

Expanding Your Web Presence

Overview

Links play a very important role in search engine ranking algorithms. Why? Because search engines, specifically Google, perceive links that reside on other websites (often referred to as backlinks or inlinks) to represent "expert" opinions of a target website. Google values the link text (anchor text) as a method of determining what the "experts" are saying about a target site.

From an Organic Optimization point of view, links affect your website rankings in 2 distinct ways.

1. PageRank Improvement
2. Link Reputation

PageRank is passed from one website page to another through backlinks. More backlinks typically means higher PageRank values. Stanford University's patent (licensed to Google) includes the following formula describing PageRank.

$$PR_A = (1-d) + d (PR_{T1}/C_{T1} + \dots + PR_{Tn}/C_{Tn})$$

Where:

- PR_A is the PageRank of a target page.
- C_{TX} is the number of outbound links on a backlink page.
- d is a damping factor (typically .85).

PageRank of a source page is equally distributed (passed) through all the links that reside on that page to each backlink page. A few examples will help illustrate the concept.

PR of Source pg	Number of outbound links	PR contribution that passes to linked pg
5	10	4
5	100	3
4	10	3
3	100	1

Note: PR values published on Google's toolbar are considered to be log values.

Link Reputation is often times the more important aspect of a backlink. When backlink text (hypertext or anchor text of a link) includes the keywords, it is said to have high Link Reputation.

For example, many Internet links to www.gerber.com read "[Gerber baby food](#)". Since the keyword phrase "baby food" is found within the hypertext link, search engines associate the phrase "baby food" with www.gerber.com. This association of keyword - hypertext with the target link produces stronger search engines rankings for that keyword.

Link Relevancy

The term "Link Relevancy" is commonly used within the SEO community but is not well understood. Some believe relevancy refers to contextual similarity to a backlink website. Some believe it refers to the backlink page – not

the website. And others believe relevancy refers to Link Reputation.

Our research shows that although Google does encourage website managers to "have other relevant sites link to yours", none of the major search engines, including Google, measure the contextual relevancy of a website/page linking to another for ranking purposes.

Link Types

Amongst SEO's, there is a lot of talk about link building - which strategies and tactics are the best. And, over time, the answers to these questions have changed. As Google has become more sophisticated and their algorithms more refined, they are able to detect many backlinks they deem as 'unnatural' and "neuter" their SEO value. Yet as Google advances, so do the tactics of SEO companies who desire to attain an unfair advantage on behalf of their clients. The 'cat and mouse' game continues.



For those not familiar with the many link-building methods, an outline of 10 common tactics with relative cost is covered below.

1. **Reciprocal Linking (\$)** This is one of the oldest form of link building. In essence, the process is simple: "you link to me and I link to you". But some time ago, Google figured out a way to determine if a backlink was reciprocated and neutered their SEO value. Today, it is widely believed that reciprocal links have no SEO value.
2. **Directory Listing (\$ - \$\$\$)** Directory submissions use to be common among SEO link building tactics. That was before Google neutered the PageRank of most directory backlink pages. There may be 3 exceptions still worthy of consideration: ODP, YAHOO and business directories. ODP is not a very well maintained directory and getting a single listing may require more time and expense than its value. Yahoo is a paid directory costing more than \$200. Business directories don't pass much SEO value but they do add to Google's "trust factor". If a website is not currently in business directories, adding it through www.ubl.org may be a worthy exercise.

3. 3 way link trading (\$\$ - \$\$\$)

These links are traded among link suppliers and partners. Suppliers link to Partners and Partners link to a target site. Although these kinds of links do build some PageRank value, they are not very relevant nor to



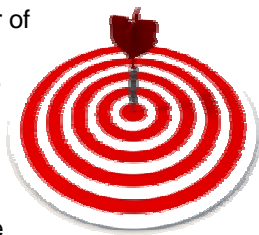
they live for a long period of time. Therefore, their overall SEO value is limited.

4. **Guest Blog Postings for BLOG NETWORKS (\$\$)**. These are links that appear within a blog post and link back to a target website. They are contextual links and have some relevant content. But they do not possess much PageRank value (PR0-2). They do build some "Link Reputation" because the backlink anchor text includes the keyword. And the link lives for a long period of time. These types of blogs are syndicated throughout blog networks so one blog post may actually be used on several different websites.

5. **Guest Blog Postings for INDUSTRY BLOGs (\$\$\$)** This kind of guest blogging is similar to the Blog Network style. The primary difference is that industry blogs have higher PageRank value but there are fewer of these kinds of blogs. The posts themselves are typically longer and have a more professional tone. Consequently, they are more expensive than the Blog Network posts but individually, they pass more SEO value.



6. **Press Releases (\$\$\$\$)** This kind of linking strategy attempts to build market buzz about your product/services. The backlinks themselves within the press release do not have much value as the release quickly goes into an archive mode. The purpose of press releases is to draw attention to your website so other websites will link to it and/or an editor of an online magazine might decide to run a story on the company/products.



7. **Article Syndication (\$\$\$)** Writing and syndicating articles through article directories has been a long time favorite SEO link-building tactic. More recently, however, these links seem to have less and less value because they appear deeper and deeper within the article directories. The real hope of Article Syndication is that some other website may need content and is willing to use an article that includes a backlink as its source. The problem is that Blog Networks have provided a better mechanism for those requiring content and Article Syndication has taken a back seat.

8. **Paid "Text Links" (\$\$\$\$\$)** These are advertising links that are disguised and appear as natural links. If the link appears natural and passes Google's algorithmic tests, then the links pass real SEO value. Since these links are typically placed on high PR website pages, they have strong SEO value. These links are very expensive and paid monthly or annually- similar to a media-buy. For campaigns that require more PageRank value, Paid "Text Links" are a must. To reduce the chance of algorithmic "neutering" paid text links should be purchased in some quantity.

9. **Social Networking (\$)** There is lots of talk about social networks and their link building potential. Yet few realize that account pages for FaceBook, Twitter and Delicious (3 popular social sites) have rel="nofollow" attributes in the backlink. Under these conditions, the SEO value of these backlinks is ZERO. Although social networking may add to the number of visitors, they do not directly affect SEO ranking efforts.

10. **CHAFF links (\$)** There are some link building tactics that build worthless links. Among them are social bookmarking sites and profile pages. Most social bookmarking sites have added rel="nofollow" tags to block SEO value. And profile pages can never be found by Google's natural spidering process because profile pages are password protected. Even though these tactics have no SEO value, some SEO companies promote them as part of their backlinking strategy.

For several years, Google has delayed the award of SEO value from backlinks. Links that are young still pass some value, but as the link matures and ages, Google seems to award more value. Historically, the waiting time is about 90 days before Google passes the majority of the backlinks value.

Conclusion

Links are an essential part of all major search engine ranking algorithms. Google, more than the others has developed sophisticated methods to thwart traditional SEO tactics.

More quality backlinks typically translates into higher rankings by passing both PageRank and Link Reputation. The number of links necessary to succeed for a particular keywords 'space' is very dependent on how many backlinks with strong of Link Reputation competing websites already have.