



**Web Site Search Engine Optimization Series:
“SEO Link Building – Who, What, When, Where, Why
(and How)”**

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SEO Link Building – Who, What, When, Where, Why (and How)¹

Perhaps you've read an article or two by search engine optimization (“SEO”) experts stressing the importance of link building to the visibility of your web site on the major search engines. If, for example, you happen to navigate the Google online documentation to the “Webmaster Help Center” you will see the Google response to the question “**How can I improve my site's ranking?**” The Google response includes the statement “In general, webmasters can improve the rank of their sites by increasing the number of high-quality sites that link to their pages.”²

“Link building” then, is the process of developing “inbound” links to your web pages in order to drive traffic to your site and improve your search engine ranking. Sounds simple, but there are so many different complex online link building programs and strategies it's mind boggling! *And, some techniques, even legitimate techniques implemented incorrectly, may actually render inbound links completely useless.*

I started this article intending to cover the 5 W's – who, what, when, where and why. But, at the risk of detracting from the clever title, I felt the need to add “How?” in order to make it more useful. So this article is designed to provide insight into the following questions:

1. **Who** should link to my web pages?
2. **What** should the link entail?
3. **When** should I add a link to my site?
4. **Where** should a link appear?
5. **Why** should you care?
6. **How** can businesses develop their own inbound links?

No doubt, reasonable minds can disagree with some of the opinions and strategies contained in this article. I direct your attention to footnote references to several online articles that I found helpful. I encourage you to review these articles so you can draw your own conclusions. I do hope you conclude that there are a number of legitimate link building strategies that you can tackle!

Why Should You Care?

Sorry, I have skipped over who, what, when and where to begin instead with “Why?” After all, if I cannot make the case that link building is important, you certainly will not read the rest of this article!

¹ Please keep in mind that this content is provided for educational purposes in order to introduce you to important search engine optimization concepts. There are many factors that influence search engine results and page rank - we cannot promise that the techniques described in this article work in all cases. Thank you! –Bill Schwartz, EBIZ Machine

² See <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=34432>

It is believed that, in the eyes of the major search engines, the number and quality of the incoming links that point to your site are indicative of the worthiness of your site. I know, it sounds like a popularity contest – perhaps this stirs up memories of the disdain you had for your high school prom king/queen election process. Popularity and Page Rank aside, you *are* interested in driving qualified traffic to your web site and developing relationships with businesses that offer complementary products and services. Link building techniques are designed to accomplish this.

Who Should Link to My Web Pages?

It is believed that links from “authoritative” websites and “related” industry sites carry the most weight. An “authoritative” site might be an educational organization (.edu), a publication, a government agency (.gov), a known subject matter expert or an organization/association in yours or a related industry.

As for “related” sites, partners, vendors, but not competitors are good “reciprocal linking” (discussed later) opportunities. Their sites should be related to the products and/or services you provide.

Make sure to set your standards high! Analyze the inbound links to the page where you would like to see your link. Are they in fact authoritative and relevant sites? How do you research inbound links to your potential linking partner?

There are some excellent SEO link building tools out there! Netconcepts provides a free “Link Popularity Checker” at <http://www.netconcepts.com/linkcheck/>. Another site is LinkPopularity.com - <http://www.linkpopularity.com/>. Use these tools to assess the quality of the links to the page **before** you ask for a link! While you’re there, check out the link popularity of your web pages and those of your competitors.

Note that many SEO experts believe that you should stay away from a web page that already has too many links. How many is too many? According to an article in Website Magazine, “... it is best to shy away from any pages with more than 20 outbound links.”³

You’ll recall that we mentioned the term “PageRank” earlier in this article. The Google PageRank scoring system is used to quantify the relative importance of a web page. You can determine PageRank by downloading and using the free Google ToolBar (<http://toolbar.google.com>).

Should you consider PageRank while determining whether to ask for a link on a page? One contributor to the online article “Over 125 (Legitimate) Link Building Strategies”, Dixon Jones, suggests that the PageRank of the web page where you would like your link

³ Boggs, Chris, [The Nitty Gritty of Link Requests](http://www.website magazine.com/content/blogs/posts/articles/link_requests_boggs.aspx), Website Magazine, December 14 2005, http://www.website magazine.com/content/blogs/posts/articles/link_requests_boggs.aspx



to reside should be between 3 and 10.⁴ In his article “The Nitty Gritty of Link Requests”, Chris Boggs suggests that PageRank is not as useful as it used to be but “PageRank is still a good guide.”⁵

Many Internet marketing professionals continue to suggest that you submit your site to the appropriate category within the major directories as well as to vertical engines and industry directories. Examples of popular general directories include Yahoo!, Open Directory (dmoz.org), GoGuides, Gigablast, JoeAnt, Gimpsy and BlueFind. Many allow you to submit your website URL for free. Some may require you to add a reciprocal link to their directory.

In his article, “SEO: Weaving a Web of Links”, Stephan Spencer cautions against seeking links from “free for all” links pages that are packed full of links⁶. Again, pay attention to PageRank and topic relevance. Watch out for automated submission programs that submit to irrelevant search engines and directories.

What Should the Link Entail? What Should You Put on Your Link Page?

Once you have targeted an inbound link opportunity, you will want to suggest the link location and the exact link language you wish to appear on their site. Make it easy to implement your link – place HTML on your site that your partner’s webmaster can cut and paste onto their web page.

Embed your keyphrases into the link text. Although the subject of web page optimization is beyond the scope of this article, make sure the page the link points to (the “Target Page”) is “optimized” for those keyphrases. The target page need not be your website home page. Not sure how to determine the best keywords for your business? I discuss this very issue in my article “Web Page Keywords – Do’s and Don’ts” which you can review at <http://www.ebizmachine.com/seotips.html>.

The question “What should you put on your link page” presumes that the linking relationship is “reciprocal”. Not all links will be reciprocal – we’ll talk more about link building strategies that involve the creation of useful online content encouraging “natural” link growth without reciprocal arrangements. However, your arrangements with partners, alliances and some directories may well be “reciprocal”. In other words, “I’ll point to you if you point to me.”

Before you approach a partner for a reciprocal link, you may wish to create your link to their site in advance demonstrating the techniques described in this article. “One good

⁴ Robin Nobles, Eric Ward and John Alexander , Over 125 (Legitimate) Link Building Strategies, <http://www.searchengineworkshops.com/articles/leglinkpop.html>

⁵ Boggs – see above

⁶ Spencer, Stephan, SEO: Weaving a Web of Links, practical ecommerce, March 12, 2007, <http://www.practicalecommerce.com/articles/156/SEO-Weaving-a-Web-of-Links/>



turn deserves another” - include one or two carefully drafted paragraphs of descriptive information for each link.

When Should I Add a Link to my Site?

But for my need to have a catchy title, this section is better named “**How often should I add inbound links?**” Experts these days are writing about “natural growth of inbound links” and “organic link gaining” and “Emulating Natural Growth in Link Building”, as search engine optimization authority Chris Boggs recently wrote in Website Magazine.⁷ Sounds downright “earthy”, doesn’t it?

It’s clear that link building is a slow and steady *grass roots* process and some experts maintain that link growth should follow a natural, *free range, pesticide-free* progression (*OK, I added the italics for fun*). Boggs writes that efforts to rapidly gain links “are sometimes easy for search engines to discern..., especially if the links are in a known network of sites that exchange links.”⁸ Suddenly adding 100 new links to a site that for 6 six years has had 5 inbound links may cause a search engine to penalize you for your participation in a “link-farm.” But, adding a few relevant links every so often does appear to be consistent with natural growth.

Where Should the Link Appear?

Ideally, your link should be placed within the content of a page rich with topical information relevant to the focus of the target web page. This may be asking a bit much – your link partner may already have a “links” or “resources” page designed solely for this purpose. However, make sure your prefab HTML link includes descriptive information that goes above and beyond a simple link and make sure you offer to reciprocate with a high-quality descriptive link.

Check to make sure the agreed-upon location is a page that has been indexed by the major search engines. In particular, it should not be a page that only authenticated users (login & password) can view.

How Can Businesses Develop Their Own Inbound Links?

The last section of my 5 W’s and an H article may be the most important. There are many bytes of available online information related to link building strategies. In many respects, your success stems from the quality of the relevant content on your website. Your industry peers and topical experts will be eager to reference your website if it is a valuable source of relevant information and you have achieved an appropriate level of

⁷ Boggs, Chris, [The New Holy Grail of SEO?](#), Website Magazine, February, 2007, p. 12.

⁸ Boggs p. 13.



expertise. Your peers will assess your site in the same or similar manner as is described in this article. They will assess the quantity and quality of inbound links to your web pages.

Here are some suggestions that both enhance the usefulness of your web site content and help you build inbound links to your site.

1. Publish a “How To” or a “Review” Article

Someone in your organization must like to write! Add your article to your website and publish it! There are many websites dedicated to publishing articles for free. Many allow you to include a brief bio AND a link to your website. The Article Banks website <http://www.articlebanks.com/> contains useful information and resources related to publishing your article online.

Not sure what to write about? Start with your most popular keyword search phrases and develop a topic that your customers frequently raise. You sell GPS devices - compare and contrast the two most popular manufacturers who also happen to be popular web searches. You are a CPA– how about a “top ten” list of personal tax misconceptions? Do your best to make your content unique, original, useful and entertaining.

Convert your article to PDF format that online visitors can download and print. Consult with your web developer about adding “email to a friend” functionality.

2. Post in a Relevant Online Forum or Newsgroup

Join an online community relevant to your website and become a regular, contributing member. Make sure to include your website URL in the signature area of each of your postings.

3. Post in a Relevant Blog?

You’ve heard the buzz on blogging. Your website URL can be included in blog contributions but be careful here. Search engines are more and more sensitive to “Blog Spamming”.⁹ Chris Genge, a contributing SEO author in the article “Over 125 (Legitimate) Link Building Strategies”, writes “Even though blogging is all the rage these days, I think it will go the way of link farms in the not-too-distant future, especially if/when the SE's determine that it is just another case of spamming. We are staying away from it...”¹⁰

⁹ Boggs, Chris, *The Nitty Gritty of Link Requests*, Website Magazine, December 14 2005, http://www.websitemagazine.com/content/blogs/posts/articles/link_requests_boggs.aspx

¹⁰ Robin Nobles, Eric Ward and John Alexander , *Over 125 (Legitimate) Link Building Strategies*, <http://www.searchengineworkshops.com/articles/leglinkpop.html>



4. Publish in an “e-zine”

Some of the most popular sites relevant to your business may not have a link program. Offer instead to contribute a unique topic to their monthly e-zine (email newsletter). Include your bio and a web page link.

5. Write a testimonial or review for a trusted product/service

Many businesses are eager to publish testimonials on their site. Ask to include a link back to your relevant web page.

Finally, make sure to track your link building progress. Create a spreadsheet for this purpose. You will no doubt have to follow up on your link requests. Capture details including the information you entered and the date you submitted your request. Politely remind link partners of their commitment to link to your site and point them to the inbound link from your site to theirs. Run your favorite link popularity and page rank tools to monitor your progress.

Conclusion

If you are at all interested in driving qualified traffic to your web site and in developing relationships with suppliers of complementary products and services, you should spend some time learning about web page link building strategies. In this article, we discuss the who, what, when, where and how's of SEO web page link building. Link building is much easier if your website is a valuable source of topical information and you have attained a high level of expertise.

In the “How Can Businesses Develop Their Own Inbound Links?” section of this article, I provide several suggestions designed to help you achieve that end. However, they say “The devil is in the details.” When it comes time to manage the process of soliciting and adding inbound links to your web pages, there are many details that will influence the success or failure of your program. You must carefully choose your link partners and directories and be prepared to suggest the link page location as well as the makeup of the link itself.

Finally, you must be both diligent AND patient. It's fine to methodically forge relationships and build a community with complimentary web sites. But there is growing evidence that link building in an “unnatural” manner will hinder your search engine visibility and negate your efforts. So, be careful out there.



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