Link Building:

Increasing Your Site Authority and Reputation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 Why Site Authority is the #1 Ranking Factor

02 Everything you Need to Know About Link Building

03 The LinkGraph Way: Link Building through Outreach

04 The Right Way to do Link Building: Our Favorite Strategies

05 Final Thoughts on Link Building

01 Why Site Authority is the #1 Ranking Factor

Over the past 2 decades, Google has crawled almost 130 billion web pages, but over 90% of those pages don't appear in the SERPs for a single search query. Google relies on approximately 200 ranking factors to determine which of these trillions of pages to present to users in search results, an understanding that courses of those factors can mean the difference between your site appearing on page 1 or disappearing into the internet void entirely.

Search engine ranking factors can be separated into two primary types: On-page and off-site. On-page signals provide Google with a comprehensive understanding of what a website is about, but off-site signals tell search engines how websites are perceived by users, industry experts, and other reputable webmasters. Improving your site's off-site signals helps Google recognize your site's trustworthiness, reputation, and expertise.

Search engines measure your site's reputation primarily through backlinks, or links to your site from other domains. Links are a voting mechanism, and every backlink you receive is a "vote" or reference for your site. Sites that are authoritative and reputable have votes that count more than votes received from a prominent site like The New York Times or the Wall Street Journal communicates to search engines that your content has a lot of value and is trustworthy.

Other off-site factors like third-party reviews on social media or platforms like Yelp and Google My Business, as well as unlinked mentions of your brand name, also show Google that others perceive your site as high-quality.

Unlike on-page SEO, off-site signals are, for the most part, out of the webmaster's control. You can't choose when, how, or if a site links to you, influence your competitors' link profiles, or dictate your business on social media. But because off-site factors have such a significant impact on whether Google will rank your site, boosting your off-site signals is essential in improving online visibility and driving organic traffic from search.

There are strategy ways to enhance your site authority, and the most effective comes in the form of white-hat link building. By earning quality links on other trustworthy sites, you can improve your site's reputation in the eyes of users, other webmasters, and search engine crawlers.

The 3 Key Site Authority Signals that Google Measures

Of the multiple off-site factors that Google's algorithm crawls to evaluate your site authority, some play a more vital role in getting on the first page of Google. The below off-site signals are the primary factors that make for high authority, reputable websites. Focusing on improving them can directly translate into your website earning better results in the SERPs.

FACTOR #1

Backlinks

In every correlation study of search engine ranking factors versus top search results, backlinks are always the #1 greatest predictor of rankings. The more "votes" that your site has (and the more higher-quality sites that those votes come from) the more likely your site will appear on page 1.

But not all backlinks are created equal. Google looks to several different factors to evaluate the quality of the backlinks your site receives.

PageRank
The more total PageRank a linking site has, the more PageRank and authority it passes on when it links to your site.

Textual Relevance
The text content of the landing pages that link to your site matters.

> "In many experiments I've run with building backlinks from massive sites, a link without surrounding relevant text content doesn't seem to pass nearly the same amount of PageRank as when there is text content and it's very aligned"
>
> - MANICK BHAN, CTO OF LINKGRAPH

Domain Authority
The higher the domain authority of the linking site, the more valuable the backlink.

What is Domain Authority?
Domain Authority (DA) is a comparative metric created by the company Moz to measure how likely a website is to rank in search results. This score is measured on a 0-100 scale. The higher the domain authority, the more likely a site is to rank.

How does Domain Authority relate to SEO?
Technically, your Domain Authority score is not a Google ranking factor. However, many of the metrics that are used to compute DA are similar to the ranking factors that make up Google's algorithm. DA is not an absolute metric, but the score is helpful for comparative and benchmarking purposes. Making efforts to raise your DA will likely result in more keyword rankings and increased organic traffic. Your site's DA is a reflection of your site's overall reputation.

Anchor Text
The anchor text is another contextual factor that determines how impactful a link will be.

> "Think about what type of context each one of these anchor text options offers
>
> "Click here" | "Joe's site" | "Plumber" or "yourzip.com" | "Hayward specific anchor text"
>
> Natural backlink profiles usually have at least 30-40% of their anchor text profile referring to their brand name in some way"
>
> - MANICK BHAN, CTO OF LINKGRAPH

Referring Domains
There's a dampening factor that makes additional links from the same domain pass less PageRank. More referring domains means for a healthier backlink profile.

Unlinked Mentions
Besides links from publications and online editorials, a natural part of having a strong brand and digital presence is being mentioned in online forums (e.g. Quora, social media sites, etc.)

FACTOR #2

Branded Traffic / Direct Traffic to your Site

Visitors who go directly to your website or search for it in Google Search are strong quality indicators to Google that your site is reputable and well trusted. Google measures Branded Traffic as the number of people that are searching for your brand in Google each month.

Search engine algorithms use branded and direct traffic as comparative metrics to your competitors. Unlike black hat link building or fake reviews, branded traffic is hard to fake. For this reason it is an effective way to measure your site's reputation among your industry peers.

Google is able to measure branded traffic through the data it collects in a few ways:

Google Analytics attributes the source and amount of your traffic. It's a easy way for them to measure your direct traffic.

Google Search looks at the total search volume for search queries containing your brand vs. competitors

Google Chrome shows them to measure people navigating to your site directly in the URL bar.

One easy way to increase Branded Traffic is by having assets on your websites that customers regularly access and utilize. This could be anything from a dashboard or internal platform they can get to by logging in somewhere on your website. This forces them to visit often.

At LinkGraph, we have a software suite of free tools that drive tons of branded traffic to our site. Our **SEO Domain Authority Checker** and **Keyword Search Volume tool** are valuable assets that users come back to utilize again and again.

White-Hat vs. Black-Hat Link Building

Link building has a complex history. In the past, spammers and low-quality sites used black-hat tactics (buying links, link farms, automated boilerplate) to manipulate their content or high-quality. As a result, Google's algorithm updates have often focused on identifying these black-hat techniques and penalizing those sites that choose to employ them.

White-hat link building, however, is a safe way to increase site authority, because it uses Google's favorite thing – high quality content – to improve your site's authority.

Some webmasters are hesitant to pursue link building because they have been impacted by some of the lower-quality options. But you get what you pay for. Some websites that try to pay someone on Fiverr to programmatically blast link spam out across hundreds of thousands of low-quality sites that domain authority fast will be penalized and require remediations that are time-consuming and expensive.

At my SEO agency, we only encourage the best practices of white hat link building techniques that actually benefit your backlink profile and are in the real world of SEO today. To learn more about black-hat SEO and the link building tactics that you should avoid, you can reference my, "How to Identify and Recover from a Negative SEO Attack" ebook.

03 The LinkGraph Way: Link Building through Outreach

Every SEO and digital marketing agency has their own approach to link building. At LinkGraph, most of our links have to content placement, contextual relevance, and appear on greater and marquee publications. Our approach to link building is a combination of the strategy to effective website, and content outreach that that produce the best results for your site's overall rankings and authority.

STEP 1

Create Content Worthy of Links

Earning high-quality links requires high-quality content. The better the content you create, the more likely bloggers, journalists, academics, industry leaders, and other influential webmasters are going to want to link to it. Unique, high-value content is the "ante" you have to put into the game if you want to be competitive.

Although quality may feel subjective, Google's webmaster guidelines are very clear about how they perceive quality. In-depth, long-form, detailed, well-researched, industry-specific, interactive content that provides a great user experience is more likely to meet the content-quality criteria that Google looks for.

The more content assets that your website has, the more opportunities you have to pitch to webmasters, bloggers, and journalists looking for new content to share with their target audience or readership. Creating valuable content and assets creates a better value proposition for those who are considering linking to you or writing about you on their own site.

Here are some tips to content creators for the key qualities of linkable content:

- **Content Uniqueness** — Original research, reporting or analysis
- **Tropical Depth** — Substantial, complete description of topic
- **Quality** — Grammar, Spelling, Readability, Diction, Style
- **Rich Media** — Pictures, Videos, GIFs, Infographics, Charts
- **External links** — Natural links that lead to useful, relevant content. Webmasters will notice if the only intent of your content is backlink building.
- **Structure + Information Architecture** — Purposeful and easy-to-follow organization. Content appears on the page with hierarchy and structure

Webmasters that consistently create great content or have a robust content marketing strategy that meets the best practices of onsite SEO will have an easier time transitioning to scaling up a link building strategy. Generating loads of quality content means far more link building opportunities in the future.

STEP 2

Find Promising Link Prospects

When trying to discover where to earn backlinks from, there is no better strategy than looking to your competitors or to the first page of the SERPs. You can use various tools and techniques to analyze your competitors' backlink profiles and identify where they are earning their links from. Most likely, those websites fall within your industry niche and are on the hunt for good content. But do analyzes with that information in mind. Identifying link building opportunities for "junk" sites is a waste of time.

With our Toxic Backlink Checker tool, you can compare your backlink distribution with up to four competitors. See their domain authority, number of referring domains, or our suggested targets for possible manual outreach and link building opportunities. You can also use our tool to clean up your link profile and generate disavow text for any spamming links.

Backlink Analyzer

Suggested Outreach Targets

Utilize trying to place a link on any site that you can get to link to you, it's a good idea to focus on the industry-specific publications or websites that have topical relevance to yours. Other link building vendors out there can offer you short lists but because they are on random bloggers or older blogs that aren't necessarily directly tied to your industry or don't get much traffic.

Although it takes a little work, identifying what those high-authority sites in your industry are is a lot more effective strategy. It is more likely to get you good links that build your site authority and feel for the long term.

STEP 3

Pitch & Place Content

Once you have a database of relevant target specific publications that have direct relevance to your site content, you can pitch them your original content through manual outreach. Whether your content is a blog post, a long-form article, a press release or a case study, your pitch should provide journal reasons as to why your content will offer their existing audience or potential customers useful, relevant information that enhances their knowledge or experience

You can find contact information for your target publications on their site and pitch your content ideas via email. Most publications that accept guest posts or articles have some type of submission page, contributor guidelines, or editorial email address clearly identified somewhere on their website.

Remember the guidelines for what makes a good pitch: Keep it brief, to the point, and focused on the benefits to your audience and an engaged audience. You should only pitch to sites that will actually help build the site authority for your own website. A good link from a site with high DA is far more valuable than lots of links from spamming, low-quality sites.

04 The Right Way to do Link Building: Our Favorite Strategies

If you search "link building," on YouTube or Google, you will find a wealth of videos or articles claiming they have the fastest new strategy for earning more links in less time. Although there are many link building tactics, the strategies I include in this ebook are the most effective, long-lasting, and will always be worth your time and effort.

There will always be someone advertising their hack as the faster, better way to get links, but often, those quick tricks don't and are ignoring the basic principles of link building. Sites that actually have the time and money on your side will earning higher quality links requires higher levels of effort. As Google's algorithms continue to advance, the below strategies will remain the most effective and beneficial for building your link profile.

Content Marketing and High-Quality Linkable Assets

Content marketing is an advertising strategy focused on creating valuable content in an effort to earn customers trust and build brand awareness. At its core, link building is a content marketing strategy, and relies on having high-quality assets that other reputable sites want to link to.

Examples of content can range from blogs, landing pages, infographics, maps, tools, long-form articles, ebooks, podcasts, video content, and more. but at the most basic level, all valuable content will enrich the user's knowledge, understanding, or experience. People love useful resources like ebooks, calculators, helpful online utilities and tools, and these assets often rank on Google fairly easily, because useful resources naturally attract backlinks.

Pitch Journalists on Useful Information or Content Ideas

Journalists and media outlets are always looking for new, fresh content to write about. Pitching content ideas (blog posts, long-form press releases, manual outreach, or even social media marketing is a great option for earning more links and brand mentions.

> "As the former founder and CEO of a link building agency, Rubico, we used to pitch sports writers at ESPN and other top publications with stats about ticket prices ahead of major playoffs and match-ups. I also built infographics comparing ticket prices for different sports and concerts and sent it around to journalists covering live entertainment. It was hard work, but we always got a few pick-ups. When they used our data, they gave us attribution in their articles. Through that strategy, we were able to build dozens of golden, high authority links from marquee publications."
>
> MARCUS BRAUN, CTO OF LINKGRAPH

You can even use Facebook or Twitter advertising campaigns to target journalists and lead them to your high-quality, linkable assets. Focusing on those industry-specific journalists and writers who have already shown familiarity with your niche through their clicks and page views increases the odds of time and legwork. If writers looking for ideas related to your content through advertisements instead of through email pitches, it can be another way to get their attention and find your content ideas more enticing.

Local Citations & Directory Listings

For small businesses, getting your site listed across all business directories and getting local citations is relatively inexpensive (under $100) and is the best option for getting a big boost in local search results on Google Maps. Nearly a third of all mobile searches are for local information, and local SEO can help search engines better understand your location, the markets you serve, and how customers will reach out to you.

Local SEO is one of the cheapest growth strategies you should try – from a value for your marketing dollars perspective, it tends to be one of the most efficient. For sites with no links, local citations are a great way to start creating trust signals. Not only do they make your site more visible in search, it earns you links back from well-established sites with lots of traffic.

Here are just a few of the popular business directories that you can start earning links from right away. Your industry niche may have its own unique directories, so do the research to identify as many sites as possible that you can earn links from simply by listing business information like your address, phone number, and website.

- Google My Business
- Yahoo Local
- City-Data
- Bing Places
- Local.com
- MerchantCircle
- YellowPages.com
- Mitbusiness.com
- DexKnows
- Yelp
- Angie's List
- Chamber of Commerce
- Foursquare
- City Search

Broken Link Building

Broken link building is the process of searching for broken links on authoritative sites then reaching out to the webmasters linking to the broken page to offer your content as an alternative. The great thing about broken link building is that it provides a stronger value proposition for other webmasters. It helps solve a problem for them by removing the need to search for or create new content for the broken link.

There are a variety of software platforms you can use to find broken link opportunities. Broken link building can take time, but the good news is that you can outsource it to a freelancer, authoritative links, without having to do as much content creation, as long as you already have a piece of relevant content to offer.

You can also create an entirely new piece of content to substitute for the broken link, but this is more time consuming, and there is no guarantee that the webmaster will agree. The harsh reality of blogger outreach and pitching content is that you may get a "no," or worse, often, no response at all. For this reason, link building services with robust networks of publications and guest post opportunities can earn links much more quickly as a result of their existing relationships.

Guest Blogging & Contributorships

Guest blogging is another strategy for boosting offsite SEO signals by building brand authority and expertise in your industry niche. Although in-content links are evaluated as higher-quality by search engines, links that appear in guest post attribution can still benefit your link profile and are another type of link worth pursuing.

Guest blogging can help you secure some high authority links that are otherwise very challenging to acquire. As you do your blogger outreach, take notes on the style, content, and main focus areas of the sites you'd like to guest post for. Providing them with high-quality, well-researched blog posts that aligned to their audiences can lead to more opportunities, like the webmaster wanting to feature you again, leading to a wealth of future backlinks for your site.

Developing your personal brand by becoming a thought leader in your industry is very effective for boosting your off-site SEO signals. Industry professionals with authoritative backlinks should look for publications in your niche that could benefit from having you write for them. When your industry peers see your name or byline appear on reputable publications, podcasts, YouTube channels and more, they will perceive your name, and the brand associated with your name, as one to listen to and trust.

Value-for-Value Exchanges

Find potential partners in your space where you can trade some kind of collateral, whether it be a link, ebook, social media exposure, or some type of influencer partnership. In the process of doing that, request that they link back to you.

Value-for-value exchanges can help you build relationships across your industry while promoting your best assets. You could request another webmaster to link to your product or service in a resource list in exchange for you linking out their latest blog post over your well-followed social media networks. These exchanges can be extremely valuable to your brand and your SEO in the long-term.

But before you offer your best assets to others, make sure you only do value-for-value exchanges with those sites that will help, not harm, your backlink profile.

Press Mentions & Publicity

Brand mentions happen when another site talks about your products or services, and they help boost your site's authority, even if unlinked. But perhaps the simplest of all link-building strategies is turning those mentions into links. It involves simply asking.

In this case, though, you'll be asking people who clearly already respect or are familiar with your website. Use search engines to find mentions of your company, brand, or website and check to make sure that mentions by writers or bloggers include links to your website. If they don't, you should send a polite email requesting that they add a link.

Reaching out to journalists for press and social media mentions is a way to get backlinks and grow site authority. You can also sign up for HARO (Help a Reporter Out) to connect with journalists looking for sources or interviews. If you don't have a link building service agency creating the content to pitch for you, offering your expertise or services to journalists is a no-cost option that can help build page authority for your own website.

05 Final Thoughts on Link Building

Before you start planning and executing your link building strategy, have an honest conversation about whether your website is ready, because the answer might be no. That based on the quality of the pages you have or bad sites, but it might mean that there are some things you could be doing better, whether it's improving your page speed, making your site more higher-performing UX/UI, or increasing your page speed and load times.

In order to improve site authority, you need to have content on your site that people want to link to. Focus on Technical SEO Basics Guide to SEO: On-Page and Content Optimization to make sure you are executing the best practices of onsite SEO like optimized title tags, meta descriptions, internal links, keyword-rich URLs, etc.

If your website is ready and has valuable content worth users right now, then link building through manual outreach is the safest, most effective way to build your site authority, increase your keyword rankings, and improve your organic traffic. Not only is link building outreach Google-approved, it's a relationship-based approach that offers other search engines value in the long-term. Valuable content that enhances the user's experience.

If your site is ready for a high-scale link building campaign, LinkGraph specializes in acquiring high-quality, in-content links that appear on websites with high domain authority and contextual relevance to your industry. We have a wide network of publishers who seek out our informative, interactive, and search-engine-friendly content. With our award-winning link building services, we've helped hundreds of brands cut rank websites at the top of the SERPs in just a few short months.