Wordtracker Masterclass:

Link Building

How to build links to your website for SEO, traffic and response.

Ken McGaffin and Mark Nunney
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The web keeps growing so fast that the number of websites cannot be counted. So how then do you stand a chance of your website being found?

Well the honest answer is, with difficulty.

You certainly want to be found on search engines - for which you need quality content containing the keywords your target audience search with. You’ll also need links from other quality, relevant sites.

Also, you’ll want to be found on the large social websites like Facebook, and smaller ones specializing in your target markets. You’ll need links from quality relevant sites for that too.

To be linked to, your content must be worthy. That requires quality content that other sites will want to share with their visitors.

But being found is not enough. Once you have been found, you have to convince real people of the value of what you have to offer. You want them to link to you in turn, tweet you, mention you on Facebook. You want...

...links without asking.

In this book we will teach you how to build the links you need to get your website found on the web.
We’ll explain the five key stages to successful link building:

1. Find quality sites that make up your market’s online community.
2. Network and make friends with influencers within that community.
3. Create quality, link-worthy content, also optimized for search engines.
4. Promote your content to the community.
5. Get links without asking.

The book is aimed at people of all levels of ability and involvement in web design, publishing and marketing – from small businesses building their own ecommerce sites through to managers responsible for briefing professional web designers.

These are the people who will benefit:

- **Website owners** who need content that brings business results and makes the most of their writing.

- **Website editors** who want to establish their site as an authority by attracting relevant, quality links from influential sites and by producing content that is always search engine friendly.

- **Search engine marketers** who need an easy-to-follow roadmap for creating the quality content they know is required for link building for search engine and social media success.

- **Corporate communications managers** and agency staff who need to work with a variety of people to produce consistent, quality website content that delivers on communications objectives.

- **Government agencies and non-profit organizations** that need to publish information effectively, influence opinions and gain support from online audiences.
You’ll find numerous links to websites and resources that will be kept up to date and you can also ask questions and discuss related issues at http://www.wordtracker.com/academy/link-building-book.

Yours

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PS If you like the book, please give us a link to http://www.wordtracker.com/ebooks/link-building-ebook using the text link building.
Content is money in the bank
1. Links without asking – how to get quality websites to link to you

Sending out link requests is a time-consuming business. So wouldn’t it be wonderful if other sites linked to you without being asked?

Sound impossible? Well, it can be done and in this book, we’re going to show you how.

With link requests, you first have to find target websites, review them to decide if asking for a link is worthwhile, identify the contact person and send them a customized link request.

If you can do all that in 15 minutes per request, you’ll be doing very well. On that timing, you’ll be able to send out 160 requests in a 40 hour week and with a success rate of say 10%, you’ll get 16 links for your efforts.

40 hours for 16 links - perhaps there is a better way to spend your time?

Sometimes the best way to get links is not to ask for them.

That doesn’t mean you should sit back, do nothing and wait for links to appear.

Spend time creating content and making sure your site is attractive – with content others will want to link to. There are lots of things you can do to build your link popularity without sending out link requests (though, of course, the carefully targeted link request that is impossible to turn down does have its place – more of that later).

Here are some of the approaches we’ll be exploring in this book:

(i) Play an active part in online discussion groups, forums, blog comments and other social sites. Not only will you learn, you’ll also become known, spot the movers and shakers, and if you post good opinions and helpful advice then people will link to you.

(ii) Create relevant profiles on the large generic social sites (like Facebook, Twitter and StumbleUpon) and on smaller specialist social sites that serve your market, eg, WAYN for travel; RecipeZaar for cooking; stylehive for fashion and style. Build a network of friends on these sites.

(iii) Publish a regular newsletter and re-use the content on your website. Encourage people to link by asking, “if you’ve enjoyed this newsletter, you can link to the permanent version at (insert URL)".
(iv) Publish articles on other websites – blogs, ezines, information sites, media sites, even article banks. You can find sites to submit articles to by doing a Google search, eg, intitle:"submit an article" business and this produces over one million results.

(v) Find niche blogs, sites and newsletters that serve your market and that you would like to link to your site. Study the type of content they publish and adapt your writing to their style.

(vi) Create an interactive tool. My favorite of old was ‘The Longevity Game’. You answered about 20 questions and the tool predicted at what age you would be likely to die. Irresistible – I still remember that my prediction was 83. The test was designed and published by an insurance company – could they have been trying to sell me a pension? A little bit of creativity in thinking about such tools will be time well spent and a good programmer will be able to create a tool in just a few hours.

(vii) Create great content. (OK, it’s an old trick, but it still works.) Just keep publishing great stuff. One of the best at this is online marketing expert Sean D’Souza’s PsychoTactics. His site and newsletter are models of consistency and genuine value to readers.

(viii) Submit your website to legitimate award sites like Mike Corso’s Cool Site of the Day. The emergence of sites like Digg and Reddit means that such ‘pick of the day’ sites will struggle long term but meanwhile they offer a quick, free link and traffic opportunity.

(ix) Praise and link. When you find genuinely useful resources, write a short, complimentary review together with a link. Then publish on your website and click on it just to make sure it ends up in your target’s referrer logs. Larry Chase of Web Digest for Marketers publishes a monthly newsletter that reviews about 10 web resources. A few days later he writes to each reviewed site and allows them to quote his comments in return for a link.

(x) Become a source of quotes. Provide sharp, useful, timely quotes for the media. You can get yourself known and you’ll find journalists will seek you out. Sign up for services such as PR Leads ($99 per month) which can put you in contact with journalists looking for experts to quote.

(xi) Volunteer to become an editor for several directories. You’ll be able to submit reviews of your own sites and you’ll have opportunities to get to know your market better - that inevitably leads to more linking opportunities. Go beyond the obvious - as well as DMOZ, try Joe Ant, Skaffe and Web Beacon.
It’s easy to get too wrapped up in sending out link requests. Stepping back and thinking of some creative ways to get people to link without being asked will be time well spent.

**2. The Link Building Mindset – the principles that will get you noticed**

Links from authority websites are essential if your link building efforts are to be successful. But what does it take to get those authority sites to link to you? Well, you’ll probably guess that it is not easy – quality links don’t materialize from feeble or automated requests. To get those ever-so-valuable links you’ve got to adopt the right mindset – the principles that show link targets you mean business and that you’re worth linking to.

(i) **Know your online community**

The majority if not all of your potential quality links will come from the online community around your industry. This community is made up of blogs, websites, forums, associations and email newsletters specializing in your industry.

You really must get to know this community and you must establish your position within it. To do that you must devour information: you must know the best news sites, the most popular newsletters, the busiest forums and the most popular blogs and tweeters. Sign up for the newsletters, create Twitter lists, get yourself a news reader and read as many useful RSS feeds as you can. These will deliver news to your desktop rather than you having to go and search for it – used well, they can be a huge timesaver.

(ii) **Obsess about your customers**

Get to know them inside out. Understand their stories. Statistics about customers on their own are not enough – statistics don’t give you much to use in link building. Customer stories, on the other hand, provide wonderful material.

People are interested in other people and if you write web copy that highlights interesting stories, you’re sure to attract links.

So find out about your customers. What are their needs? How did they arrive at your website? What did they do when they arrived? And most importantly what did they do when they left? Did they find the answer to their problem? How did your site help them?
You can start this process simply by looking at the emails you receive – reply to people’s queries, enter into email conversations, monitor your brand and products on Twitter, send direct tweets, ask questions, probe a little deeper to find out more.

Ask your customers directly to share their stories – direct requests can give you some terrific insights. You might even put a formal story-gathering project in place.

Whatever you decide to do, the main objective should be to add detail, opinion, examples and ‘color’ to your web copy.

(iii) Use the language that your customers use

Keywords are just ‘the words people use when they search’. Using keywords is fundamental to successful link building. There is nothing better than getting keyword rich links coming back to your site.

Keyword rich links are easy when you’re buying directory listings or text link ads, or indeed when you have relationships with other sites and can ask them to link to you using your chosen keyword phrases.

But paid links for the sake of boosting your search engine rankings now carry a risk because Google hates them (see ‘Buying links’ below). If Google finds paid links without a nofollow tag it will at best remove their worth and worst penalize you.

But there are other ways to get keyword rich backlinks.

When people link, they often use the name of a product, a publication or the title of an article or blog post as the linking text. So use your target keywords wherever you can in names and titles – it’s a simple way to influence the words people use when they link.

(iv) Be wary of automation

There are many link building schemes that claim to be able to build you inbound links automatically. Avoid them like the plague – they invariably involve some variation on search engine spam. Don’t waste time trying to fake an inbound link network. Better to invest your time and money in building real links from quality sites.

(v) Be generous with your outbound links

Giving outbound links to quality content is one of the best ways of establishing yourself in your online community. But be selective with the sites you link to – don’t just link to any relevant sites you find: choose sites that have exceptional or useful content.
Add some comments and descriptions as you link. The readers of your website will appreciate it and your generosity will encourage some valuable word of mouth marketing for your site.

And of course, the publisher of the site that you’ve linked to will appreciate it. Think how badly you want links – other webmasters are the same and they will pay attention to sites that link to them. Your outbound links could be the start of a beautiful relationship.

(vi) Watch out for great content, no matter where it comes from

There’s an old technique that comedy writers use called ‘switching’. The idea is to create a new joke from the basic elements of another, successful joke by switching the situation. So the basic elements of a joke about salesmen could be switched to a joke about teachers.

You can do the same switching for content ideas. Take a close look at any piece of content that catches your eye – an article, a contest, a survey. Isolate the basic elements and then transfer the idea to your own industry.

For example, online pawnbrokers Borro.com, conducted a poll to find out what things women value most. Their mothers came out top, with their partners only managing fifth place, below things like their mobile phone and photographs.

The basic element of this story is to use a survey (giving credibility) to find a surprising and interesting answer (or two) to a seemingly simple question. We once used a similar technique for a debt help company when a survey discovered that borrowing money to pay for a wedding was a significant cause of serious debt. Could you adapt this to your own industry?

(vii) Get your message out

Great content on your site is wonderful to have. But if people don’t know about it and if search engines have not indexed it, then you’ll not be getting the payback that your hard work deserves.

You need to take steps to get your message out and make sure people know about it.

Journalists, editors, popular bloggers and other influencers get inundated with press releases and other stories – most of it has not been edited well and contains irrelevant information. So take care when you contact them. The big mistake is to put in too much – to try to tell people everything. That will only overwhelm them: instead, stick to a single aspect of the story you have to tell.
Write the absolute minimum that you need to get their attention: include a link that will take them to more information if they are interested.

Best of all, first identify and get to know your target influencers by helping them, e.g. with comments on their posts, mentions in your own, answering any questions they ask on Twitter or in their posts.

**(viii) Incorporate writing into your daily routine**

The more you practice the better you’ll become. The web is a text-based medium. Even if you’re creating a software application or interactive content, you’ve still got to write about it, to tell people of its existence. And since it is a text-based medium, you’ve got to learn how to write clearly and briefly without waffle.

Learn how to write great copy – even better, learn how to write great copy that contains important keywords. And the best way to learn is to write a little bit every day – build time for writing into your daily routine. Start simply – a 100-word blog post once a day should not be beyond any of us.

**(ix) Obsess about quality**

It’s not the number of links you get, or the number of articles you write or the number of pages that you publish. It’s about getting links from quality sites in your industry.

In deciding the importance of your site and your search rankings, search engines put emphasis on the quality of sites that link to you. What could be a better source of unbiased information than a link from an article that a journalist has written and an editor approved?

Just as important if not more so, is that quality sites will have high levels of traffic and as a result, you’ll get a lot of interested people directly visiting your site.

Quality links attract more links. People see a link to your site on BBC.com, NYTimes.com, Digg.com and many others and they’ll be more likely to link to you. There is a power law at work: the strong get stronger – people with good inbound links get more inbound links without asking.

You can also get some pretty neat testimonials – being able to write ‘as featured on the BBC’ on your website is a valuable endorsement.