

FREELANCE SEO

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How to Build Links to your Website

Gaining more exposure from the search engines will generate more page views, which in turn will create more revenue for you. One way to boost the authority of your website and improve its ranking positions is to build links.

Link building is a balancing act. In the past there has been an emphasis on the *quantity* of backlinks that are built to your site – historically, the more links you have coming into your domain, the higher you will rank for your relevant keywords.

Now, however, the search engines are focusing on the *quality* of your inbound links. Backlinks are still used by search engines as an indicator of the popularity and importance of a webpage, but a wider variety of factors play a part in the influence a particular link has on a website's rankings.

Different types of links

You can obtain a wide range of links from across the web. Here, we go into more detail about how to acquire links from online directories, social platforms, social bookmarking sites and blogs.

Directories

Directories are large databases that collection information on websites and organise them into categories and subcategories. By adding your site to one of these sites, you will be able expand your exposure, as directories display your site for every related search query on their database. This means you have a higher chance of being noticed by individuals who are actually interested in your products or services.

Although not as powerful as they once were, directories place an importance on linking to site homepages and reducing deep linking (ie linking to internal pages). This makes directories more advantageous for finding sites instead of individual pages, as the search index on each site will pick up on the specific terms that you have incorporated into your meta tags.

Good quality directories are filtered manually, which means that they are spam-free and a good source of SEO-friendly backlinks.

Uploading your site to a directory is not normally difficult, but it can be time consuming. Once you've found a directory, you need to follow the instructions on the site. Normally you will be asked

to select 'submit' or 'upload link', then select a category that best fits your site. On the rare occasion that you can't find a category that matches what you offer, try to find the next best alternative.

After you've filled in all their required information, you may be met with the option to either:

- ✓ Ask for a free link
- ✓ Arrange a reciprocal link
- ✓ Pay for a Premium link

If you arrange a reciprocal link, you will need to provide a link back to the directory somewhere on your own site before your listing will appear. There are often perks to signing up for a Premium listing – you may be featured higher up on the page, for example, or your listing may go live sooner than if you were to opt for the free listing.

Social media

With the right [social media management](#), you can generate links from social media platforms quickly and easily. Profiles on websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Tumblr are an extension of your company and should be treated as such. Clients and customers alike will look through these sites to evaluate the quality and the calibre of your business, so keep your profiles active and they'll prove to be a great source of links to your site.

It is also important to remain thematic with all of your social media profiles. Irrelevant posts could deter viewers and create the wrong impression of your company. The key is to have a basic social strategy in mind before creating or sharing content, and focus on sharing message and links that are highly relevant to what you do; they need to inform and/or entertain the reader.

Social bookmarking

Social bookmarking sites such as Pinterest and Reddit help users collect links to the most traffic worthy content. Not to be confused with social networks, the use of bookmarking sites allows you to find and collect the best content and save it for use on social media sites at any time. Bookmarking is a great way to organise and manage your website URLs so you can find the content you want, when you want it – and so can other web users.

Blogs

Posting guest content on other people's blogs is another way to get backlinks and targeted traffic from the right kind of audience. Try finding a blog that is dedicated to a topic that is relevant to your company. For example, if you sell dog bedding, try and find a dog-loving blogger and ask if you could write a guest post for them. You can incorporate a well-placed hyperlink into the post that takes the reader back to your site.

Additionally, if you have your own blog, you can fill your blog with high quality posts for free by inviting other bloggers to write for you! This arrangement is beneficial to both parties, as the writer will be able to include a backlink to their domain in the post, while on the flip side, you're attracting readers from different communities, all while beefing out your blog with varied content.

Commenting

In addition to making good use of guest posts, commenting on content is another way to generate great backlinks.

Commenting on blogs is a fairly easy process. When you find a blog that you'd love to leave some feedback on, scroll down to the bottom of the page to find the comment section. After you've written a response to the piece, you will be asked to provide some personal data such as your name, email address and your website – this is the crucial part that allows you to generate links. On many websites, you can also link to your social media or a blog if you have one.

But there are some things to take into consideration before you start commenting away. Firstly, only comment on a piece to add value to the discussion. If what you've said makes little sense or will make little impact, your efforts are going to be wasted. In fact, the blog owner is likely to delete your contribution straightaway.

Secondly, be a regular. This takes time, as you don't want to be leaving thin, irrelevant comments on every page. Try to build rapport with the blog author, be friendly and professional, and remember that a friendly post will always go a long way.

Rome wasn't built in a day, and your link profile certainly won't sprout from nowhere. Although it may seem like you're investing plenty of time and resources into your link building in the early days, keep at it – we guarantee you will reap the benefits later on.

How to identify a quality link

When allocating value to links, search engines take a variety of factors into consideration.

Popularity

One way to determine the quality of a link would be to look at the global popularity of the domain that's providing it. If a domain has a great deal of sites linking to it, you can guess that it's made a pretty big splash in its industry. As a general rule, the more popular the site, the better.

Relevancy

The relevancy of the link is also important. It's better to obtain links from sites that are closely related to your business or your sector.

If you have acquired a large amount of links from websites that have no relevance to your products or services, it's unlikely that they will have any positive effect on your search engine rankings. Taking the time to generate links from relevant websites isn't just better for your overall SEO – taking this approach could also allow you to tap into a new area of the market and reach a bigger audience.

Trust

The trustworthiness of the source is again very important. Search engines have designated 'trusted' sites – Wikipedia and Twitter are two examples of sites that have already proved their worth when it

comes to providing trusted, accurate and valuable content - and to improve the strength and authority of your own domain, you should aim to get links from these kinds of authoritative platforms. It's tricky, and in some cases costly, but ultimately it *will* be worth it.

Traffic

If you've stumbled across a blog that seems to receive high levels of traffic, this could be an indicator that it's popular and authoritative. However, you still need to be cautious. What kind of traffic is it getting, and where is it coming from? The scraping tool SEMRush can analyse a domain's traffic levels.

If you see that a vast amount of the site's traffic is coming from a country that you don't supply to, or that traditionally doesn't speak your language, then you may have found a click farm. Click farms are usually located in developing countries, where employees are paid to click on website elements to hollowly boost the status of a client's website or product. Beware of these - the data is artificial, and a link on this site will not benefit you in the long term.

How to identify a quality domain

The quality of a link is ultimately down to the quality of the domain in question. Here are a few other things you'll need to consider when evaluating a website for a backlink:

- ✓ Are there real names and photos associated with the site?
- ✓ Is it professionally designed?
- ✓ Is it free from broken links and 404 errors? Tools like Screaming Frog are helpful as they screen sites for errors, redirects and issues such as page duplicates. If these are rife, steer clear from the site!
- ✓ Does the site provide links to its social media accounts?
- ✓ Does it reference or cite high quality websites?
- ✓ Does it have high quality content?
- ✓ What kinds of sites are linking to it? Tools like Majestic SEO will help you analyse a website's backlink profile so you can see what kind of links you'll be inheriting if you decide to generate a link from a particular domain.

The difference between nofollow and dofollow links

Another factor to consider when evaluating the quality of a backlink is whether or not it is a 'nofollow' or a 'dofollow' link. You can identify the status of any given link by heading to the page's source code and looking for the following pieces of code within a link.

Dofollow:

```
<a href=http://www.domain.com rel="dofollow"> Link Text </a>
```

OR

```
<a href=http://www.domain.com rel="external"> Link Text </a>
```

Nofollow:

```
<a href=http://www.domain.com rel="nofollow"> Link Text </a>
```

If the code is left blank, the search engines will assume it is a dofollow link.

Dofollow links are very important as they effectively count as 'votes' towards your website that are endorsing its content. Dofollow links are very valuable and will work wonders for your SEO.

In contrast, nofollow links do not count as 'votes'. They do not affect the authority of your page and will not have a direct impact on your search listings.

Although nofollow links do not directly contribute to better exposure, they do play their part in generating referral traffic to your site. Essentially, they allow you to share a link to a webpage without having to endorse the webpage itself. A strategically-placed nofollow comment on a blog or forum can send traffic to your site, too, which could potentially lead to paying customers.

Google's algorithm has changed so much in recent years that it is now essential to create a mixture of both dofollow and nofollow links. A red flag may be raised if you only have dofollow links on your site.

How to develop an effective, sustainable long term link building strategy

Understand Google's algorithm

Getting to know what makes Google tick will help you to create effective links. The algorithm enables Google to rank webpages from a user's query based on a number of factors. The algorithm is modified when necessary and updates such as Panda and Penguin have caused a storm in the SEO community. The Panda update in 2011 prevented sites with poor quality content from ranking highly - this is why quality content is so important. The Penguin update, launched in 2012 and now running concurrently within the algorithm, helps Google to catch sites deemed to be spam. This update reinforces the importance of generating dofollow links that you haven't paid for.

Furthermore, other updates have stated that links in the footers and sidebars can now cause more harm than good and this could leave you being shunned by the search engines. So it's best to have links built into the content, even better to have it in the first paragraph.

As a rule of thumb – don't try to con Google. It's a slippery slope!

Be personable when contacting other bloggers

The best way to build long term relationships with link partners is to be professional yet friendly. When contacting external websites and asking for links, make it clear that you're not a robot.

For instance, if you're keen to collaborate with a particular blogger, don't just send them the same email template that you've sent 100 other people. Make your cover letter unique and friendly. And if you're not too afraid of human contact, pick up the phone – having a proper conversation with the person in charge of managing the website will ensure you stick in their mind.

Focus on creating quality content

The next step is to [create exceptional copy](#). External bloggers are most interested in pieces that offer a unique angle on a topic, or contain something that hasn't been seen before.

Our whitepaper titled **how to create engaging website content** contains tips on how to plan and develop your content for the right audience.

Keywords

Keywords are essential when building links as they help searchers to find your site in particular. When creating a list of keywords to use, you need to think about what will be used in a query in a search engine, but also you must consider which words will help to find your page.

For more information on keyword selection, please refer to our whitepaper [how to choose the right keywords for your campaign](#).

Broad match

Broad match keywords reach the widest audience as they use any word in your key phrase and in any order. Due to the nonspecific quality of these keywords, you could end up spending a lot of money on irrelevant traffic that won't convert. In order to deter this kind of traffic, negative keywords can be used and they will help to increase your click through rate and reduce your average cost per click!

Phrase match

The use of Phrase match keywords offers a degree of the versatility of a broad match but allows for a higher degree of control. Unlike broad match keywords, the order of the words in phrase match is important, but there may be other words before or after that phrase. For example, if your chosen key phrase is "glass cabinets", using phrase match, your ad could appear when terms such as "cheap glass cabinets" or "glass cabinets Essex" are searched.

Exact match

Exact match is the most specific and restrictive match type as your ad will only appear when the exact phrase is searched. Using exact match will attract those looking for your product exactly and will result in higher conversion rates and less unwanted traffic and costs.

Anchor text

Now that you've decided which match type you'll use, you can move on to decided which words to actually use! The anchor text refers to the clickable link with a piece of text that links to the site that you have designated. It is common practise to ensure that the anchor text is relevant to the page you're linking to. The use of anchor texts also helps search engines to determine the topic of the page.

Using exact match anchor text, a hyperlink with the same keywords as the web page, is useful to include, but don't overdo it! If this tactic is overused, a Google spam filter is triggered as it is uncommon for all the keywords to be used in the anchor text as well. Remember to include anchor text variety as this will be less obvious and won't upset Google.

Google Keyword Planner

A helpful tool to generate ideas for target keywords is the [Google Keyword Planner](#). It's a great SEO tool that will help to find and manage relevant keywords for your campaigns. The Keyword Planner can also support keyword research- it allows you to find various phrases related to your product, brand or any other key search term. Furthermore, it can similarly offer a great deal of historical information on the traffic a keyword obtains, this will permit you to decide if it is cost effective or

not. Additionally, the planner will generate traffic forecasts which will spot keywords with developing or declining search popularity.

After you've created a Google AdWords account, if you didn't already have one, you can log in and take advantage of all the tasks that the planner allows you to perform. Just a selection of the available actions include searching for new keywords and ad group ideas, getting search volume, getting traffic forecasts and, lastly, multiplying keyword lists to get a new keyword idea.

Thanks for reading!

We hope you've enjoyed this guide on how to build links to your website. Naturally, the information presented here is just the tip of the iceberg – generating links from the right sources and keeping on top of Google's best practice guidelines is a full time job in itself, which is why we'd always suggest asking an SEO specialist to take over the ongoing management of your link building campaign. Be sure to [contact Freelance SEO Essex](#) for help, advice and quotes.

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