

Link Building Strategies

Do you wonder why your site does not receive the traffic you believe it deserves? The only people visiting your website are current customers. Where are the new customers the web designer promised you? One of the most overlooked steps in creation of a website is Search Engine Optimization (SEO). We like to think that search engines will crawl our website and shazaam, like magic, we appear at the top of the results for our keywords. Unfortunately, it rarely works that way. We need to build relationships or "links" to our sites. While this can be a daunting endeavor, it can be very rewarding.

We are going to look at link building theory and practice. How do you let the world, more accurately the web, know you are open for business? Where do you begin building links? What about link building software? What are directories? Who are your top competitors? Who links to them? How do you ask for a link? Do you want reciprocal links? How many links do you need? These are the questions all website owners and link builders need to answer.

Search engines look at links as votes. The more links your website has, the more votes it has to be number 1, or the "authority" on your subject matter. Not all links are created equal. Links from more popular websites are weighted heavier than links from less popular sites. Search engines are now smart enough to know that content is related, so, links from relevant sites are more important than links from sites, which are irrelevant.

The link text will help you rank better for your keywords. If possible get into the major directories. Avoid FFA's or "Free For All" link farms.

How do you let the world know you are open for business?

PR or public relations. The way most link builders will approach this is to create a press release that is disseminated to the right people. How do we know we reach the right people? In a recent interview with Eric Ward, the father of link building, he stated that most of the press release web services allow a person to subscribe to items that interest them. If a person runs a widget website and is interested in widgets, they will receive any press release that is related to widgets. Often, they may list the new widget information on their own website. That's an easy link. The press release itself is another link. Yes, it may cost a bit of money to draft and the service may not be free, but you have built several links with a simple press release.

Link Building Software

Link building software automates the task of collecting relevant sites and their contact information, based on keywords. Many of the available software

packages include an automatic contact manager that allows you to contact sites with very little effort. It is generally accepted that you should not use the automatic contact features. Instead use the software to identify sites and contact them manually. Many webmasters feel the automated emails to be spam and will reject, with prejudice, any site that asks for a link using them. Software should be used in addition to other link building strategies.

The directories

The major pay for inclusion directories include Yahoo and Business.com. These directories charge to be included in their database of websites. They are often used by major search engines to help determine rank. Don't forget the free directories such as the ODP and joeant.com. The ODP (Open Directory Project) is at <http://dmoz.org>. They are selective on the sites they include. Not all websites will be able to obtain a link at the ODP. joeant.com on the other hand is very easy to get into. You will have to join to enter your site into their database, it's very easy to do, and is a super easy link to obtain.

Who are your top competitors?

It is important to seek out your top competitors, the websites that are ranking on the first page of search results for your keywords. Knowing who is at the top, and who links to them is the first and foremost part of link building.

Who links to them?

Returning to our link building is like life analogy, imagine you operate a linen laundry. As a linen laundry owner, you wouldn't want to network with people who are involved in high technology or manufacturing. You would want to network with people who are in the hospitality or closely related industries. Restaurants, hotels or people who interact with them on a frequent basis. That is if we have a website that deals with the latest widgets and widget reviews, we wouldn't want to waste time seeking links from automobile manufacturers (unless the widgets are automobile related). We want links from other widget and widget related websites.

The easiest way to determine who is linking to your top competitors is to use the link: command in your search engine of choice, the Google link command seems to be broken, so use a search engine other than Google. For an example we will use a fictional company Widgetreviews, with the URL of <http://www.widgetreviews.com>. Widgetreviews is at the top of the search engines for your search term "widget reviews". Because of this, we want to see who links to Widgetreviews. Just enter "link: www.widgetreviews.com" (without quotation marks) into your favorite SE, other than Google of course.

Follow this procedure for the top 5 or 6 sites that use your keywords. Compile a list competitor websites and their incoming links. We will use the list as a source for our link building strategy.

Asking for a link

We now have a list of website pages that link to widgetreviews and can now see if we can get our site listed on the page as well. You will need to visit the pages listed. It is important that when you write an email to a webmaster that it is obvious you have visited the site yourself and that it is not a machine generated email (spam). You will need to determine the email address of the person you need to send your request to, be sure to state why you deserve to be listed on their page, as well as a few compliments about their website, and your contact information. Be courteous and succinct most webmasters have little time to deal with their daily tasks. Most important, ask for link text that uses your keywords, not your company name. Using our widget example, you would ask for a link with the text "widget reviews", or in HTML Widget Reviews.

Reciprocal links

Generally, reciprocal links are not weighted as heavily as non reciprocal links. I usually only offer reciprocal link if I really want a link from high traffic site that demands a reciprocal link.

How many links do you need?

Your work at link building will never end. The good news is that as your site becomes an authority on your subject matter, websites will link to you on their own.

Your options

You have three options when it comes to link building. Hire someone, don't worry about it or Do It Yourself.

The first option is a good option, but it can be very expensive. Professional link builders often charge \$20 a link + the cost of the link (yes, websites sell links). As you can see, this can add up quickly. Building a hundred links through a professional link builder could easily cost \$2,000!

The don't worry about it option doesn't cost a thing. But, don't expect any traffic. The World Wide Web is a collection of links. Each site pointing to other sites. Without links, your otherwise brilliant and insightful website will slowly die a horrible lonely death.

This article is written with the DIY'er in mind. I wish you good luck in your link building adventures!