



The Definitive Guide to Successful Link Building Campaigns



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The Definitive Guide to Link Building

Every successful search engine optimisation (SEO) campaign requires inbound links from quality relevant websites.

Search on Google with one of your most popular keywords and you will see millions of results, so how does Google decide who comes first? How can **you** persuade Google to give your website a higher ranking in the results?

By way of example try searching Google for *office furniture* (see image below) and there about 104 million results in the Google Database. How do you get near the top of 104 million entries?



You have to work on two main areas - the keywords you use on your own web pages (this is called ‘on-page’ SEO) and the links on external websites that point to yours (link building).

On-page factors are easy to control and therefore the search engines don't base their algorithms on these alone. They look for more information in the links from other websites that point to your website. These are much more difficult for you to manipulate and so are given precedence in search engine algorithms. This means that the search engines will give more weighting in the algorithm to external factors than they will to ‘on-page’ factors.

Not surprisingly then, successful SEO requires successful link building.

Good quality website content, an understanding of your online community and knowing how to get external sites to link to yours is the key to building quality links over a period of time.

Whilst this may seem daunting it is entirely possible no matter what your level of experience - just approach the job systematically and give it sufficient time and you'll be getting quality links without even asking for them.

Here we will take you through the various steps involved in the six stages of **“the definitive link building campaign”**:

- Stage 1. Strategy
- Stage 2. Management & Measurement

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- Stage 3. Networking & Prospecting
- Stage 4. Content creation
- Stage 5. Promotion
- Stage 6. Debrief & Repeat

Stage 1. Strategy

"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat". Sun Tzu.

It is always advisable to know where you want to go before you start your journey. Your destination is your link building strategy - it is that which you are trying to achieve.

a) Choose which keywords to target. For SEO, this means you must decide which keywords you are targeting. And you must include those keywords in the link text of both internal and external (from other sites) links.

b) Group your target keywords into market sectors. So, for example, if your website is an online garden centre you might categorise your keywords into the following groups:

- seeds
- plants
- garden furniture
- water features
- barbecues
- seasonal e.g. Christmas

c) Concentrate your link building work on each market sector in turn, eg *barbecues*, *water features*. For each of those, you might further refine your target keywords into keyword niches, eg for barbecues, this could include:

- gas barbecues
- charcoal barbecues
- portable barbecues
- barbecue accessories
- Weber barbecues, Outback barbecues etc.

A keyword niche is all keywords containing a seed keyword, eg the *gas barbecues* keyword niche includes *camping gas barbecues* and *natural gas barbecues*.

Stage 2. Management & Measurement

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To be successful, any project needs to know who does what, when, who is in charge, what's being measured and how. Let's break that down. Before you start, make sure you have answers to these questions:

a) Decide who will do what and how? Who posts blogs? Who tweets? Who comments? Who moderates? What's your company's social media policy? What software will be used?

What account will be used for sending and receiving emails from bloggers? How will records of (and contact with) link prospects be kept and used?

b) Clearly define the decision-making process You might well be dipping a toe into new territory for your company. Is blogging the PR department's brief or the online marketing department's brief? (We've seen SEO under one and blogging under another). How will options be debated and who will make the final decision? If these issues aren't sorted out then you can be paralysed when any issues occur (and it's the main reason why big companies often are).

c) Ensure you have the ability to make changes to your website Sounds simple enough but it often isn't. If website changes are needed you need to be able to make these changes quickly. Can you edit and add content to your website?

d) Decide what the success measurement will be, eg inbound links, website traffic, Search Engine Ranking, mentions, email recruits, feed subscriptions, sales etc.

As well as total links created, you should count links containing the target keywords in their link text. Be aware that there are many factors outside your control - you might get lucky and deserve no credit for good results; or you might have the best link building campaign ever and still fail due to factors outside your control.

Metrics are there to help you - of course you need results but we suggest you concentrate more on how you do things (your method and your process) and the results achieved will be more to do with your considered actions than some fluke.

e) Choose your monitoring tools, eg [Google Analytics](#), [Clicktracks](#), [MajesticSEO](#) etc. Inbound links measured by Yahoo! will not give the same result as inbound links measured by MajesticSEO and neither is consistent over time. For example MajesticSEO link counts increase as the number of URLs it crawls goes up.

It's now time to get out into the community...

Stage 3. Networking & Prospecting

You must find and explore your online community in order to make friends and build lists of link prospects. There are many opportunities for this detailed below.

- a) **Check your own website's inbound links and referrers.** Use your site's analytics, [Google Webmaster Tools](#) and [MajesticSEO](#).
- b) **Find relevant blogs.** Study and when confident start commenting - don't push your own products or services at first.
- c) **Monitor news sites.** Make sure you know what's going on. Comment, be supportive and helpful, try and make friends.
- d) **Build press lists.** Contact journalists, position yourself as an expert - show your pedigree.
- e) **Join forums.** Register, use your signature, be more helpful than promotional - earn the trust of the forum community.
- f) **Look for specialist sites** that accept article submissions.
- g) **Take part in specialist social sites.** Register, help, etc.
- h) **Look for specialist groups on big social sites,** like Facebook, StumbleUpon, Twitter.
- i) **Look for local sites and small news sites.** Establish contact.
- j) **Join trade associations.** Be active and look for contacts.
- k) **Check out Chambers of Commerce.** They are there to help and that includes links.
- l) **Look for relevant libraries.** Great resources for communities and quality links.
- m) **Approach your suppliers.** They have websites, don't they?
- n) **Watch competing websites.** Study inbound links, press releases, successful content and tactics.
- o) **Find directories.** Consider becoming a directory editor. Don't submit your own site until it's established.

Not sure how you can do this? **Do regular searches with your target keywords to find all of the above.**

- p) **Read all you can on the quality sites you find,** follow links to the websites they mention.

Stage 4. Content Creation

Quality content is essential for natural link building. The old adage 'Content is King' is very true but also remember 'Link Building is Queen' and as such they go hand in hand. This is

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because the most important factor in getting links without asking is creating content that is worth linking to!

The list below takes you through some of your options for creating link-worthy content:

a) Always be on the lookout for ‘spectacular content’. It can turbo-charge your link building results. But even in the most competitive markets, a solid, consistent approach will bring rewards over time.

b) Make the most of the content you already have. Is it worth linking to? If not can it be made so? In some recent work for a national retailer, after much digging around we eventually found ‘gold’ - a large collection of quality ‘how-to’ content stuffed away in PDF format in a hidden corner of an old website.

c) Publish industry news (one-offs or regular). Many industries have industry websites and they have a huge appetite for industry news. Provide a regular supply, use target keywords in your headlines and you'll get links from pages relevant to your content (good) using your target keywords (perfect).

d) Don't ignore national media news (one-offs or regular). National news is a tougher nut to crack but be persistent and you can get results.

e) Customise your news for regional media (one-offs or regular). Regional news is easier to get coverage and links from. The obvious technique is to give your news stories a regional flavour.

f) Ask target bloggers/experts to comment on an article when writing it. Once you've earned a reputation, you will find people will return to your blog / website time and again.

g) Interview key industry personalities. If an expert is speaking at a conference or writing regular blog posts then they will want publicity and coverage. Offer it and they will speak to you. Make the interview interesting and others will link it.

h) Review other sites and resources. You review, they link. You might make friends at the same time too.

i) Link to any reviews of your own site. They review, you review their reviews. Do you have any product you can send for review? If you are a service and you have spare capacity then consider providing the service for free, if appropriate, and benefit from the publicity.

j) Learn how to produce videos. Applies to all the above, but in video format. Pretty much all mentioned content ideas here can be in video format or accompanied by videos.

k) Publish photos. People love photographs and will link to them. Social sites like [StumbleUpon](#) and [Digg](#) love collections of stunning and interesting photographs. Many photographs on sites like [Flickr](#) can be recycled for free. If in doubt use one of the stock photo sites to buy royalty free photographs.

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- l) Publish infographics.** Not cheap or quick to make but they can make a dull or hard to understand subject appealing.
- m) Conduct surveys or polls (for stories and PR).** Surveys are great for market research and improving your products; and provide stories that news sites and blogs will love to link to.
- n) Run competitions and giveaways.** It's easy for a competition to be ignored, so make it interesting and make it simple to understand and enter.
- o) Create free widgets and tools.** Some sites create almost useless tools just to get the links from sites that list free tools. We do not recommend this. Far better to make a genuinely useful free tool that keeps on giving value to users and links to you.
- p) Publish free downloadable guides and whitepapers.** Take some content, wrap it up into a PDF and you have yourself a 'free guide' – like this one!.
- q) Collect and publish case studies.** Readers want specific content - examples. Case studies are detailed examples.
- r) Create lists.** Collections of useful stuff like lists, top tips, how-to's, 10 best, 10 worst, etc. are really link-worthy. Want some ideas? Search for 10 best and 10 worst then adapt and 'switch' (ie rewrite) the best content to your market.

Stage 5. Promotion

So, hopefully now you know why you're building links (your strategy); which keywords you're targeting; you've researched and established yourself in your market's online community; and are creating quality content. Now what? - You've got to let people know, of course!

It's time to promote and here's a detailed list of methods for you to consider:

- a) Create RSS feeds** (try registering with [Feedburner](#)).
- b) Publish newsletters.**
- c) Post on your site/blog.**
- d) Submit content to generic social sites**, eg Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, StumbleUpon, Digg.
- e) Submit to your specialist social networking sites.**
- f) Contact your specialist contacts** with email, direct tweets or even telephone.

- g) **Contact journalists you know personally.** Don't just issue press releases - get to know them, chat and build trust.
- h) **Buy/use a list of relevant journalists' details** and get to know them.
- i) **Contribute with guest posts and articles** on specialist blogs and sites.
- j) **Submit articles to article sites** like [ezinearticles](#).
- k) **Issue press releases** to online and offline specialist distributors (like [PRWeb](#) and [Press Dispensary](#)).
- l) **Submit to [site-of-the-day sites](#).**
- m) **Consider Eric Ward's [URLwire](#)** - it's a paid-for service but is top quality.
- n) **Buy PageRank links (or not)**, ie links without the no follow tag, if you want to take the risk - **but we don't recommend it.**
- o) **Buy promotional links (adverts)** on generic sites like StumbleUpon and Facebook; specialist sites; and [Pay Per Click \(PPC\)](#).

If your content is good and your network strong then you will get links from your immediate contacts. From that, readers and other contacts will find your site, visit and perhaps even link to it.

You'll be getting links without asking. **Success!**

Stage 6. Debrief & Repeat

We recommend that you have separate link building campaigns for each of your target market sectors. Work on one campaign after the other but try to overlap each so that search engines don't see too many surges of similar links at one time. This is important as if you create too many similar links at the same time the search engines will punish you for 'spamming'

As each campaign comes to an 'end' with your team, you should review your strategy, tactics and execution to find lessons to learn and changes to make. Consider the following:

- a) **Improve your strategy.** Are you targeting the right keywords?
- b) **Build on your tactics.** Are your chosen methods the right ones?
- c) **Streamline your systems.** Were you able to get done what you wanted done? If not how can that change?



Then move on to the next market sector.

Of course, if at the end of it all you think it is just too much hard work (and it is hard work!) you can always outsource your link Building to professionals like [wsiims](#)

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