

Improve Your Link Popularity

By Paul J. Bruemmer

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One of the most important search engine optimization (SEO) tasks is developing link popularity. Not only because of Google, but because every major search engine now uses this criterion as part of its relevancy formula.

Link Popularity Began With Google

PageRank (PR) is an important variable in Google's algorithm. It evaluates Web structure through link analysis to determine relevancy by means of "link popularity." PR gives higher rankings to sites with many strong, quality links leading to their pages. These sites are deemed to be highly relevant because of the quality and number of these links.

To quote Google software engineer Matt Cutts, "Google's PageRank search technology works by first identifying the link structure of the entire Web, then ranking individual pages based on the number and importance of pages linked to them." Note that the quality of the backlinks is more critical than the number.

Beware of Link Farms

Linking no sooner became the rage than people began to look for short-cuts to link popularity. But there's a right and a wrong way to create backlinks, and short-cuts can get you in trouble. One of these short-cuts was the creation of link farm services that provide hundreds of irrelevant links. Google calls this spamming and will remove sites associated with link farms from its index. Other engines also hate spamming and will do the same.

How do you define a link farm? It's a network of sites that link to other sites for the sole purpose of increasing their PR score or link popularity. You get hundreds of links to your site from totally unrelated sites and in return, you must link to hundreds of other unrelated sites. This is counterproductive because you need to link to related information to provide value to your customers. In fact, if customers are sent to unrelated topics they'll probably abandon your site out of frustration.

So how can you build link popularity the right way? You need to link to information that expands your customers' knowledge in topics related to your business –topics of interest to them. There's no short-cut for doing this, it takes due diligence. Below are five tips for getting started on the road to link popularity

Five Tips for Improving Link Popularity

1. Directory Listings: Ensure your site is listed in ODP (free) and also include Yahoo! Business Express (\$299 yearly) and LookSmart Express Submit (\$299) or Basic Submit (\$149). Directory listings boost link popularity because they rely on human editors, known to result in relevant content.

There are many lesser-known directories that might be advantageous to be listed in. You can find many industry-specific and smaller directories in Search Engine Guide's Search Engines Directory <http://www.searchengineguide.com/searchengines.html> .

2. Request Links: When looking for possible link candidates, start by visiting a search engine and typing in your most important strategic keywords. You'll see a lot of competitors, but look for non-competing, complimentary sites. Screen those sites, selecting only the ones that might be receptive to your link request. Give them a compelling reason to link to your site and be sure to suggest where a link might be appropriate. A good strategy is to link to them first and point this out, which might help get a link back.

Another way to do this is to identify a well-established site with good content that targets the same audience you want to reach (non-competitive, of course). Then perform a link analysis from that site, noting the incoming links and soliciting those sites.

3. Promote Linkability Within Your Site: There are many ways to do this. Basically, you want to provide quality resources and outgoing links as appropriate. This can include links to search engines, news hubs, weather reports, industry resources, industry professional groups and so forth. Outgoing links can be important in two ways: they provide incentive for other quality sites to link to you when you're already linked to them, and if internal linkage is done properly, it can improve your PR score. For technical information on PR see the white paper by Chris Ridings "PageRank Explained

4. Publish Articles: Get the experts in your company to write informative articles your audience is interested in, then submit these articles to appropriate online publications in your industry. Provide a brief bio containing your Web site URL and make it a condition for publication that the article must appear with a bio containing your company URL. This can generate a lot of links, but it takes time and editorial skills.

5. Testimonials: It can be worthwhile to start a testimonial page of products and services you find useful. Say you admire certain marketing sites or publishing sites. Contact the company, telling them why you value their services or find their products effective. Be earnest and concise. The company may respond asking for permission to display your comments on their Web site. Grant them permission provided they agree to link to your site. Sometimes it helps if you post the testimonial on your site first and refer them to that page.

In conclusion, this is an important SEO strategy and one of the best ways to improve your visibility and rankings. So you want to do it the right way.

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Bio:

Paul Bruemmer <mailto:paul2@web-ignite.com> is the CEO of Web Ignite <http://www.web-ignite.com/>, a search engine optimization company. Founded in 1995, Web-Ignite has helped promote over 15,000 Web sites and was recognized by Iconocast and MarketingSherpa

as a top SEO firm. Client testimonials report search engine traffic increases of 150 to 500 percent. A frequent speaker at search engine conferences, Bruemmer writes for ClickZ and many other publications.

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