heartbeat behind the brands they turn to – not a cluster of greedy, boardroom robots trying to wring every last cent out of their pockets.

Engaging with people online can help you do this, but there are some other ways to showcase your humanness, too:

- On your website, include an **about page** and a picture of you. People love putting a face to a name.

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■ In that vein, include a clear picture of yourself on all personal social media profile pages associated with your name. That means a portrait/headshot that's close enough to show your face. (If you're using a picture where you're a minuscule ant against a landscape background, zoom in!)

■ Again, maintain your social presence and post regularly. Ghost accounts are a red flag for most people.

Have you noticed a theme, here? Showing you're human is about staying open, honest, and transparent. If you want to build relationships, online or off, you have to share bits of yourself and remain present.

Rand Fishkin talked about this back in 2011, but what he said then is still relevant today:

"SEO at its core is about great content combined with earning great references. Sharing openly, honestly and adding value with that content is far more likely to produce returns in the form of links, reputation, references and customers than staying closed and secretive."

BONUS TIP: Remember to build relationships offline, too! The more people who know and like you only increases the chances that you'll earn links naturally. Go to relevant conferences, events, meetups, or anywhere you can start building relationships.

4. Make Sure Markers of Trust Are All Over Your Website

Think about what you look for when you want to find a trusted source online. Those markers are exactly what should be gracing your site if you want that trust for your own brand.

Most of us notice these factors unconsciously during our internet browsing sprees, but they are key to supporting a trustworthy presence online (in addition to great content and an active social presence).

According to Jakob Nielsen, websites **communicate trustworthiness** in four main areas:
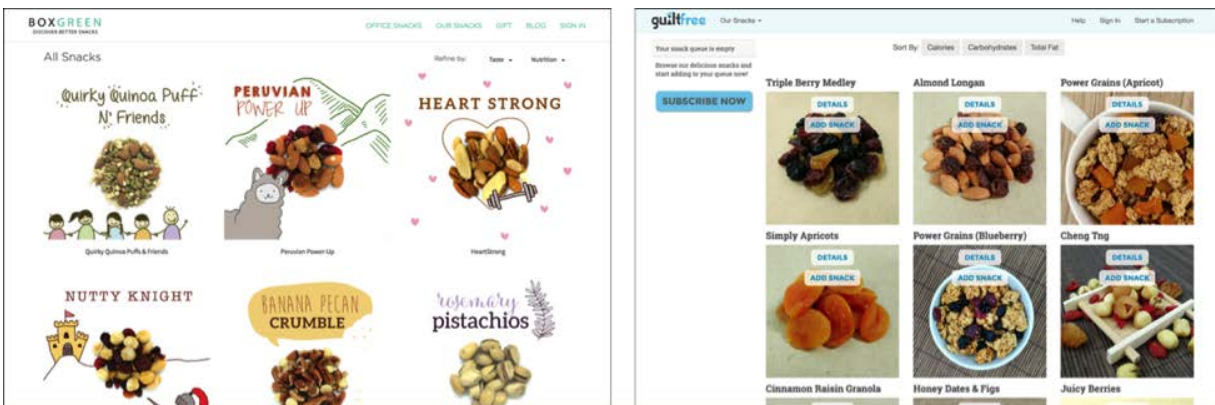
Trustworthiness in Web Design

NN/g   *4 Credibility Factors*

■ **Design quality –** Professional appearance, clear navigation

■ **Up-front disclosure –** Being honest and transparent about anything that affects the customer relationship

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- **Comprehensive, correct, and current content –** Webpages, blog posts, and product pages all fall under this category

- **Connection to the rest of the web –** Links go out to, and come in from, other websites

For a drilled-down look at the trust elements that can make or break your site, look at this chart from Fishkin's article mentioned earlier:

Trustworthy	Untrustworthy
Clean, modern, beautiful design	Dated, unprofessional, disjointed design
Proper grammar, spelling and sentence structure	Poorly written prose, rife with errors
Deep detail provided about the background and associations of the publisher and author	Little to no information about the author(s) or publisher
High-quality photography of the author(s)	Often no photo available
Citations (often in the form of links) to other trustworthy sources	Content lacks references to trustworthy sources but may link out w/ affiliate codes
Presence of high-quality graphics, screenshots or other visuals	Graphics, where present, feature clipart or stock photography
Signals of social adoption and sharing (tweets, +1s, likes, etc)	Typically, few signs of social sharing exist
External validation from reviewed platforms (iPhone/Android app, browser plugins, etc)	Little or no signals of external validation from well-known platforms
Short, pronounceable, memorable domain and brand name	Domains are keyword-based, use hyphenated, non-.com extensions and/or poor brand names
Well reasoned, logical, intelligent content	Poorly-argued, hard to follow content
Professional logo	Amateurish, low quality logo
Interaction and engagement on the site (comments, visits)	0 comments or signs of other interactions/engagement
Frequently and recently updated content on the site	Content often lacks indication of when it was produced and site is rarely updated
Clear indications from the author when / where bias or conflict of interest may exist	Disclosure of any biases is non-existent

5. Link to Other Trusted Sources in Your Content

The final puzzle piece for earning trust?

High-quality links.

It's the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

That means if you want to build a stellar link profile, link out to other trusted sources in your content.

Aurora Harley, writing for the Nielsen Norman Group blog, has some great insights about why your content and online presence need to be **linked to the greater web** (both linking out and in):

An unconnected, lone website is suspect, in other words. It vouches for no one and no one vouches for it.

"An isolated website that does not link to and cannot be found on third-party review sites, social media, or news outlets appears to either have something to hide or not be a fully established, stable company."

Since the internet is all about interconnectivity, it's no wonder people and Google give sites with no link profile the side-eye.

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In particular, linking out to high-quality sources does two things for you:

■ It associates you with those sites. If the person who clicks the links in your posts finds those links lead to great information, it speaks well for the value you're providing.

■ It builds your authority. Anyone who reads your posts will be able to see that you know industry sources and have done your research (read: you're an expert).

The best part about linking out is that it's easy to do. If nothing else, integrate it with creating link-worthy content.

Trust Online is Earned, Not Grabbed

Perhaps the most important takeaway for successful trust-earning, relationship-building, and link-winning is you can't rush any of it.

No relationship is built overnight, and you can't win trust through one interaction. Instead, a user or customer needs to see that you're true to your word over and over. It's something that can only happen with time.

When you treat link-building as a long-term game tied to building true connections with your audience, you'll have a better chance of going further.

Don't grab for people's trust – earn it, and the links will follow.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Ongoing, on a daily/weekly basis

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

3-month minimum time frame

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

30-40, depending on the effort put in

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- Skilled content creators (copywriters)
- Your social media profiles (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- Ahrefs for link-tracking

B E N E F I T S :

- High-quality sites finding your content and linking to your site acts as a trust factor and a 'vote' for your credibility, which ties into higher Google rankings. Ongoing link-building will build DA (domain authority), which builds overall website value.

- Link-building through relationship-building is a long-term, evergreen, "worth-it" process to earn solid, lasting growth and higher rankings for your website. Earning trust and links through relationships is a much more lasting process than overnight, quick link-building tricks.

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How to Get Backlinks with Resource & Links Pages

AUTHOR **Chuck Price**

Link building gets a bad rap. So much so, that many have tried to re-brand link building as **"link earning."**
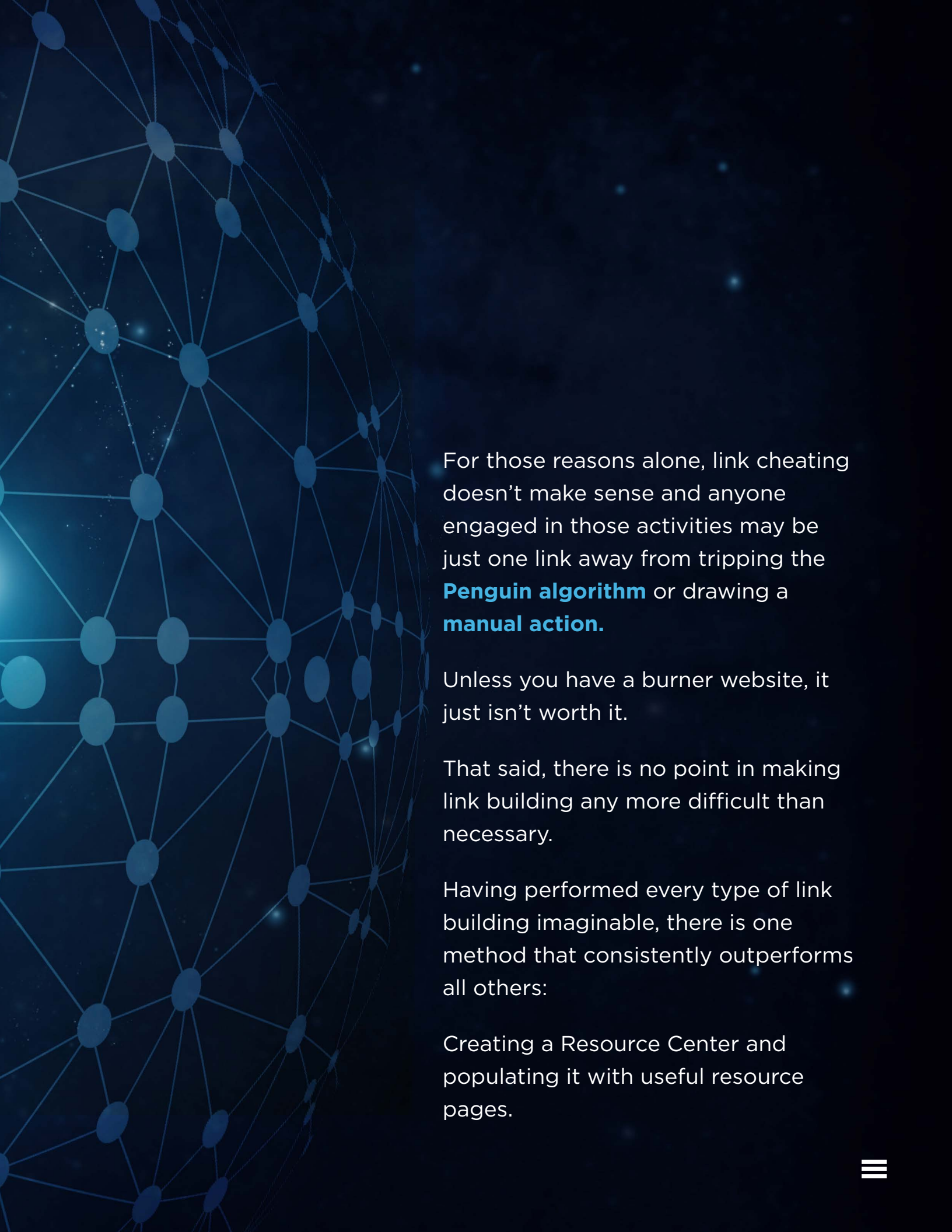
However, as long as links remain one of the **most important ranking factors,** anyone practicing SEO has a duty to engage in link building. Specifically: link building that conforms to Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

Because link building is hard and links are needed to reach the top of the SERPs, there is a huge black market. Much of it is blatant, including **spam emails** offering guest posts on seemingly trusted authority sites.

You also have websites filled with menus of link packages available to anyone with a PayPal account. Private Blog Networks (PBNs) are the darling of the black hat forums and Facebook groups.

Here's the thing. Google employees get those emails, too. Members of the Google spam team are also members of black hat forums and Facebook groups. Google quality raters stumble upon sites selling links regularly.

For those reasons alone, link cheating doesn't make sense and anyone engaged in those activities may be just one link away from tripping the **Penguin algorithm** or drawing a **manual action.**

Unless you have a burner website, it just isn't worth it.

That said, there is no point in making link building any more difficult than necessary.

Having performed every type of link building imaginable, there is one method that consistently outperforms all others:

Creating a Resource Center and populating it with useful resource pages.

What Are Resource Centers & Resource Pages?

For clarification purposes:

■ A **Resource Center** is essentially a landing page / category page consisting of links pointing to resource pages. Instead of having just a plain links page, it's best to incorporate:

- Images.

- Varied text formatting (bullets, numbered lists, and short paragraphs).

- Subheadings to break up the page for easy reading and scanning.

■ A **Resource Page** is a part of a group of useful and informative articles or guides that are topically related to a website.

Types of Resource Pages

■ **Tried and True –** These pages are the proven winners that reside on competitor websites.

■ **Fresh and Bold –** This content is designed to put you on the leading edge of what is happening in your niche.

The best resource centers incorporate elements of both.

This ensures that your site is unique and adds value beyond what is available elsewhere. It also increases your chances of being found for unique search queries.

Getting Started

It's best to get started with tried and true content. Content that has demonstrated the ability to attract links.

Your mission is to identify **link-worthy content,** then improve on it. This works particularly well for non-sexy, B2B websites; traditionally one of the **hardest to attract links to.**

The company across the hall from my office trains individuals to become commercial drivers of school buses and trucks. They aren't one of my paying clients, but they'll be receiving some free consulting today, as they represent the epitome of a non-sexy (albeit B2C) business.

The CDL school could really benefit from having a good resource center on their website. The starting point would be a search for CDL and seeing what Google suggests.
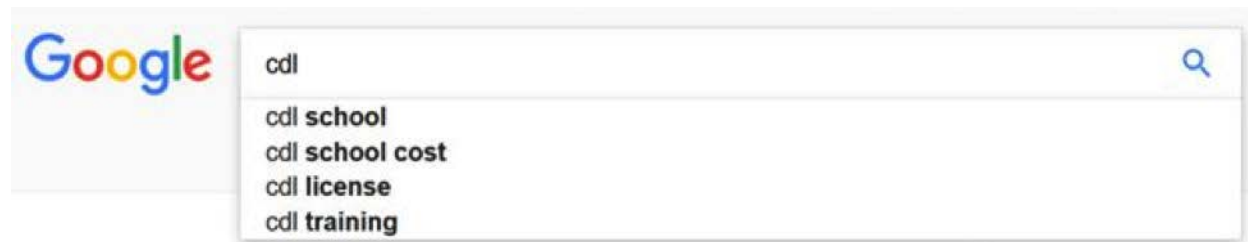
Next, move onto related searches like:

Then, continue with even more searches that are related to "Commercial Driver's License", "Truck Driver School", "Trucking", etc. One could also use a **keyword research tool** for help in developing topic ideas.

After finding popular topics, it's time to find linkable content matching those topics.

My tool of choice for content discovery is Ahrefs Content Explorer. (There are a number of tools on the market with similar functionality.)

Upon entering the search phrase "cdl licensing," the first result shows links from 502 referring domains.

That's a lot of linking domains and this topic looks like it has strong potential for attracting links. Creating a page like this is worth consideration for The CDL School Resource center.

The next step is to repeat this process phrase by phrase until one has a robust resource center filled with link magnets for content.

Beyond the Tried & True

In addition to the tried and true, it's a good idea to have fresh and bold content.

A good place to mine fresh content is **Google Trends.** A search for "Commercial Driver's License" turns up the following related topics and queries.
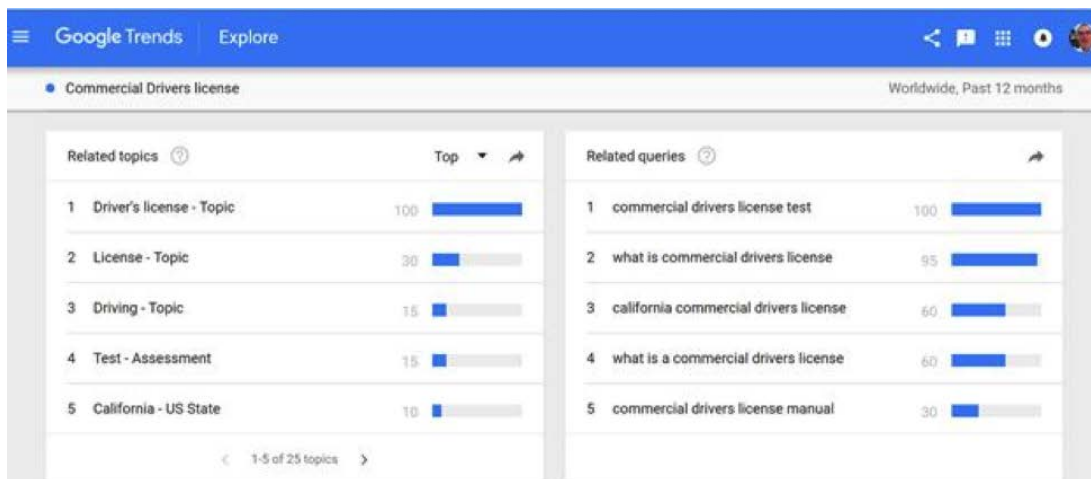
If I see a strong trend, I don't worry about a content's ability to attract links. The potential for attracting links may or may not grow with interest in the topic.

Either way, the content still adds value to the resource center by providing information the public has demonstrated an interest in.

Building Links

A natural starting point is to mine the links pointing to the original tried and true content. There are several **free and paid tools** capable of doing this.

Every link tool runs their own bots, and provide different link info, so its best to get link data from multiple sources.
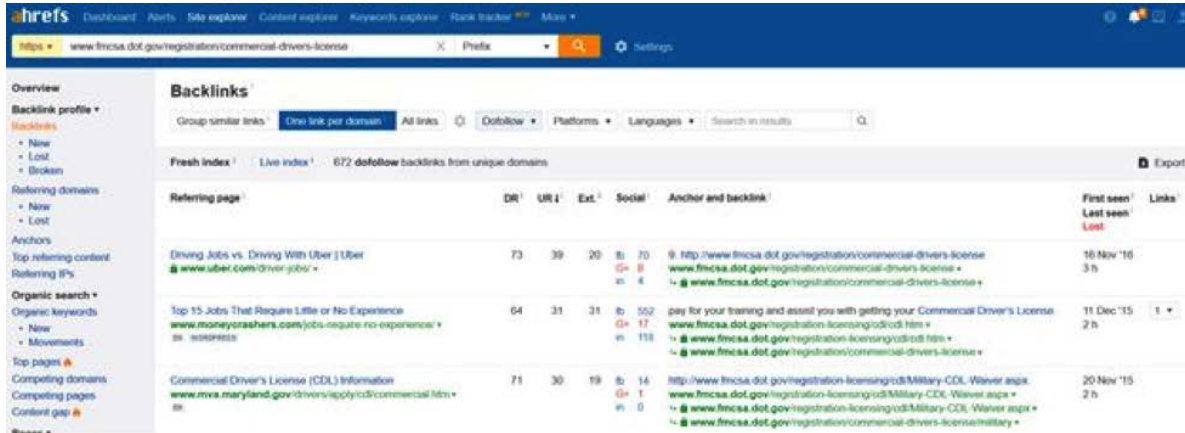
The next best source for links?

Resource pages!

Good resource pages tend to link out to other good resource pages. Use **Advanced Search Operators** to help find resource pages on related sites. Two of my favorites are:

- *"keyword" site:.org intitle:"links" -inurl:pdf -inurl:ppt -inurl:doc*
- *"keyword" site:.org intitle:"resources" -inurl:pdf -inurl:ppt -inurl:doc*
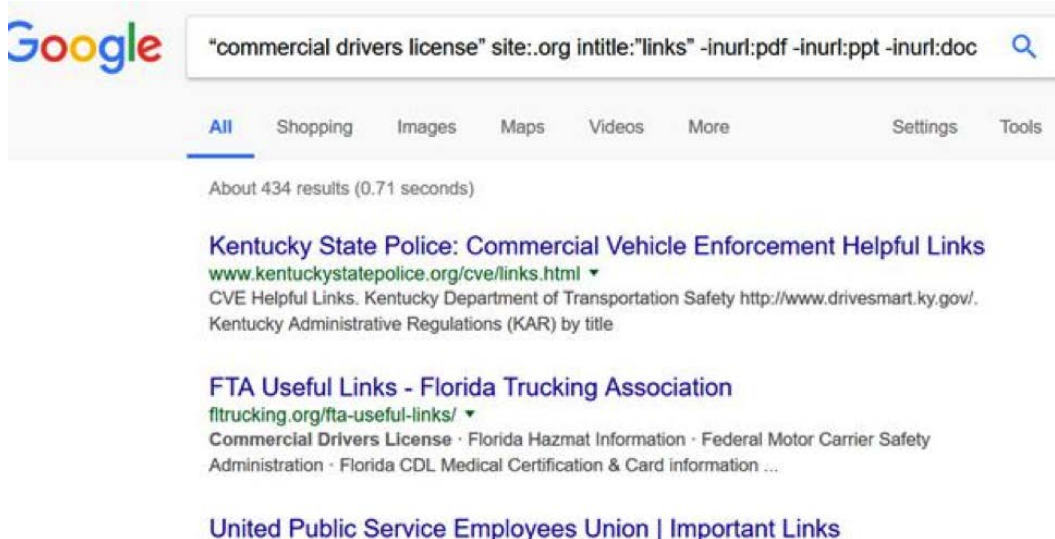
Can one get a link from the Kentucky state police? Maybe. It depends on the quality of the resource as well as the trustworthiness of the website on the whole.
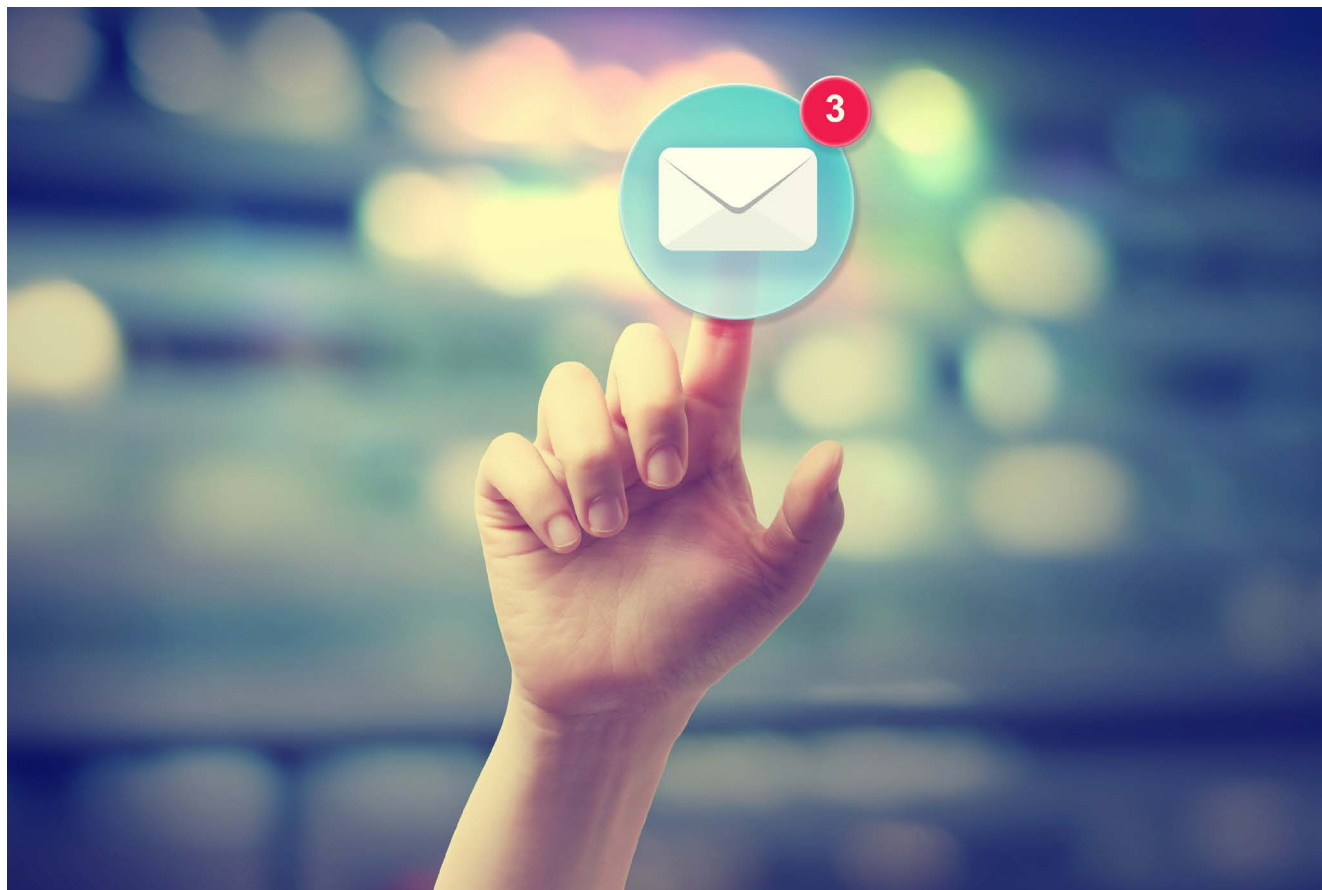
Email Outreach

Rule number one: Never send out a templated link request. The conversion rate for link requests is notoriously low to begin with.

If you want to succeed, there needs to be some level of **personalization in every request.**

How to prove you're a human rather than a bot:

■   Read the webpage: Is there a realistic chance of getting a link? If not, don't bother.

■   Use a credible email account: Not Gmail. This helps to separate you from the spammers.

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■ Pay attention to your Subject line: Some webmasters require a specific subject be used for link requests.

■ Find the right person's name: Whenever possible, begin your email by addressing the site owner by name

Be clear about what you're asking for.

■ Explain why you emailed.

■ State the URL that you are asking to get a link from.

■ Provide a good reason to link to you.

■ Check resource pages for **broken links.** If you have a suitable replacement page, that's a good reason to link.

■ Include the URL that you would like the webmaster to provide a link to.

Show the email recipient that you have invested some time in learning about their site. This could provide added incentive for them to link to your site.

The Takeaway

Resource centers provide a perfect foundation for any content marketing campaign. In addition to providing a great user experience, they have the added benefit of feeding Googlebot.

Useful resources attract powerful links. The combination of quality content and high-value links drives organic rankings and ultimately traffic.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Ongoing starting Month 1 or 2

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
3-12 months

A V E R A G E   E M A I L   O U T R E A C H E S   P E R   L I N K   B U I L D E R :

- 50-60 outreaches a day to new prospects
- 5-6 follow-ups to "close" on links

T O O L S   N E E D E D :

- BuzzStream
- Ahrefs
- Google Search

B E N E F I T S :

- You will be earning "real" links – as opposed to buying paid or sponsored links.

- You have the opportunity to score links from websites that are thematically or topically related to your own; getting highly relevant links.

- Because the websites linking to you are related, they have the opportunity to send good direct traffic.

- They might even help you out in the SERPs. ;)

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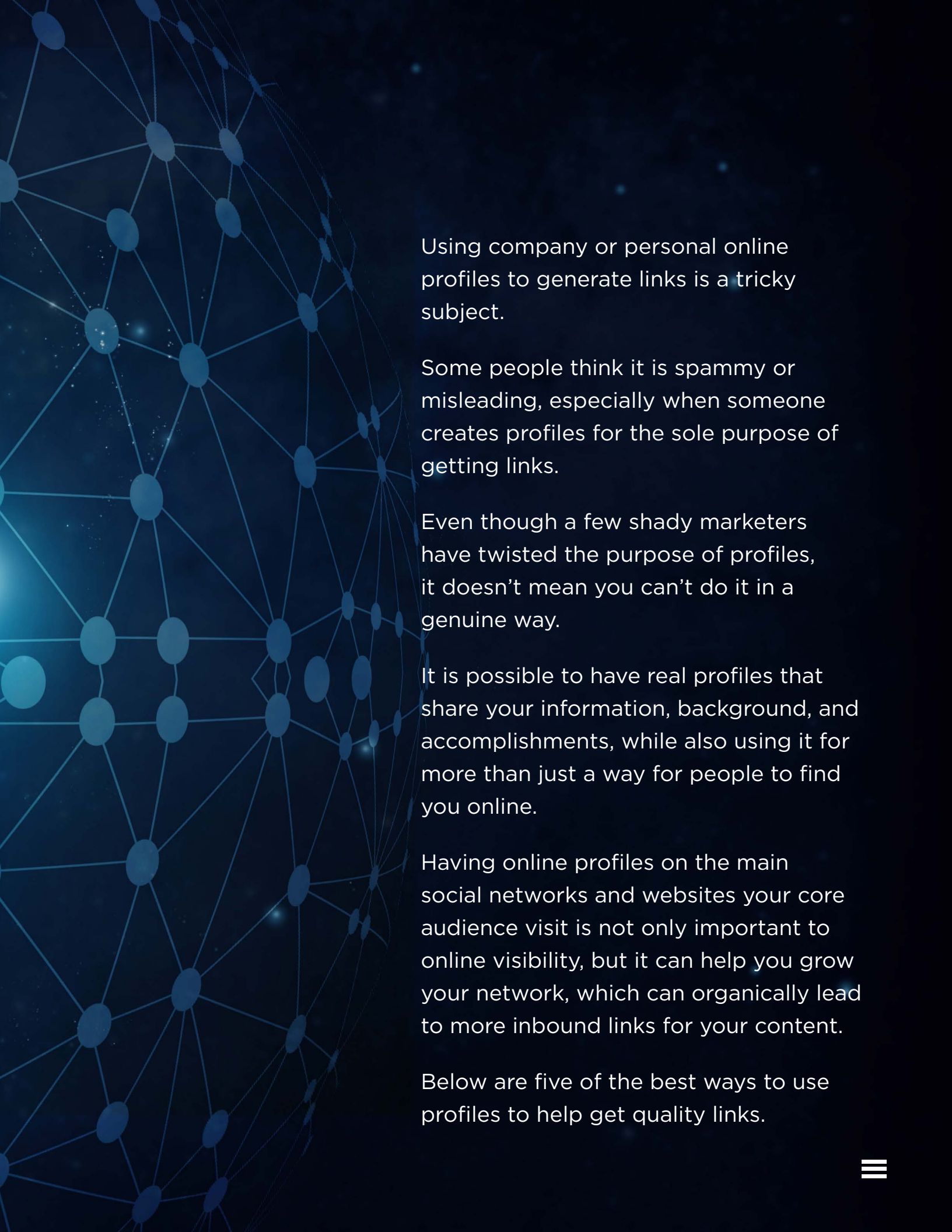
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5 Ways to Use Social Profiles to Get Quality Links

AUTHOR **Kevin Rowe**

Using company or personal online profiles to generate links is a tricky subject.

Some people think it is spammy or misleading, especially when someone creates profiles for the sole purpose of getting links.

Even though a few shady marketers have twisted the purpose of profiles, it doesn't mean you can't do it in a genuine way.

It is possible to have real profiles that share your information, background, and accomplishments, while also using it for more than just a way for people to find you online.

Having online profiles on the main social networks and websites your core audience visit is not only important to online visibility, but it can help you grow your network, which can organically lead to more inbound links for your content.

Below are five of the best ways to use profiles to help get quality links.

1. Outreach with an Executive's Profile for Better Response Rates

Connections made with a real person get higher engagement and provide better trust than the same activities done with a company profile.

Many online users have learned to ignore messages and requests from brands on social networking sites, simply because there are just too many companies on there trying to get users to buy their products or share their content.

Personal connections continue to matter. It is possible to use network building as a way to share content on an individualized basis, but it does take some work to grow the relationship first.

Some digital marketing teams log into an executive's personal profiles to add friends or connections, or to follow-up with existing contacts to help build relationships.

This helps executives get to know others in the industry, which can lead to a reciprocal relationship of sharing and promoting each other's content.

However, while this seems like a good way to offload some of the social networking, it can have a lot of potential drawbacks.

If the executive doesn't know what was said and then happens to talk to the connection in person or on the phone (or even in email), it can make them seem disingenuous and untrustworthy.

If a team is helping an executive with their social media, make sure they are still involved in the process.

2. Forum Profiles Can Be Used to Build Relationships with Highly Technical People

Most people are on the basic social networks, like LinkedIn and Facebook.

But there are many more niche networks and forums that are commonly used daily by those that are deeply involved in a certain industry.

Try to find these online communities and get more involved.

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You'll find that there is often more depth to the questions and discussions, leading to a lot of good opportunities to build trust and get others interested in your content (provided it's useful to the discussion at hand).

Some sites to check include:

- **Reddit,** which has thousands of "subreddits" or threaded discussion boards based on a specific topic.

- Github, which is a portfolio hosting and online community for programmers and developers.

Because these are highly technical forums, it doesn't make sense to go in and start spamming discussions with your links.

Try to integrate with the community by answering questions, getting involved, completing your profile, and staying active before even attempting to share your own content.

When you share your content, make sure it's actually useful to other users. Otherwise, you may find yourself being ostracized for trying to commercialize the discussion.

3. Use LinkedIn to Share Your Content with the Right People

When possible, ask your executives to get involved with your online activity or set up a sharing schedule (with their permission) to regularly share content on their personal social media profiles.

LinkedIn is the perfect platform for this, as executives can have their own profiles and can share content as needed.
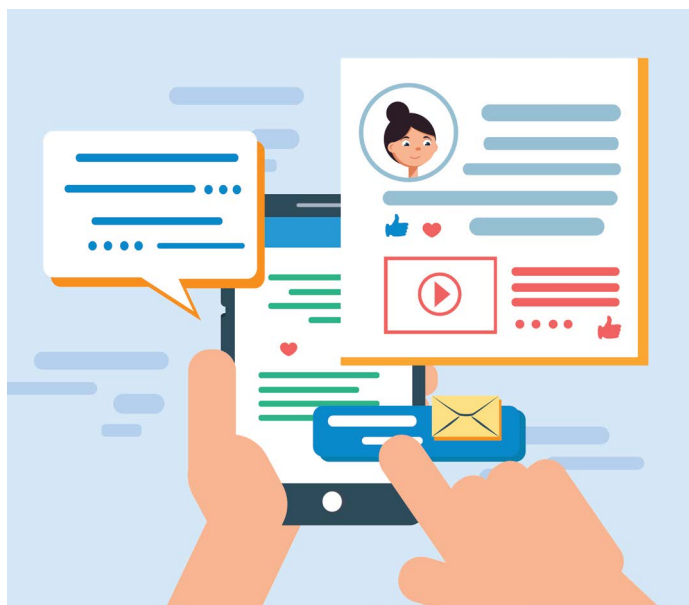
Because executives have more personal credibility, their link suggestions are much more like to be taken seriously by users than a company profile simply sharing links to their blog.

The executive's profile is "vouching" for the content, making it more trustworthy.

When possible, ask executives for their insight or commentary on an article that can then be shared with the link.

Users like hearing the opinions of influential or high profile people, so adding this personal touch can help increase interest.

4. Reach out to the Social Profiles of People Who Are Authorities

LinkedIn is great for building personal credibility and sharing content, but you can also use Twitter, forums, and Facebook to do outreach and get others interested in your content.

On Twitter (and Instagram), it's a common practice to follow people in your industry you hope will follow you back.

Taking the "first step" toward building a relationship can help get you noticed organically and hopefully start a relationship.

After following someone, send them a tweet mentioning something they did recently, such as podcast they were on or an article they wrote.

This can show that you admire their work.

People are much more likely to take an interest in someone that they know already appreciates what they do – because it doesn't feel like they have to win them over – it's already done!

As these influencers and authorities begin to trust you, you can ask them about sharing your links or if there is a way you can continue to help one another promote new ventures and projects.

Building genuine relationships with influencers or authorities in your field can be a fulfilling way to not only grow your online visibility, but to also learn from some of the best minds in the business.

5. Promote Your Content with Facebook Ads to Drive Traffic, Shares & Links

WordStream founder **Larry Kim** is a master at getting tons of traffic to his content, and he has shared in presentations and in blog posts how this strategy has lead to big gains. He even did a **webinar about this topic for SEJ.**

Essentially, with the right targeting and even as little as $50, you can get your content in front of the right people on Facebook.

When you have clear and concise targeting, the ad spend is lower, and the user interest is usually a lot higher.

Try to target exact interests or industries (e.g., manufacturing VPs in the U.S. instead of simply users who have an interest in "business") and make sure your content title and description shares exactly how it is useful to the people you're trying to target.

As the ad garners more visibility, you'll see a trend in natural links as well, as users who see the ad share the content with their own networks.

This helps it grow organically, making your ad budgets stretch much further.

Conclusion

Getting shares and links for your content using online profiles and personal outreach certainly isn't the fastest way to build links, but it is one of the most genuine and usually has the greatest long-term impact.

As you grow your network, you'll find that people are more likely to share content from people they know, like, and trust.

By focusing on building your online profiles by staying active, sharing interesting and relevant information, and promoting the work of others, you'll find that it often comes back to you in a big way.

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S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
10-20 forums per month

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
It will likely take more than 30 days to see the first round of links come in, but typically you will see results with link building in 3-6 months, depending on a large number of factors.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   P E R   M O N T H :
The number of links should depend on how competitive the targeted keywords are or how aggressively you want to build Domain Authority. But a base program should have 10-15 links per month, minimum.

T O O L S :
■ BuzzSumo   ■ Upfluence

■ Facebook

B E N E F I T S :
■ This type of program will generate highly contextual links from natural relationships, which is how Google seems to intend links to be built. This is a very low-risk link building program.

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How to Get Quality Links with Thought Leadership & Speaking

AUTHOR **Maddy Osman**

Over 5.6 million blog posts go live every day. That's more than 233,000 per hour.

And, despite only about **20%** of the world's population speaking English, **66%** of that content is in English.

That's a lot of competition for users' attention.

One way that you and your content can stand out in such a crowded space is by earning your place as a thought leader.
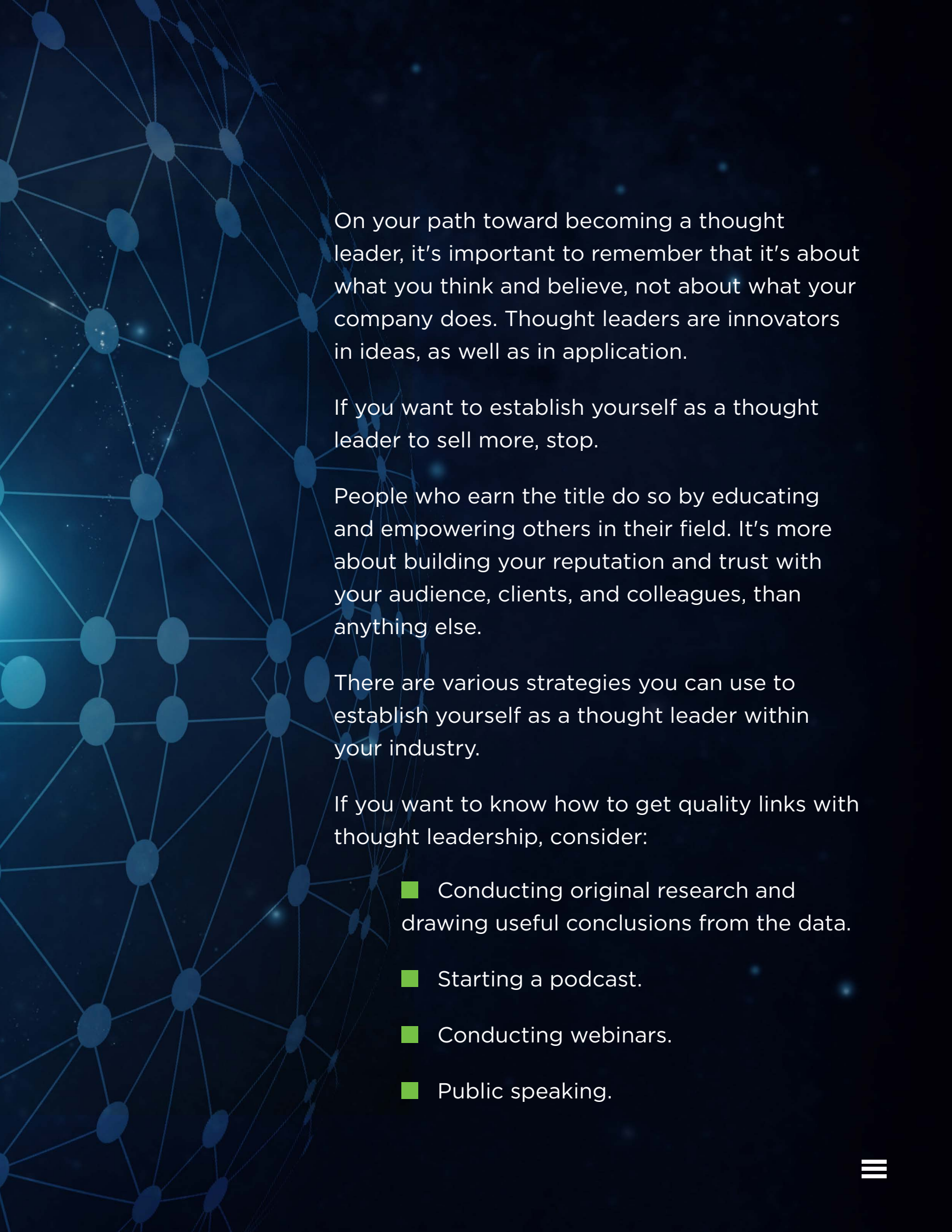
A thought leader is one of a few go-to people in their field of expertise. They are the type of person who is frequently quoted in the media and who many look to as a trusted source of information.

Not only does a thought leader inspire with their innovative ideas, they can show people – step-by-step – how they turned those ideas into reality.

But you can't merely brand yourself a thought leader and have it be so – it's an honor you need to earn.

When you do, your content will rise to the top of people's considerations, where it can be consumed, rather than lost, among the 4.4 million other blog posts pushed out on any given day.

On your path toward becoming a thought leader, it's important to remember that it's about what you think and believe, not about what your company does. Thought leaders are innovators in ideas, as well as in application.

If you want to establish yourself as a thought leader to sell more, stop.

People who earn the title do so by educating and empowering others in their field. It's more about building your reputation and trust with your audience, clients, and colleagues, than anything else.

There are various strategies you can use to establish yourself as a thought leader within your industry.

If you want to know how to get quality links with thought leadership, consider:

- Conducting original research and drawing useful conclusions from the data.

- Starting a podcast.

- Conducting webinars.

- Public speaking.

Doing the Research

The vast majority of commercial blog posts are churned out by people who aren't experts in the field they're writing about but rather experts in creating SEO-rich content. They are gleaning what they can from other blogs and bolting it all together in a package that sells.

What they are not doing is diving into any raw data to derive truly unique conclusions.

If your goal is thought leadership, you don't want to be like these people.

Instead of re-working material that is already out there, you need to **bring something new to the table** – often with the quantitative data to back it up.

One way of doing this is by teaming up with research firms to design studies. BuzzSumo and SparkToro are two companies that do this well.

Another is to dive into datasets that are already out there, developing your own conclusions from what you see.

No matter how you do it, bringing innovative ideas and new insights to those working in your field will help you become a thought leader much faster than regurgitating status quo content.

Pushing a Podcast

Starting a podcast is a great way to **attract links** while developing your reputation as a thought leader.

Podcasts that follow an interview format are perhaps best for this purpose, as they are the easiest to produce, and every time you interview a guest, there's a good chance that they'll link back to their podcast feature on your website.

Another positive aspect of starting a podcast is that it gives you space to challenge ideas with other experts and develop theories that can be built on in the future.

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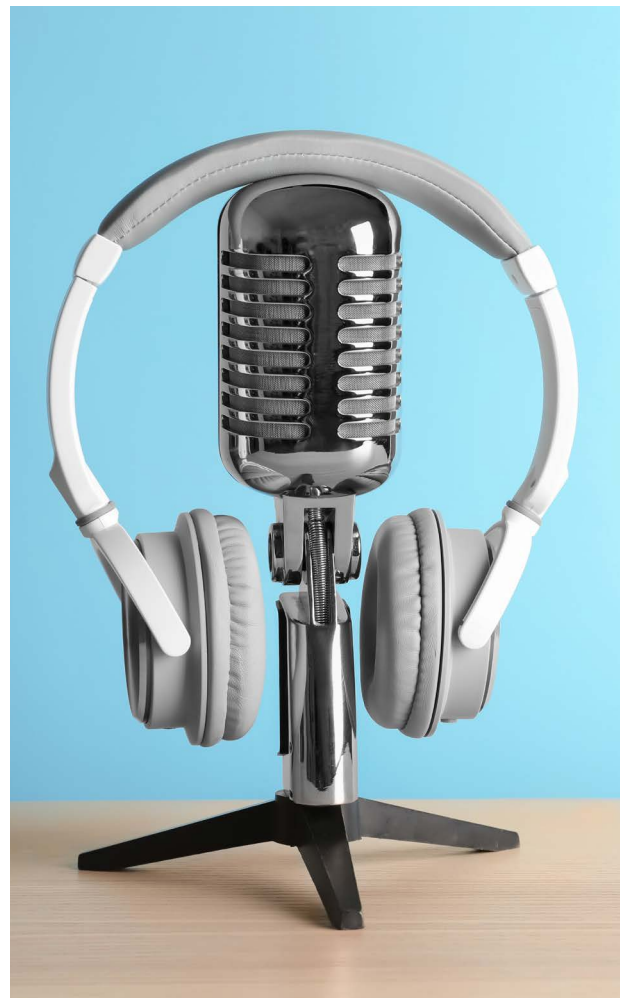
Building Links with Speaking

When you're invited to speak at an event, you're well on your way to being considered a thought leader.

However, you'll still want to build links to cement your place in the industry – not everyone is going to be there to watch your presentation.

One of the best methods for building links via speaking events is creating landing pages for every event at which you speak. The landing page should include details about the event itself, as well as slides, opt-ins, downloads, and other resources.

When you're creating resources for the event, focus on developing them so that they work as valuable, standalone content as well – you want them to be link-worthy.

From there, make a push for a link from the organizer's website.

A direct link is often included with your bio on the website. However, you can push for a more profound impact by writing relevant blog content specifically for the organizer and the event.

While planning what to say at your speaking event, you will want to use your position to act as a company spokesperson – like when **John Mueller** answers SEO questions.

Additionally, be quotable. By repeating fundamental takeaways as quotes on your slides, you'll be able to get your point across and make it easier for people to link back to your work.

To help facilitate backlink building, consider hosting your slide visuals directly on your website.

If you want to get in on the event scene but public speaking isn't your forte, you can also look at building links by opting to sponsor an event.

The easiest way to do this is to create an event listing on your company website and submit it to directories, local news, and all relevant PR people.

When reaching out to those at news outlets, it's worth testing the waters to see if they would like to do an interview about what to expect at the event – another great backlink building opportunity where you can add value for your target audience.

Getting Woke with Webinars

Webinars are a fantastic mix of a podcast and public speaking events.

To get the most traction with your webinars, you'll want to keep them between 30 and 40 minutes long.

This time includes the recommended amount allotted for a live question and answer session at the end. You absolutely want to have that, because that's what most webinar attendees want.

As part of your webinar, you'll want to include engaging slides, as well as opt-ins, downloads, and other resources. It's almost exactly the same idea you'd use for creating content based on a speaking event.

Of course, even if you don't create any additional material besides the slides for your webinars, people can link directly to a replay on your website.

Final Thoughts:
How to Get Quality Backlinks with Thought Leadership and Speaking

Building links by becoming a thought leader requires you to actually become a thought leader, which is a title you have to earn – not one you can award yourself for marketing purposes.

If your thoughts and beliefs are strong and clear, you can get there. It isn't about what you or your company does, but about why you do it.

Also, don't forget: you don't have to be the CEO or founder of a company to be a thought leader. Anyone within a business can offer insights worth sharing.

As a simple example, you don't just hear from Google's CEO; you also hear from representatives like Danny Sullivan and John Mueller. Each person is a thought leader who has influence.

You will want to approach becoming a thought leader by genuinely wanting to educate and help others in your field.

By taking this approach, all the effort and work that goes into launching podcasts, webinars, and public speaking events will make sense.

On top of the direct impact all of these methods will have, they will all also help you develop terrific content that people will want to link to as a trustworthy source.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

For this tactic to really work, you'll need to be consistently creating new content and getting it in front of relevant audiences on a weekly basis.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

As early as one month after implementation.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :

There's a direct positive relationship relevant to the amount of work you put into original research or the uniqueness of your content.

T O O L S :

You won't need any fancy tools to make this tactic work – it's all about the content.

That said, depending on the tactics you use, you'll probably want to invest in podcasting and webinar tools. Screen recording and video hosting tools may also be useful.

B E N E F I T S :

■ Link building via thought leadership and speaking happens when you create genuinely great content that's unlike what's already out there. In tandem with producing great content, you'll need to plan a complementary content distribution strategy to reach the widest relevant audience.

■ Link building via thought leadership and speaking is valuable because backlinks earned are more than arbitrary – they're proof that your content is worth reading. Regardless of how Google updates its algorithm, one thing always remains the same: we must focus on creating quality content if we want to rank in relevant search.

Take a Stand: Building Links Through Social Responsibility

AUTHOR **Tony Wright**

A number of years ago, I conducted a rather ambitious **research project** to find out how consumer preferences were affected by a brand's social stance.

While I certainly didn't conclusively answer whether a brand should take a stand, I did come to one concrete conclusion:

A brand that takes a social stand almost always sees an SEO benefit from that stand.

For most companies, taking a social stand is difficult. Taking a stand means that a portion of your audience is not going to agree with you – usually the most vocal portion.

No one likes to have people calling for boycotts to your products or services. The resources required to respond to unhappy customers who disagree with your stand can be astronomical.

There's definitely a lot of think about when taking a stand. But the old adage "Say anything you want about me, just spell my name right" is apropos to the search engine optimization results of a brand taking a stand.

Brands That Stand Get Links

When a brand takes a social stand, they get links. Period.

Both sides of a social cause will link to a brand that is taking a stand.

Those against the stand will link to the brand to make other like-minded individuals aware of a perceived atrocity.

Those who support the brand's stand will link to make like-minded individuals aware of a brand that supports their worldview. From an SEO standpoint, the brand wins.

The links garnered from a social stand are almost always **quality links.**

I would argue that one of the easiest ways to get links from major media sites is to take a significant social stand. This works especially well if the social stance you take is unique.

Taking a stand is not the same as jumping on a bandwagon.

For instance, if your company takes a stand supporting the #MeToo movement, don't expect to get a ton of links.

Even though taking that stand is morally the right thing to do, your stand is not going to mean much from an SEO standpoint.

If you take a unique stand – say, for instance, declaring that your company will not allow certain medicine to be bought using employee benefits (e.g., **Hobby Lobby)**, you'll get press. And you'll get links. Quality links.

Is Taking a Stand
Right for Your Brand?

SEO does not live in a vacuum. For years, we were siloed as "those people who mess with the website code."

To be successful, the SEO team must have a seat at the table. When deciding whether a brand should take a stand, marketing must be heard – and that includes SEO.

Time after time, brands that understand their audience are more successful when taking a stand.

The best example is **Chick-fil-A.** While the company didn't intentionally take a stand against same-sex marriage, the remarks of its founder put Chick-fil-A firmly in the crosshairs of the debate.

Despite numerous calls for boycotts of the restaurant, sales skyrocketed. And the number of links the company received was astronomical – some estimate more than 50,000 high-quality links!

Don't get me wrong, I certainly don't agree with Chick-fil-A's stance, but their core customer did. And the company was rewarded for it.

Taking a stand can also backfire.

Look at the foundation **Susan G. Komen.** The organization took a position against planned parenthood.

This angered many loyal donors. Susan G. Komen certainly benefitted from a lot of links from major news sources, but the SEO benefit wasn't enough to stem the tide of revolt. To this day, the organization is still working to win back an audience they lost over a controversial social stance.

So, how do you know whether to take a stand?

Making this decision is an area where the SEO team should shine. It's all about the data.

How well can we **know our audience**?

What is the overall opinion of our customers on the stance we are looking to take?

This is the same type of research SEO professionals do every day when putting together campaigns.

You can provide the data for the decision makers. This makes our role as SEO pros and analysts extremely important in any equation regarding corporate responsibility and social stances.

Who Cares About Your Social Stance?

A recent YouGov study found that **59%** of Americans would boycott a brand for its political stance. This number is even higher among millennials.

Our study found that geography makes a difference in how consumers react to a stance.
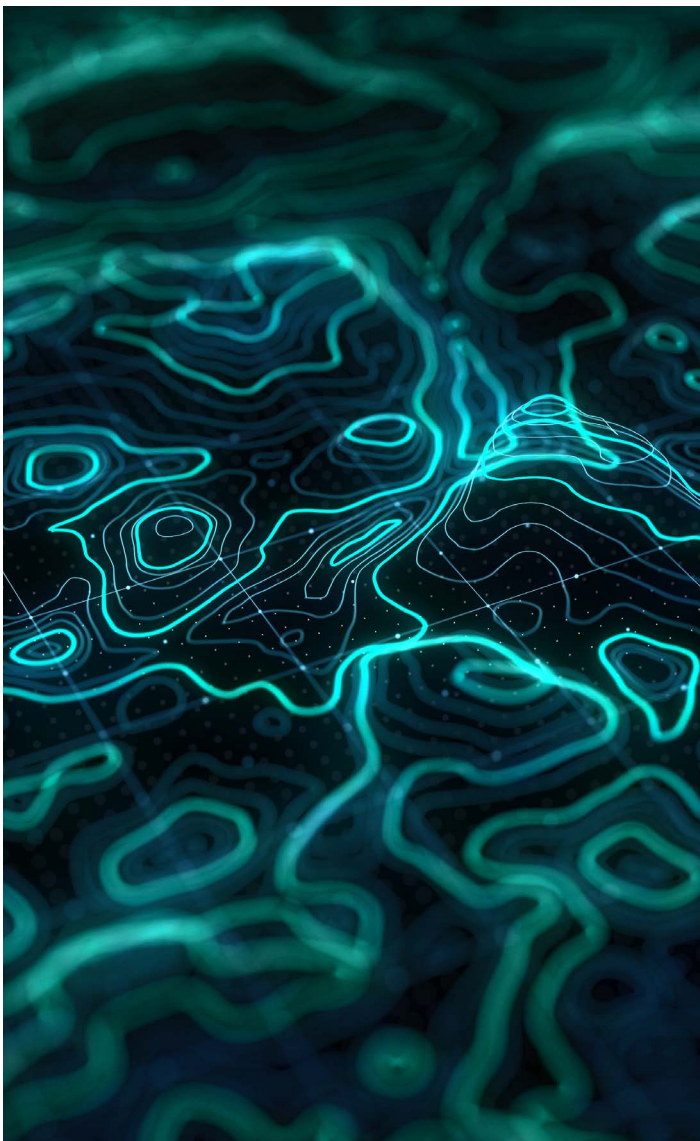
For instance:

- ◼ Those in the Northwest U.S. are statistically more likely to support or boycott a brand because of its social or political stance.

- ◼ People in the Southern U.S. are less likely to react to a brand's positions.

In addition, we found that women are more likely to care about political stances than men.

Also, the younger the consumer (above age 18, we don't have data for minors), the more likely they are to be conscious of a brand's stance.

What to Consider

It is increasingly popular for brands to take both political and social stances. But it is not a decision that should be taken lightly.

The benefits of taking a stance that resonates with your core audience are immense. Taking the wrong stance can be devastating to the bottom line.

The key is knowing your audience. This is easier for small business, as your audience is usually easily understood.

For enterprise companies, this decision can be much more difficult. That's why it's important for all companies to get the analysts and SEO pros at the table.

Digital data is the best source we have for understanding our audience. So use it.

Don't be afraid to take a stand, but do it right.

The benefits are vast, even if the risks are harrowing.

SUMMARY

TIMEFRAME:

This is an ongoing tactic

RESULTS DETECTED:

Dependent upon efforts and results

AVERAGE LINKS PER MONTH:

1-5

TOOLS:

■ Email   ■ Social Media

■ Tool to identify influencers (optional)

BENEFITS:

■ Completely white hat way to build links.

■ Provides branding value as well as can boost morale based on doing good things.
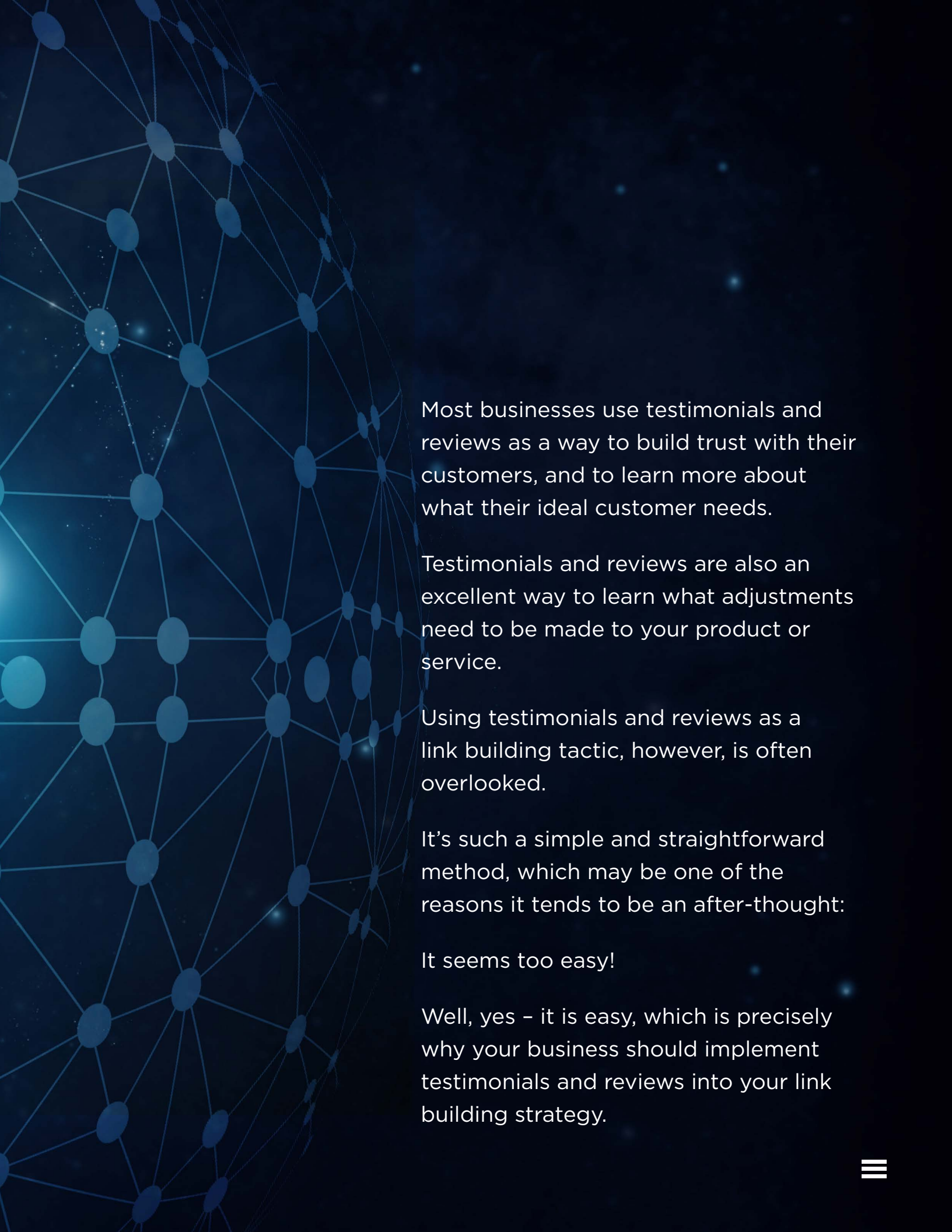
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How to Build Links Using Testimonials & Reviews

AUTHOR **Julia McCoy**

Most businesses use testimonials and reviews as a way to build trust with their customers, and to learn more about what their ideal customer needs.

Testimonials and reviews are also an excellent way to learn what adjustments need to be made to your product or service.

Using testimonials and reviews as a link building tactic, however, is often overlooked.

It's such a simple and straightforward method, which may be one of the reasons it tends to be an after-thought:

It seems too easy!

Well, yes – it is easy, which is precisely why your business should implement testimonials and reviews into your link building strategy.

Why Focus on Testimonials and Reviews as a Link-Building Tactic?

1. ESTABLISH TRUST & CREDIBILITY

Not only are reviews helpful to a customer during the decision-making process, but testimonials and reviews are also an excellent way to establish trust and credibility for your business.

A study by Bright Local revealed that **68%** of consumers are more likely to buy from local companies with positive reviews, and "91% of 18-34-year-old consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations."

Do you trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations?

Local Consumer Review Survey 2018 — 18-34, 35-54, 55+

BrightLocal

2. IMPROVE SEO & RANKINGS

With each new testimonial or review you receive, search engines will recognize that your website has been updated with fresh and relevant content.

When your website is updated, it provides a new crawling opportunity, meaning that your page may rank higher, depending on the quality of the new review.

Testimonials and reviews can also improve your chances of ranking for long-tail keywords.

By analyzing your customers' comments, you can discover new phrases to use as keywords for on-site optimization.

With each testimonial or review you submit, search engines will see your business name and website near relevant keywords and phrases, which can help to improve site authority.

3. EARN BACKLINKS & UNLINKED MENTIONS

Testimonials and reviews provide benefits to three parties:

- The consumer.

- The reviewed business.

- The reviewer.

Yes, the reviewer, too – leaving reviews is a link building opportunity!

Writing quality reviews increases your website's exposure and visibility through backlinks or unlinked mentions.

Here's an example of backlinks earned by reviewers of Ahrefs:

4 Steps to Link Building with Testimonials & Reviews

1. MAKE A LIST OF RELEVANT SITES

Make a list of products or services you use daily, especially in your business.

Consider their relevancy to your company.

If you're a content agency, a backlink on your review of an editing tool will be more useful than a backlink on your review of a new pair of shoes.

If your review will be published on a company's website, another thing to consider is their **domain authority** or Alexa ranking.

2. CHECK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

Not every company provides a space for submitting reviews directly on their website.

If there isn't an on-site location for submitting a review, check the company's contact information to locate an email address.

Review sites like Yelp and Foursquare also provide opportunities to review and rate companies, although they're not as personal.

If you use a review site, be sure to include your business name and website in your profile. You also have the option to share a review on your own site, in the form of a blog post.

3. WRITE OR CREATE A UNIQUE REVIEW

Create an authentic review with a good deal of personalization. Offer **trust and authority,** and use a few relevant keywords in your text.

Having keywords and phrases near your business name in your review can increase your company's relevance to those keywords during search engine crawls and boost your exposure online for your brand name.

Here's a unique way to create a review that wasn't just text, but ended up being a cool little video example of how we use a certain software app every day.

For example, if you Google my agency "Express Writers," around the bottom of page 1 you'll find that we submitted our "bot" to **Drift as a testimonial** of how much we love their live chat software and use it on a daily basis. (I built a bot with a playbook called the 'Write Bot,' pen name 'Pen Pal,' that earned this feature from them.)

This not only won us an indexed keyword high up in Google for our brand name, but we even have a link on their site!
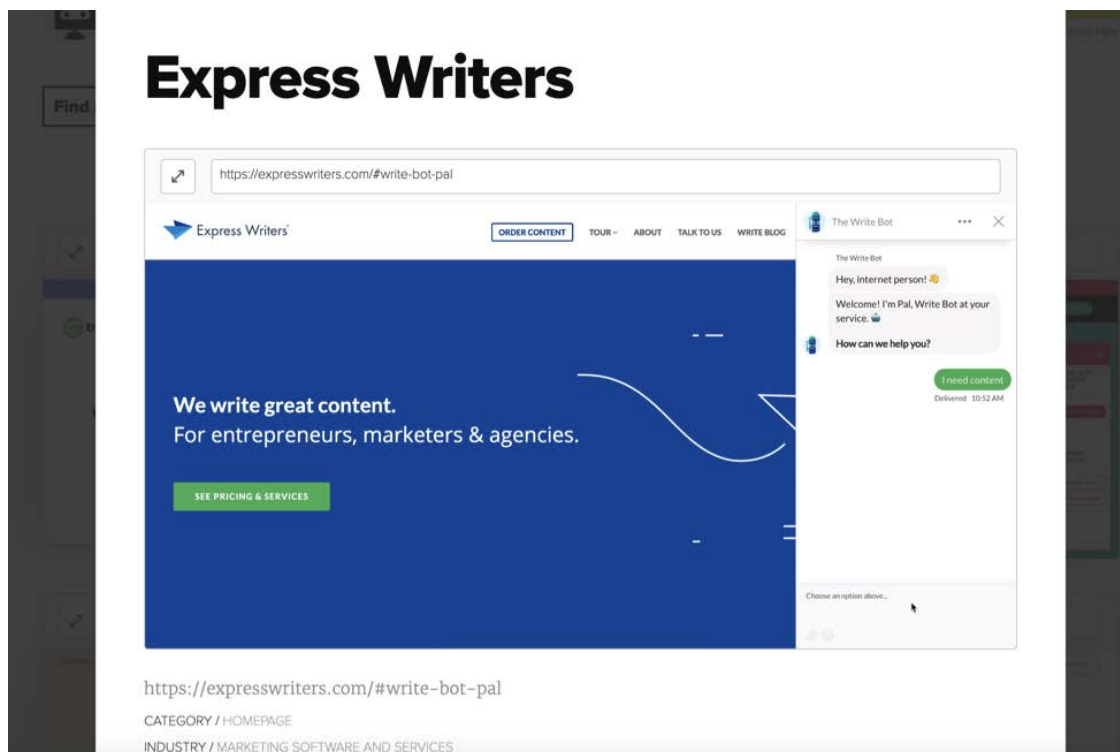
If there's a product or service that you particularly love, consider taking it one step further.

Share your review or mention the company in a blog post on your own site, and include a backlink.

4. REACH OUT

Now it's time to reach out to the company! Be sure to include your business name and website when you submit your review, to provide the opportunity for a backlink to your site.

If the company doesn't link back to you, they'll probably still include your business name.

That's helpful, too, because even **unlinked mentions** can be beneficial.

If you wrote a review or mention in your own blog post, be sure to include a link to the post when you reach out to the company.

You can even use an excerpt from your content as the official testimonial.

Join our happy clients

World's leading companies choose SEMrush.
We have over 4,000,000 users. See what they have to say.

SEMrush not only helps you perform day-to-day tasks, but also provides in-depth analysis that is very clear and can be easily incorporated into your digital marketing strategy and significantly improve your performance.

Umit Yilmaz
SEO Engineer at Ebay.com

With SEMrush we are able to identify opportunities and react to them in less time by having a trusted source of data that is extremely easy for the whole team to access.

Kenyon Manu
Director of Search at Overstock.com

SEMrush has long been one of my favorite SEO tools.

Aaron Wall
Founder at Seobook.com

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Develop B2B Relationships Through Testimonials and Reviews

Building authentic business-to-business relationships can be a challenge.

When you write testimonials and reviews – or mention a favorite product or service on your own blog – keep it genuine and personable.

Newer companies, especially, will appreciate this gesture.

To continue to develop your relationship, follow and engage with the company on social media.

When your review is published, share it on your own social media channels, and tag the company.

In this example, **Carl Pullein,** a time management and productivity coach, mentioned the popular productivity app Todoist in his content. **Todoist retweeted** Carl's post on their account:
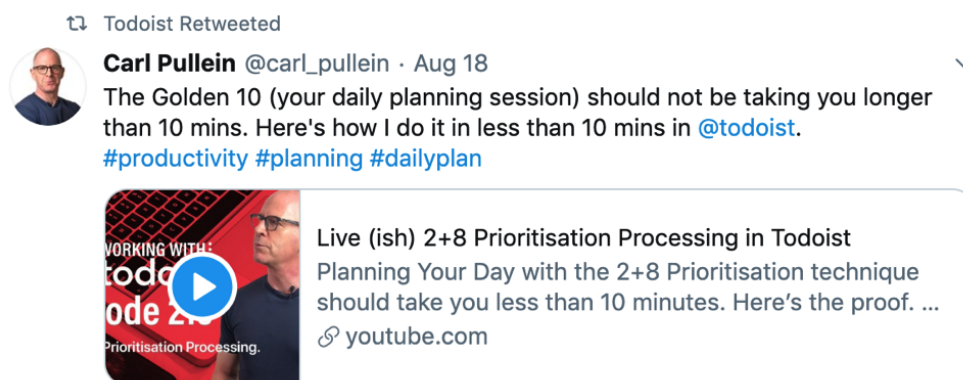
Establishing trust and building relationships with other businesses provides further backlinking opportunities.

A company may even consider collaborating in the future, having seen your enthusiasm for their product or service, and trusting your company to provide genuine and valuable insight.

Update Your Link Building Strategy

Testimonials and reviews are an easy and effective way to build quality backlinks and improve your website's authority and visibility.

As a bonus, writing or requesting testimonials and reviews isn't nearly as awkward as some other standard link building methods!

Update your link building strategy to include testimonials and reviews, and start building authentic B2B relationships that will benefit your business for years to come.

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S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :

Month 9, then ongoing monthly

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :

3-6 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   P E R   M O N T H :

10

T O O L S :

- Relevant Sites

- Review Sites

B E N E F I T S :
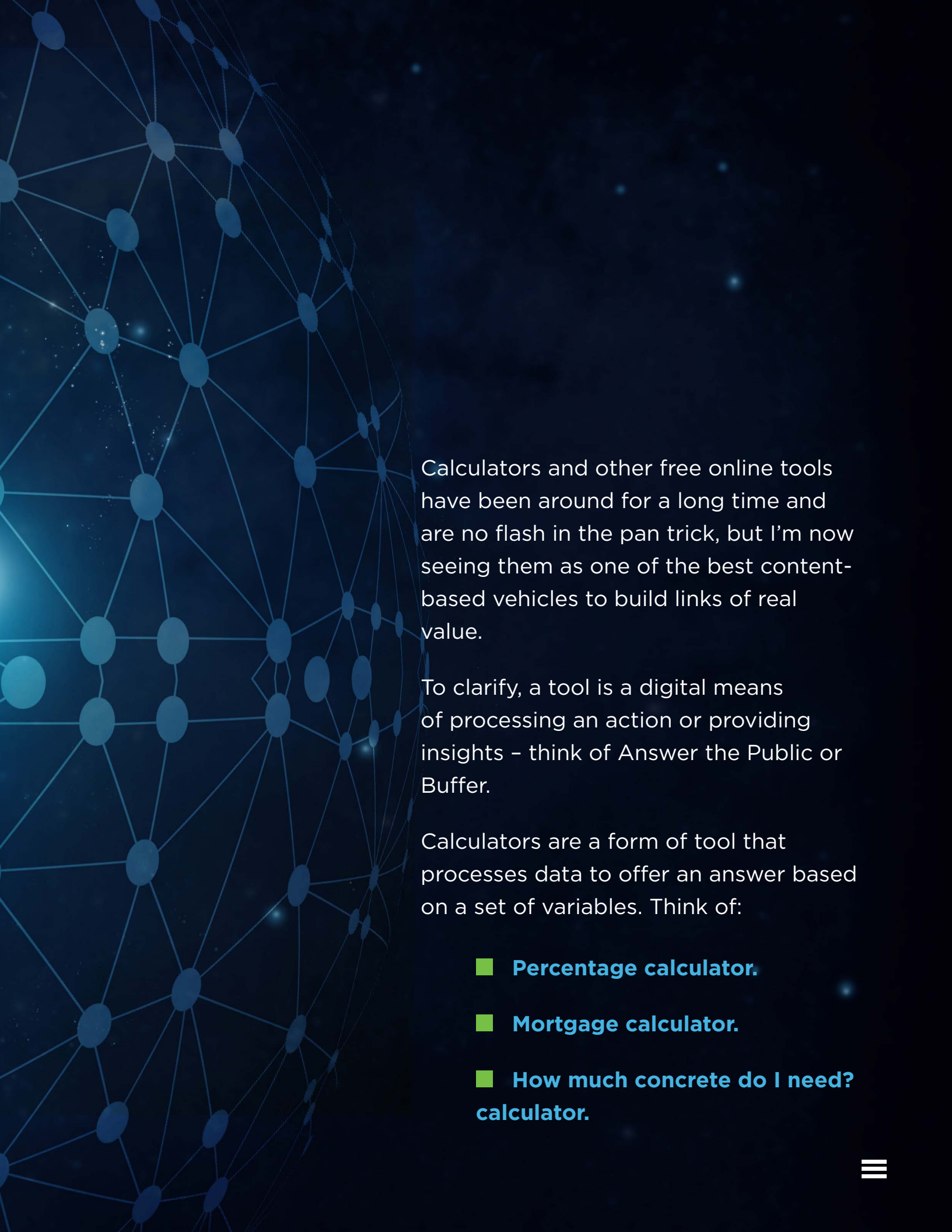
- Establish trust and credibility.

- Improve SEO and rankings.

- Earn backlinks and unlinked mentions.

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How to Earn Links by Creating Free Tools: 5 Examples

AUTHOR **Shelley Walsh**

Calculators and other free online tools have been around for a long time and are no flash in the pan trick, but I'm now seeing them as one of the best content-based vehicles to build links of real value.

To clarify, a tool is a digital means of processing an action or providing insights – think of Answer the Public or Buffer.

Calculators are a form of tool that processes data to offer an answer based on a set of variables. Think of:

- **Percentage calculator.**

- **Mortgage calculator.**

- **How much concrete do I need? calculator.**

Why Build Calculators & Tools

What paid tools often do well is to offer a freemium version that completes one action of significant value but has limited results. Just enough to:

- Encourage linking but not giving away the full scope of the tool for free.

- Get a user hooked on the tool and more likely to upgrade.

Think of Buffer, Screaming Frog, BuzzSumo, etc. The free Buffer account has been invaluable to me over the years.

Calculators, on the other hand, are amazing because they offer so much value. I have the percentage calculator in my bookmark and use it on a regular basis.

Am I going to link to them and cite them if I ever get the opportunity? Of course, I will because they help me for free.

Psychologically, they have an advantage as in the exchange of value I have taken something and to make it fair I want to give something back.

It's all about the **rule of reciprocity.** If you understand this, then you understand how to get good links.

And people like to share good things that work or make their life easier.

Above all, calculators and tools make such good link content because they are evergreen – you can keep building links to them for years and the investment keeps paying back long-term.

5 Examples of Great Calculators & Tools

1. WORDCOUNTER

WordCounter is a tool I use a lot for a variety of tasks, such as checking title/description length and auditing competitor content. I prefer directly pasting into here than using a Chrome app as it has more control.

If WordCounter could generate **Lipsum** then I would be happy.

The tool has been around since 2008 so it captured the market early and has maintained a dominant position and as a result has a strong link profile.

WordCounter - Count Words & Correct Writing

EXTERNAL BACKLINKS	REFERRING DOMAINS	REFERRING IPS	REFERRING SUBNETS
FRESH	FRESH	FRESH	FRESH
180,657	1,010	899	822
HISTORIC	HISTORIC	HISTORIC	HISTORIC
412,855	2,871	1,743	1,480
Incoming links from other websites, excludes supplemental	Unique domains linking to this site.	Unique IPs hosting referring domains	Unique Class-C subnets

2. TYRE SIZE CALCULATOR

This calculator is for serious petrol heads and was recommended to me by someone who does race classic cars they've restored.

You can search for one tire or compare two to compare the width/diameter/sidewall and measure the revolutions per mile – essential if you are racing cars or want the top performance out of your car.

The page has a healthy link count and I would expect this will keep paying back for years being of such value to anyone in this niche industry.

Tyre Size Calculator

EXTERNAL BACKLINKS	REFERRING DOMAINS	REFERRING IPS	REFERRING SUBNETS
FRESH	FRESH	FRESH	FRESH
1,327	**201**	**181**	**170**
HISTORIC	HISTORIC	HISTORIC	HISTORIC
3,389	332	279	266
Incoming links from other websites, excludes supplemental	Unique domains linking to this site.	Unique IPs hosting referring domains	Unique Class-C subnets

3. HOW MUCH TO MAKE AN APP

HOW MUCH TO MAKE AN APP

Have you ever wondered how much it would cost to develop an app for iOS or Android? This handy app cost calculator will help you: Find out how much your app will cost in under a minute!
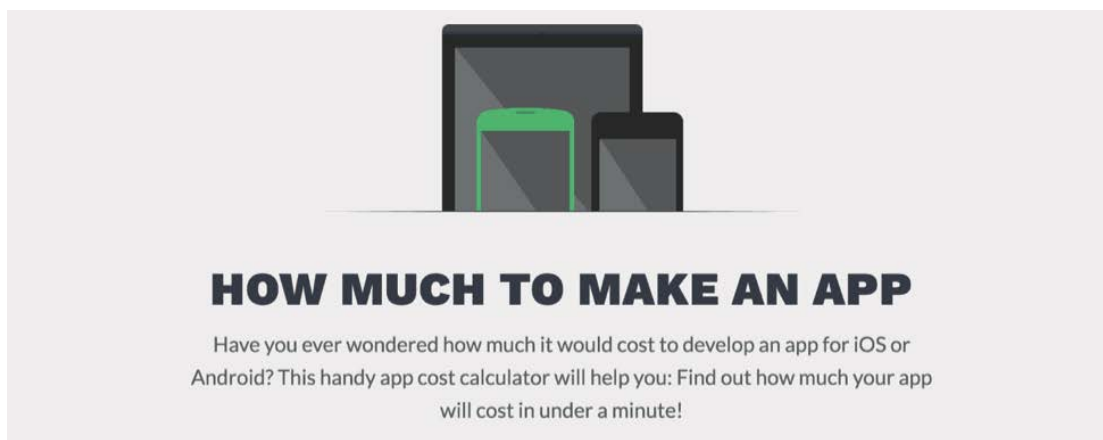
As with the best calculator and tool development, this tool was created out of user demand.

Z1 is a web agency and after being continually asked the same question, they created an app so they could field enquires and not waste time sending out quotes to people underestimating how much an app costs – thus reducing time wasters.

As a bonus, the app became widely popular and has generated a strong link profile and considerable exposure for the brand.

As a result of the success, they developed a range of tools, including App vs. Website? and How Much Does a Website Cost?

Considering the impressive link count, this has been a highly successful tactic for Z1 for marketing.

How much does it cost to make an app? - App Cost Calculator

EXTERNAL BACKLINKS	REFERRING DOMAINS	REFERRING IPS	REFERRING SUBNETS
FRESH	FRESH	FRESH	FRESH
300,981	768	736	686
HISTORIC	HISTORIC	HISTORIC	HISTORIC
1,005,053	3,593	2,425	1,936
Incoming links from other websites, excludes supplemental	Unique domains linking to this site.	Unique IPs hosting referring domains	Unique Class-C subnets

PURELINQ CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION **BASE** SEARCH MARKETING

4. IS IT BETTER TO RENT OR BUY?
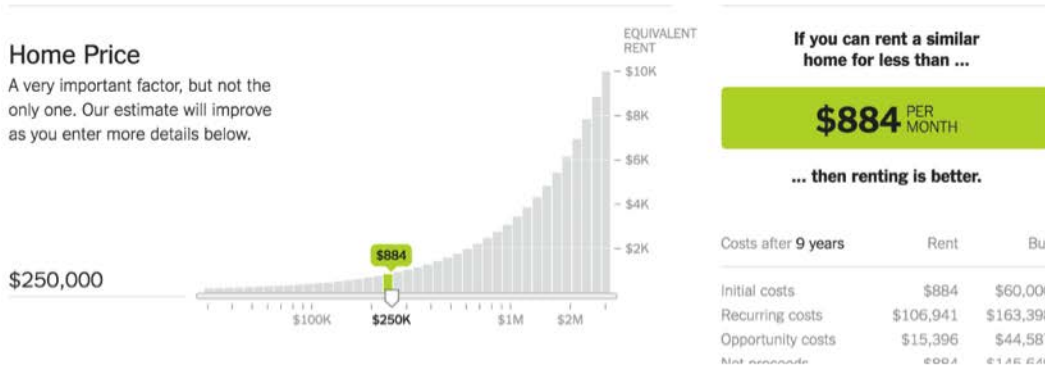
Financial based calculators are probably the most popular kind, with mortgage calculators, retirement calculators, and tax calculators heading the list.

The New York Times went for a fresh approach to the question of "how much does a mortgage cost" to comparing the cost of buying against renting. The theory being that buying is not always the better option that people think.

Benefiting from the platform that only the New York Times can offer, this calculator was widely talked about when it launched and subsequently is the most mainstream out of all the examples shared here.

Beautiful and elegant, the tool is an excellent example of how visually pleasing simplicity is – yet, oh so difficult to code.

The link count reflects what you would expect from a tool of this caliber.

5. EMBED CODE GENERATOR

Siege Media does great content-based link building so it's no surprise that they offer a perfect example of a niche tool for a highly-targeted audience.

When the embed code generator launched in 2013, it was at the height of the infographics-for-links period. It addressed the issue of getting the proper citation and link for your infographic from the publisher.

It's a well-conceived idea and solution that works brilliantly to take the complication away from figuring out the right way to structure and embed code for anyone who can't code.

This is an example of how a simple concept solving a niche problem relevant to your audience can see successful results. It's also brought a nice link count for Siege.
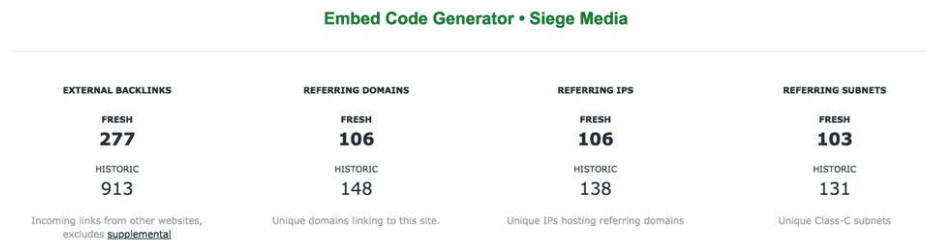
What Sort of Calculator or Tool Should I Build?

When producing a tool, the concept is key. The best calculators come out of user research and surveys.

Know what your audience wants to know.

When you can define what problems your audience needs solving, then you can begin to structure your ideas around this.

Tools that are simple and focus on one process or action are far better than trying to complicate a user with too many options.

Think of simple questions such as:

- How do I write this embed code?

- How much will this app cost?

- How many bricks do I need?

Calculators are popular, so to get traction with links, you will need to think a little more creatively and bring a fresh perspective to an existing idea or combine two existing ideas into a unique one.

Reverse engineering the link profile on exciting tools will help you to understand what sites are linking to these tools and then consider what variation or new tool they might be interested in.

Broken link building works well for tools by searching for best [niche] tools or best [niche] calculators and reviewing what tools are broken or outdated on the page. You can then create something improved to outreach to the same sites.

How Often Should I Be Building Calculators?

Using calculators and tools to build links fits within your "hero" content production cycle.

Depending on your content budgets, your development of tools could be limited to an annual basis or at the most every quarter.

It would be highly unlikely that even the best budgets can create a tool per month in one niche due to a limitation of ideas – but it isn't impossible.

PURELINQ   BASE SEARCH MARKETING

SUMMARY

TIMEFRAME:

Tools fit into your hero based content that has more investment and less frequency.

RESULTS DETECTED:

From when you begin outreach, link count will start to build after 2 months onwards.

TOOLS:

A good coder! There are a few subscription-based tools for ease of producing a calculator, but I recommend getting a coder and building your own as it will be cheaper in the long run and you will have a far better piece of content.

BENEFITS:

■ Unlike PR based content that has a spike of traffic and then tails off quickly into obscurity, the right tool is the piece of content that can keep giving links for years. The evergreen factor means they can be promoted over and over again on a periodic basis to keep topping up more fresh links.

■ After your initial outreach seeding, a good tool should gain its own momentum and begin to deliver sustained links by itself through the waterfall effect assisted by periodic boosts of outreach rounds.

■ If you position your tool correctly, your traffic will be highly relevant to your brand. This technique works especially well for SaaS businesses who can offer a small tool at the top of the funnel that becomes a pipeline for leads.

How to Use Trending Topics to Build Links & Boost Traffic

AUTHOR **Jason Hennessey**

More traffic, more links, more conversions – the trifecta of **search engine optimization** (SEO).

Whether you're an **SEO expert** or a website owner looking to increase your presence online, you know that engaging, SEO-friendly content is the key to attracting **high-quality links** and organic traffic.

However, you may feel like you are fresh out of ideas or even that you are in a **"boring" niche** that makes it difficult to think up interesting content topics.

Fortunately, by staying tuned into current events and trending topics in your niche, you can easily and creatively develop content that's clickable, shareable, and linkable.

Here are five ways to use trending topics to attract links and targeted traffic to your website.

1. Keep Up with the Times

The first step in creating content that's bound to go viral is staying ahead of the trends as much as possible.

By the time you are seeing tons of articles on a given topic, it may be too late to ride the wave.

That's why you should leverage several **tools** to stay on top of current events, news stories, pop culture, and more.

That way, as soon as a story breaks, you can start drafting up your own article, review, video, or opinion piece.

THE BEST TOOLS FOR KEEPING UP WITH TRENDING TOPICS

GOOGLE TRENDS

Google Trends is a great trending topics tool, as it shows you the top rising searches related to your keyword.

You can also filter your searches by region and date.

Use Google Trends to see what topics are trending in your niche and keep track of any increases in traffic.

FACEBOOK

While most of us use Facebook to stay in touch with friends, share our thoughts, and even follow our favorite brands, it's no surprise that Facebook is great for recognizing what topics are trending online.

You can check out popular hashtags related to your niche, pop into Facebook groups to see what your audience is talking about, or simply stay tuned into what events are showing up on your Timeline.

You may even want to survey your followers to find out what they are interested in at the moment.

TWITTER

Much like Facebook, Twitter is a hub for all that is happening online – from important social issues to celebrity news and everything else in between.

Check out the Trending section to see what's hot online right now, or visit popular hashtags in your industry. You may also want to follow public figures and your favorite brands to see what is being shared and talked about most.

REDDIT

Reddit is underrated, but it can actually be a highly valuable tool, both for finding content and promoting your own.

You can explore "Subreddits" related to current events, technology, politics, and nearly any niche you can imagine.

You can also engage with posts to boost your "karma" so that you will have more opportunities for engagement on your own posts later on.

Reddit can be a great place to find out what's happening in the world of SEO, business, and beyond.

2. Look Out for Opportunities

Once you are aware of what topics are currently trending in your space, then you can to look out for opportunities to create some truly amazing content.

Doing so goes far beyond simply writing a spinoff of an existing article or even an opinion piece on a current event. Now is the time to think outside the box.

Rather than scouring the web for ideas, the best approach is to start with what you know already – your brand.

If you are honed in on your brand message and what your audience is looking for, recognizing solid content opportunities should be much easier than starting "from scratch".

Here are some questions to ask yourself when looking for content opportunities:

■ Is there a "gap" in what's currently being covered? Is there an angle that other news outlets and websites are missing? Can you offer a fresh take on a current issue?

■ What is my audience interested in at this moment? Is there a pressing issue that needs to be addressed? Sometimes it's as simple as asking them what they are interested in, and creating content around that.

■ What are your competitors talking about? If your competition is covering a topic, that's a good indication that you should be too. Just make sure that it is, in fact, relevant to your audience and that your content is original.

■ What has worked in the past? Regardless of what's trending now, is there a style or format of content that has worked well in the past. Can you replicate your "evergreen" content with a modern twist?

■ What kind of content is most linkable in your niche? This takes a bit of digging, but by searching your key terms, you should be able to find some content pieces that have performed well online. If they have a high number of quality links, see if you can dissect their strategy and format.

I don't recommend "starting cold" and covering a trending topic without doing a bit of research first.

If you truly understand your audience, you will get a sense of what is of interest to them and how to format your content in an effective way

3. Develop Shareable, Engaging Content

The beauty of creating content around trending topics is that it is relatively low risk with potentially high rewards.

While getting the hang of it may take some trial and error, it involves rather minimal investment.

That being said, there are some tricks for **creating content that will attract links** and boost traffic.

CHOOSE THE BEST FORMAT

While the go-to for content tends to be blog posts, sometimes it's best to get a bit more creative.

Think long and hard about what format would be most engaging for the content you hope to put out.

Would a short video do the trick? A listicle? A funny cartoon?

The possibilities are nearly endless.

When it comes to trending topics, most times people are looking to get their information as fast as possible.

You want them to know instantly what the content is about, what your main points are, and what actions you want them to take.

The faster they can consume it, the more likely they are to share it.

AIM FOR A WIDER AUDIENCE

Most of the time when you are crafting a content marketing piece, especially for links, you will want to tailor it to a unique audience.

However, what matters here is that your content is picked up by a wide range of platforms and is shared at hyperspeed.

By aiming for a wider audience, there's more potential for it to be shared across the web.

It may not be the most conversion-friendly piece you have put together, but the point is that it:

- Generates a lot of traffic.

- Attracts links.

With more shares, the odds are in your favor.

ADD IMAGES, INFOGRAPHICS & VIDEOS

Adding images, videos, and more to your content will only up the engagement factor, making it more likely that people will share your content.

This also helps it appeal to people who prefer different kinds of information (video, written, etc.).

Also, by adding other features to your content, you make it easy to repurpose your content for other platforms.

For example, you can share your graphics on Instagram, your video on YouTube, promote an infographic via email, and more. This opens up even more traffic channels.

OPTIMIZE FOR SEARCH

Obviously, if traffic and links are your main objectives, you will want to **optimize your content for search engines.**

If you aren't well-versed in SEO yet, you can work with a content marketer or SEO copywriter to make sure that your content follows SEO best practices.

Don't worry if your website isn't fully optimized. Your goal here is to create content to market across platforms quickly and obtain links in a shorter period of time. You can always work to optimize your site later on.

OPTIMIZE FOR SHARING

This should be an obvious point but it is often overlooked.

It should be super easy for users to share your content as they wish. This means making the share buttons accessible on your website, including an engaging title and description, and setting a featured image for your post.

You will also want to optimize your content for mobile and even make it available in a variety of formats, if possible. This makes it easy for users to share your content to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and more.

5. REPURPOSE ACROSS PLATFORMS

Once it's time to share your content, it's worth being strategic about what platforms you are going to **circulate your content on** and how.

Simply sharing a blog post on Facebook won't do much to get you the traffic and links you are looking for.

If social media management isn't your forte, again, it may be worth working with a content marketing expert to **develop a strategy** for your content.

If that's not quite in the budget, here is a list of ideas to get you started:

- Turn written content into a slide video with voiceover to share on YouTube.

- Address the topic via Facebook Live on your business page.

- Add images from your article on your Instagram Story.

- Run a campaign to your email list that includes a link to your content.

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■ Circulate your content in niche-related Facebook Groups.

■ Connect with influencers in your industry to promote your content for you.

■ Run a Facebook or Instagram ad campaign.

■ Use **email outreach** to attract links to your video, article, or infographic.

■ Run a competition or promotion with your audience for a prize in exchange for social shares.

■ Contact friends and contacts in your network to share your content.

Keep in mind what platforms you are already active on and which ones your audience is most likely to engage on.

Think creatively about how best to **repurpose content** into a variety of formats for optimal sharing.

Again, this may take some trial and error, but eventually, you will be able to see which platforms bring in the most traffics and links.

Make a note of this and you will be sure to fine-tune your approach the next time around.

Conclusion

Using trending topics in your content marketing can be a great way to go viral in your content and boost traffic and links to your website.

You must be able to stay on top of the trends, keep your eyes open to opportunities, and then craft content that's made to engage.

Then, share it like crazy and watch the magic happen!

PURELINQ · CONTEXTUAL LINK BUILDING SOLUTION · BASE SEARCH MARKETING

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Weekly

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
Immediate to 8 months

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   P E R   M O N T H :
Varies

T O O L S :
- Google Trends
- Reddit
- SEMrush
- Graphic design/visual content

B E N E F I T S :

- Targeting trending topics in your content allows you to ride the momentum of an event or trend that is happening in the current moment. Since users (in high numbers) are actively searching for that topic, you can capture high-volume traffic for a short period of time.

- Targeting trending topics also gives you an edge over your competitors. While they may be focusing on publishing blog posts and waiting for Google to take notice, you can stay ahead of the curve by attracting organic and direct traffic, attention, and social shares quickly.

35
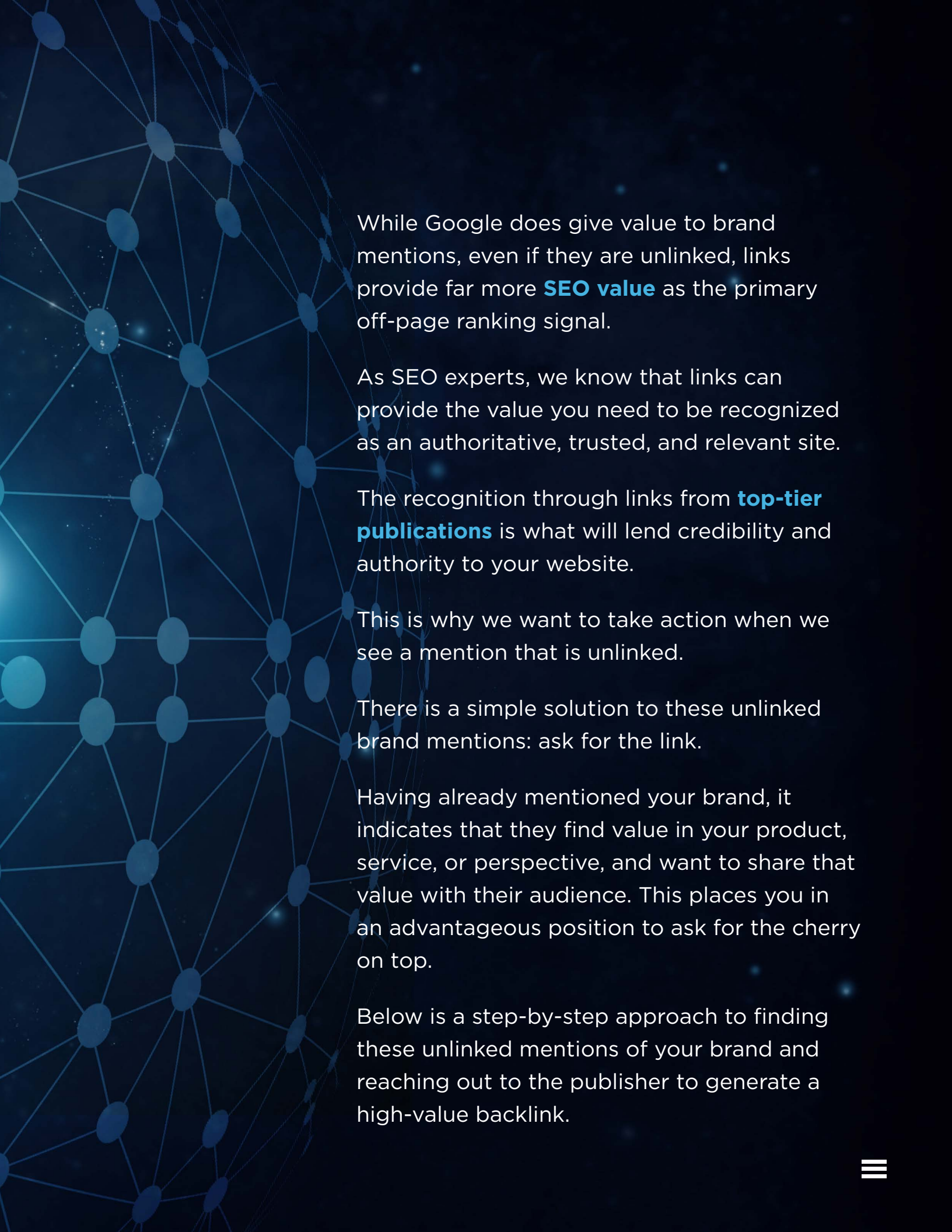
How to Turn Unlinked Brand Mentions Into Links
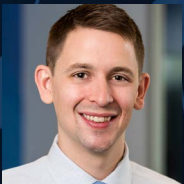
Unlinked brand mentions are mentions of your brand on published sites that do not provide a link back to your website.

Backlinks are critical in developing website authority, especially within relevant communities.

AUTHOR **Brock Murray**

While Google does give value to brand mentions, even if they are unlinked, links provide far more **SEO value** as the primary off-page ranking signal.

As SEO experts, we know that links can provide the value you need to be recognized as an authoritative, trusted, and relevant site.

The recognition through links from **top-tier publications** is what will lend credibility and authority to your website.

This is why we want to take action when we see a mention that is unlinked.

There is a simple solution to these unlinked brand mentions: ask for the link.

Having already mentioned your brand, it indicates that they find value in your product, service, or perspective, and want to share that value with their audience. This places you in an advantageous position to ask for the cherry on top.

Below is a step-by-step approach to finding these unlinked mentions of your brand and reaching out to the publisher to generate a high-value backlink.

STEP 1: # Research

Use a tool to scan the web for unlinked mentions of your brand.

You want to find all the links that will add value.

My personal favorite is SEMrush. BuzzSumo is another helpful resource to discover social shares of your blogs or mentions of your website.
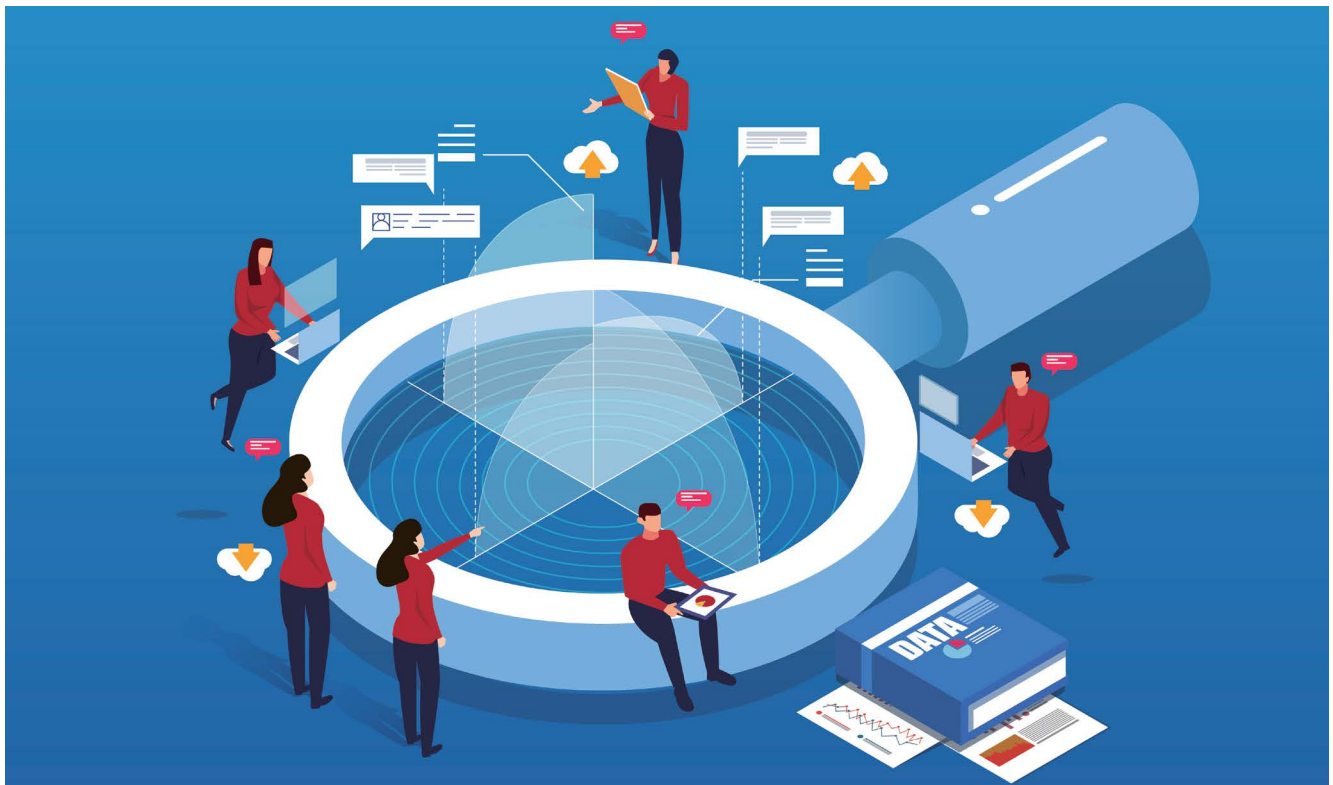
Make sure to scan for all potential variations of your company (e.g., Search Engine Journal, SEJ, SearchEngineJournal). This will ensure that no mentions are missed.

In addition to searching for the brand name, you can search for any branded products, tools, or assets.

Also try searching for employee names, as the CEO might be referenced in an article with no link.

Expand your search by scanning for alternate spellings of your brand name, as your search tool will not catch misspelled branding.

Once you have compiled a list of unlinked mentions, next you must prioritize based on the highest SEO or PR value.

If you have a well-established brand, you might find thousands of unlinked mentions.

Though you can manually attempt to capture a link on all of these websites, the optimal strategy is to prioritize the most authoritative websites.

You can use your judgment to assess authority (i.e., Have you heard of the website? Would you be excited to have a link there?), but there are also objective metrics to assess authority.

Moz, Majestic, and Ahrefs have their own metrics to quantify URL and **domain authority.**

Use these metrics to help prioritize which unlinked mentions are worth the outreach effort.

STEP 2: Find Contact Information

The ideal contact would be a site's webmaster, especially if there are external links in the article but none leading to yours (for whatever reason).

If you can't find the contact email for the webmaster on the site's contact page, try performing a site search for the keyword "webmaster" (for example, Google search — site: https://**www.searchenginejournal.com**/ webmaster).

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SEARCH MARKETING

Note that this could result in many results and may prove frivolous. You can also use LinkedIn to zero in on the webmaster or someone in a related position.

Next, find either the author of the article or the website editor's contact email to reach out.

If you're unable to find any of the previously mentioned contact emails, then use the general information email or standard contact form.

STEP 3: The Pitch

Find a reason it would benefit the webmaster to take the time and effort to insert a link.

Word your request in a way that they can clearly see that linking to your website will not only benefit you and your brand, but also provide value to them and their audience as well.

Sometimes, internal pages are easier to link to than to your homepage.

For example, if there's a webpage (blog post or service page) that covers the topic of discussion on the page you're trying to acquire a backlink on, it might make more sense to request a link to that specific page instead.

When asking for the link, be cordial and thank them in advance for their time. You want to avoid coming off as pushy.

If it's an article, compliment it in a unique and genuine way. Also, be sure to thank them for including you/your company in the article.

Explain how adding the link will provide additional value to their audience.

STEP 4: Follow-up

If the link hasn't been added and you haven't heard back, always make sure to follow up. Only stop once you hear either a yes or a no.

At the same time, don't harass them either. It's a fine line to walk.

If you spam them daily with the request, they'll be less likely to want to do you this favor.

Your first follow-up should be after a few days (between 3 and 5), then after a week and a half, then every few weeks.

It might also be that the email you're using isn't being monitored, so see if there's an alternative contact email you can use.

You never know, you might be able to build a relationship with the more enthusiastic respondents and possibly earn a guest post or featured article.

Track your outreach efforts in a spreadsheet.

A Strategy Example: Rebrand

If your company goes through a rebranding or if you migrate your website to a new domain, it is important to update your old links and/or branded anchor texts.

Map out and implement 301 redirects from your old domain to your new one, otherwise, your once-robust backlink profile will be scattered with broken links.

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Majestic is a helpful tool to find these links to the old domain. Provide any material they might require as well (logo, new company name, etc.)

While redirects are good, they're not as impactful as a direct link. Reach out to all of the quality domains that link to you and request they update the link.

It's easy enough to convince the website to update the branding/ backlink appropriately, as you're pointing out an error on their website (having dated information and having broken links is bad for their site health as well).

Conclusion

Let's say a well-recognized publication mentions your brand without a link.

You have been mentioned by this trusted source, however, the recognition ends there.

Ideally, this mention will have a link to your website as well, which helps to build awareness amongst relevant users.

While this unlinked mention does provide some benefit to your company, this four-step link building tactic allows you to leverage this recognition since Google relies on backlinks as a primary off-page ranking factor.

All in all, backlinks will determine your brand's reputation and give your target audience relevant information – it's a win-win.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
This should be a quarterly process.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
The results can vary. However, once a publisher agrees to provide the backlink, it can take on average a week to get this backlink implemented.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
15-20% of outreach results in a successful placement.

T O O L S :
■ SEMrush   ■ BuzzSumo   ■ Majestic

B E N E F I T S :

■ Using the above tools to discover unlinked mentions of your brand and reaching out to the publisher to acquire a valuable backlink has proven to be beneficial to your SEO rankings.

■ Once you transform an unlinked brand mention to a secure backlink to your site, you are adding SEO value, guiding potential customers directly to your website, and driving up the total amount of referral traffic.

How to Use Video for Link Building

I first wrote about using videos, specifically on YouTube, for link building back in 2010. Here is my opening paragraph from that piece:

"Nylon Magazine (and yes I know that I'm a bit too old to be reading it) has started to put a YouTube link in every article in their print magazine. It's a fantastic way to mix media and use offline methods to promote online marketing. Jamie Oliver sends out emails to his subscribers with video messages in them. This goes to (you guessed it) his YouTube channel."

AUTHOR **Julie Joyce**

If you're reading this today, that probably doesn't sound like anything too unique does it?
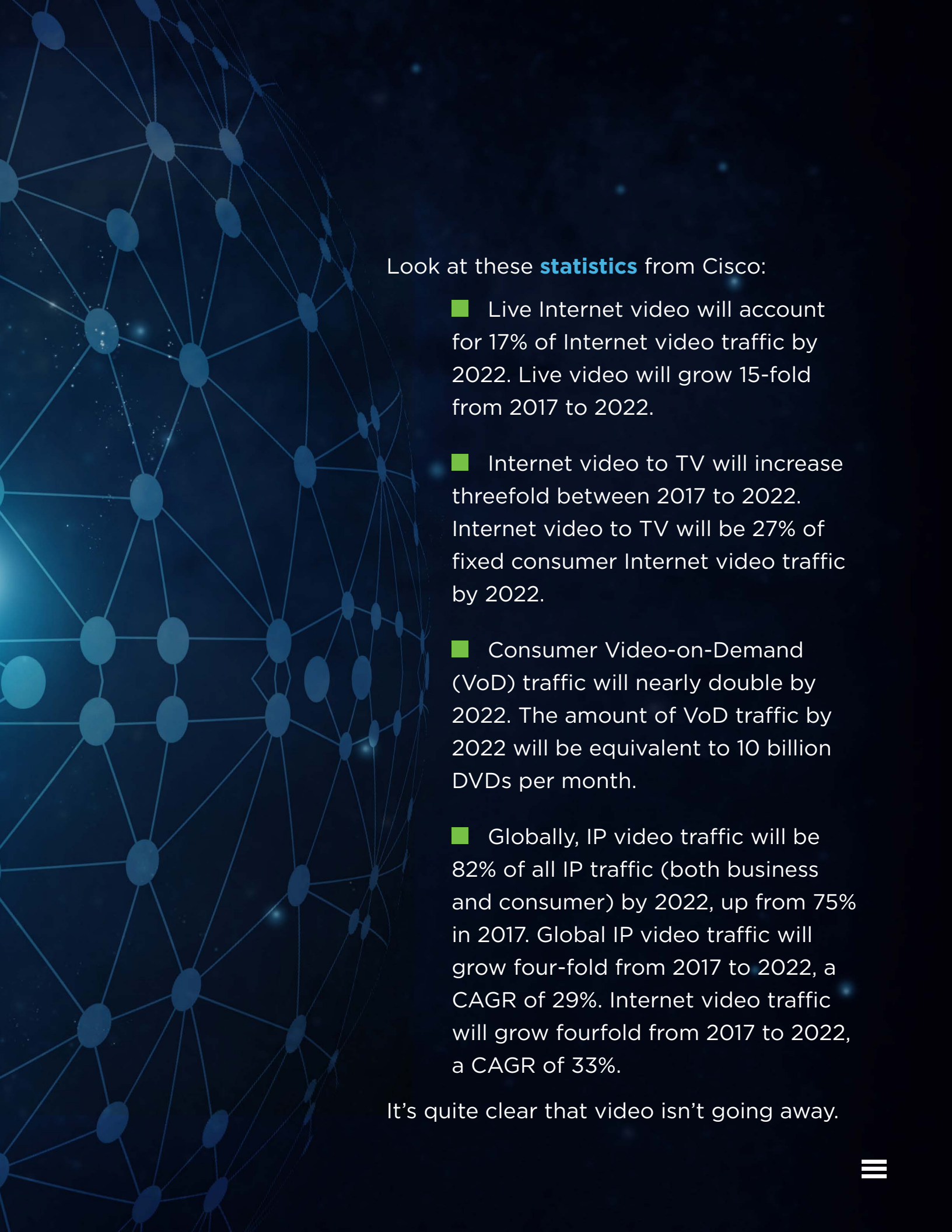
In fact, it seems pretty basic.

Back then it was new.

Now, video is everywhere.

- YouTube isn't the only player these days but it's still a strong one. Vimeo, Vivo, Daily Motion, and Twitch are four competitors and surely more will emerge.

- Videos are commonly embedded in email newsletters and websites.

- Webinars happen on a nonstop basis and can be watched live or replayed.

- We're all hanging out on Google Hangouts or having meetings with GoToMeeting.

- We see our friends on Facebook Live.

- We're certainly all sharing videos from every possible source on every possible social platform.

Look at these **statistics** from Cisco:

- Live Internet video will account for 17% of Internet video traffic by 2022. Live video will grow 15-fold from 2017 to 2022.

- Internet video to TV will increase threefold between 2017 to 2022. Internet video to TV will be 27% of fixed consumer Internet video traffic by 2022.

- Consumer Video-on-Demand (VoD) traffic will nearly double by 2022. The amount of VoD traffic by 2022 will be equivalent to 10 billion DVDs per month.

- Globally, IP video traffic will be 82% of all IP traffic (both business and consumer) by 2022, up from 75% in 2017. Global IP video traffic will grow four-fold from 2017 to 2022, a CAGR of 29%. Internet video traffic will grow fourfold from 2017 to 2022, a CAGR of 33%.

It's quite clear that video isn't going away.

Creating Videos for Link Building: The Basics

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

As with any content, your first step before creating a video needs to be conducting intensive research to see what is already out there.

- What videos do well?

- Which ones get the most shares and views?

- What sets them apart from everything else? (There are various ways to get this information but two popular tools are Ahrefs's Content Explorer and BuzzSumo).

It's important to remember that you can't measure success simply by the number of links that your videos get.

Maybe a video gets 3 links but gets shared 500 times on Twitter, watched 5,000 times, and then 4 people who want to use your product or service come to you after seeing this video.

Wouldn't you call that a success?

BRING SOMETHING NEW TO THE TABLE

Originality will always be one of the main concerns in using videos to build links.

Just like any other content, you must consider how to make your videos stand out.

If you are marketing gardening services and you see that there are 500 videos about pruning rosebushes, make a video about the tallest or longest-lived rosebushes in the country, or make a video series where each video is specific to a region of a country.

Always think about having good lighting and sound. It sounds ridiculous to have to remind anyone of that, but I've seen plenty of poor quality videos.

If people can't see you well or the audio is too low/there are background noises, people aren't going to sit through it.

Make sure your videos look OK on mobile. With so many mobile users this is something that has to be considered. Don't forget to make it easy to share your videos.

This is done for you on YouTube but you need to ensure it's done on your site if you've embedded the video there.

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YOUTUBE

First, let's check a few **statistics:**

- Each month there are over 1.9 billion logged-in YouTube users.

- Every day people watch over a billion hours of video.

- YouTube has been launched in close to 100 countries and with 80 different languages.

- YouTube is currently the second most popular site in the world, after Google.

Going back to my pruning roses example, we see that two out of the three video results in the first page of the SERPs for a "pruning roses" search are YouTube results. In many cases, all three are YouTube results.
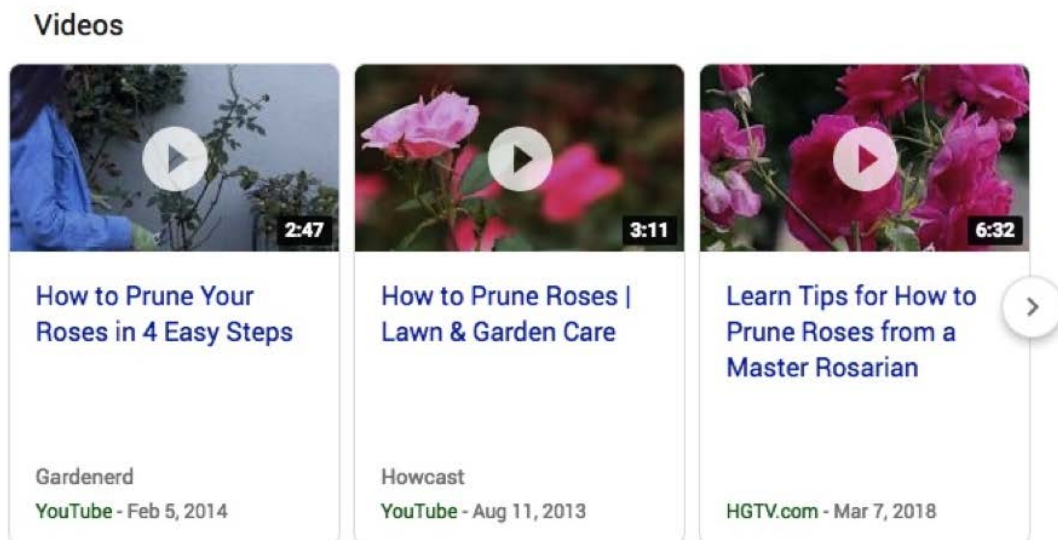
Simply put, without video you lose the chance for more SERP real estate and, in my opinion, you lose the chance for the visibility that can lead to some potentially great links.

Let's look at Search Engine Journal on YouTube. There are currently 6,800+ subscribers and hundreds of videos.

Obviously, as a columnist for Search Engine Journal, I'm a bit biased but this is some fantastic content. As a link builder, fantastic content is my dream.
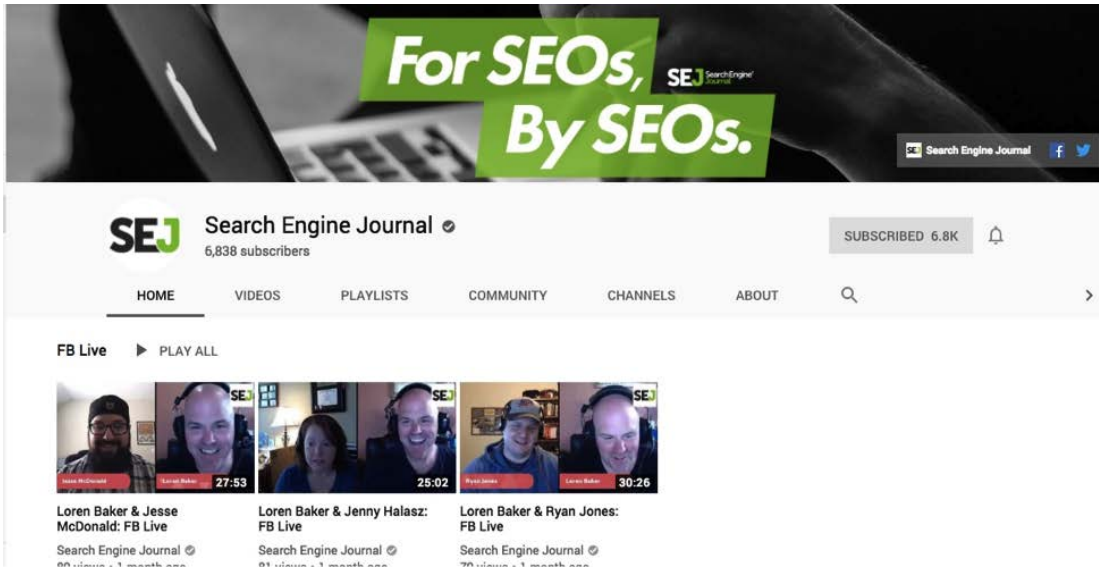
As you can see below, the YouTube channel for this very site pops up as one of the 10 listings in the SERPs on a brand search for [Search Engine Journal]. So it's a great way to take up more real estate for your brand on the first page.
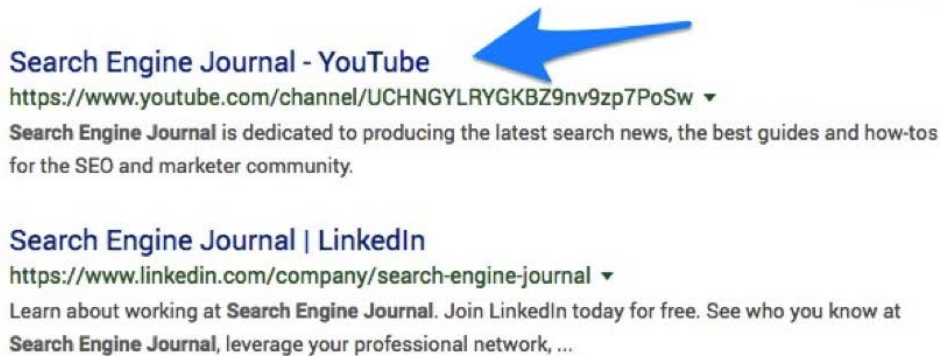
Each of these videos, like any piece of content, is a chance for a link. Because we're interested in links here.

Why Video Is So Useful

Videos can be embedded on a site to make the content more appealing. Each can be used as a resource to point someone to when you're trying to build a relationship that will lead to a link.

Playlists can be created and offered as resources. Transcripts and timestamps can be added to sites where the videos are embedded.

Each of these videos can appear in the SERPs in a regular search or a video search.

When you send out your email newsletter, you can point your subscribers to specific videos. You can let everyone know that you have a new series.

You can ask for questions that people would like to have answered in your next video.

If you're a fan of the **Skyscraper technique** where you find a piece of content, make something better, then reach out to the people who currently link to the original content, video is a great way to stand out.
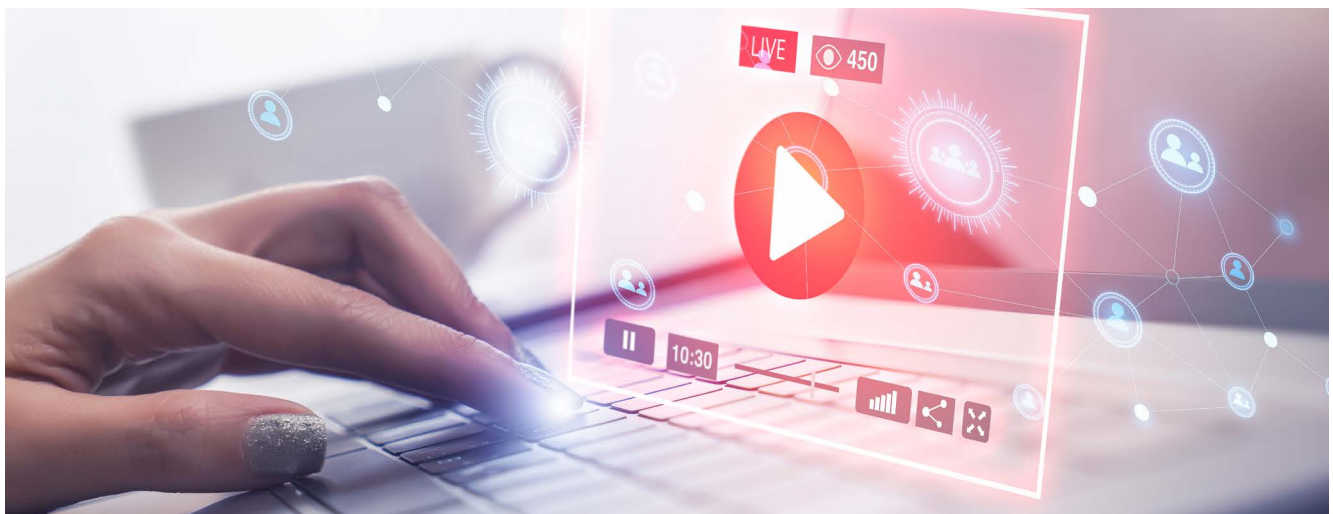
A Real-World Example

A few months ago I was involved with a video where I spoke about **old school link building.** This video is part of an ongoing series with Siege Media, which is catalogued on YouTube and on the website.

For the first time, clips of the videos were released instead of just the full thing, and they were released weeks apart before the entire episode was released.

With a video piece you can do the same thing you can do with a large content piece and break it up and market those pieces on their own, then do the same thing with the full piece.

Take a look at how this video appears on the site:

You have the timestamps, which are very useful for people who want to get right to a specific point. The two video clips are linked within those timestamps.

There are Show Notes, which reference the discussion we had along with how to follow us on social media. The social share buttons are right there.

There are links to the podcast version of the episodes as well as the brand channel on YouTube. There are also more internal links to keep a visitor on the site.

All of this adds up to a great user experience. That's an important point to note, too.

When we think about building links with videos, it isn't just about getting links to your actual videos.

That's great if it happens, but it's more about using videos to generate interest in content that will attract links, directly or indirectly.

I'll close with another quote from my original piece:

This type of link building won't work with every demographic or every niche. It may be a fantastic way to generate more traffic for a fashion site, but not a great way to get more traffic to your site about retirement benefits. Some target demographics just aren't really using a lot of social media sites yet.

That's no longer true.

From what I can tell, just about everyone has realized the power of social media and video.

It's fascinating how quickly things change.

S U M M A R Y

T I M E F R A M E :
Monthly I'd expect 1-2 links, but I'd expect lots more social shares. In 6 months, I'd expect 10 links minimum.

R E S U L T S   D E T E C T E D :
Hours after implementation you could see conversions of some sort whether it's a contact form filled out or an email asking about services. Within a month I'd expect the video to rank well for key terms.

A V E R A G E   L I N K S   S E N T   P E R   M O N T H :
2 or more

T O O L S :
- Ahrefs
- BuzzSumo
- YouTube
- Vimeo
- Vivo
- Daily Motion
- Twitch
- Google Hangouts
- Facebook Live
- GoToMeeting

B E N E F I T S :
- Using video for link building is a great way to add more visual interest to your content as well as simply add more pieces of content to your marketing toolkit.

- With the fierce competition that we're seeing today, using videos to help build brand awareness and get eyes on your content is something that everyone should consider.

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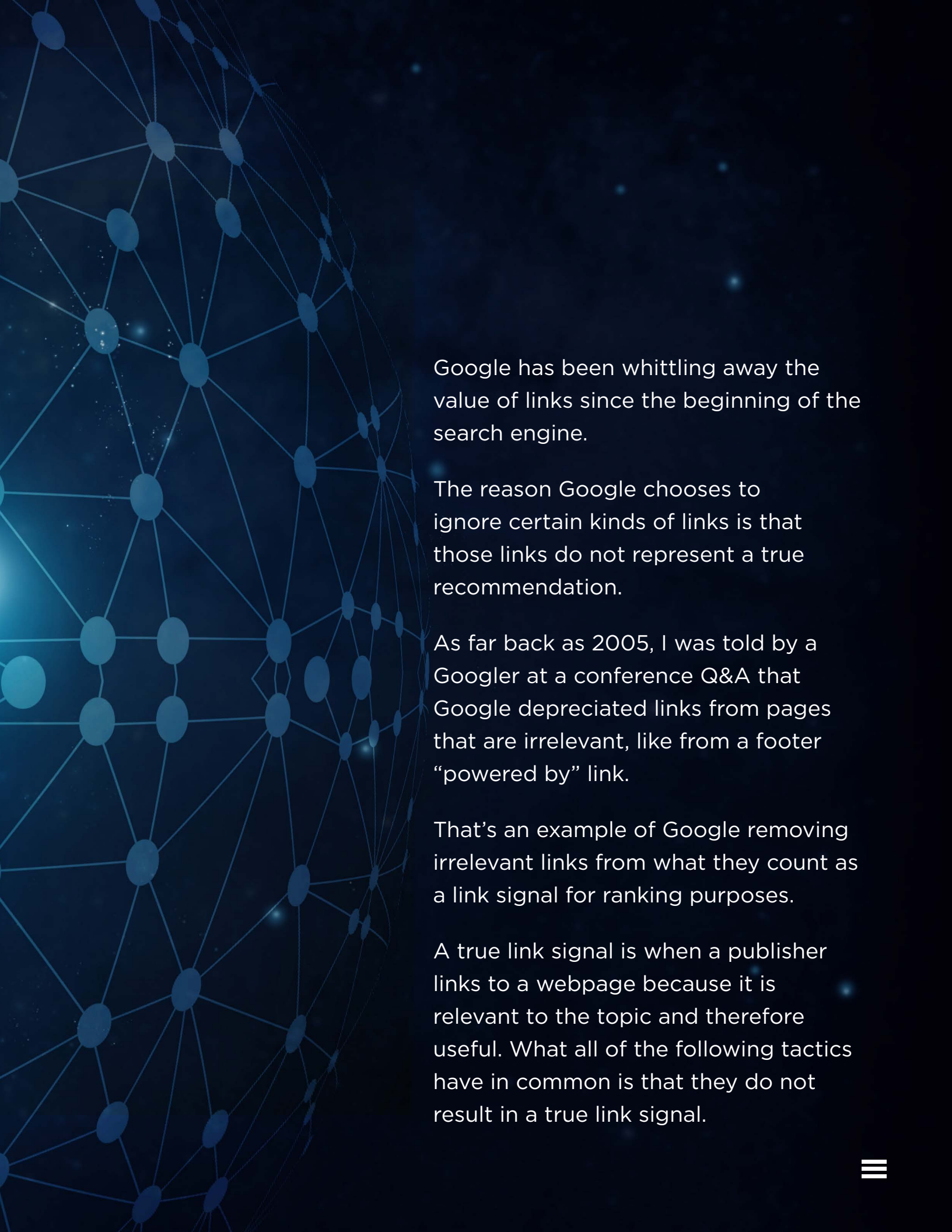
18 Popular Link Building Tactics You Should Actually Avoid

AUTHOR **Roger Montti**

Google has been whittling away the value of links since the beginning of the search engine.

The reason Google chooses to ignore certain kinds of links is that those links do not represent a true recommendation.

As far back as 2005, I was told by a Googler at a conference Q&A that Google depreciated links from pages that are irrelevant, like from a footer "powered by" link.

That's an example of Google removing irrelevant links from what they count as a link signal for ranking purposes.

A true link signal is when a publisher links to a webpage because it is relevant to the topic and therefore useful. What all of the following tactics have in common is that they do not result in a true link signal.

1. Historical Data Link Trap

This is from a patent about historical data that covers inbound links, outbound links, how fast links are acquired, how often content is updated and so on.

> One of the factors that are relevant to link building has to do with adding links to a page without the page actually being updated.

Google is on record stating that just because something is in a patent or a research paper doesn't mean it's in use.

Additionally, the older the patent the higher the possibility that another algorithm was developed that made it obsolete.

That said, we don't know whether something like this is in use. It's something to take note of.

This patent is called, **Information Retrieval Based on Historical Data.**

Google has snapshots of the web, including snapshots of the state of the linking patterns.

The most common and easily detectable mistake is adding a link to an existing webpage.

This patent dates from 2003. Matt Cutts, then head of Google's spam fighting department, is listed in the patent as one of the authors. That's a good sign that this patent has a strong anti-spam component.

THE ALGORITHM THAT TRACKS LINK ADDITIONS & REMOVALS

Among the various things this patent covered, one of them was tracking changes of links on a webpage:

- How many links are added.

- How often links are added.

- How often links are removed.

This patent covers a wide variety of changes to links on a page and links to a webpage.

Here's a sample of the things this patent covers.

The section below discusses identifying how new links that are associated with a document are and assigning scores (weights) relative to the newness of those links and then using those scores to rank a webpage.

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26. ...assigning weights to the links based on the determined measure of freshness, and scoring the document based, at least in part, on the weights assigned to the links associated with the document.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein the measure of freshness of a link associated with the document is based on at least one of a date of appearance of the link, a date of a change to the link, a date of appearance of anchor text associated with the link, a date of a change to anchor text associated with the link, a date of appearance of a linking document containing the link, or a date of a change to a linking document containing the link.

Now, this section of the same patent discusses issuing penalties.

First, it discusses determining time based link information (claim 54) and in claims 55 and 56, it discusses penalizing rankings based on time related link patterns.

54. A method comprising:

...determining longevity of the linkage data;

deriving an indication of content update for at least one ...or more linking documents providing the linkage data; and

adjusting the ranking of the linked document based on the longevity of the linkage data and the indication of content update for the linking document.

The next section (claims 55 & 56) are sub-sections to claim 54 above. The following part describes how Google can alter ranking scores with time based link information:

> 55. The method of claim 54, wherein the adjusting the ranking includes penalizing the ranking if the longevity indicates a short life for the linkage data and boosting the ranking if the longevity indicates a long life for the linkage data.

> 56. The method of claim 55, wherein ...adjusting the ranking further includes penalizing the ranking if at least a portion of content from the linking document is considered stale over a period of time and boosting the ranking if the portion of content from the linking document is considered updated over the period of time.

What that section appears to cover is obtaining links from content that hasn't been otherwise updated.

Link selling was a multi-million dollar business in those years. Prior to Penguin, around 2007-2009, Google was able to identify which links were paid and began devaluing them.

I know this because an executive from a link selling business told me that many of the links they sold were increasingly no longer working.

There were multiple theories of how Google was catching links added to pages that weren't otherwise updated. In retrospect, something like the Historical Data Patent could be used to easily spot paid links in addition to other paid link signals.

The importance of the patent I cited is that Google monitoring historical link information is possible. There is a solid basis for the possibility.

The patent shows that it's possible that Google could detect paid links by monitoring the inbound/outbound link changes within a domain over time.

Webpages change all the time. But there are some rates of changes that don't happen on normal sites. So a site that's selling links from within existing webpages could have the power of those links penalized.

Adding links to previously published articles in an attempt to influence Google may backfire. A person reported to me in early 2019 that he purchased links from an existing page and his page lost rankings within two weeks.

Was it the fact that the page was an old existing page that was not updated? Or was it something else?

It's hard to say. I'm just putting this information out there for your consideration.

2. EDU Discount Link Building

The offer a discount link building technique can result in a penalty. Don't do it.

This is an example of a sketchy link building tactic. Offering something in return for a link is a paid link. Overstock.com **was reported** to be penalized by Google in 2011 for offering discounts to university students in exchange for links.

abac.edu/goldcard/Discount listing.pdf   Go   APR **MAY** JUL

◀ **27** ▶

0 Jul 2017   2009 **2010** 2013

Link Details; please use the following hyperlinks for each keyword:

"vacuum cleaners" should by the hyperlink to: http://www.overstock.com/Home-Garden/Va Cleaners/2004/subcat.html

"gift baskets" should be the hyperlink to: http://www.overstock.com/Gifts-Flowers/Gift-Baskets/125/dept.html

"bunk beds" should be the hyperlink to: http://www.overstock.com/Home-Garden/Beds/Bu Beds,/bed-frame,/2013/subcat.html

"baby bedding" should be the hyperlink to: http://www.overstock.com/Home-Garden/Crib-Sets/3432/subcat.html

"vessel sinks" should be the hyperlink to: http://www.overstock.com/Home-Garden/Bathroo Sinks/Vessel,/style,/3238/subcat.html

Overstock.com apparently was offering university discounts in exchange for links to their product pages. A university published a PDF document with discounts that were intended for students.

Unfortunately for Overstock.com, the document apparently contained the text of the outreach with instructions for how to link to the Overstock.com product pages. The PDF doesn't exist anymore but Archive.org has a snapshot of it **here.**

Beware, some SEOs are still recommending discount link building. As you can see from the link above, this tactic violates Google's guidelines and if that matters to you then don't do it.

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3. Free Products Link Building

This is another variation of a paid link. The interesting thing about this tactic is that it can actually be illegal because it may violate FTC rules against publishing reviews that have been paid for with products, samples or other compensation.

The official guidelines are here: **FTC - Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising**

An easy to read FAQ about endorsements is here: **FTC - Endorsement Guides: What People Are Asking.**

4. Content Marketing Links

This is not about guest posting. This is about a different form of content marketing.

Content marketing is a lot of things. A valid version focuses on publishing articles on one's own site to establish the site as a thought leader and create a useful resource that generates goodwill and links.

Another version of content marketing is hiring a writer to publish an article on a third party website, with a link to the client from within the article.

These kinds of article links do not typically contain a disclosure that a payment was made to the writer for the article and the link. This is advertising.

When money or other consideration is exchanged for a link, that is considered an advertisement done for promotional purposes.

This may violate the FTC Guidelines cited above. A relevant section is here:

> *"Your spokesperson should disclose her connection when promoting your products outside of traditional advertising media (in other words, on programming that consumers won't recognize as paid advertising). The same guidance also would apply to comments by the expert in her blog or on her website."*

The following FTC guideline states that if the advertisement cannot be disclosed (as in a hidden arrangement), then that advertisement should not exist.

> *"If a disclosure is necessary to prevent an advertisement from being deceptive, unfair, or otherwise violative of a Commission rule, and it is not possible to make the disclosure clearly and conspicuously, then that ad should not be disseminated. This means that if a particular platform does not provide an opportunity to make clear and conspicuous disclosures, then that platform should not be used to disseminate advertisements that require disclosures"*

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5. Viral Link Campaigns

HOW VIRAL LINK CAMPAIGNS CAN BE USEFUL

Viral link campaigns can be useful. A viral link campaign can be useful if it is highly targeted to the demographic of people who would become purchasers and results in links from relevant webpages.

In my opinion, some of the value in viral link campaigns lie less in link creation and can be in awareness building. Building awareness for a company has value.

HOW VIRAL LINK CAMPAIGNS FAIL

The more off-topic a viral link campaign is, the less likely it will result in relevant links. In that scenario, there is no value for ranking or awareness building.

A viral link campaign is useless if the reason people are linking has nothing to do with your core business model or your keyword phrases.

Viral contests and other forms of viral stunts for links tend to result in irrelevant inbound links. Google discounts irrelevant links.

The page and/or the immediate context of the link must have a meaningful relevance to the site being linked to. If the relevance of the link is for the topic of the viral campaign, then those links may help rank that site for that topic.

A friend shared with me the anecdote of a company that ran a campaign for their real estate company. The campaign was a contest to about the world's worst real estate agent portrait photograph. For years afterward, the real estate site failed to rank for meaningful phrases but it did receive a lot of traffic for phrases like world's worst real estate agent.

Now imagine bloggers and news organizations linking to a toy retailer website because the toy retailer created the world's biggest teddy bear. All the links have the context of the World's Biggest Teddy Bear. The landing page they're linking to is the viral link page about the world's biggest teddy bear.

That site may rank for the world's biggest teddy bear. But those thousands of links will not help that site rank for their important search queries because none of those links come from the context of a specific toy nor do they link to a specific toy.

So how can that site rank for yo-yos when all their links are about the world's biggest teddy bear?

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It won't. They never do.

I gave a presentation at an Internet marketing conference several years ago and one of the audience members was confused at why his wildly successful viral link campaign failed to increase rankings and sales. The above description is why irrelevant viral link campaigns fail in terms of creating a lift in rankings and sales.

Don't overlook the value of building awareness with a viral link campaign. Viral linking as a strategy can be useful. Just don't expect an off-topic viral campaign to result in a change in rankings.

REDIRECT VIRAL LINKS PAGE TO ANOTHER PAGE

While we're on the topic of viral links, this is a strategy that no longer works. This strategy dates back to the days when Digg was popular. The scheme was to build a ton of viral (irrelevant) links to a viral link page. Then months later take the page down and do a permanent 301 redirect to the home page or to a product page.

This no longer works and hasn't worked for many years. Google will not assign PageRank or relevancy signals through a redirect (or canonical) if there isn't a one to one relevance between the two pages.

6. Sponsor Links

In my opinion, it is very unlikely that a philanthropic event will generate links from a meaningful context. This is similar to a viral link campaign. The best links are from a context that's related to your topic to a page on your site that is about that topic.

This kind of link is convenient and expedient. That's why some SEOs recommend them. They're easier to acquire, which is good for the link builder and not so good for the client.

It's not really the kind of link that will move your rankings. I say this from personal experience. I and others experimented with these around 14 years ago. This is nothing new. They simply do not move the dial on rankings.

And if that's not good enough for you, here's what Google's John Mueller **said** about charity sponsorship links in a Webmaster Hangout:

> *"…if with your website you're sponsoring… different clubs and sites where it looks like the primary intent is to get a link there, then that's something the web spam team might take action on.*
>
> *…So I'd try to take a look at the bigger picture there and think uwhether or not this is really something that you're doing systematically; like going out and sponsoring other sites or products with the intent of getting a link or if this is something that's essentially just a natural part of the web."*

7. Scholarship Links

PageRank and link ranking algorithms look at how the web interconnects.

Google builds a map of the Internet then likely creates what's called a Reduced Link Graph, consisting of mostly non-spam links and pages.

Then as part of the ranking analysis, it organizes the web into neighborhoods by topic.

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Scholarship links are great if your goal is to rank for [keyword phrase] + scholarship. The problem with these kinds of links is that they have an irrelevant context.

Most sites that do scholarship link building aren't about scholarships. They're about things like personal injury lawyers.
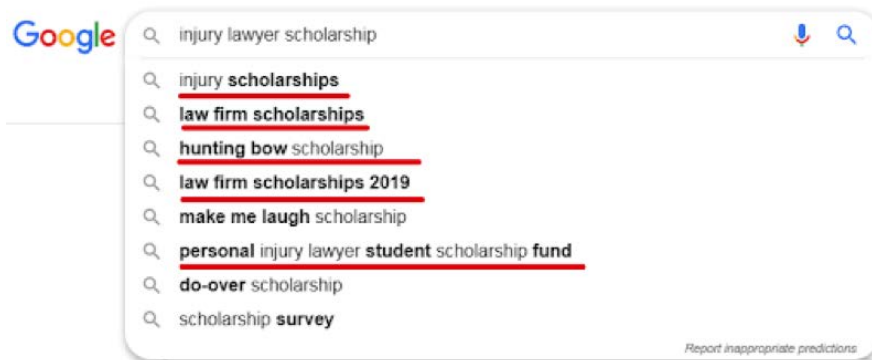
There is no relevance between a link from a school to a personal injury lawyer for the purpose of ranking for personal injury lawyer search phrases.

The link is relevant for things like "personal injury attorneys scholarship." Google will rank these kinds of pages for those scholarship search phrases and that is the extent of the value.

This is useless for business owners because the links aren't about their business, they're about scholarships.

If a personal injury lawyer attained links that are relevant for the search phrase, pizza restaurants, they will rank for personal injury pizza restaurant.

But a pizza restaurant link is not desirable for a personal injury lawyer website. The same kind of relevance problem applies to scholarship links.

An SEO may say that a link from a .edu will help increase the domain authority of a page, that it will increase "trust" and that Dot Edu links are special.

That's wrong in three different ways.

- No such thing as **domain authority.**

- No such thing as a trust metric in use by Google. (John Mueller responding to the suggestion that a site had acquired "long term trust" said, **"I don't know that we'd call it trust** or anything crazy like that.")

- **Dot EDU links are not special** because of their domain.

I think we're done with scholarship links.

Now let's move on to an even more useless link building trick.

8. Badges for Links Trick

One of the oldest and out of date link building tricks around is the Badges link building strategy. The Badges for links strategy is a variation of the Awards strategy as well as the Widgets strategy.

The idea is to create a fake award then award to websites that will display your image badge that proclaims them a winner. The trick is to give them the badge and the code which contains a sneaky link back to your website.

Run as fast as you can from any SEO who tells you the Badges trick is a useful link building tactic. This link building strategy is so stale that if you breathe on it it'll crumble and blow away.

The badges link building technique is similar to the widgets technique, which Google **explicitly called out** in 2016.

It's similar because in both cases the link builder is giving something of value (an award, a visitor counter) and forcing the link back to the original website.

The tactic relies on people linking to your site for reasons other than your content. Those kinds of links have been devalued since at least 2004 when Google stopped passing PageRank from pages that are irrelevant to the page they're linking to.

The idea is to create an awards page and have the badge link to that awards page. The idea is that the link will pass PageRank since the context of the link is similar to the context of the webpage.

One of the failures of the badge for links strategy is that unless your site is about awards, the link is useless. All it's going to do is help your page rank for "Keywords + Awards). How does that help you? It doesn't.

9. Blog Comments

Blog commenting is such a bad link building tactic that the search engines created a link attribute called "nofollow" in 2005. Should anyone really consider a tactic that was already burned in 2005?

Even though the **"nofollow"** attribute is now a hint, that's no excuse to start comment spamming like it's 2004.

Does anyone believe Google would make the nofollow into a hint without being able to handle a 2004 link building tactic?

10. Buying Websites

Buying a website is an edgy tactic. Redirecting the domain in order to parasite the link signals doesn't work anymore. The reason is that Google will not pass link signals from one page to another unless the pages are a close match.

Creating a separate website only doubles your work because now you're link building and content writing for two websites.

11. Charity Link Building

This is a variation of the sponsorship link building tactic. The problem with this tactic is that the links are irrelevant.

An SEO will try to convince you that domain authority, trust, and Dot EDU magic will help a site rank better. But those excuses have already been documented as untrue.

12. Content Syndication

This is a variation of guest posting, only worse. **Content syndication** is creating content and letting others publish it in exchange for a link.

Former Google engineer Matt Cutts warned the SEO community in his famous post about guest blogging called, **The decay and fall of guest blogging for SEO.**

13. Contests for Links

This is a variation of viral link building. It creates a situation where other websites are linking to a site for reasons that have nothing to do with the relevant topic. Off-topic links are never good.

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14. Widget Links

Widget links are one of the oldest forms of scaled link building.

Many years ago in the early 2000s, the top ranked site for Mesothelioma was a lawyer site that distributed visitor counters for universities to use at the bottom of their webpage.

Placing the page counter code resulted in a link to the lawyer site. It worked for years and then it stopped working.

When WordPress gained popularity many people started using other forms of useful widgets for people to add to their sites.

Plugins for things like a weather display, news, RSS feeds and other useful functions were created so that they resulted in a link back to someone's site.

Google **formally published** a blog post to warn against this technique.

15. Press Release Link Building

Press releases are useful for announcing important news about a business. The value is in a news organization publishing a news story based on the press release.

The value is not in the links embedded in the press release. Sites that syndicate press releases tend to be of low quality.

Google may also choose to ignore the links in duplicate content because it's painfully obvious that links in duplicate content do not represent the quality of being a true link signal.

Google's John Mueller is on record as **stating that** press release links are something Google tries to ignore.

So if common sense and logic aren't enough to convince you that is a low-quality tactic, then perhaps a Googler's statement will.

16. Profile Link Building

As the moderator of the Link Building Forum at WebmasterWorld and being friends with many forum owners, I can tell you right now that online community administrators know about link builders who sign up to a forum in order to drop a link from their profile.

Just don't. It's a low-quality link with zero context and zero relevance. It's not a true link.

A forum profile link is about as useless and spammy as a link can get. There is ZERO context for a ranking signal to a webpage. It's silly to consider such a link as a link building tactic.

In my opinion, anyone who recommends this tactic has a credibility problem.

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17. Forum Spamming

Forum administrators and moderators are on the lookout for link builders who post a couple useless "me too!" posts and then answer a question with a link to another site saying, "And there's more information at this site!"

Sorry, but most forum admins and mods consider that spam. The mods will trip over each other to delete those kinds of posts.

If you want to publicize your business in a way that puts it in a bad light and generates buckets of ill will, have at it.

18. WordPress Theme Link Building

"Powered by" links in the footer stopped working over fifteen years ago. Just stop.

Takeaway

Being fashionable is about going along with current trends. Like fashion, link building tactics have many trends, sometimes driven by how easy they are.

When it comes to link building, it's good to understand the history behind certain tactics. It's also useful to understand how search engines use links.

Knowledge will help keep you from making avoidable mistakes.

Don't let anyone tell you that knowing about patents or research is useless. Knowledge is useful. Understanding how search engines treat links can save you from needlessly tanking a website's rankings.

There are so many ways that a link building strategy can go wrong. These are, in my opinion, a few of the link building strategies that are a waste of time and money.

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10 Bad Links That Can Get You Penalized by Google

AUTHOR **Brian Harnish**

Every SEO professional worth their salt knows that links (along with content) are the backbone of SEO.

Links continue to remain a significant ranking factor.

What happens when you get bad links on enough of a scale to harm your site?

Your site can get algorithmically downgraded by Google – or worse, you get a manual action.

While Google maintains they are **good at ignoring bad links**, enough bad links can harm your site's ranking.

This guide will explain 10 different types of bad links that can get you penalized, and what you can do about them.

1. Press Release Links

Press release links were popular about 10 years ago.

These links were super easy to get.

All you had to do was write a press release and syndicate it to hundreds of press release distribution sites.

You'd quickly get hundreds of links.

Like any SEO tactic that worked well, it got abused.

Now, Google considers press release links a **link scheme** because these are so easy to manipulate.

You especially want to avoid any press release links that rely on over-optimized anchor text targeting your main money keyword.

If you absolutely must have a website link due to factors beyond your control, use naked URLs or branded URLs as your anchor text, and use only one link from the contact area of the press release.

2. Discussion Forum Links

To be clear: not all forum discussion links are bad.

If a link is coming from a good quality site, an established user, and the link itself is not manipulative or spammy, you probably will want to keep it.

However, if you have thousands of links coming in from foreign discussion forums, they are all low-quality spammy links, and they continue to come in, you may want to **disavow** them.

Any links that look spammy won't do you any favors in Google's eyes.

3. Links From Foreign Guestbooks

Links like these are also manipulative.

Links from foreign guestbooks can be placed manually or with the aid of an automatic program.

Enough of these at scale can cause ranking drops.

When in doubt, **disavow.**

4. Many Random NoFollow Links

Think you can fool Google by randomizing your footprint just enough so that your spammy link building will go undetected?

Think again.

It is exceedingly difficult to create randomized footprints that you think Google will not detect.

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If you are using an automated program, it is increasingly likely that Google will find the footprint of that automated program, unless it is truly random.

Why? The simple act of nofollowing the link is a footprint.

Thousands of links from many different sites that are all nofollowed is an indicator that something spammy is going on.

5. Private Blog Networks (PBNs)

PBNs used to be a great way to build links to get rankings.

You could randomize your footprint and all would be well.

You could continue to see significant gains from using these techniques.

Not anymore.

Now, PBNs on a massive enough scale can tank your site and cause it to lose organic traffic.

Google is able to detect – and punish – most PBNs.

Some PBNs may take longer to spot than others, but eventually, Google will catch on.

6. NoFollowed (& Followed) Social Bookmark Links

Social bookmarking links are also considered to be manipulative by Google.

This can get you in trouble if you do it too much.

Think about it. They are all manually-placed and are spammy as hell.

It's no wonder Google considers these a link scheme.

7. Directory Submissions (or a Directory Submissions Service)

Directory submission services love to tell you that you will get great traction from their links.

"We'll help increase your Google rankings!!" they will say.

However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Submitting to low-quality directories will likely do more harm than good for your rankings.

As with many things in SEO, there is an exception.

It is OK to use **relevant and targeted directories for natural link building** – especially in local SEO.

In fact, here are **21 Web Directories That Still Have Value.**

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8. Blog Comments

Historically, blog comments have been one of the most-abused tactics in SEO.

Comment spam is an ancient link acquisition tactic to avoid.

It. Does. Not. Work!

In fact, you can thank spammy blog comments for the introduction of **nofollowed links.**

The goal was to prevent spammers from getting SEO benefits from abusing the comments section.

But there is a right way to approach **blog comments.** The key is leaving topically relevant comments on topically relevant sites.

9. Links From Fiverr or Other Cheap Link Services

This is yet another abused tactic in SEO.

Again, this is so egregiously bad that, while they are not part of Google's guidelines, the patterns and footprints left behind are likely obvious to Google's algorithms.

It would not be hard for Google to set up an investigative protocol to sign up for accounts for these services, pose as SEOs or other webmasters, and check out the most common patterns used by these services.

Just always remember – that person you're talking to on the black hat forums regularly could very well be a Googler.

10. Links Built by Automatic Link Building Programs

Ever heard of tools like GSA Search Engine Ranker, Scrape Box, or XRumer?

Sure these tools can build you lots of links. However, in recent years, these programs have become less effective.

This SEO professional does not recommend using these programs for your SEO efforts, especially not on your money site.

If an SEO can think of it, it is likely that Google is already several steps ahead with pattern variations already built into their algorithm.

Are Links Actually to Blame, or Is It Something Else?

So far we've talked about links that harm you.

But could it be something else?

To find out, you should perform multiple audits.

Assess the state of your site and move forward from there.

- A **technical SEO audit** to uncover any potential crawl issues, technical issues, or any similar issues impacting the site.

- A **content audit** to determine the state of the site's content.

- A link profile audit to assess the current state of the site's overall link profile.

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From here, you will be able to move forward with steps to fix the site.

If you are unfortunate enough to have a complex site with issues in all three columns, you will need to get to work.

Manual Action: Preparing the Disavow File

In my opinion, nothing beats Link Detox by Link Research Tools. It can assess links from the most sources (25), such as Majestic, GSC, Moz, Ahrefs, SEMrush, and many more.

You will want to compile all links for as many sources as you can get your hands on.

Upload them according to the instructions in Link Detox.

Once you have done this, and you have gone through Link Detox's process of reviewing and rating links, it will be necessary to prepare the disavow file.

Google has **said some interesting things about the disavow file,** including the following:

> Someone **stated in Reddit:**
>
> *"…recently John Muller from Google confirmed that bad links can in fact hurt your rankings in some cases…"*
>
> To which **John Mueller replied:**
>
> *"This was specific to links that you've built yourself, not about negative SEO."*

Mueller has also discussed the following:

Someone tweeted:

"If I have a "medium" sized website with lots of local physical branches, tens of thousands of backlinks, very old website with a 3-letter domain that gets linked to a lot by crap websites and 0-value directories, are those directory links hurting me? Should we disavow?"

Then followed up with:

"Or does it not matter, and Google knows these websites link to sites like mine for no reason on a daily basis and we don't seek these links out?"

John Mueller responded:

"Random links collected over the years aren't necessarily harmful, we've seen them for a long time too and can ignore all of those weird pieces of web-graffiti from long ago. Disavow links that were really paid for (or otherwise actively unnaturally placed), don't fret the cruft."

Frequently Asked Questions About Link Audits

HOW CAN YOU ASSESS WHETHER YOU HAVE A LINK PENALTY?

Did you get a manual action notification?

Just check under manual actions within **Google Search Console.**

You'll know immediately if Google has penalized your site.

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Did your site get downgraded algorithmically?

Usually, you can assess whether you have an algorithmic downgrade by examining your Google Analytics data.

Typically, you'll see an approximate 35-50 percent drop in overall traffic. This could be to certain pages, folders, or even sitewide.

A careful analysis can sometimes reveal other issues (e.g., technical or content) on a site that are causing such traffic drops.

In these cases, you should begin with a multi-tiered audit implementation approach designed to fix content-related issues along with link-related issues.

SHOULD YOU LOOK AT THE LINK PROFILES OF SITES THAT LINK TO YOU?

While a full audit isn't necessary, checking out the links that link to you could be helpful.

In general, if you see something extraordinarily spammy, that lowers the quality of the link overall. If you don't, it's probably a good idea to keep it.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU IDENTIFY A NEGATIVE SEO ATTACK?

You need to stop the attack as quickly as possible. If you are under high volume link attack, it's only a matter of time before you will be penalized.

The process itself is really fairly simple and not overly complex:

- Block all bots. Except perhaps the major ones: Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

- Do a mass disavow of all incoming links.

- Implement a regular link review and disavow process to continue disavowing all incoming links until the link attack goes away.

## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO IMPLEMENT A GOOD LINK PROFILE?

Adopt **good habits:**

- Use branded anchor text where possible.

- Use naked URLs.

- Do not use exact match keyword anchor text.

- Don't get links from bad sites or bad neighborhoods.

- Don't place links with over-optimized anchor text manually or with tools.

- Make sure your links are editorially vouched for by the site owners involved.

- Get links from good authority sites in your niche.

- Engage with people

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In general, your **link profile** should be fairly balanced, and **types of links** should not exceed approximately 20 percent of your overall link profile.

Avoid spammy, unnatural links and disavow any against Google's guidelines.
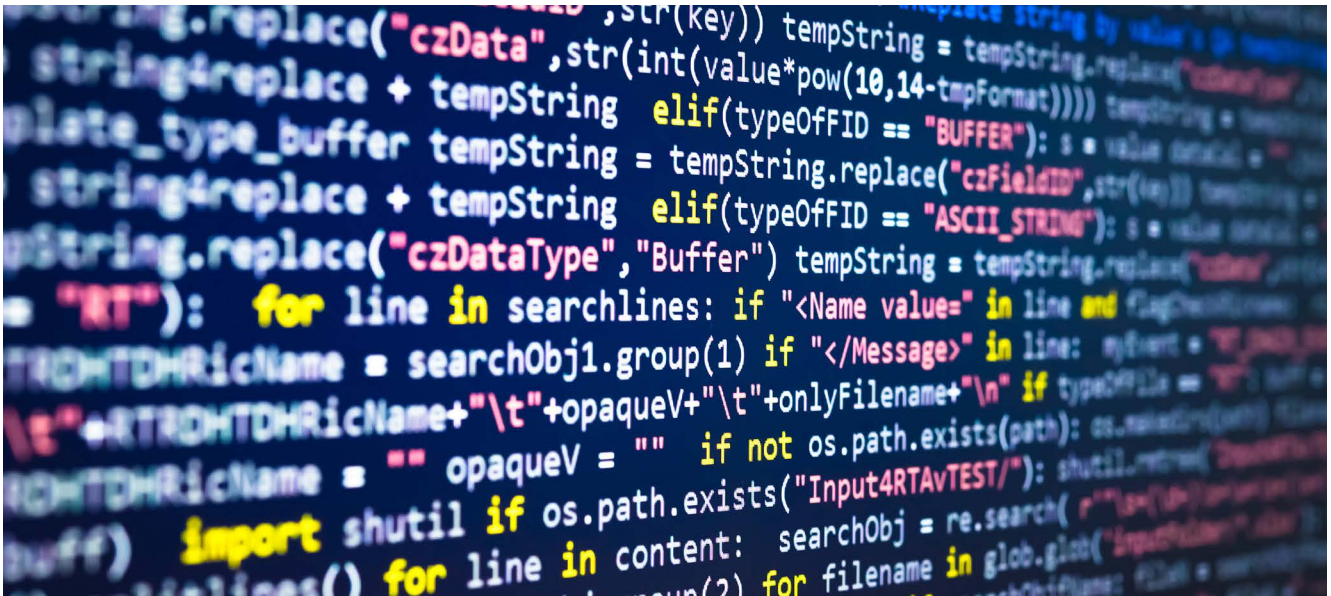
HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO REMOVE AN ALGORITHMIC DOWNGRADE?

It can take 6-8 months or more to remove an algorithmic downgrade, depending on its severity.

And if it's a manual action, you could be looking at close to a year.

I've personally worked on a 200,000+ link profile in the legal industry that took over a year to fully get completely reversed, and seven submissions of the reinclusion request sent to Google.

Don't give up – it's possible to repair even the worst of the worst link profiles.