The Beginner's Guide To Link Building
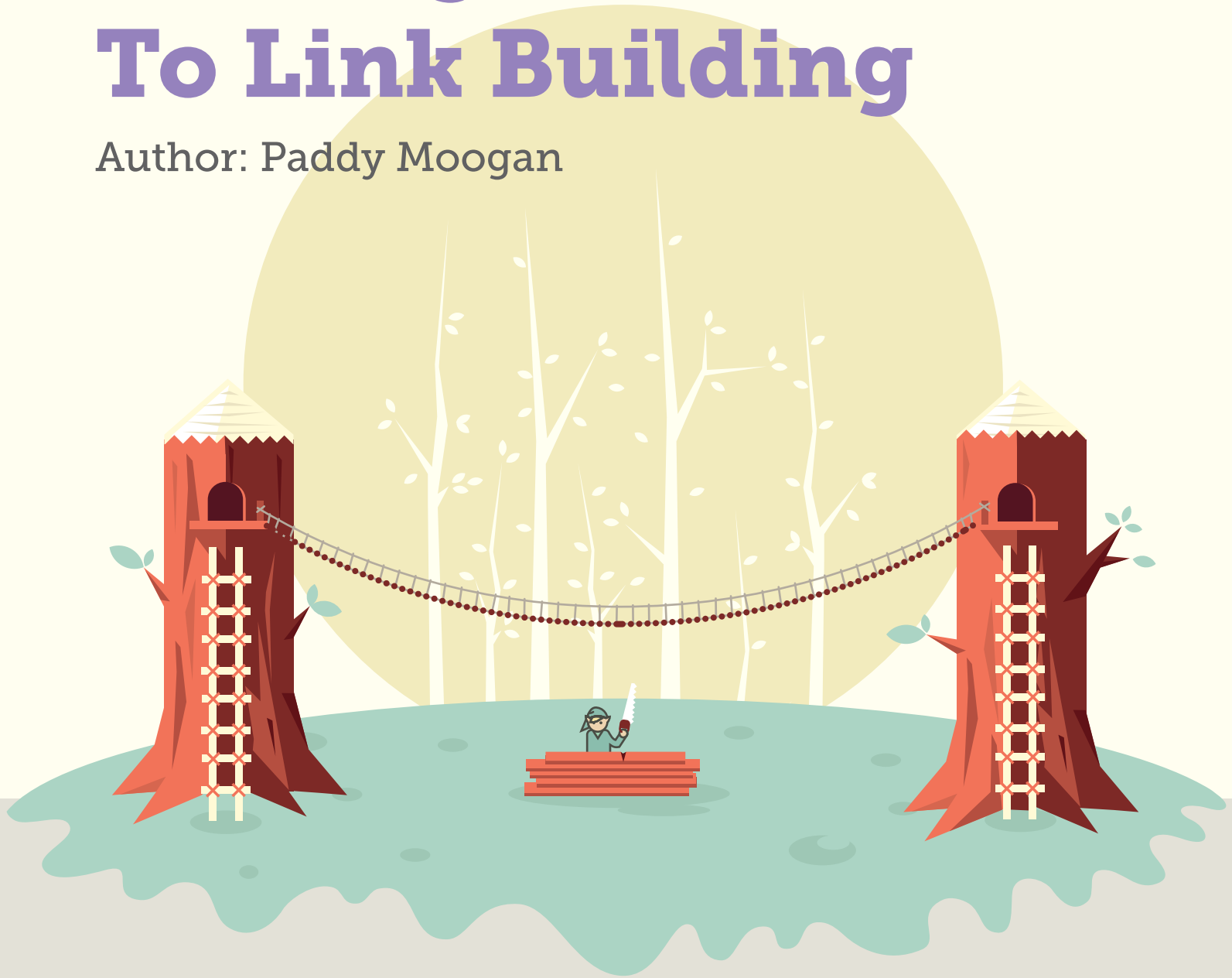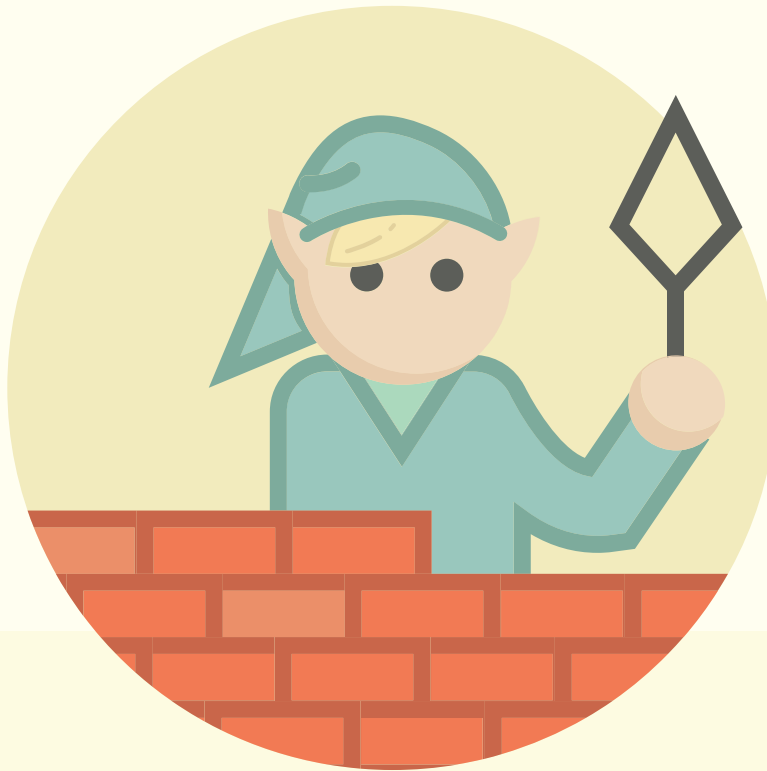
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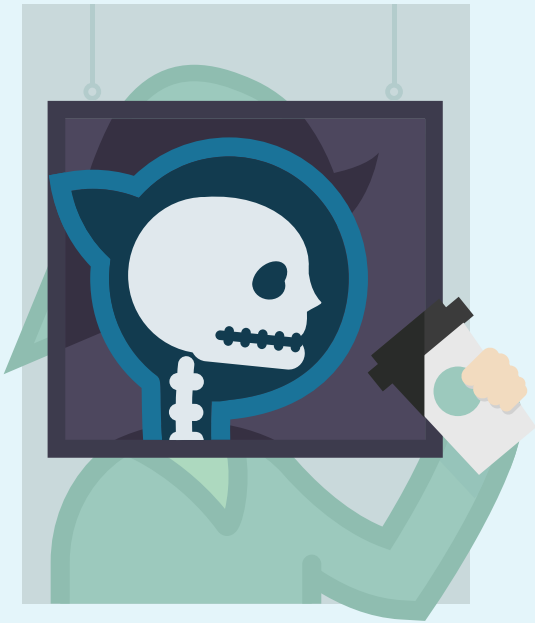
MOZ

What You Will Learn

Chapter 1

What is Link Building & Why is It Important?

Whether you're brand new to link building or have been doing it for a while, we're sure you'll find something useful in this guide. The landscape of SEO and link building is always changing, and today, the importance of building high-quality links has never been higher. The need to understand and implement high-quality campaigns is essential if you're going to compete and thrive online, and that isn't going to change any time soon. This guide is designed to get you going quickly and in the right direction. There is a lot to take in, but we've broken everything up into easy-to-digest chapters and have included lots of examples along the way. We hope you enjoy The Beginner's Guide to Link Building!

Definition of Link Building

Link building is the process of acquiring hyperlinks from other websites to your own. A hyperlink (usually just called a link) is a way for users to navigate between pages on the internet. Search engines use links to crawl the web; they will crawl the links between the individual pages on your website, and they will crawl the links between entire websites. There are many techniques for building links, and while they vary in difficulty, SEOs tend to agree that link building is one of the hardest parts of their jobs. Many SEOs spend the majority of their time trying to do it well. For that reason, if you can master the art of building high-quality links, it can truly put you ahead of both other SEOs and your competition.

Why is Link Building Important for SEO?

The Anatomy of a Hyperlink

In order to understand the importance of link building, it's important to first understand the basics of how a link is created, how the search engines see links, and what they can interpret from them.
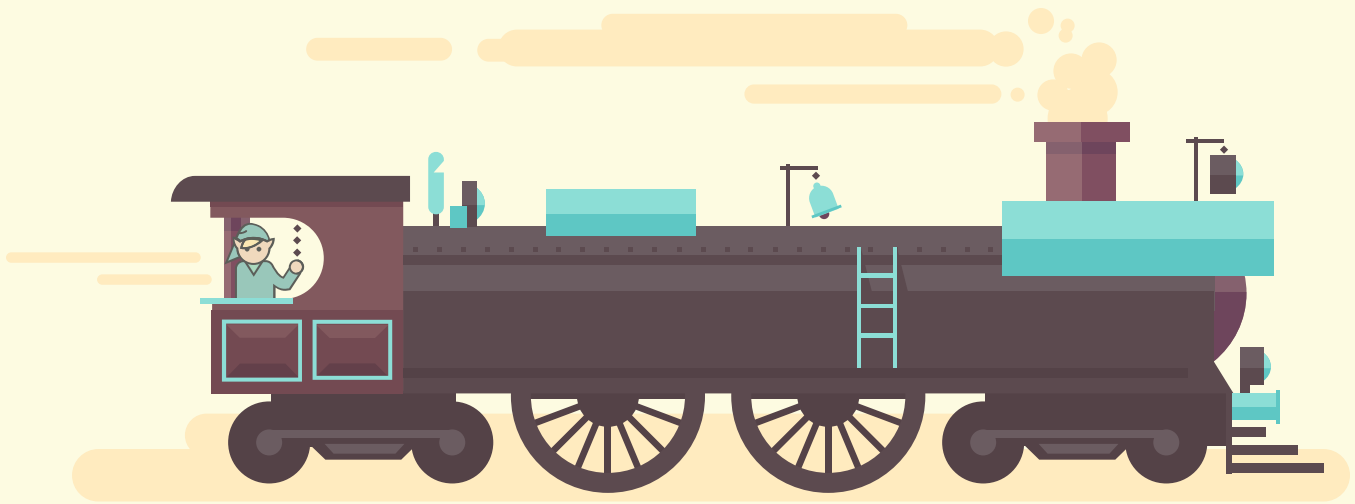
`<a href="http://www.jonwye.com">Jon Wye's Custom Designed Belts</a>`

Start of link tag

Link referral location

Visible/ anchor text of link

Closure of link tag

1. Start of link tag: Called an anchor tag (hence the "a"), this opens the link tag and tells search engines that a link to something else is about to follow.

2. Link referral location: The "href" stands for "hyperlink referral," and the text inside the quotation marks indicates the URL to which the link is pointing. This doesn't always have to be a web page; it could be the address of an image or a file to download. Occasionally, you'll see something other than a URL, beginning with a # sign. These are local links, which take you to a different section of the page you're already on.

3. Visible/anchor text of link: This is the little bit of text that users see on the page, and on which they need to click if they want to open the link. The text is usually formatted in some way to make it stand out from the text that surrounds it, often with blue color and/or underlining, signaling to users that it is a clickable link.

4. Closure of link tag: This signals the end of the link tag to the search engines.

What Links Mean for Search Engines

There are two fundamental ways that the search engines use links:

1) To discover new web pages
2) To help determine how well a page should rank in their results

Once search engines have crawled pages on the web, they can extract the content of those pages and add it to their indexes. In this way, they can decide if they feel a page is of sufficient quality to be ranked well for relevant keywords (Google created a short video to explain that process). When they are deciding this, the search engines do not just look at the content of the page; they also look at the number of links pointing to that page from external websites and the quality of those external websites. Generally speaking, the more high-quality websites that link to you, the more likely you are to rank well in search results.

Links as a ranking factor are what allowed Google to start to dominate the search engine market back in the late 1990s. One of Google's founders, Larry Page, invented PageRank, which Google used to measure the quality of a page based in part on the number of links pointing to it. This metric was then used as part of the overall ranking algorithm and became a strong signal because it was a very good way of determining the quality of a page.

It was so effective because it was based upon the idea that a link could be seen as a vote of confidence about a page, i.e., it wouldn't get links if it didn't deserve to. The theory is that when someone links to another website, they are effectively saying it is a good resource. Otherwise, they wouldn't link to it, much in the same way that you wouldn't send a friend to a bad restaurant.
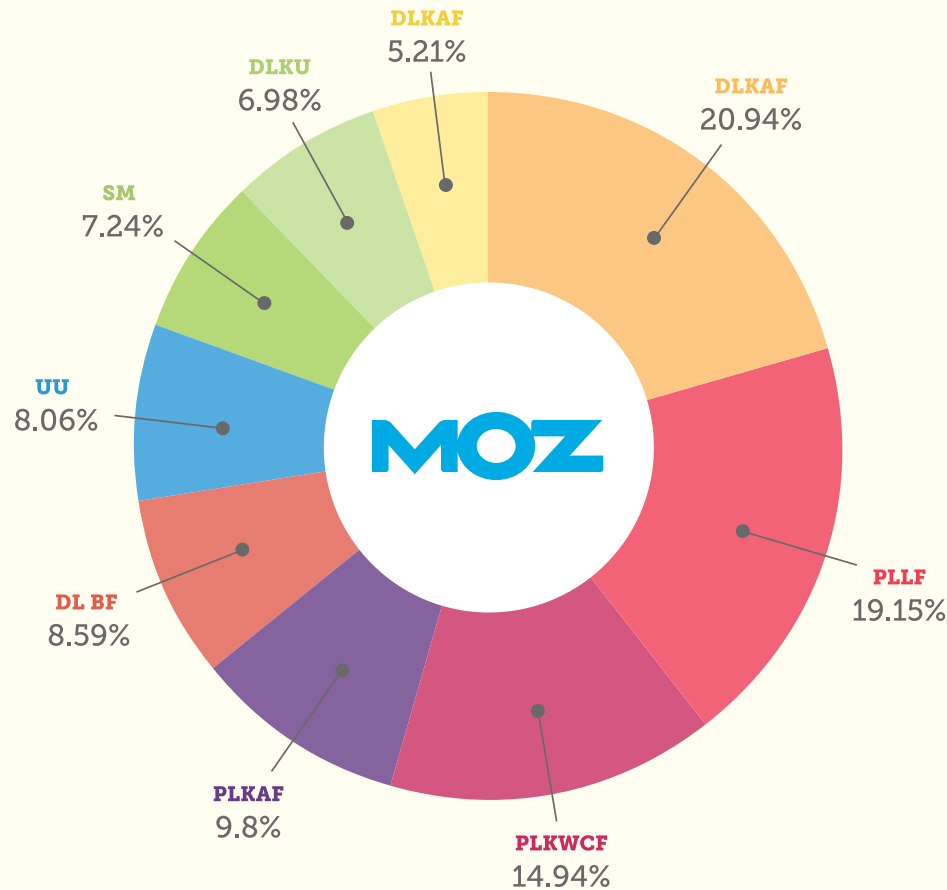
However, SEOs soon discovered how to manipulate PageRank and search results for chosen keywords. Google started actively trying to find ways to discover websites which were manipulating search results, and began rolling out regular updates which were specifically aimed at filtering out websites that didn't deserve to rank.

This has also led to Google starting to discount a number of link building techniques that were previously deemed fine, for example, submitting your website to web directories and getting a link in return. This was a technique that Google actually recommended at one point, but it became abused and overused by SEOs, so Google stopped passing as much value from that sort of links.

More recently, Google has actively penalized the rankings of websites who have attempted such overuse of these techniques—often referred to as over-optimization—in their link building. Google's regular Penguin updates are one such example. Knowing which link building techniques to avoid and stay within Google's guidelines is an important subject that we'll discuss later in this guide.

We don't know the full algorithm that Google uses to determine its search results—that's the company's "secret sauce." Despite that fact, the general consensus among the SEO community (according to the 2013 Moz search ranking factors survey) is that links still play a big role in that algorithm. They represent the largest two slices of the pie chart below.

Weighting of Thematic Clusters of Ranking Factors in Google

DLKAF
5.21%

DLKU
6.98%

DLKAF
20.94%

SM
7.24%

UU
8.06%

PLLF
19.15%

DL BF
8.59%

PLKAF
9.8%

PLKWCF
14.94%

Domain-Level, Keyword-Agnostic Features
(e.g. domain name length, extension, domain HTTP response time, etc.)

Page-Level Link Features
(e.g. PageRank, TrustRank, quantity of link links, anchor text distribution, quality of links sources, etc.)

Page-Level KW & Content Features
(e.g. TF*IDF, topic-modeling scores on content, content quantity/relevance, etc.)

Page-Level, Keyword-Agnostic Features
(e.g. Content length, readability, uniqueness, load speed, etc.)

Domain-Level Brand Features
(e.g. offline usage of brand/domain name, mentions of brand.domain in news/ media/press, entry association, etc.)

User, Usage, & Traffic/ Query Data
(e.g. traffic/ usage signals from browsers/ toolbars/clickstrean, quantity/ diversity/ CTR of queries, etc.)

Social Metrics
(e.g. quantity/quality of tweeted links Facebook shares, Google +1s, etc.)

Domain-Level Keyword Usage
(e.g. exact-match keyword domains, partial-keyword matches, etc.)

Domain-Level, Keyword-Agnostic Features
(e.g. domain name length, TLD extension, domain HTTP response time, etc.)

It is generally accepted that if all other factors are equal, the volume and quality of links pointing to a page will make the difference between rankings. Having said that, with recent moves from Google, including the release of Penguin updates and its push of Google+, there is speculation that the impact of links is being reduced and replaced with social signals such as tweets or +1s.

For now, though, there is little doubt that if you get high-quality links to your website, it will help you rank better and get more traffic (we'll talk more about what makes a "good-quality" link in Chapter 2). We've mentioned "high-quality" a few times, now, and there's a good reason: The focus on quality is increasing as Google becomes ever more sophisticated at filtering out low-quality links. This directly impacts SEOs, as they need to make sure the link building techniques they choose focus primarily on that quality.

What You Need to Know About Nofollow

Whether you're brand new to link building or have been doing it for a while, we're sure you'll find something useful in this guide. The landscape of SEO and link building is always changing, and today, the importance of building high-quality links has never been higher. The need to understand and implement high-quality campaigns is essential if you're going to compete and thrive online, and that isn't going to change any time soon. This guide is designed to get you going quickly and in the right direction. There is a lot to take in, but we've broken everything up into easy-to-digest chapters and have included lots of examples along the way. We hope you enjoy The Beginner's Guide to Link Building!

There is an attribute that can sometimes be applied to links called the "nofollow" attribute. If added, you will not notice any difference if you're a user. But, if you look at the code of the link, it will look slightly different:

```
<a href="http://www.example.com" rel="nofollow">Example</a>
```

Note the addition of rel="nofollow". This tells Google not to pass any PageRank across this link to the target URL. Effectively, you're telling Google not to trust this link and to discount it from consideration. Therefore, it should not help the target URL to rank any better.

The main reason a site might use nofollow relates to scenarios in which that site lacks total control over the links that are added to its pages. In other words, they don't want to show Google a vote of confidence when they don't know whether or not they actually are confident. This is more common than you'd expect; here are a few examples:

- Blog comments
- Forum posts
- Guest book comments
- Editable Wiki pages (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Yahoo! Answers
- Guest post signatures

Users can freely add links to each of these places, and because of their size, it isn't really practical to moderate every single one of those links. So, in order to deter link spammers from taking advantage of a site's PageRank, the site will often choose to apply the nofollow attribute to all links posted by other users.
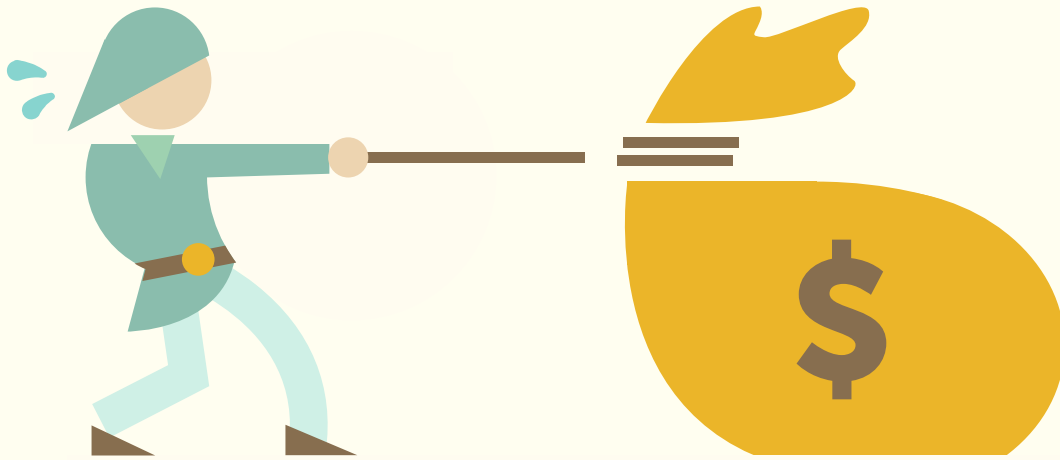
Another use for the nofollow attribute is for advertisers to use on links that have been paid for. So, if you buy an advertising banner on a website which links to you, Google says that the nofollow attribute should be added so that they know not to pass any PageRank across that link. The idea here is that you shouldn't benefit in the organic results by buying advertisements that include links on other websites.

More recently, Google has [expanded this concept](#) to included optimized links in press releases, article directories, and advertorials. These are all examples where the use of nofollow is entirely appropriate.

In terms of your work, you should know that links that have the nofollow attribute applied will probably not help your organic search rankings as directly as followed links. [That isn't to say they're not worthwhile](#). After all, typical users don't notice whether a link is nofollowed or not, and may actually click through and visit your

website even if it is. That is, after all, the point of buying advertisements online. That being said, for the purposes of link building, you want most of your links to be followed and therefore counted by Google.

How Can Link Building Benefit My Business?

As we've discussed, links are a very important signal that the search engines use to determine rankings. So, we know that increasing the number of high-quality links pointing at your website can significantly increase your chances of ranking well.

There are other benefits to link building, though, that may be less immediately obvious yet still worthy of consideration.

Building Relationships

Link building can often involve outreach to other relevant websites and blogs in your industry. This outreach frequently relates to the promotion of something that you've just created, such as a piece of content or an infographic. A common goal of outreach is to get a link, but there is much more to it than just this: Outreach can help you build long-term relationships with key influencers in your industry, and these relationships can mean that your business becomes highly regarded and trusted. This in itself is valuable, even if we forget link building for a moment, because we are creating genuine evangelists and advocates for our business.

Sending Referral Traffic

We've talked about the impact of links on your rankings, but what about the impact of links on referral traffic? A good link from a highly-visited website can lead to an increase in traffic, too. If it is a relevant website, chances are that the traffic is also relevant and may lead to an increase in sales, as well. Again, in this situation the value of a link isn't just about SEO—it's about customers. A great example of this in action was [this guest post](#) written by Michael Ellsberg on Tim Ferriss' blog. He also wrote a case study on [Forbes](#) explaining just how valuable this guest post was to him. "There's a big difference between being exposed to a large audience," he says, "and being exposed to a comparatively smaller (but still large) audience which is ridiculously passionate." In other words, the avid followers of a single blog were far more likely to take the advice of the blogger than (for example) viewers were to pay attention to the anchor on CNN, even if the latter group outnumbered the former.

Brand Building

Good link building can help build your brand and establish you as an authority in your niche. There are some link building techniques, such as content creation, which can show people the expertise of your company, and this can go a long way toward building your brand. For example, if you create a piece of content based upon industry data and publish it, you have a chance of becoming well known for it in your industry. When you do outreach and try to get links to the content, you are showing your expertise and asking other people in your industry to help spread the word and show others the same.

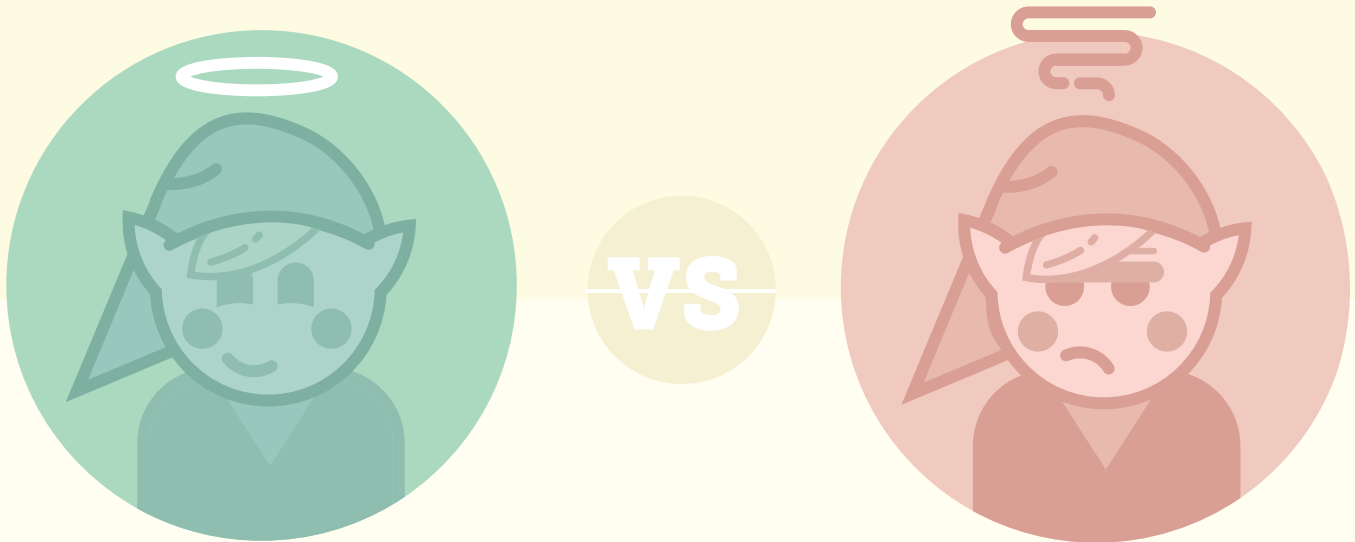### An Important Note On Link Building Vs. Link "Earning"

Or, the importance of having webpages worth linking to.

Before building links, you need something of value to build links to. Often it's the homepage of your website. More often than not, though, you build links to specialized resources such as a blog post, tool, research study or graphic. Sometimes these assets exist long before you begin your link building campaign. Other times, you create these resources specifically with the goal of building links in mind.

This introduces the concepts of [link earning](#) and "deserving to rank." **All link building campaigns must start with something worth linking to.** It's very difficult to build links to low-value webpages, but when you begin with something truly valuable that people find useful or share-worthy, link building is a much easier endeavor.

Chapter 2

Types of Links
(Both Good and Bad)

As we mentioned in Chapter 1, quality is more important than ever, because Google has begun penalizing websites that build low-quality or spammy links. In the past, SEOs have been able to border on the risky side when it came to link building. Techniques such as article submissions and directory listings were commonly recommended by SEO companies, because they worked well and posed little risk if done correctly. However, times have changed with the introduction of the Penguin updates from Google which aggressively hurt websites that pursue these low-quality link building techniques. In this chapter, we'll give you a sense for the types of links you should and shouldn't focus on building.

"Natural" Editorial Links

This type of link is the holy grail for SEOs. Essentially, these are the links that you didn't even have to ask for because they are editorially given by other website owners. This is much more efficient than having to contact someone and ask them to link to you. However, you need to give someone a good reason to do so, and you need to find ways of making large numbers of bloggers aware of that reason.

An example of a good reason may be a great piece of content that you've created which you then seeded with a few key influential bloggers, and through that process more bloggers have naturally become aware of it. This is hard to do and can take time, which is part of why these types of links are so highly valued. They are also the types of links that Google often hold up as great examples, indicating that they will stand the test of time.

Manual "Outreach" Link Building

This is probably one of the most common types of link-building you'll perform as an SEO, particularly if you're just starting out or your business is still quite small and unknown. It involves manually contacting website owners and bloggers, asking them to link to you. Again, you need to give them a reason to link to you and to be successful, you need to be contacting people who are relevant. If you're contacting people who have no connection to your industry, then they are likely to be confused when you ask for a link.

Self-created, Non-editorial Links

This type of link is generally frowned upon these days, as it often falls in line with black-hat practices that aim to fool the search engines into thinking a piece of content is relevant and important when it actually isn't (more on black-hat practices in Chapter 6). With the introduction of Penguin in 2012 (and the subsequent updates to it), Google has begun devaluing and even penalizing this type of link.

Due to these links not being editorially given, they inherently carry less weight than the other types of links. In the past, they have been useful for some SEOs working on certain websites, but you should use great caution in their implementation now.

A few examples may be:

- Blog comments that are not moderated
- Press releases with optimized anchor text
- Article directories
- Guest post signatures
- Advertorials
- Embeddable widgets
- Infographic embeds
- User profile pages
- Guestbooks
- Forum signatures
- Directories that are not moderated

The types of links you choose to pursue with your strategy should depend on your existing link profile, but in general, you should avoid links that are not editorially given. Instead, you should focus on the tactics that will give you editorial links that add value to your website and business.
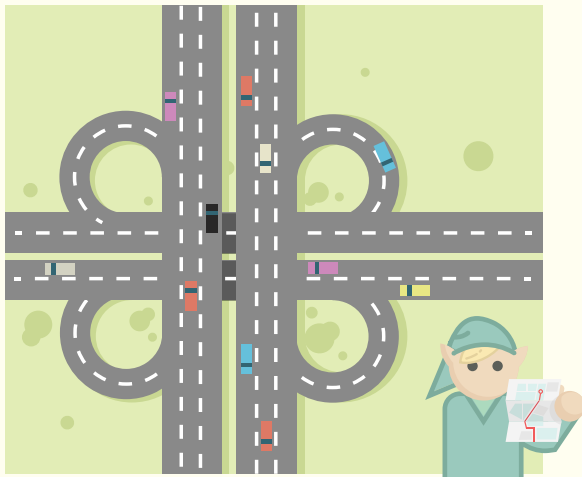
How to Start a Link Building Campaign

What is a Link Building Campaign?

A link building campaign is the process of actively trying to increase links to your website, usually accompanied by some kind of overarching objective. It will use assets belonging to the website in order to acquire those links, and an asset can be anything from content and news to products and services.

Structuring a Link Building Campaign

There are various components of a link building campaign; some will be crucial to success and others will be helpful but not necessarily essential. Much will depend on a combination of your available assets and resources.
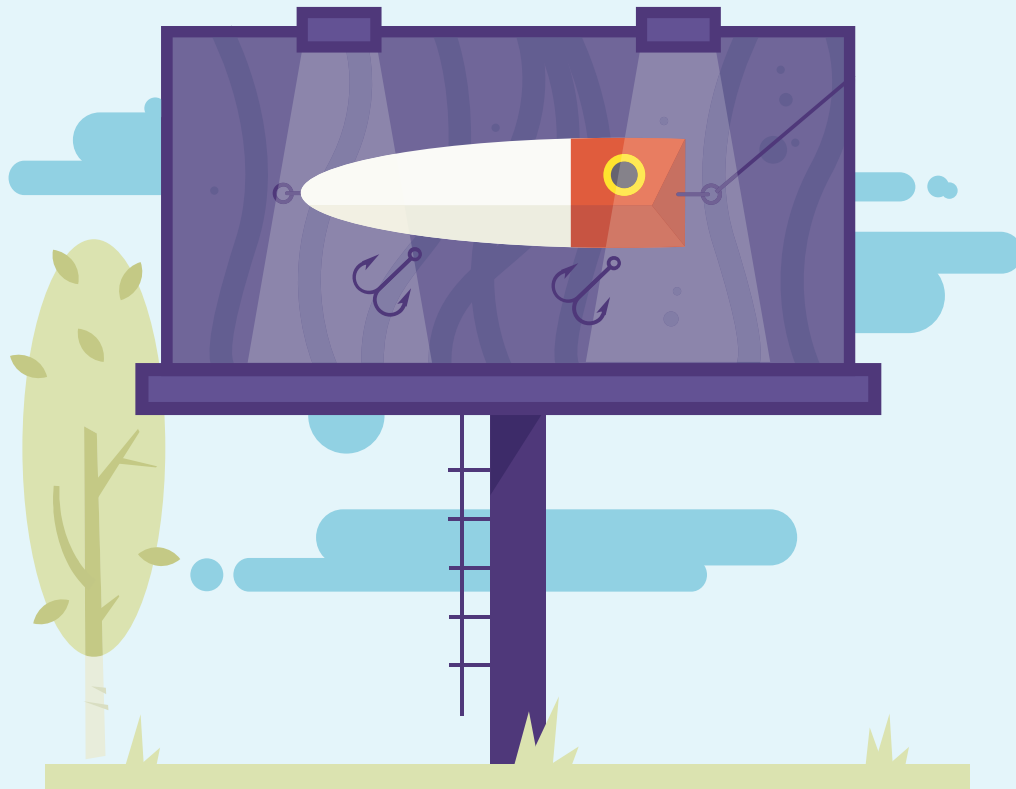
Setting Goals

Link building is a form of online marketing, and with any form of marketing you should start with goals. Knowing the goals of your campaign right at the start helps to ensure that you create a strategy that gives you the best possible chance of success. You also need to ensure that the goals of your link building campaign tie in closely with the overall goals of your business. For example, "build 10 links" is not a good goal to hit if building 10 links does not have any impact on the overall success of the business.

Here, we encounter a slight issue. We learned earlier that links are a strong part of the search engine ranking algorithms. So, wouldn't hitting a goal of more links help with rankings? Helping with rankings helps drive more traffic and this helps bring more customers, right? All of this is true, but the problem is that it can sometimes take time for the links you've built to start having an overall positive effect on rankings. It isn't as simple as build links one day and see improvements the next. This is particularly true in competitive industries.

This poses a problem for SEOs because it can be hard to show that a link building campaign is successful, even if it hits certain goals.

For this reason, it is very important to not only set realistic goals, but to make sure that the goals you set are more intelligent than "build x links." The goals need to tie into real organizational goals and ultimately have a positive impact on the bottom line of your business. For example, you may want to increase organic search traffic in order to drive more sales. At the same time, you need to educate those around you that SEO and link building doesn't succeed overnight and that results are not instantaneous. Like any good marketing, the focus should be on long-term gains, not overnight quick-wins.

"You also need to ensure that the goals of your link building campaign tie in closely with the overall goals of your business."

Finding Your Assets

At the heart of any link building campaign is the asset that you're going to use in order to attract and earn links. This can also be known as the "hook" that will make people care about what you have to offer, and will entice them into linking to you. Assets will vary from business to business and you need to identify which assets your business has that will be of interest to others and can be used in link building.

Examples of assets may be:

Content

Data

Products

Services

People

One other asset that black-hat SEOs still use is money. Obviously, all assets will probably require an investment of some kind, but these SEOs approach link acquisition as a pure cash transaction. **Buying links is strictly against Google's guidelines, and if a website is caught engaging in this practice, it can mean a heavy penalty and loss of traffic.** Buying links is risky and usually the risks will outweigh the potential loss, so we strongly recommend against it.

You'll also need to make sure that the assets you create are relevant to the audience you'd like to attract. Aleyda Solis put together an [in-depth walk-through](#) that's worth a look.

What Types of Links You Need

When defining the strategy for your link building campaign, you will need to think about the types of links you need to get. There are various types to consider:

1. Links to your homepage
2. Links to "deep" pages (such as product or category pages)
3. Links containing your brand / company name
4. Links containing the keywords you're targeting

Additionally, there are combinations of the above, such as a branded link to a deep page. Identifying what types of links you need will start with a detailed link analysis of your current website as well as a look at how you rank for certain keywords in comparison to your competitors. You can use Open Site Explorer to run this kind of analysis and see what your link profile currently looks like.

The analysis will show you opportunities for improvement. For example, you may see that you're not ranking for one of your main keywords. After doing some link analysis, you find that you have no links pointing to your website that contain this keyword, or, you find that the most relevant deep page has no links at all pointing at it. If you identify something like this, you have a tangible problem that you can work to resolve. In this case, it may mean that your strategy includes trying to build links to the deep page that currently doesn't have any links and doesn't rank for your target keywords.
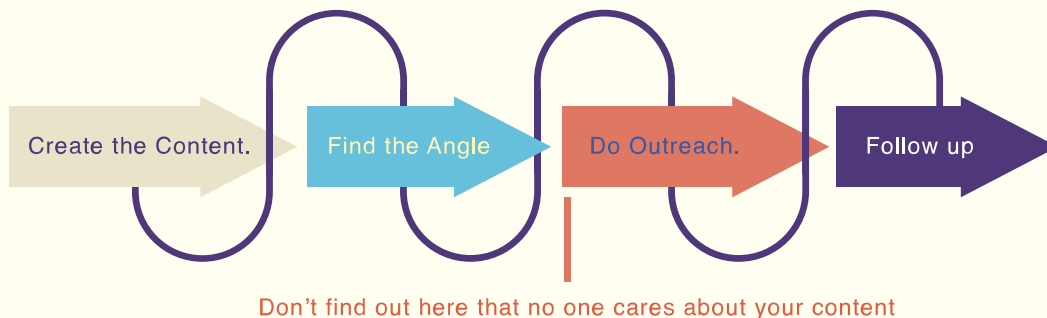
Finding link targets

The first thing you need to think about is what types of people you should contact, as you want to make sure that you are contacting people who are likely to be interested in your content. If you contact people randomly, your response rate will be a lot lower, and you're likely to give yourself and your website a bad reputation.

Ideally, before you actually start a link building campaign, you should have a rough idea of who you think will care about what you're doing. If you create a piece of content that you want links to, such as an infographic, you should ask yourself right at the start of the process who will care about it. More importantly, who will care enough to actually link to it?

This last bit is crucial. While you may find it quite easy to get people look at your content, it is a whole new level of engagement for them to actually link to it. Linking to something requires a bit of effort and time, so you need to make someone care enough for them to not mind doing this. The barrier for getting your content shared on social networks is much lower. More people have a Twitter or Facebook account than a website or blog, making it easier for them to share.

So How Do You Make People Care Enough to Link?
You need to find a hook that makes people care. You need to work this hook into your content right from the start. If you put off creating your hook until the moment you begin your outreach, you may discover that no one cares about the point of your content, the result being that you will have devoted a lot of time to crafting content no one wants to link to.

Create the Content. Find the Angle Do Outreach. Follow up

Don't find out here that no one cares about your content

Some hooks that you can think about may be:

News
Funny
Controversial
Data Visualization
Competition
Ego-Bait
Long-Form, Detailed Content

There are lots of hooks, but the ones above should at least get you thinking about what you can offer to people that will make them link to you.

A simple exercise you can do here is to go to your Facebook feed and see what links people are sharing. Note down what characteristics each link has and try to find patterns. Chances are that links shared on Facebook are funny, because many people use this platform for personal stuff and may not share more serious stuff there, with the exception of big news or controversial topics. Now go and take a look at your Twitter feed, note down which types of links are being shared there and ask yourself why. You may find that more long-form, informative content is shared on Twitter than on Facebook.

Identifying Your Target Audience for Links

Once you have your idea mapped out, it shouldn't be too hard to find out who will fall within your target audience. Generally, you just need to brainstorm subjects related to your content. Let's take a look at an example.

Imagine you are putting together a piece of content entitled, The Definitive Guide to Baking the Perfect Cupcakes. You are producing this content because you own a local bakery which sells cupcakes as well as lots of other lovely things.

Who would be interested in this guide?

Food bloggers: the obvious choice!

Parent bloggers: they may want to teach their kids how to make cupcakes and your guide will show them how to do this

Recipe websites: because your guide will contain lots of great recipes for different types of cupcakes

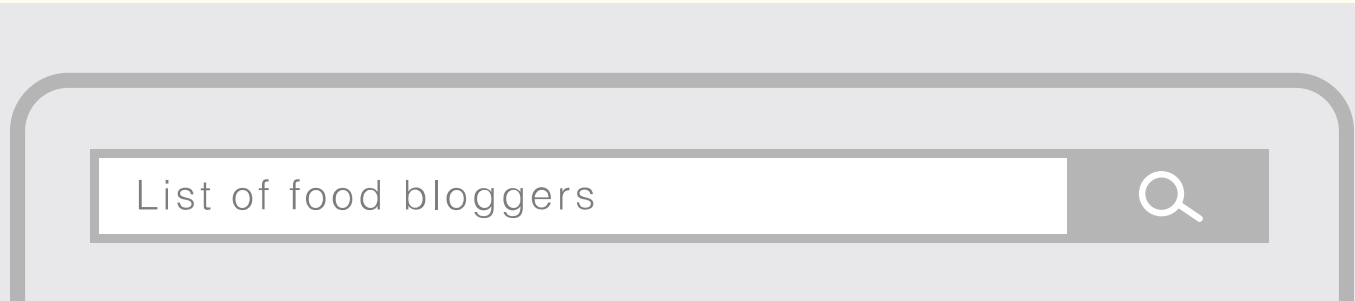**Party websites:** no party is complete without a plate of cupcakes

With just a minute or two of thinking, we've easily come up with four types of websites that may be interested in our cupcake guide. Now we can start researching these in more detail to get a better idea of whether or not we stand a good chance of getting a link from them.

Techniques For Finding Link Targets

In this section I will outline a few simple techniques that you can use to turn your idea of "food bloggers" into a full list of websites that you can contact.

Find Lists of Bloggers

By far the most simple place to start is a search on Google like this:

List of food bloggers

This single search gave me lots and lots of great lists to search through. The big advantage of using this technique is that someone else has already done the hard work for you by curating the list.

Scrape similar..

Once you've found a list like this, you can quickly grab all of the URLs from the page using a tool like Scraper, which is a Google Chrome plug-in. You simply right click on one of the URLs and click on "Scrape similar:"

You can then copy the list into Google Docs or your own spreadsheet. From here, you can copy and paste all the URLs into a tool like URL opener, which will open all the URLs for you with one click. You can then go through them all, find out if they're relevant to your content, and if so, find their contact details.

Find Bloggers on Twitter

Followerwonk is a fantastic tool that is part of the Moz tools, and if you have a Moz Pro subscription you can use it for free. It allows you to do all kinds of cool stuff with your Twitter account, but the feature that we're interested in allows you to search Twitter bios. We are going to search it for "cupcake blogger" to see if we can find anyone on Twitter who mentioned "cupcake blogger" in their bio:

Search Twitter bios   Compare Users

🔍 "cupcake blogger"   **Do it**

You can select more options such as number of followers and location, but for now we want to keep the search quite broad. This search resulted in 12 people on Twitter being found:

You can then download these results into a spreadsheet which makes them easier to sort through. It will also tell us if they have a website or not:

CSV   EXCEL

It turns out that from these 12 results, we find 8 unique websites:

RESULTS	
cupcakestakethecake.blogspot.com	cupcakemediallc.com
robinmerrill.com	thecupcakekilla.tumblr.com
h3llocupcake.blogspot.com	shemakescupcakes.wordpress.com
zencupcake.com	jellysgallery.co.uk

Not a bad result for a few minutes' work! These are also super-relevant to our content, so we know that we have a good chance of getting a link or, at the very least, getting some good feedback from the blogger.

Advanced Search Queries

There are a number of ways to search Google that are not immediately obvious to us as users. We are accustomed to searching for strings of keywords and this is how 99% of Google users search too. But, there is a set of search tools available to us that can make our results a lot more focused and specific to what we need.

For link building, this means we can filter out websites that may not be useful for us and spend our time looking through ones that are. Here are a few examples using different advanced searches:

cupcake blogger inurl:resources

Notice the "inurl:resources" bit? This tells Google to only show results that have the word "resources" within the URL. Here is an example of one result that Google gives us:

http://cupcake-underground.blogspot.com/p/resources.html

This is a good potential link target, because your definitive guide to cupcakes is a resource that could be of interest to visitors to a cupcake blog. Therefore, contacting the owner of this blog and asking them to list your guide as a resource could result in a link for you.

Let's take a look at another example:

food blogger "cupcakes" intitle:resources 🔍

We have combined two advanced searches here. First, we used the "intitle:resources" modifier, which tells Google to only show results that have the word "resources" within the page title. This is useful because sometimes the word may not be used in the URL, so our previous advanced search (with inurl:) would not find them.

We have also used quotation marks around the word cupcakes. This tells Google to only return results that mention cupcakes on the page. This is useful in this case because searching for "food blogger" would probably be a bit too broad and we'd have to dig through a lot of websites that may not be relevant to the topic of cupcakes.

Now you have three solid methods for finding relevant link targets and, at this point, you will probably have a nice big list of them in a spreadsheet. But, we need to do a bit more work before contacting the site owners.

Finding Out More About the Personas We're Targeting

If you want to have a high response rate with your outreach, you need to spend a bit of time making sure that the websites you've found are as relevant as possible.

You can do this by spending time learning about your target bloggers, Visit their websites, read through their content, try to get a feel for what they like and what they don't like. Take a look through their social networks, such as Twitter, to see what links they have shared recently.

In particular, pay close attention to whether or not they share other people's content or if they only promote their own. Ideally, you want to find some evidence of them sharing external resources, because that's what you'll be asking them to do.

As you go through each website, make some notes about what they've shared and what interests them. This is crucial because you'll need this information later when you contact them. Otherwise, you'll just be sending them a generic, templated email that won't be personalized to them at all.

A nice little trick you can use here is to put the blog's URL into a tool like [Tagcrowd](#) which will analyze the content of the page and show you which words are mentioned the most.

Finding Contact Details

Once you've decided that the blog is within your target audience and seems relevant, you'll need to find contact details. This is usually pretty straightforward, but here are a few tips that may speed things up a little.

Check the Header and Footer First

Most of the time, you will find a link to a contact page in the header or the footer of a website, so check these areas first. If you can't see a contact page, try an "about" page which often list contact details.

Install ToutApp For Google Chrome

[ToutApp](#) is a small Google Chrome plug-in that will actively try and find an email addresses on a page for you. When it has found one, it will be highlighted in your Chrome toolbar and you can click on it to find the email address.

Prioritizing Link Targets

By this point, you probably have a big list of link targets, and you need to prioritize them and group them into buckets so that you can customize your message to them with greatest efficiency.

There are a few ways to prioritize link targets for outreach:

- By domain metrics, i.e., PageRank, Domain Authority

- By blogger influence, i.e., number of Twitter followers

- By the likelihood of linking, i.e., a cupcake blogger vs. a generic food blogger

Let's look at these in more detail.

Domain Metrics

We'll talk in detail about domain metrics in Chapter 5. For now, all you need to know is that these metrics can measure the value of link targets just as well as they can measure the value of individual links.

There are two main domain metrics to use when filtering and sorting your link targets: PageRank and Domain Authority. You could, of course, gather the domain metrics for each website one by one, but that would take far more time; there are tools available that let you gather the data in bulk.

You can get the PageRank for your targets using Excel and the SEO Tools for Excel plug-in.

You can also get Domain Authority into your Excel spreadsheet by using the Links API plug-in by SEOgadget.

Once you have these metrics, you can do a simple sort in Excel from highest to lowest and, if you choose, you can remove link targets that do not have high enough domain metrics. This particularly helps if you have a very large set of websites and you don't feel that you have the time to contact them all. I tend to sort by PageRank first and get rid of anything that is below a score of 1. If I have a very large set of results, I may also get rid of anything below a score of 2.

I then sort by Domain Authority and will generally get rid of anything below DA30 or DA35, if I have a very big list. This isn't an exact science, however, because a new website that may be very good and relevant may not have accumulated enough PageRank or Domain Authority yet. However, if you have a large list of potential link targets, you do want to be quite aggressive in narrowing it down so that you have a good quality set of remaining websites to work with.

Blogger Influence

A crucial part of getting as many visitors to your content as possible is getting influential people to share it. Getting just one influential person to share your content can lead to a big ripple effect, as lots of their followers will also share it. So, even if a blogger doesn't appear to be associated with a particularly strong domain, don't discount them before you've checked to see how influential they are on social networks.

Again, you can simply go to their social profiles one by one to find out how many followers they have, etc. Remember that we used Followerwonk to search for potential people to reach out to? Well, Followerwonk will also give you metrics about each person, such as how many people follow them and what their influence score is. If you download a CSV from Followerwonk, you will see a column that includes the influence score:

INFLUENCE SCORE	
82.25	61.57
91.34	71.55
67.31	65.36
69.97	50.01
66.18	73.29

Simply sort by this column to see which of the people on Twitter are most influential. These are the people you probably want to target first because they have the ability to share your content with a large number of engaged followers.

Likelihood of Linking

This is where your manual research comes back into play. As you browse the potential link targets, you should try to assess how likely they are to link to your content. There isn't a tool that can do this for you and you will need to come up with your own way of defining this. One simple way could be to score them on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not at all likely to link and 5 being very likely to link.

Questions you should ask yourself when giving them a score are:

- Have they shared external content before?

- Are they super-relevant to my content (i.e. a cupcake blogger should score higher than a generic food blogger)?

- Is their blog active; i.e. have they blogged within the last month?

These questions should give you an indicator of how likely they are to link to you.

Once you've gathered all this information, you should sort it all so that you have a list of bloggers who:

1. Are likely to link to you

2. Have high domain metrics

3. Have good social followings

These are the websites that you should contact first and with messages that are highly customized and tailored to them. Take another look at their website and try to pick up clues that can guide you in what to include in your email. This will help your message look genuine and avoid coming across as just another outreach email that isn't personalized.

These websites also have the power to "seed" your content. This means that other websites will also become aware of your content, perhaps even removing the need for you to make any manual contact with them.

At this point, you should have a nice list of quality websites which are likely to be interested in the content you've created or the campaign you're running. You have their contact details and have prioritized which ones are most important. Now it is time to start contacting them.

Outreach

Now we need to actually take the plunge and start telling people about our great content or campaign. You should start with your high-level targets because they can not only get you good results if they respond well, but you can then use them as social proof later on when you outreach to smaller websites. If smaller websites see that an influencer has liked a piece of content and shared it, they are going to be much more open to you when you contact them.

You're Contacting a Real Person

There is not some machine behind the website you're contacting which chooses whether or not to reply to you. It is a real person who, in reality, probably gets lots of outreach emails if they have a popular blog. They are a real person and they deserve to have a bit of your time to make them realise you're not just another spammer or automated email program. We'll talk about a few specific ways you can do this later in the guide but, for now, remember that you are contacting a real person. Ask yourself how you would talk to this person if you met them in real life. You'd have a real conversation with them, not the same conversation you've had with other people you met that day.

Also, I don't think a single blogger wakes up in the morning with the thought, "Hmm, who should I link to today?" They never planned to link to you; they have other stuff to work on which likely takes priority over what you have to offer them. For this reason, you should not assume that a blogger owes you anything; it is your job to tell them why you deserve their time, attention, and help.

If the idea of contacting a real person and telling them about your content makes you a bit nervous, then do a gut-check and be sure that your content is as shareable and valuable as you think it is. While overconfidence can be a mistake, you should feel confident enough in your idea to believe that real people will react well to it. If you walked up to someone in the street and showed them what you've been working on, would they react well? If not, you probably have more work to do before you start outreach.

How to Craft Your Message

Remember that the bloggers that you're contacting are probably very busy people, even more so if they run popular blogs with big followings. Your message needs to be detailed enough to explain why they should care, while being short enough for them to read everything and not get bored or delete the message.

Here are some points to bear in mind for crafting your message:

- Tell them why they should care about you

- Tell them what action you'd like them to take

- Show that you're genuine and not a spammer

Lets take a look at these in more detail.

Tell Them Why They Should Care About You

If you're at this point with your link building campaign, you shouldn't be stuck on writing this. If you've been working on a piece of content, right at the start of its creation you should have determined the answer to the question, "Why would anyone care about this enough to link to it?"

Remember our hooks from earlier:

- News
- Competition
- Funny
- Ego-bait
- Controversial
- Long-form, detailed content
- Data visualization

Does your content fit into any of these? If not, is there anything else unique about the content that may make someone care about it?

The blogger you're contacting is probably active in your industry and will know a lot about the subject matter of your content, so take a look through their recent blog posts and, if possible, relate these to the reason you think they should care.

As an example, if you're contacting a blogger who is a big movie fan, they may have blogged recently about a film they really like. If your content involves films and includes the film that they blogged about, mention it! This not only tells them why they should care about your own content, it also shows that you've taken the time to read their blog, rather than just sending them a templated email.

Tell Them What Action You'd Like Them to Take

Many outreach emails skirt around the subject of what the sender actually wants. Some may not dare to mention the words "link" or "SEO" in fear of the blogger flagging the email as spam. However, we do need to actually find a way of getting the blogger to take the action we'd like. Sometimes, the action may not JUST be about a simple link. It could be about a number of things, including:

- Sharing your content on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook or Google+
- Embedding your content if it is an infographic or widget
- Accepting a guest post from you, relating to your content and linking back to it
- The blogger writing an opinion piece on your content and linking to it

These are just a few examples, but you can see pretty quickly that there are different levels of actions and the barriers to each one are different. For example, the blogger taking the time to write their own piece of editorial content about the topic and linking to your content is a big ask. By contrast, simply sharing on their social networks will probably take a few minutes, maximum.

You should take account of this when crafting your message and be aware that the more you're asking of a blogger, the more compelling and interesting your content must be.

The actions above are not mutually exclusive, either. You may experience great results if an influential blogger links to you AND shares a link with their social network. At the same time, you can also use a subtle tactic if you receive a slightly negative response. For example, if the first action you try to get the blogger to take is to write an editorial piece on their site and they say no, but they like what you've done, you could follow up and ask for a tweet instead. This is particularly useful if you're contacting an influential blogger who many not budge once they've said no, but who likely has a large social following with whom they wouldn't mind sharing the content.

Another follow-up to this scenario could be that you offer to write a guest post for them. This is a good solution if they like the content but do not have enough time to write about it. Typically, you'll want to save this kind of follow-up for very strong websites because it does require extra time and resources from you in order to make it happen.

Show That You're Genuine and Not a Spammer

This is all about personalizing your message so that the blogger doesn't immediately reach for the spam or delete button. Remember that popular bloggers will receive many outreach emails, so it is worth taking the time to make yours a little different and customized to them. There are many ways to do this without adding too much time to your process or compromising on quality. Here are a few of these ways:

- Use their name
- Use a good subject line
- Mention something specific about their work
- Use a proper email signature
- Use a genuine email address
- Use your location (if relevant)

Let's take a look at these in more detail.

Use Their Name

Sounds simple and straightforward enough, but a lot of people do not take the time to do this despite it usually not taking that long. It can truly make a big difference and get you that extra bit of attention you need in order to get your key message across.

Here are a few tips for finding someone's name:

- Check the about page
- Check the author name under blog posts
- Click through to their social media accounts to see if their name is listed on there
- Enter their email into a tool such as Rapportive (Gmail) or Xobni (Outlook) which looks for additional information connected to an email address

If you absolutely can't find their name, using something like "Hi there" is fine but do avoid using things like "Hi Webmaster" or "Hi blogger" as these have traditionally been used by mass email spammers and you want to avoid being associated with that!

Use A Good Subject Line

Before they have even opened your email, the blogger will see the subject line. If they don't like what they see here, then chances are that you will be deleted straight away and they won't even bother to open the email. This is the worst that can happen because you don't even get a chance to speak to them or get feedback at all.

There is something else important to remember here: A bad subject line may also trigger spam filters and result in your email being flagged as spam. At this point, you're relying on the blogger actually checking their spam folder (many won't) and seeing your email as genuine. Either way, this isn't a good place to be.

Here are some tips for writing a good subject line:

- Keep it short and to the point
- Mention the name of the website if you can
- Avoid overuse of capital letters
- Mention something specific about their site (like the name)
- Avoid things like "link exchange" or "link request"

Here are some really good, in-depth articles from Hubspot and Smart Insights on the subject of good subject lines.

Mention Something Specific About Their Work

This is really important if you want to show that you haven't sent the same templated email out to loads of bloggers. Mentioning something specific about the blogger you're contacting or their blog can really help show that you've taken the time to do your research before sending the email. This also gives you a great opportunity to introduce your own content and the concept of why the blogger should care about it.

Let's look at a few ways you can mention something specific:

- Look at the topics of their recent blog posts
- Look at their recent tweets / retweets
- Look at the comments they've made on blog posts
- Look at their about page for personal interests
- Look at their bio on their Twitter page

All of these can give you valuable information about the blogger which you can then bring into your email naturally. Here is an example of how this may actually look in an email:

I noticed your recent blog post about the best movies of 2014 so far. I couldn't agree more and would definitely put The Wolf of Wall Street at the top of my list, too. I actually wanted to share with you something related to this - LINK - it is a visualization of the top-grossing movies of 2014 along with production costs and profits. I thought, given your recent blog post and your interest in movies, it may be of interest to you.

This didn't take very long to write and was the result of looking at a handful of recent blog post titles written by the blogger I'm contacting. It would be pretty difficult (probably impossible) for a piece of email spam software to spin something this unique and specific to the blogger, so it is likely to pass the spam test.

Use A Proper Email Signature

This is a small tip and takes no time at all. You should insert a proper email signature on the bottom of all your outreach emails which includes things such as:

- Your full name
- Your job title
- The URL of the website you represent
- Your phone number
- Your social media accounts (if work related)

John Smith
Online Marketing Executive
www.example.com
01234 567 8910
twitter.com/jsmith

So, you may end up with something that looks like this.

This is another signal to the blogger that you're a genuine person. They can go and check out your website, your social activity or even give you a call. Again, spammers would not do this.

Use a Genuine Email Address

There is some debate on this one. Some SEOs strongly believe that you should always use an email address from the client you're representing rather than your regular one for your SEO company. So if I were doing outreach for Zappos, I should use **myname@zappos.com** rather than **myname@distilled.net**.

This argument tends to stem from the fact that SEOs can have a bad reputation, i.e., if the blogger sees that you're emailing them from an SEO company email address, it can instantly turn them off.

However, from my own experience, I've never had a problem with using my Distilled email address for outreach. In fact, it can be a very good way to check that what I'm doing is good quality. I can ask myself this question:

"Am I ok with outreaching to this blogger about this content, using the Distilled name?"

If the answer is no, then should you really be doing outreach in the first place?

Ultimately, you should test whatever works best for you. If I'm given the choice, I would probably use a client email address, but if one was not available, I wouldn't let that stop me from doing outreach using my regular email address.

One thing for which I would advise caution here is using free email address providers such as Gmail, Hotmail or Yahoo. Unfortunately, lots of spammers also take advantage of these free services, making this another signal that you're not a genuine person.

Use Your Location (If Relevant)

The opportunities to use this tip may be few and far between, but if you have the opportunity, it can really help you look more genuine and sow the seeds of a good relationship.

The idea is that if you're contacting a blogger who happens to reside in the same city as your client, mention it in your email. This really allows you to work the local angle and say something along the lines of:

"As we're also based in Seattle, we wanted to take the opportunity to speak to local bloggers such as yourself and try to share some of the content we've been working on which may be of interest."

You can take things a step further and even meet up with local bloggers for lunch or a coffee. There is no better way to show that you're a real and genuine person than buying someone a coffee (and a cupcake!). If you find that there are quite a few local bloggers in your area, then organizing a local meet-up could also be a great way of building genuine relationships and getting them on board with your brand.

Following Up

I have probably built just as many links as a result of following up with people as I have with my first email. People are busy; popular bloggers will get lots of emails, and in a world where we can check email on the move, your email may get buried pretty quickly and forgotten.

For this reason alone, it is worth making sure that you follow up on all outreach if you don't get a reply first time. The added benefit here is that you also reinforce the fact that you're a genuine person and not some automated piece of software that is hitting lots of websites at once.

In order to follow up properly, you need to keep your outreach as organized as possible and record the replies that you get. The last thing you want is to follow up with someone who has already linked to you!

There are a few ways to stay organized with your outreach ranging from very simple Excel spreadsheets to fully integrated customer relationship management (CRM) systems. Let's look at some of these options.

An Excel Spreadsheet

When you're first starting out with link building, a simple spreadsheet will work just fine. Even at the intermediate level, it can still do the job, but it can become a bit big and cumbersome if you're working on multiple campaigns at the same time.

A simple Excel sheet can start off looking like this:

	SIMPLE EXCEL SHEET					
1	URL	DA	CONTACT EMAIL	CONTACT NAME	CONTACTED?	REPLIED?	LINKING?
2	www.example.com	73	mail.example.com	John Smith	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	www.site.com	63	mail.site.com	Jane Roberts	Yes	No	No
4	www.website.net	45	mail.website.net	Steve Williams	No	No	No

It really can be that simple. You can add extra columns for any specific data or metrics that you care about, but this will certainly do the job for you.
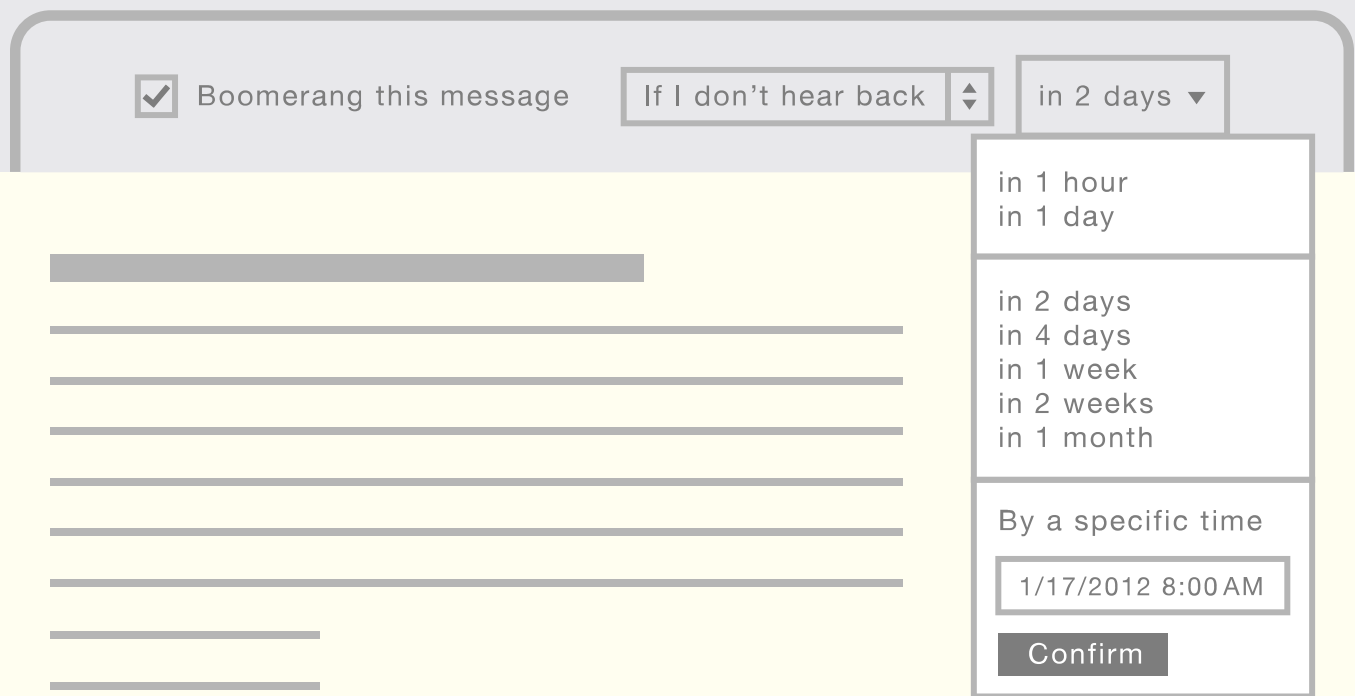
However, after you've been using this for a while, it may become a little difficult to work with. For example, what happens when you run a second campaign and you want to connect with your contacts again? It is possible to do with an advanced enough Excel system, but it can get a little messy.

Specialist Tools for Outreach Management

At this point, you may need to invest in a more robust, focused system for managing your outreach. There are a few options here such as [BuzzStream](#) and [Raven](#) which are probably the most popular for this kind of task.

Boomerang

[Boomerang](#) is a free plug-in for Gmail with a nice little feature that we can use for following up with outreach targets. When sending an email, you can tell Boomerang to send the email back to you if you don't get a reply within a set period of time. It looks something like this:

In this case, if the person I'm emailing doesn't reply within two days, Boomerang will send the email back to me. At this point I can quickly follow up with them and the great thing is that I can be sure that I'm not emailing the wrong people who may have already replied.

Combine this with canned responses (outlined below) and you have a quick and effective way of following up with all your link targets.

How to Follow Up

In terms of exactly how to follow up with people, my advice is to keep the email short and to the point. You've already emailed them once and outlined all the details they need, so you don't need to repeat it all over again. If you reply to the same email you sent, then most email programs will actually include the original email, anyway, so the person can scroll down and find it very easily if they want to.

In Terms of What to Say, Something As Simple As This Can Do the Job:

Hey John,

I just wanted to follow up on the email I sent a few days ago (pasted below) regarding the ultimate guide to backpacking that I've put together. It would be great to get your feedback, if possible, and see if this is something you'd be interested in sharing with the readers of your blog.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks!

Paddy

(Here you can include the original email so they can refer to it if they can't remember it.)

It's nice and short, says what you need it to, and is polite.

I usually tend to follow up with someone once. If I still do not get a reply, I'll probably move on and not contact them any more for this particular campaign. If you follow up any more, you're running the risk of annoying them and actually damaging your chances of building a relationship with them.

Dealing With Negative Replies

At some point, you're probably going to get negative replies to your outreach. This is normal and something that you shouldn't worry about. In fact, it can be a great opportunity to engage with a blogger and get further feedback from them. In this section are a few principles to bear in mind when dealing with negative replies.

Always Reply; Don't Ignore the Email

It can be tempting to just ignore the email and move on, particularly if you've put your heart and soul into a piece of content that someone just doesn't like. But, ignoring the reply means that you're damaging your chances of ever building a good relationship with that person. They may not like the current work you've done, but what about the next piece you do? The last thing you want to do is alienate anyone so that they don't even bother looking at your future pieces of work.

Get As Much Information and Feedback As Possible

When replying to someone, try to get some feedback on why they're not interested in linking to you. If you're promoting a piece of content, ask them for their opinion on what would make the content better. Is there a better way of presenting the information? Are there extra facts or statistics that would have made it more valuable or effective?

Sometimes the problem may not be the content itself. Instead, the blogger just may not have time to write a blog post and link to you. In that case, you may want to offer the blogger some help with writing the post so that they don't need to spend time on it.

At the same time, you could ask the person for their opinion on what content is sorely needed in their industry. Do they see a demand for something, but do not have the time to create it themselves? There is great opportunity here if you look for it. For example, you may be able to come to an agreement in which you partner with the blogger to create a piece of content. You put the work into the content which they want to see created, and they use their contacts to help promote it. Together, you've created something valuable for the industry.

Also, imagine you get a good idea for a piece of content from them. Then you go away and create it, email them again and show them. They are probably going to be much more receptive this time around! Even more so if you can somehow give them credit for the idea, perhaps a small mention or a link on the piece of content which would acknowledge them again and show them.

Quick Tips For Efficient Outreach

Even though you want to take the time to personalize your emails, there are a few good tools that you can use to speed up your process without compromising on quality.
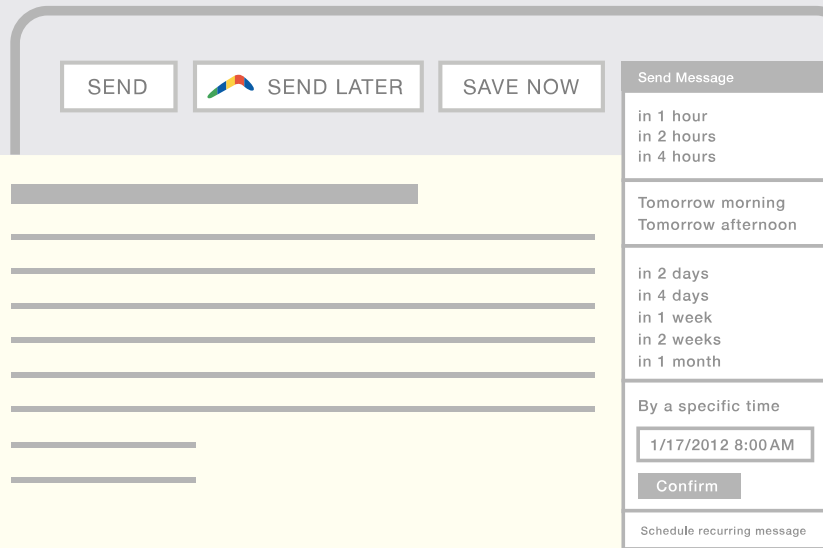
Boomerang
I mentioned Boomerang earlier, saying how it can be a great tool for making sure you follow up with people using this nice little feature:

☑ Boomerang this message   If I don't hear back ⇕   in 2 days ▾

It also has another great feature that allows you to schedule when an email is sent. This is very handy if you're doing outreach across different time zones. A good example being if you're in Seattle and you're outreaching to UK based bloggers, when you get into the office and start emailing at 9am, it is nearly the end of the working day in the UK. This may not be the ideal time to email someone.

So, Boomerang allows you to schedule when an email is sent. Once you've installed the app, a little button appears in Gmail:
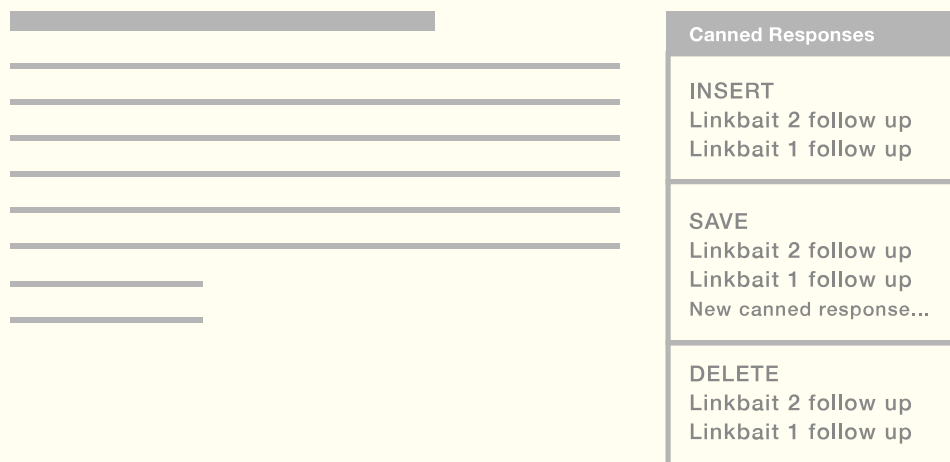
When you compose an email and click on this, you get this dropdown:

From here you can schedule the email and make sure it reaches someone at the right time.

Canned Responses

Canned responses is a Gmail Labs feature ([read how to enable Labs here](#)) and allows you to quickly insert pre-written templates into an email. This is super-handy for a number of reasons, one of which being that you don't need to worry about copying and pasting into your emails every time. Instead, you can just select the canned responses option and insert the relevant text:

This is extra-useful if you combine it with Boomerang and use it to follow up with people. You can create a canned response that follows up with people you've already emailed. Using our example from earlier, it may look something like this:

Note that the bits highlighted in yellow are the parts that you personalize to the person you're contacting. You still need to personalize it, otherwise you're not likely to get a response.

Rapportive

Rapportive is a great plug-in for Gmail and Outlook which gives you quite a bit of information about the person you're emailing. Here is an example of how Rapportive looks when I try to send an email to Rand:

rand@moz.com
Seattle WA

Wizard of Moz

@randfish

LinkedIn

Mail

There is a bunch of information including:

Rand's location

His position at Moz

His Twitter account

His LinkedIn profile

HEY NAME,

I JUST WANTED TO FOLLOW UP ON THE EMAIL I SENT A FEW DAYS AGO (PASTED BELOW) REGARDING THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BACKPACKING THAT I'VE PUT TOGETHER. IT WOULD BE GREATE TO GET YOUR FEEDBACK IF POSSIBLE AND SEE IF THIS IS SOMETHING YOU'D BE INTERESTED IN SHARING WITH THE READERS OF YOUR BLOG NAME?

I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FORM YOU.

THANKS

PADDY

All of this information can help me to find out a little bit more about him and help to further personalize my email to him. For example, if he has recently tweeted a news story that I know about, I can comment on it, too. This shows I've taken the time to do my research on him, rather than just sending a blanket email to lots of people.

Outreach Pitfalls to Avoid

There are a few common mistakes that can happen when you're link building. Mistakes happen; this is fine as long as you learn from them. Hopefully, this section will help you learn from other people's mistakes and avoid some of these pitfalls.

Using Mass Emailing Software

There are many providers of software which allow you to email lots and lots of people at once. This is a legitimate practice as long as people have opted into hearing from you and are expecting the email. Lots of companies do this all the time with their mailing lists. However, when it comes to link building, it is generally a bad idea to use any kind of software like this.

Here Are a Few Reasons:

- It is much harder to personalize mass emails like this
- If you make a mistake, it isn't just one recipient that sees it; all of them do
- You can get yourself blacklisted if people start reporting you as spam
- You are possibly breaking the law if you're mass emailing people who have not opted into being emailed in this manner

Add to this the fact that you're jeopardizing not only your own reputation, but that of the website you're representing, ruining any chance of the website owner working with the email recipients in the future.

Not Customising Your Template

Earlier, you saw an email template that I could use for follow up:

Imagine sending this email to someone without editing the yellow bits? It is VERY unlikely to get a positive response! This is why in this particular example, I've chosen to highlight the sections in yellow so that I'm less likely to forget about them.

If this does happen, the undo send feature of Gmail Labs can sometimes rescue the situation if you're quick enough.

HEY NAME,

I JUST WANTED TO FOLLOW UP ON THE EMAIL I SENT A FEW DAYS AGO (PASTED BELOW) REGARDING THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BACKPACKING THAT I'VE PUT TOGETHER.
IT WOULD BE GREATE TO GET YOUR FEEDBACK IF POSSIBLE AND SEE IF THIS IS SOMETHING YOU'D BE INTENESTED IN SHARING WITH THE READERS OF YOUR BLOG NAME?

I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING FORM YOU.

THANKS

PADDY

How Long Will It Take for Link Building to Improve a Site's Ranking?

As mentioned in the previous section on setting goals, it can take time for link building to have a positive effect on the rankings of your website. The length of time can vary greatly and depend on a number of factors:
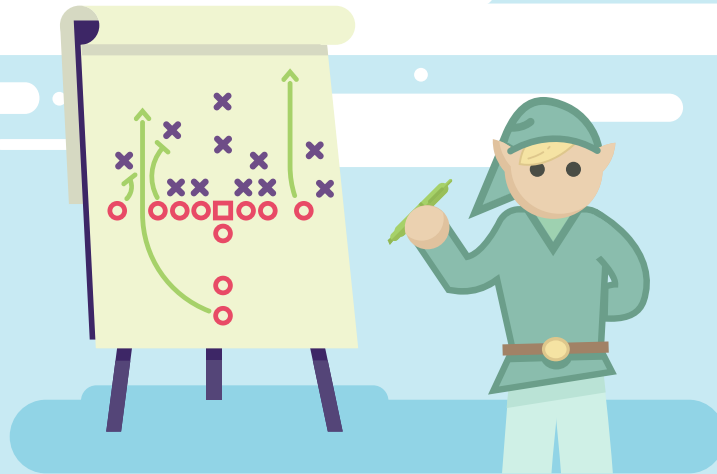
- The competitiveness of your industry as a whole
- How competitive your target keywords are
- The activity of your competitors, i.e., if they are actively building links, too
- The types of links you're building
- The history and strength of your domain

All of these factors can mean that it can take from several days to several months before an increase in ranking is achieved. This should be factored into your goals and expectations and all parties should be made aware that instant improvement is unlikely.
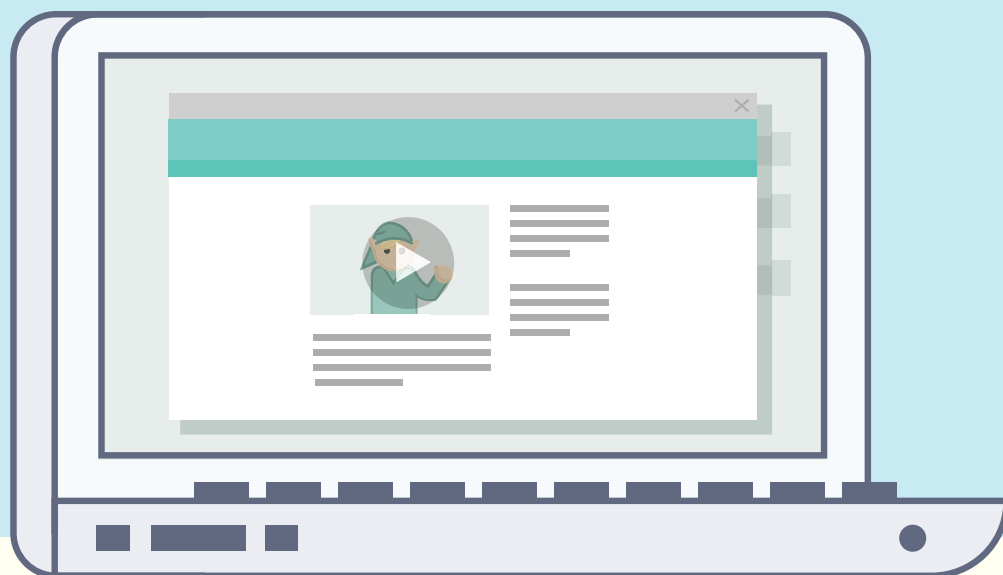
A realistic expectation to set is that you will see an increase in traffic if you are constantly working on improving your website, business, and online activity. You should try to not think of link building as a one-off activity, because you may be disappointed by the results. Instead, link building should be a constant stream of activity coupled with other initiatives such as content creation, great customer service and social media. Combined, all of this activity can lead to an increase in traffic and an increase in revenue for your business. It is the combination and a consistent drive towards the goal that can make this more likely to happen quickly.
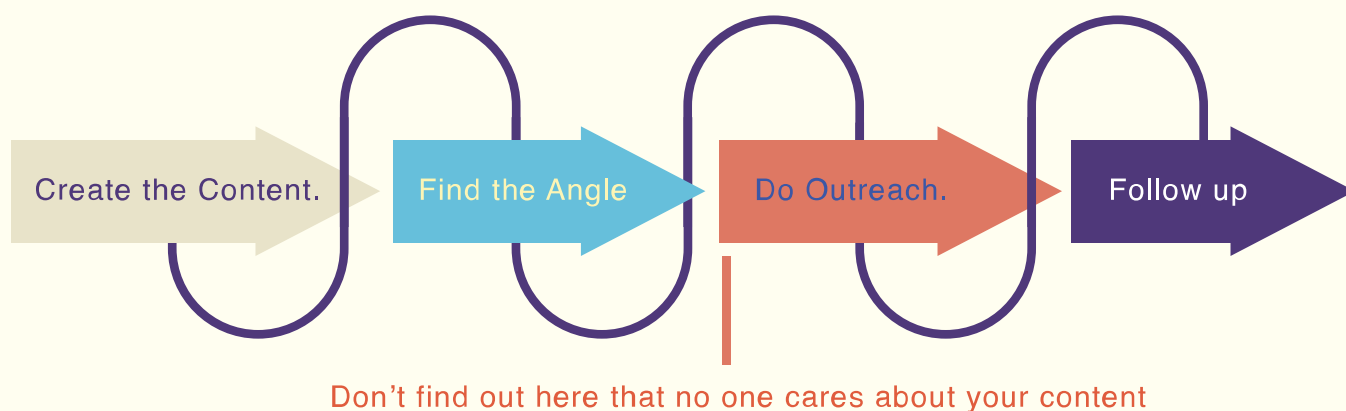
Chapter 4
Link Building Tactics

There are lots and lots of ways to get links. The right tactics for you depend on the resources you have at your disposal as well as the industry that you're in. Industries that are more established and competitive often require you to be quite aggressive with link building, and you might find earning those links more difficult. Other industries, often the newer industries that are quickly growing, are full of opportunities to engage with bloggers and build a community. With that in mind, this section reveals a few link building tactics that can be applied to most all types of websites.
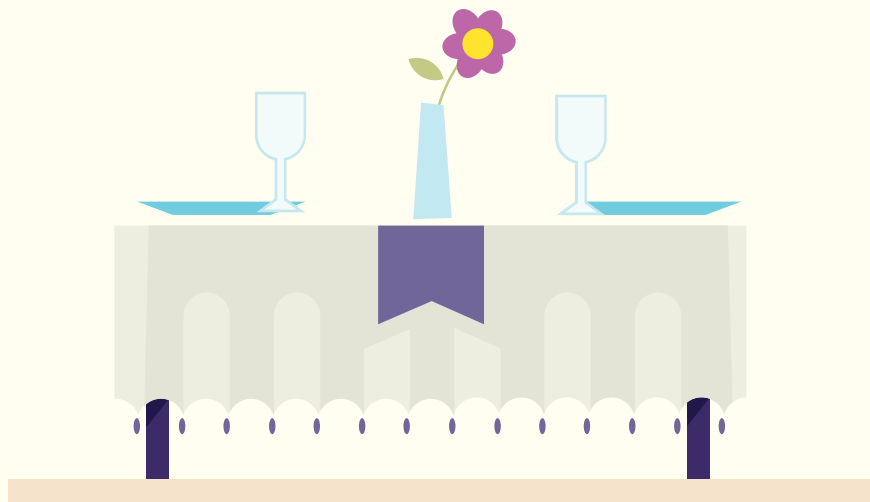
Content-Based Link Building

Content-based link building is becoming ever more popular amongst SEOs for a number of reasons, even though it can be one of the tougher approaches to carry out successfully. The basic process looks something like this:

Create the Content. → Find the Angle → Do Outreach. → Follow up

Don't find out here that no one cares about your content

Some of these you've already learned about in the chapter on [building a link building campaign](#), so we'll try not to repeat ourselves here. The basic premise is that you create an asset which you use to try and get links. This takes the form of a piece of content and can include something like:

- An infographic
- A data visualization
- A white paper
- A how-to guide
- A video
- An image gallery

You create these assets with a view to earning links to them from people who find them relevant, interesting, funny, informative, etc. You then reach out to these people in an attempt to actually build those links. Over time, you aim to reach a point at which you don't need to ask for each and every link that you receive. Instead, you should be able to seed the content with a few key influencers in your community who can help spread the word on your behalf. This can take a long time to achieve and requires a lot of investment in exceptional content, but it is certainly possible.

Examples of Content-Based Link Building Campaigns

In this section, we will look at some examples of successful link building campaigns along with some analysis of what made them successful. One thing to note here is that the primary goal of the following examples may not have been links, but they were very successful, nonetheless, so there is something we can learn.

The Ultimate Guide to Worldwide Etiquette

This is a small interactive piece of content that is not only nicely designed, but genuinely useful. It helps users understand the different expectations in different areas of the world when it comes to culture and etiquette.

http://www.swissotel.com/promo/etiquette-map/

This page currently has 68 linking root domains and a Page Authority of 63.

What made it successful?

- It works very well and is easy to use; you simply choose your country and the content changes instantly

- The design is very clean which means you understand what it does straight away

- It is relevant to the type of people who would visit a hotel booking website

- The content is genuinely useful to people because not knowing a local culture or etiquette is a common problem

100 Years of Rock Music Visualized

This is another interactive piece of content which shows the different genres of rock music that have developed in the last 100 years.

http://www.concerthotels.com/100-years-of-rock

The page currently has 198 linking root domains and a Page Authority of 53. Let's look at why it attracted links:

- The interactivity really adds to the content; it engages the user straight away & keeps them on the page

- You can interactive with the piece and listen to samples of music

- It applies to a large number of people (rock music fans)

- It is in line with people who would use a hotel booking site focused on music venues

You vs. John Paulson

This was a very smart idea by an SEO in the UK. It is an interactive piece of content that allows you to compare your annual salary with that of John Paulson who is a very successful forex trader.

https://mahifx.com/john-paulson/

It used to be hosted on the homepage and was used as a link building technique to get links to the homepage prior to the service being launched. Before it was moved, the content had over 200 linking domains. What made it successful?

- It's interactive but very simple to use; it only asks you for one piece of info (your salary)
- It is very engaging; it keeps you scrolling down the page to find out more
- The sheer scale of how much money John Paulson makes is hard for most of us to comprehend
- It is very shareable as it is relevant to pretty much anyone, not just forex traders

18 Startup Founders Share Their Lowest Points

This is a bit different to the previous pieces of content and mainly consists of written, rather than visual, content. It is a series of stories from startup founders who share their lowest points before become big successes.

http://www.attendly.com/stories-of-failure-and-redemption-18-startup-founders-share-their-lowest-moments-before-coming-out-on-top/

This page currently has 21 linking root domains and a Page Authority of 36. Let's take a look at what made this happen:
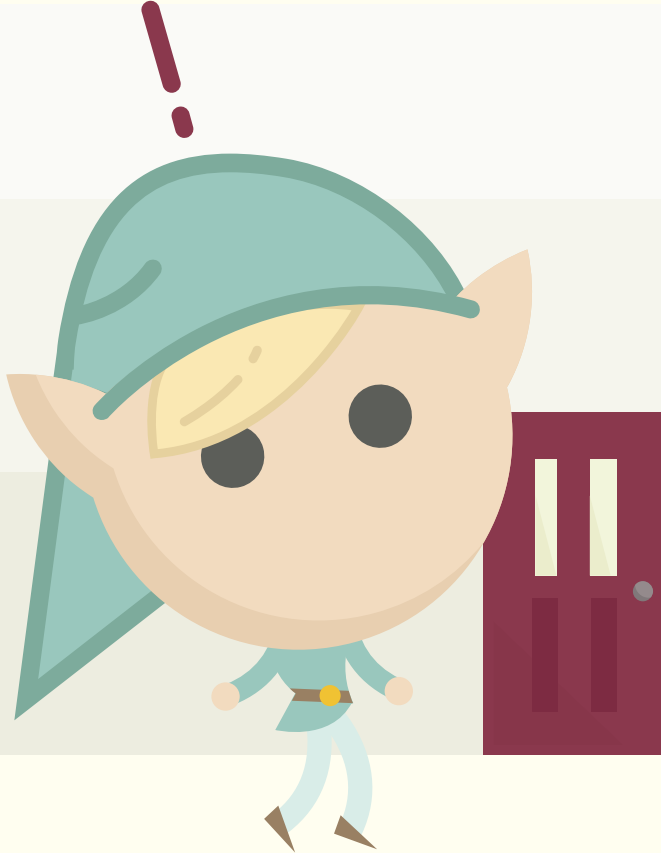
- It is different; interviews are usually about high points and successes but this was the opposite, so it can provoke people's attention
- The interviewees and their companies are very well known within their fields, so they probably have large social followings
- This content can appeal to a wide range of people who are active online, therefore increasing the chances of getting links and social shares

Guest Blogging

Guest blogging is the process of approaching other websites to see if they will publish a piece of content that you write on their blog. While it is often an effective way to earn links using high quality content, Google has cracked down on marketers who abuse this tactic with low-quality content and over-optimized anchor text.

As guest blogging became an increasingly common tactic, it became increasingly automated and the quality of the posts declined considerably. Google noticed. Matt Cutts, the head of Google's webspam team, [wrote a post](#) declaring that we could "Stick a fork in it: Guest blogging is done." If you can produce high enough quality content, many reputable sites will still gladly accept guest posts ([Moz is one of them](#)). That said, it shouldn't be used solely in order to build links, as Google has gotten very, very good at finding and devaluing links built in this way.

Ego Bait

Ego bait is a piece of content that plays on the egos of the people who are featured within that content. The hope is that, by being included, these people feel better about and are more inclined to share the content with a link. You've probably seen examples of this before. Here are a few:

http://www.thelovelyplants.com/10-gardening-blogs-to-follow/
Lists gardening blogs along with a short description of each one.

http://go.brandshank.com/top-10-electronic-music-blogs-2011/
Lists the top 10 electronic music blogs based on a number of factors including Tweets, Facebook reach and MozRank.

http://www.webdesigndev.com/roundups/30-most-influential-people-in-web-design
Lists the most influential individuals in web design and includes pictures of them, as well as their websites and social channels.

All of these will get the attention of the people or websites being featured. While this can be a good way of getting high-quality links and traffic to your website, it is unlikely to get you huge volumes of links, because the content is usually quite targeted toward a few high-profile people or websites.

The process for ego-bait link building looks something like this:

Concept and research targets > Write content > Outreach > Follow up

Step 1: Concept and Research Targets

First, you need to come up with the concept for your content, and it will need to be somewhat related to the theme of your own website. For example, if you run a website selling garden sheds, you might choose one of the following ideas:

- Top 10 Gardening Blogs of 2014
- 15 Inspiring Garden Designs
- The Top Gardening Bloggers to Follow on Twitter

These are very simple ideas, but the point is to not over-complicate things.

Once you've decided on your idea, you need to research whom you will feature in your content. There are a few things you should bear in mind when trying to find the right people:

- Look for blogs that are active and have posted very recently.
- Look for blogs that have good levels of social followings.
- Make sure you can find contact details of bloggers.

Also—and this should go without saying—if you're making something like a top-10 list, make sure that each person or site on that list is actually worthy of being on such a list. If your only motivation is finding people who might be willing to share, that could be obvious both to the people you're attempting to bait and to the readers.

Step 2: Write content

This part is also simple, but you should try to include as much detail as possible about each person or website you feature. Remember that you're trying to get the attention of bloggers, and you want them to share the post and link to it. So, include the following, if you can:

- A picture of the blogger or a screenshot of the website

- A link to their website and Twitter profile

- Why they are included in the list; what makes the blog or person really exceptional

Step 3: Outreach
Once the post is published, your next step is to send an email to the bloggers or websites that you've featured to let them know. Here is an example of an email you could choose to send:

Remember to keep it simple. You can always add more detail if you want, but chances are the people you're contacting are busy, so you want to get your message across quickly.

Step 4: Follow up
We'll mention this several times throughout this guide to highlight the importance of this step: Make sure you follow up with the people you feature in your content. It can help to use a tool like [Boomerang](#) to remind yourself.
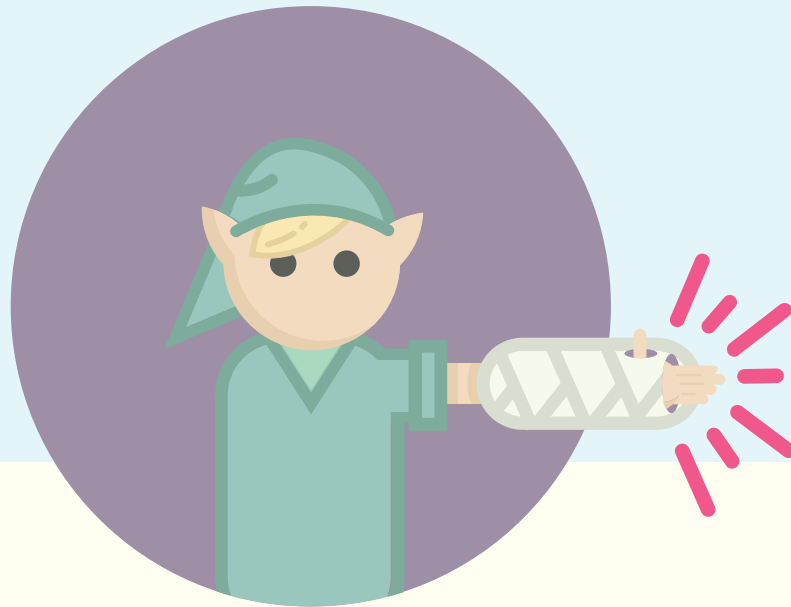
Hi John,

I just wanted to let you know that you've been featured in our list of the top 10 gardening bloggers of 2014 - LINK TO URL.

You were included because the quality of the posts you publish, as well as the advice you give to readers, is amazing, and you deserve recognition for it.

Feel free to take a look and make sure I've got all of your details correct. I'd really appreciate any feedback you have, as well. If you would also like to share it on Twitter or feature it on your blog somewhere, that would be amazing.

Thanks!

Paddy

Broken Link Building

The Internet is filled with broken links. Often, these broken links exist on valuable, high-quality pages. Broken link building is a very popular practice that works on the premise of helping webmasters fix their broken links by providing a superior alternative for them to link to.

Although the specifics can vary, the basic process looks like this:

1.) Research broken links and find good targets

2.) Content creation

3.) Outreach

Here's an example. You run a dairy testing company and want to build links to your scientific resource pages. A university in your area happens to have an older page on dairy resources, but many of the links are broken. You kindly reach out to the webmaster to point out the broken links, and helpfully suggest your newer and up-to-date resource as an alternative. The university webmaster then links to your dairy resource page.

This process can be repeated over and over again. Sometimes you use your existing content as a suggestion to replace broken links, other times you create new content specifically for this purpose.

Here are a few additional resources on how to perform broken link building:

- [The Broken Link Building Bible](#)
- [Broken Link Building Guide: From Noob to Novice](#)

Link Reclamation

Slightly different than broken link building is the practice of link reclamation, where you fix or "reclaim" links that once pointed at your site, or point to your site but fail to provide any SEO value.

There are many different types of link reclamation strategies.

404s

These are links that point to pages on your website that no longer exist. [Open Site Explorer](#) is a good tool for finding these. (Preform a "Top Pages" search and sort for 404s). You can either redirect or fix these links on your end, or ask the webmaster to change the link.

Non-linking Brand Mentions

It's sometimes common and easy to find others writing about your site without linking to it. Often a simple email to the author is enough to secure a link. Tools like mention.net, Google Alerts, and Fresh Web Explorer are great at digging up mentions.

Non-linking Images

It's common to find websites that have posted your own images without attribution. Instead of filing a copyright or DMCA takedown notice, this presents a terrific opportunity to earn a link instead.

Use tools like TinEye and Google's Image Search to find webmasters who publish your images, and politely ask for attribution. We'll cover more of this in Chapter 7.

A World of Link Building Tactics

This chapter only describes a few of the hundreds of different link building tactics you can use (or even invent!). The specific tactics you choose will depend on your resources, creativity, niche, audience, and available time.

For more inspiration, we recommend checking out Jon Cooper's Link Building Tactics or the Moz Blog's Link Building category.

Link Building Metrics

There are various metrics associated with links that you should be aware of. These metrics can help you judge the value of a potential link, helping you assess whether it is worth pursuing and how much resources you should put into acquiring it. Knowing these kinds of metrics is also useful when you are doing link profile analysis (a holistic report of the number and types of links on a website), whether on a competitor's website or your own.

Domain Strength

Domain strength is the cumulative value of an entire domain. Instead of looking at the value of individual pages, we look at the domain as a whole to understand how strong it is.

It is usually displayed as either [Domain Authority](#) or as the homepage's [Page Authority](#).

PageRank is calculated by Google and based on the number and quality of links pointing to a web page. It runs on a scale from 0-10, with 10 being the highest. We can use the PageRank of a website's homepage to get an idea of how strong it is. Although technically this is only the PageRank of a single page, it is still a good indicator of the strength of a domain, because the majority of a website's links will be to the homepage and PageRank flows from there to internal pages.

It should be noted that there is a difference between "Toolbar PageRank" and the actual PageRank used by Google. Toolbar PageRank is visible to you by installing the Google Toolbar on your browser or by using a browser plug-in/extension that pulls data from the same source. It is updated every 3-4 months by Google, which is different from the actual PageRank that is more fluid, constantly updated by Google to be fed into their ranking algorithm.

For that reason, the PageRank you see in the Google Toolbar could be several months old. This is why new web pages mainly have a PageRank score of 0: They need to wait for Google to update the toolbar.
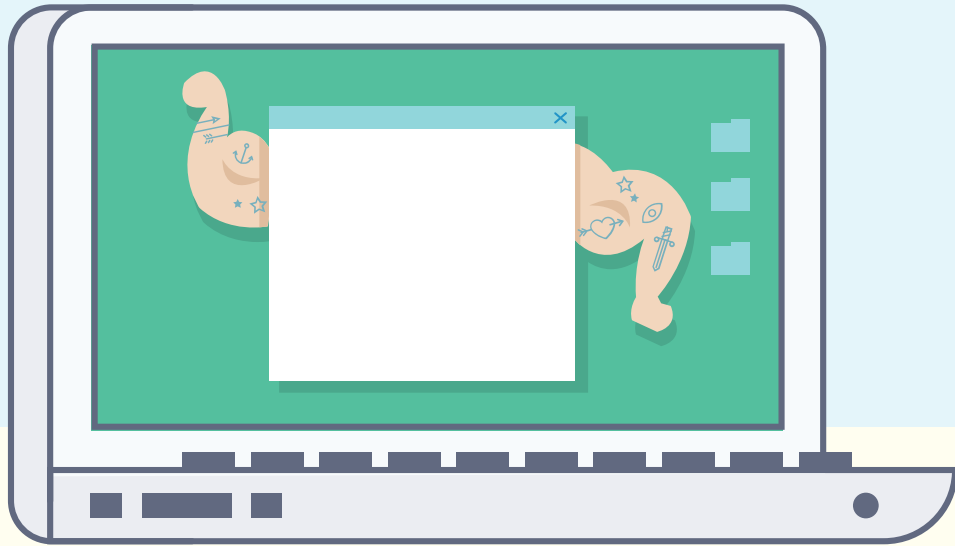
Domain Authority is calculated by Moz and runs on a scale of 0-100, with 100 being the highest. It uses a number of signals taken from the Moz crawler and tries to predict how well a domain will perform in search results. It is useful alongside PageRank as another indicator of how strong a domain is.

In terms of link building, site strength is a good metric to use because you want to get links from websites that are very strong. If the links you get are from strong domains, they will pass more strength to your own website, which is a clear signal to Google that you have a good site that deserves to rank well.

For example, CNN has a PageRank of 8 and a Domain Authority of 99. Lots of other websites link to CNN because it is an authoritative website with high-quality content. Because of this, CNN is not very likely to link to low-quality websites, so if you get a link from CNN, it is a signal that you have a good website, too.

Tools to measure domain strength

- [PageRank extension for Chrome](#)
- [MozBar for measuring Page Authority](#)
- [Google Toolbar for PageRank](#) (for Internet Explorer)

Page Strength

There will be occasions when you have the opportunity to get a link from a page that already exists on a website, as opposed to a new page that is created for a blog post or news item. An example could be an existing list of some kind to which your link gets added; perhaps your coffee shop is added to a page with a list of the best espresso in Seattle.

In cases like this, you should assess how strong the page is so that you know how worthwhile the link is to you before you put too much effort into acquiring it. There are two main metrics, and they are nearly identical to those for domain strength: PageRank and [Page Authority](#).

We've already talked about PageRank. Page Authority is another Moz metric that is very similar to Domain Authority, except that it only applies to a single page rather than an entire domain.

The higher the PageRank / Page Authority of the page you want a link from, the more likely it is to help you with your SEO efforts.

Anchor Text

We've already covered the [meaning of anchor text](); now lets consider what it means as a metric for SEOs.

Anchor text can give Google an indication of the subject matter of the page being linked to. So if I linked to a page using the words "fitness routine," then it is likely that the page being linked to contains information about fitness routines. Google can then use this information as part of its ranking algorithms. In this case, they may decide that the page being linked to should rank higher for the keyword "fitness routine" and close variations.

For many years, having a lot of links pointing to your website that contained your keyword as the anchor text was a very good way of helping you rank well for that keyword. While this is still the case to some extent, it does appear that the strength of anchor text as a signal is diminishing slightly. This is most likely because of the over-optimization of anchor text by SEOs and Google's readiness to penalize such websites through the Penguin update.

Rand talked about this in an episode of [Whiteboard Friday]() and gave some indicators of what Google may use instead.

Due to the changing nature of the perception and use of anchor text, it is probably best to be cautious when building links. Try not to build too many links that have the exact same anchor text in them, particularly if the links are not of the highest quality, such as links that are from low-quality domains, non-editorial sitewide links, or links that have too much anchor text (for more details on link quality, check out this post on State of Digital). You should try to make your link profile look as natural as possible, which often means getting links that use your brand or company name as the anchor text.

Tools for measuring anchor text

- Open Site Explorer - click on the "anchor text" tab
- Majestic SEO
- AHREFs

Number of Links

When link building, you will obviously want to keep track of how many links you have built. You will also want to check into how your website compares to your competitors' sites to see how far (or how far ahead!) you have gotten.

As we've discussed in previous chapters and seen in surveys, the raw number of links pointing to your website is a strong ranking signal. However, you do need to remember that the quality is equally, if not more important than the number.

As a metric, number of links can be useful to us in two main ways:

1. Measuring progress / success of a link building campaign
2. For running comparisons between your website and competitors' sites

Both of these uses still need to factor in quality of links in order to be helpful to us. When we compare our number of links to a competitor's number, it can sometimes show gaps that may explain ranking differences. If you're trying to rank for the keyword "wooden tables" and the websites on the first page of results all have over 1,000 linking domains, that gives you a solid sense for the competitiveness of that niche and the kind of attention you need to earn in order to rank among those results.

Tools for measuring number of links

- [Open Site Explorer](#)
- [Majestic SEO](#)
- [AHREFs](#)

Linking Root Domains

Not to be confused with the raw number of links, linking root domains is an even more powerful ranking signal to Google. When we say linking root domains, we mean the number of distinct domains that link to us, not the raw number of links.

For example, if CNN linked to you from five different news stories, that would be counted as five links, but only one linking root domain, since all five links came from cnn.com.

If the BBC linked to you from one news story, that would be one link and one linking root domain.
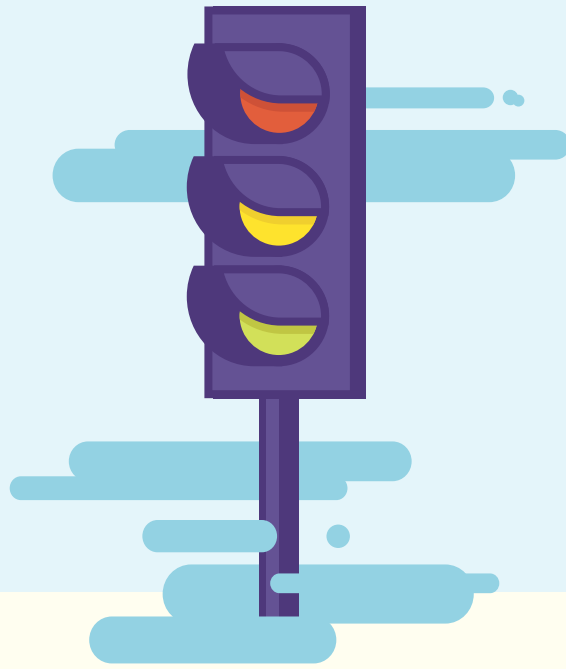
The number of linking root domains is a stronger signal than the raw number of links because it is a better indication of the true popularity of a website. If we go back to how Google think of links as "votes," then in this sense each website has only one vote to give you. No matter how many times they link to you, they still only count as one vote, which prevents the digital equivalent of "stuffing the ballot box."

Multiple links from the same domain can be the result of a number of things. Linking from multiple content pages is one way, but the most common ways are by what we call sitewide links. A sitewide link is a link that is placed in some kind of templated element of the website, such as the header, footer, or sidebar. The most common example is a "blogroll" link, as a blogroll is generally on every page of the website.

In general, these types of links are not as valuable as in-content links from just a few pages. Sitewide links can sometimes be spammy, paid for, and not editorially given in the sense that Google would like. In fact, Moz published a case study of a site that was heavily penalized by Google for incorporating sitewide links on its clients' pages. Therefore, you should treat them with caution, only get them from high-quality websites, and don't be too aggressive with your anchor text.

Tools for measuring linking root domains

- Open Site Explorer - click on the "linking domains" tab

- Majestic SEO

- AHREFs

Relevance of the Linking Page

There has always been some debate as to whether relevance is a strong signal used by Google to calculate the value of a link. Logic tells us that it should be, because it is natural for relevant websites to link to each other. However, what if you get a link from the homepage of the BBC to your website about coffee? You wouldn't reject it just because the BBC website isn't about coffee.

If we look beyond link building for a moment though, you still want to bring targeted traffic to your website so that you can try to convert visitors into customers. For this reason alone, you should be trying to place links on websites where potential customers may visit. This means that the value of the link goes far beyond SEO and can become a source of direct income.

As discussed in the anchor text section above, there are some indications that Google is moving away from anchor text as a strong signal and, instead, could be using analysis of an entire page to attribute relevance to the link. If this proves to be the case, then getting links from relevant pages could become a strong ranking signal.

Right now, best practice should be to focus on quality to make sure you're being passed link equity and on relevance in the sense that you want to attract the right kind of traffic.

Position of Links on the Page

Imagine you live in Seattle and you have a blog about coffee. You're going to share a link with your readers to the website of a local coffee shop that serves the most amazing fresh coffee ever. Where would you place this link on the page?

If you really wanted your readers to see it, you'd position it somewhere obvious. Probably in the main body of the page, probably near the top of the page, and probably within some content that explains how amazing the coffee shop is.

You probably wouldn't place the link in the footer, right? Many users may not scroll down the page that far, and even if they do, they wouldn't expect to find useful links in that section.

Google is able to work out the position of a link on a page, and from this could choose to value it differently. If the link is in the footer of a page, then Google could reduce the value of that link because they assume it isn't a great link for users (otherwise, it wouldn't be hidden away in the footer).
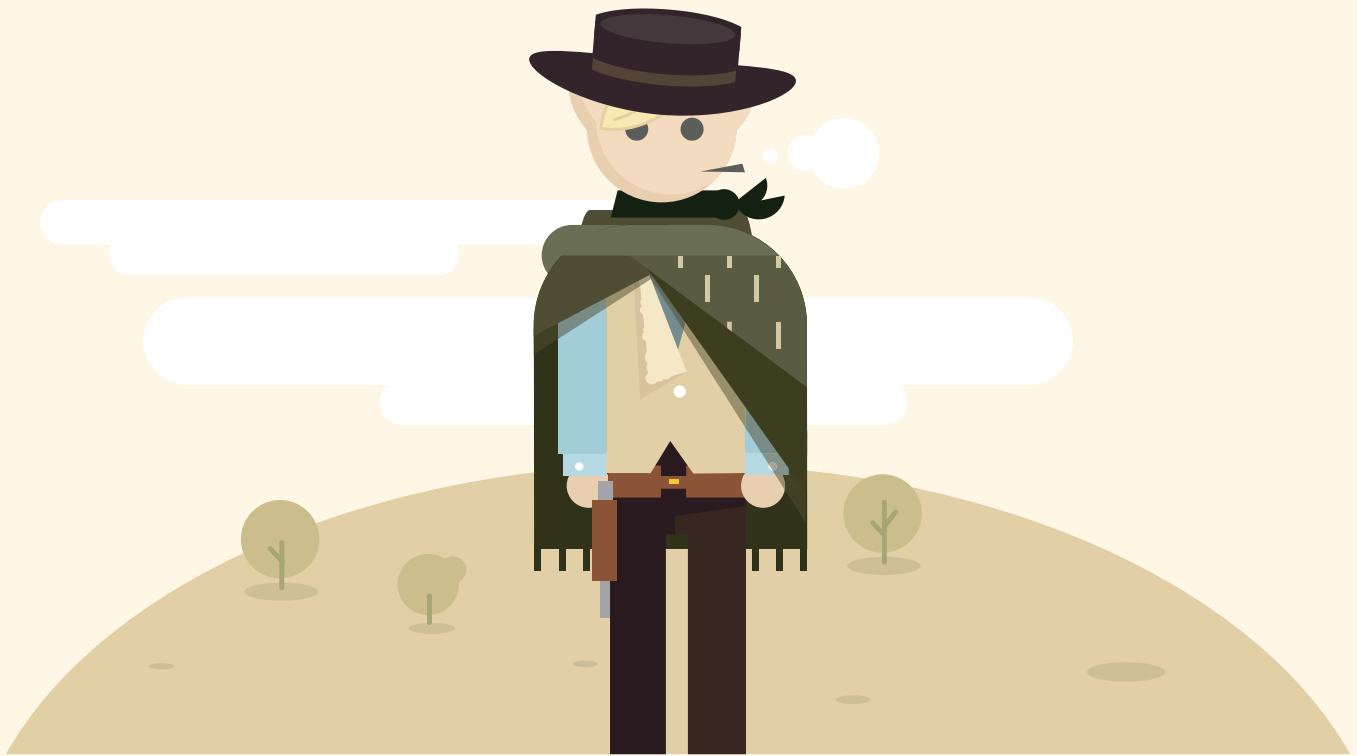
Google can also use the position of links on a page in aggregate. For example, they could see if 50% of all the links pointing to your website are in some kind of footer. This could indicate low-quality link building, and Google may decide to take a closer look.

Another example could be if Google finds that 50% of the links pointing to your website are from sidebars. Again, on its own, this may be legitimate, but it could also be a signal to Google that you're buying links. Many link brokers will place links in the sidebar of pages as opposed to within the content.

Because of this ability, you should make sure that you are getting links from websites which are happy to link from within content wherever possible. There is nothing wrong with the odd sidebar link, but too many of them does not signal a good link profile.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Link Building

White-Hat Strategies vs. Black-Hat Strategies

You'll often hear SEOs talking about "white-hat" and "black-hat" (or the questionable area in between, often dubbed "gray-hat"), particularly when it comes to link building techniques. This section will outline the differences and cover some of the pros and cons of each approach.

White-Hat Strategies

White-hat strategies are those that are very low-risk to carry out and usually fall well within the webmaster guidelines laid out by Google and Bing. Using white-hat techniques means that you stand very little chance of running into problems with the search engines when it comes to losing traffic because of a penalty.

A few examples of white-hat tactics are:

- Creating your own unique, insightful, and quality content

- Building a genuine, engaged community which interacts with your website and each other

- Promoting your website to relevant people in a genuine, personal way by writing personalized message

Pros include not having to worry about getting yourself into trouble with automated or manual spam penalties from the search engines. White-hat strategies usually work best for real users, too, and can help build long-term assets that are strong and unlikely to disappear overnight.

Cons include having to focus on the long-term goal rather than short-term gains. White-hat strategies can sometimes take some time to have a big effect on your traffic and revenue because they are less aggressive.

Black-Hat Strategies

[Originally coined](#) as a term to describe computer hackers, black-hat has also been used to describe techniques that directly violate search engine guidelines. These techniques seek to exploit loopholes in the search engine algorithms and rank websites higher than they actually deserve to.

Cloaking

- Showing different content to the search engines compared to what you show to users

- Injecting hidden links into a website you do not own by exploiting a security flaw

- Hidden text on a page that is only shown to the search engines, not users, typically full of keywords you want to rank for

These tactics don't work in the long-term, because the search engines are always looking to stop them from happening. This means that traffic and rankings can drop pretty much overnight if you're caught using these tactics, so we strongly advise steering clear.

Why Sustainable, White-hat Strategies Are So Important

You are building a business online, and chances are that you want to compete online for many years to come. If you want to do this, then you need to carefully choose the tactics you're willing to employ and make an assessment of how risky those tactics are. As with any business (offline included), there are tactics that carry a certain amount of risk with them. For example, an offline business may carry out some kind of PR stunt to try and build awareness of the brand. The inherent risk is that a stunt can misfire, negatively affecting the brand and deterring potential customers.

As a business, you need to weigh up the risks and benefits of any marketing activity.

This is why white-hat strategies are so important to a website: They pose the least amount of risk and are very unlikely to lead to you being hit with a penalty from Google. Also, just as importantly, white-hat strategies focus on adding true value to the Internet, your industry, and your customers' experience. If you want to build a loyal customer base which not only buys from you but happily recommends you to friends, you need to focus on tactics that give the customer a great user experience. Providing them with genuine, useful content is one way to do this.

What works today may not work tomorrow, and where might that leave you? Many black-hats will replace their former ways with other shady techniques, and the cycle starts again. The problem is that this is not good for most businesses. Most businesses can't afford to take risks with their websites, or constantly be looking over their shoulders, waiting for the day the search engines finally catch up with them.

If you contrast this with white-hat techniques, you know that you're building for the long term, and while some efforts will yield better results than others, you won't need to be looking over your shoulder or worrying every time you hear there has been a Google update.

You can read an excellent post by Rand on this topic along with lots of examples of white-hat tactics working very well.

A Few Words on Buying Links

Link building can be quite tough, particularly in the early days when you're still trying to build your reputation, find the right people to connect with, and create great content. It is quite understandable that SEOs look for shortcuts to help make the process a little bit easier, and one of those shortcuts is often buying links.

Buying Links is Directly Against One of Google's Webmaster Guidelines:

"Buying or selling links that pass PageRank: This includes exchanging money for links, or posts that contain links; exchanging goods or services for links; or sending someone a 'free' product in exchange for them writing about it and including a link."

Google cares so much about this because buying links can change how search results appear for users. They want companies to perform well in search results because they deserve to, not because they have deep pockets and can buy links. Also, note that

Google explicitly says "links that pass PageRank." This is where the difference between buying links and buying advertising comes into play.

Buying advertising that links through to your website is fine and can be a great practice for building awareness of your business. However, Google do say that if you're going to do this, then you should make sure that the advertisement doesn't pass PageRank to your website. There are a few ways you can do this:

- Adding the nofollow attribute to the link
- Making the link Javascript that Google can not follow
- Going via a redirected page that is blocked in robots.txt

These techniques mean that the advertisements will not affect how much PageRank your website receives and, therefore, will not affect how you perform in organic search results.

In general, buying links is a risky business, and for most companies is not worth the risk. The short-term gains often outweigh the long-term benefits, and if you're building a legitimate business that plans on using organic Google results as a means to get customers, then buying links can put that at risk.

You can read about the [Moz stance on paid links here](#), which goes into a lot of detail on the reasons behind not recommending it as a practice.

Penalties and Black-Hat SEO

If you're found to be in violation of webmaster guidelines, it is likely that you'll be given a penalty by the search engines. Depending on the seriousness of the violation, the penalty can last from a few weeks to several months or until the problem is completely fixed. There have been some very public examples of large companies being penalized by Google for violating their guidelines.

JC Penney, a very large US retailer was heavily penalized back in February 2011 for buying large amounts of links targeting a range of specific keywords. It was several months before they started to see a recovery and they were forced to spend time trying to take lots of the links down.

Another example closely followed a few weeks later when Overstock were penalized for the practice of giving Universities discounts on products in exchange for links. Again, it was several months before they started to see a recovery.

A famous example in the UK was the penalty applied to florist Interflora in February 2013 which was severe but only lasted eleven days. Google didn't directly comment on this but it was widely believed to be link related.

All of these examples made headlines because the companies in question were very large and well-known. In reality, Google hands out penalties for this kind of behavior all the time, but most cases don't receive the headlines that our example companies did.

Google hands out several types of penalties which we will briefly discuss here:

Manual Penalties

In this case, a member of the web spam team has manually applied a penalty to your website after finding something that was in violation of their guidelines. This can be anything from buying links to sneaky redirects or cloaking. To remove this penalty, you need to file a reconsideration request with Google that includes several things:

- What you've done to fix the problem that you've been penalized for

- How you plan to never engage in this kind of practice again

- Clear evidence for both of these

Then Google will manually decide whether or not to lift the penalty. They can sometimes come back and tell you that you haven't done enough and you need to keep working to fix the problem. A common example of this is if you've been penalized for low quality link building and you haven't removed enough of the low quality links yet.

In order to see if you've been given a manual penalty, you can check the [manual penalties section](#) of [Google Webmaster Tools](#).

Algorithmic Penalties

In this case, Google have automatically found a problem with your website and applied a penalty because of it. This is usually some kind of on-site problem, such as hidden text or cloaking, and you need to fix the problem before you will see the penalty lifted. With this type of penalty, sometimes just fixing the problem can lead to the penalty being lifted next time that Google crawl and index your pages. Sometimes, though, you may also need to file a reconsideration request with Google so that they can manually see if you've fixed the problem.

Why Simply "Trading Links" Isn't a Good Strategy

In years gone by, trading links with other websites was a good way of getting links. It also became known as "link exchanges" or "reciprocal links" as a tactic. However, like a lot of link building tactics, it was often abused and pushed to the extreme. Instead of trading links with other relevant, good quality websites, many SEOs would just trade links with anyone they could. Therefore, the link was no longer being given because of the quality of the website, but more because the webmaster would get a link in return.

This led to some websites having pages that were set up specifically for trading links. These pages would have URLs similar to www.example.com/links.html. Such a page would consist of a huge list of links to websites that were often unrelated to the website itself and were not always great quality.

Because of this, Google seek to devalue links that are only given because a link is being given in return. They can even penalize for excessive link exchanges and have a section in their webmaster guidelines for it:

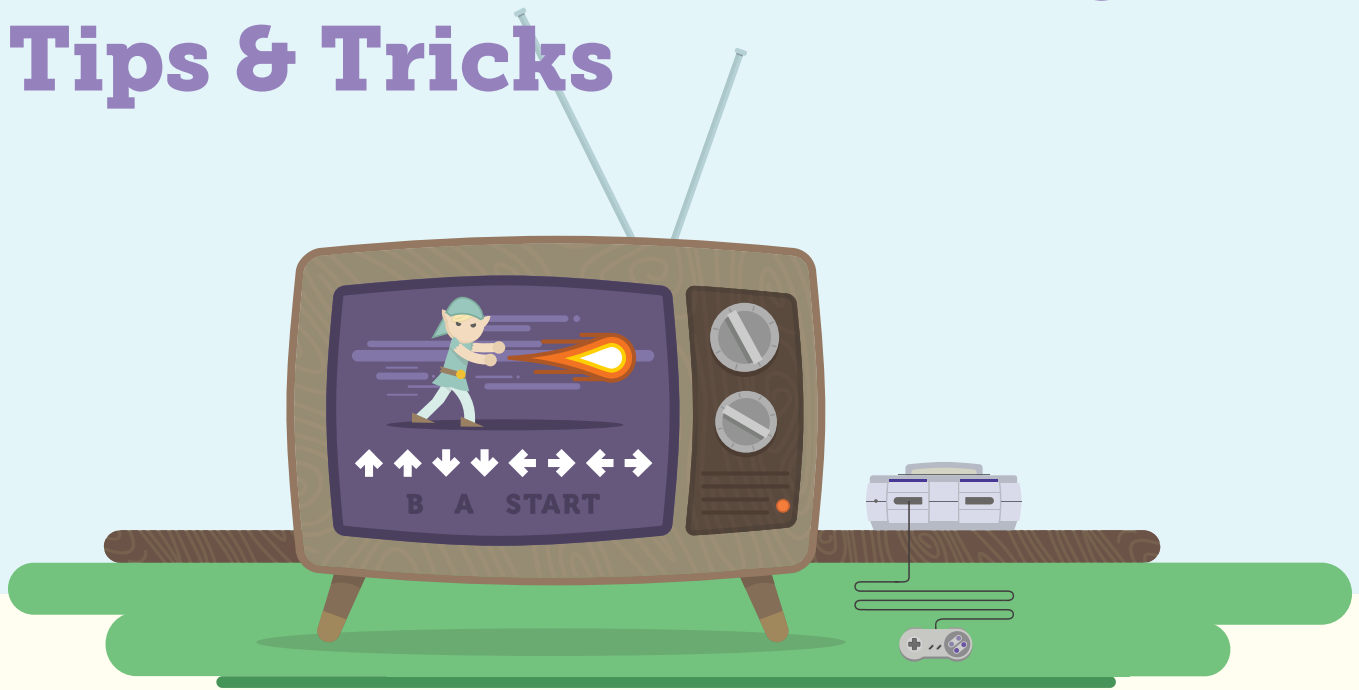**Excessive Link Exchanging ("Link to Me and I'll Link to You")**

When it comes to link building, Google want to see links that you've earned. They want to see links that you deserve because you have something of good quality to offer - not because you're happy to take part in link exchanges.

Having said that, Google has no problem at all with websites linking to each other for legitimate reasons. It is a natural occurrence on the web if a news story on the BBC cites an article on CNN, then a few weeks later CNN cite a story on the BBC. This is technically a reciprocal link, but do you think Google penalize for it? No, because there are genuine reasons for these websites to link to each other and they are doing it in a natural way that is good for users.

Contrast this with a page that has thousands of links on it, all going to unrelated websites with no relevance at all and you can see the difference in what Google does and doesn't like.

Advanced Link Building Tips & Tricks

This section will give you a few link building tips and tricks that we've picked up over the years. Some have been mentioned briefly elsewhere in this guide, but all are quite specific and should be quite useful for you, no matter what industry you work in.

Speed Up Link Prospecting With Lists

Say we worked in the gardening industry and wanted to find garden blogs to do some outreach. Our first instinct may be to search for "garden blogs" or something similar to that. This will certainly give you good results, but you'll need to search through lots and lots of search results to get a decent amount of blogs.

To help speed things up a bit, try searching for "list of garden blogs" instead which will give you results like this:

"list of garden blogs"

LISTS OF TOP GARDEN BLOGS
garden-bloggers-conference.com/lists-of-top-garden-blogs/
Below we have compiled lists from around the webto help you
identify the best and most interesting garden blogs for your
reading pleasure, as well as links to ...

A list of top 50 Gardening blogs by Blog Rank
www.blogmetrics.org/gardening
A list of the top blogs in the Gardening category based on
20+ different factors including ... 13th, Your Small Kitchen Garden,
n/a, 509,920, 1,385,331, 6, 4, rss ...

10 Great Garden Blogs - P. Allen Smith Garden Home
www.pallensmith.com/articles/10-great-garden-blogs
Here's a list of great garden blogs to follow this year. Bookmark these
sites for whenever you need inspiration, how-to information or
just to reassure yourself that ...

The Best Garden Blogs of 2013 - 6ftmama
6ftmama.com/the-best-garden-blogs-of-2013/
by Jennifer Ebeling - Aug 27, 2013 - This past week, the
Garden Bloggers Conference announced its ... The ever-expanding list
of contributors means that the wide range of content ...

Home Blogs & Garden Blogs: Top 50 List | Cision
www.cision.com/us/2013/02/top-50-home-garden-blogs/
Feb 28, 2013 - In light of this trend, we've compiled the top 50
home and garden blogs in North America. The list was
created using Cision's PR Software and ...

The UK's top 20 Gardening Blogs — Norton's Notes
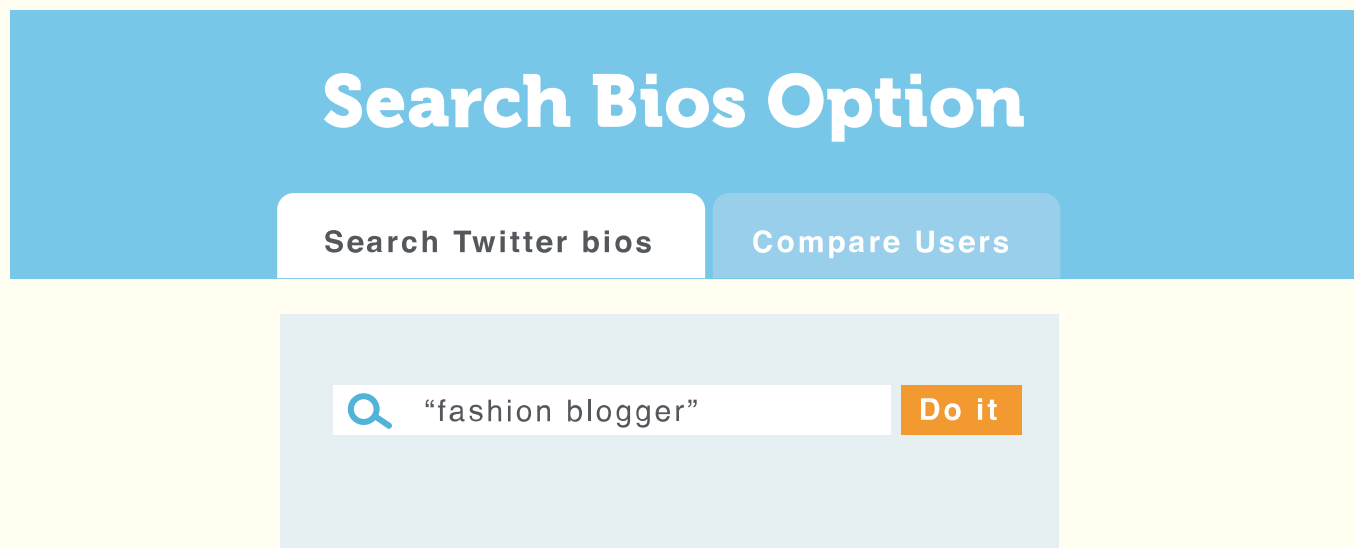chrisnorton.biz/social-media/the-uks-top-20-gardening-blogs/
by Chris Norton - Nov 22, 2011 - If I have missed a great blog off this list,
please feel free to add in the comments as ...
Shirl's Garden Watch — Packed full of pictures, videos and ...

As you can see, within the first few results are lots of lists of garden blogs that have already been curated by other people. This not only helps you find blogs quicker, but it helps you find better-quality blogs because the list has been curated. I wrote a blog post on link building using lists on the Moz blog which you should also take a look at.

Find Bloggers Using Followerwonk

Followerwonk is a great little tool that lets you run lots of analysis on Twitter accounts and it is now part of Moz, so it is free to use if you're a Pro subscriber.

One of the features of Followerwonk allows you to find influential bloggers very quickly and easily. It is the Search bios option, and you can search for keywords such as this:

Search Bios Option

Search Twitter bios	Compare Users

🔍 "fashion blogger" **Do it**

This will show me people on Twitter who have "fashion blogger" in their bio:

You can then export these results into a CSV which will tell you which of these people have websites listed next to their bio. If they do, then you can go take a look and see if they'd be a good person to start engaging with and eventually, promote your content to.

Get More Links From Your Infographics

Like guest blogging, building links using infographics has become very popular over recent years. In general, the process for getting links here is the same as the content-based link building process outlined previously, but there is an extra step here that you can take which could get you a few more links.

The technique is based on the fact that some people will embed your infographics, but will not give you a link. This is actually quite common, so there is often opportunity for you to contact these websites and ask them for the link.

To do this, we need to start by getting a copy of the filename where your infographic is hosted. Note that we want the actual jpg, png filename rather than the URL itself. We can get this by going to the infographic, right clicking on it and selecting "Copy Image URL:"

Getting a copy of the filename

Open Link in New Tab
Open Link in New Window
Open Link in Incognito Window
Save Link As...
Copy Link Address

Save Image As...
Copy Image URL
Copy Image
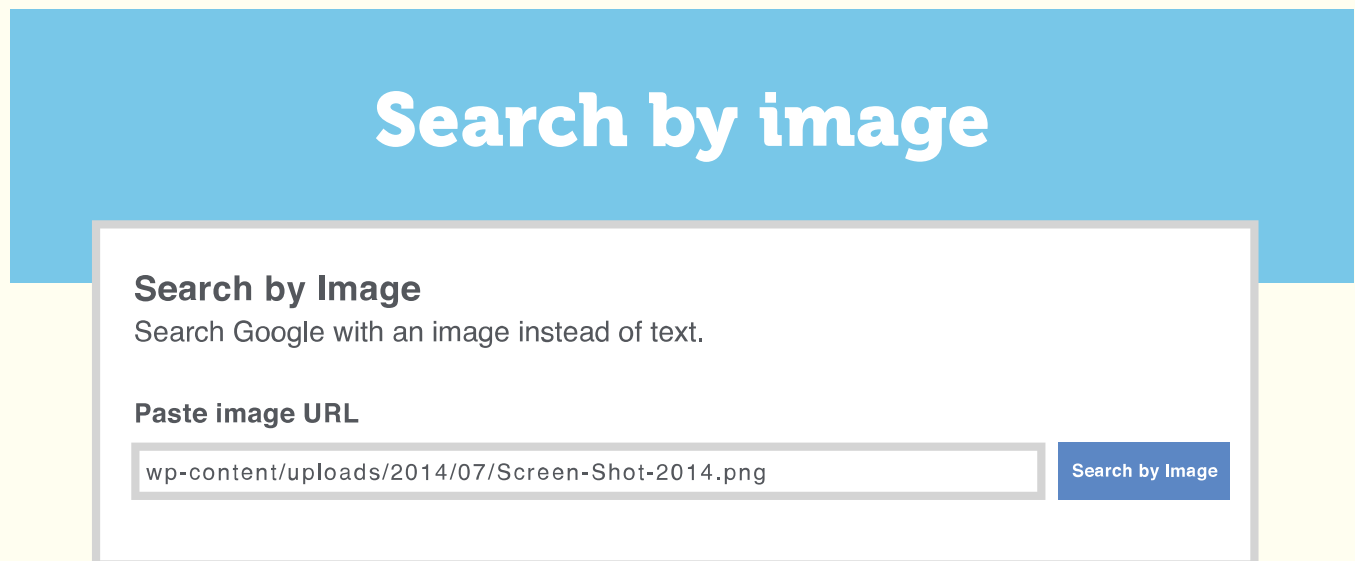Open Image in New Tab

Inspect Element

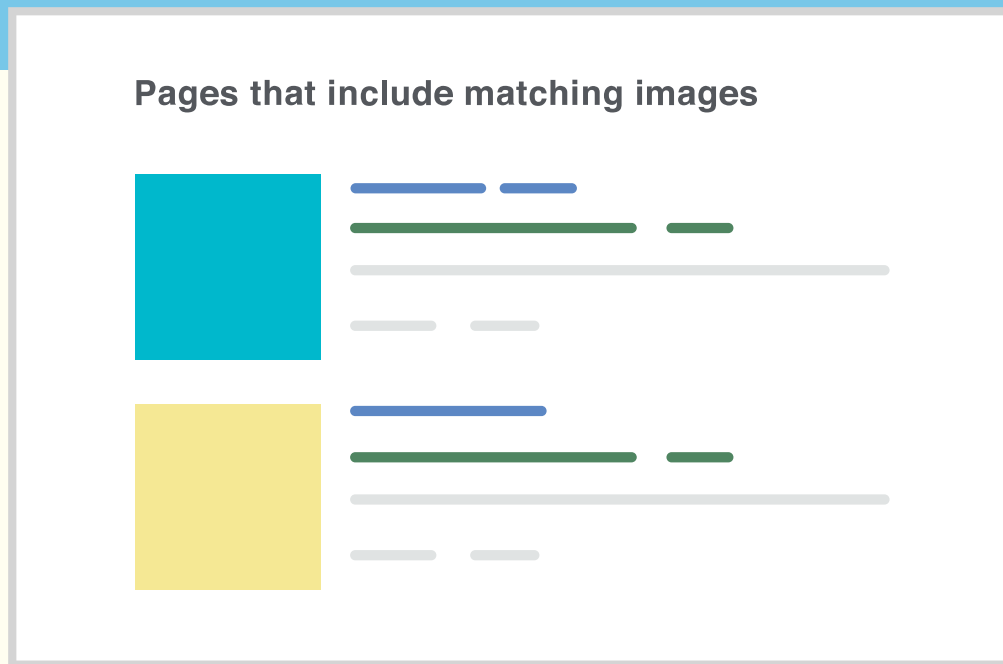**Then we need to head over to Google Images and look for this symbol:**

images.google.com

Google
Images

Click on this and paste in the URL we just copied:

Search by image

Search by Image
Search Google with an image instead of text.

Paste image URL

wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Screen-Shot-2014.png

Search by Image

Click search by image and you'll get results like this:

Search by image results

Pages that include matching images

Now you simply need to go to these URLs and make sure that there is a link pointing back to your website. If there is not, then you can drop a quick email to the website owner and ask them to add a link to the original source.

Learning More

This beginner's guide should give you the fundamentals you need to begin a link building campaign, but link building is a large and diverse field with many schools of thought and practice. To further your education and development, we recommend the following resources:

- Buzzstream Blog
- Growing Popularity and Links
- Ultimate Guide to Link Building by Eric Ward and Garret French
- The Link Building Book by Paddy Moogan
- Link Building by Ontolo
- Link Building Strategies by Jon Cooper
- Link Building on the Moz Blog

To Wrap Up...

That's about it for now! We hope that you enjoyed The Beginner's Guide to Link Building! As mentioned right at the start of this guide, the landscape is changing regularly and we'll do our best to keep this guide up to date. Remember though at one thing is unlikely to change - the focus on quality should always be front of your mind if you're trying to succeed in the long term online. Best of luck!

One more note: We simply can't thank Paddy Moogan enough for writing this guide. His expertise and wisdom made the project possible. We'd also like to thank Ashley Tate for wrangling the early stages of the project, Trevor Klein for taking it to the finish line, Cyrus Shepard for his expert review and a few key additions, Derric Wise and David O'Hara for bringing it to life with their art, and Andrew Palmer for seamlessly translating everything onto the web.

THE END