



Guidelines For Successful Link Development

Link development has long been a cornerstone of a successful search engine optimization (SEO) programs, yet few search engine marketers do the process correctly. With free-for-all (FFA) link farms and poor Web rings polluting search results, how do Web site owners know which SEM companies to avoid, and which are legitimate?

This column addresses some basic guidelines for successful link development. It will help Web site owners avoid common sales pitches from unethical SEMs.

Link Development 101

At a basic level, a link counts as a vote. If a Web site owner finds content on a site is particularly useful and informative, he'll link to that site.

As both a Web developer and graphic designer, I always visit and purchase from stock photography and digital image Web sites. Therefore, I have a page on my site that links to the stock photography sites I use most. I link to these sites because I find their content to be useful.

One might think if a site receives more "votes" than another site, then the site with more "votes" has higher link popularity. Unethical SEMs have promoted this myth for years, just so they can close a sale. It should be noted that the quality of a link always carries more weight than the quantity of links. It's much better for a site to have a small number of high-quality links than to have a large number of low-quality links.

In an ideal situation, of course, a site should have a large number of high-quality links. Link development takes time. If a site has (a) a large number of high-quality links; (b) keyword-rich text; and (c) a site and page architecture the search engines (and end users) can follow, then qualified search engine traffic isn't an issue. It's very difficult to imitate high-quality link development.

Reciprocal Linking — Is It Flawed?

I do not and never have believed in reciprocal linking because the fundamental concept: you link to me and I'll link to you, is flawed.

If you find a site's or page's content to be particularly useful and believe its content will benefit your visitors, then link to the page. You won't link to another Web page because they wouldn't grant you a reciprocal link? Perhaps you didn't find the content as useful as you thought you did.

Many Web site owners receive e-mails from SEMs saying they've added a link to their site, with a request the site owner read and edit the listing. The e-mail commonly

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mentions PageRank, or "PR," as it's known in the SEM industry. The expectation is the site owner will return the favor. Otherwise, the link will be removed.

Whenever you receive this type of e-mail, promptly filter out the address and delete it. If the SEM company truly felt your site's content were valuable, they'd link to your site with or without that link being reciprocated.

Besides, last time I checked, people who search for home refinancing don't type "search engine marketing" into a search query. A high-quality link comes from a site with content related to your site's content.

Web Rings — Good or Bad?

Another way unethical SEMs try to score link development points is by creating artificial Web rings. Unfortunately, many Web hosting and design firms try this strategy as well. What they do is create a directory of sites that are somewhat related and encourage these companies to link to each other.

Quite often, you'll see a link that says, "Site designed by XYZ Company." It in turn links to the various Web rings.

First of all, no client should be obliged to link to their Web design firm's site. When people visit your site, they aren't searching for the company that designed it. They're searching for the products, services, and information offered on your site. Unless you're selling Web design or development services, or offer products related to this industry, it's not a good idea to link to your Web design or hosting company.

I've seen more bad uses of Web rings than good uses, which is a shame. There are some cross-links site visitors certainly will find useful. If all domestic violence shelter sites would link to each other on a state-by-state basis (shelters in New York, shelters in Arizona, etc.), that type of cross-linking will make it easier for victims of domestic violence to find the shelter closest to them.

Conclusion

Link development is fundamental for search engine marketers. It's very difficult for a site to get long-term search engine traffic without it. The focus should always be on high-quality links, not a large quantity of low-quality links. SEMs must teach their clients how to correctly request links from high-quality, non-competitive sites. With successful link development, Web sites can receive long-term, cumulative search engine traffic. Just do it right.

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About Hotel Traffic Builders (HTB):

We are a full-service digital marketing agency dedicated to the boutique hotel & residential resort industry.

Our mission is very simple: ***"To maximize sales success by providing our clients with exceptional internet marketing results"***.

Our clients consistently enjoy industry leading success because of our dedicated focus

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and experience. Our use of state-of-the art tools, best in class technology and wealth of industry experience enable us to provide full solution applications. We recognize that our clients are experts at running their hotels, and our role is to develop and maintain online marketing leadership for our client hotels.

We differentiate ourselves through:

Industry Expertise

We have a singular specialized focus on boutique hotel, resort and vacation home e-Marketing. Our sole goal is to be the best at what we do by ensuring maximum success for all of your e-marketing activities. Our 52 person design and development technology team delivers unparalleled quality and results. Our sole focus is resort marketing.

Individual Customized Creative Approach & Solutions

Every client has unique needs, opportunities and priorities, our e-Marketing plans are always custom built and based on in-depth research of your specific hotel.

Cutting Edge Technology

We use proprietary state of the art tools and applications that enable project efficiency, measurability and success of your e-marketing. We not only promise success, we document it in a 24/7 real-time secured private reporting platform that we create for every hotel client. Our clients never wonder about how hard their marketing dollars are working because they always know!

Return On Investment

The true measurement of our success is our proven ability to deliver reservation bookings. We grow booking results year over year, and we grow advance bookings, which result in higher occupancy levels and ADRs.

Contact us at: www.HotelTrafficBuilders.com or call us **954- 421-6399**