

Launch a Link-Building Campaign

Dozens of Link-Building
Strategies & Tools for Driving
Website Traffic and Making
Partners Out of Competitors

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Introduction

We've come up with a neat and simple calculation that we call the Online Media Index (OMI), which measures your print to online success.

Simply take your monthly unique visitor count and divide it by your print circulation. The number should at least be 1.0, meaning the amount of traffic your website gets each month is equal to your magazine's print circulation.

Finding these numbers is simple. **Compete's free SnapShot tool** (<http://compete.com/>) provides websites' unique visitor counts, and the **Audit Bureau of Circulations** (<http://www.accessabc.com/index.html>) will provide a publication's verified circulation numbers. Simply take those numbers, divide and compare them to our grading graph below.

OMI's vary greatly from one publisher to another. Forbes has an OMI of 12, meaning they have 12 times as much traffic going to their website each month as they have subscribing to their magazine.

Forbes' unique online content and breaking news are enough to draw this great OMI. People.com has an OMI of 2.3, which is a vast improvement over where they stood 12 months ago, which was roughly a .8.

How did your publication do? If you are in the A to B range, congratulations, you are doing an excellent job driving your audience to your website. If your score is any lower than a 1.0, then you have work to do.

How to Start a Link-Building Campaign

Next to search engine optimized content, the next best way to get your pages listed on page one in any search engine is to have a substantial number of inbound and outbound links. A blog is clearly the best way to build both types of links, but how do you get people to link to your blog?

First, figure out who would benefit from linking to you.

Bloggers. You might be surprised to know that many bloggers rely on outside articles to supply their blog with updated, relevant information. Many blogs are a quick "copy & paste" of information with a link to the external source. However, even journalistic blogs will cite other blogs as references for their information.

Building relationships with bloggers isn't an exclusive party that you need to be invited to. Any time you get an email or a comment from someone on an article that you've written, make sure you follow up with them. If they are reading your content, they clearly think you are a reliable resource and this could be the start of a great business relationship.

Business Partners. These could be your blogger friends, your conference networking buddies, old colleagues, but they may also be your not-really-but-kind-of, competition. A strategic alliance is always beneficial to both parties (or it should be), and offering a link for a link isn't unheard of, even with your competitors and many times your customers, if the shoe fits.

Customers. Who better to spread the word about you than your loyal clientele? Offering links in your thank-you emails to related articles, and even outwardly asking them to link to you is a great way to invite traffic to your site. Many people won't even think about it until someone brings it to their attention. Remember, no matter how small, an incoming link is one more vote into Google presidency.

Suppliers. Bet you didn't think of this one. How about offering testimonials (closing with a link to your site) on the testimonial pages of your dealers? Most every business can use constantly updated testimonials, so a good deed for a good deed is good business. Also, see if you can get listed if they have a "Partners" page.

Friends. If all else fails, talk to your friends. In the digital age, almost everyone has a blog or is part of some social network. Tell your friends to link to your site in their forum signatures, blogrolls, myspace profiles, anywhere they can think of.

Overall, in order to get valuable links to your website, your blog must have useful informative content that people consider link-worthy. A great way to get noticed, without outwardly asking for links, is to get out into the blogging community and start commenting on other blogs. Most blogging platforms will link to your website when someone clicks on your alias.

So for today, start thinking of all the inbound link contacts you could be making.

3 Tools to Track and Analyze Inbound Links

Finding out where your competitors are receiving their backlinks may be a big help in uncovering sources you may have missed in your initial research.

Backlinks (also called inbound links) are any type of link that is directed back at your site. Next to keyword optimization, the popularity of your site in search engines is a big indication of how many backlinks you have.

Not all backlinks are the same, though.

Submitting your site to a link-farm index isn't going to give you much credibility, because search engines can identify these pages and discount your authenticity. Joining into a reciprocal agreement with link-farm pages will also flag you and hurt your search engine status.

Some great free tools for discovering backlinks are:

- **Yahoo! Site Explorer** (<http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/>),
- a backlink tool in **Google Webmaster Tools** (<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/docs/en/about.html>),
- and an overall backlink analyzer called the **Domain Stats Tool** (<http://www.webconfs.com/domain-stats.php>).

Also, if you are using Firefox, they have a great plugin called "Search Status" (<http://www.quirk.biz/searchstatus/>) that will display Google PageRank, Alexa rank and Compete.com ranking anywhere in your browser, along with a fast keyword density analyzer, keyword/nofollow highlighting, backward/related links, Alexa info and more.

However, if you are really doing your research, you may feel cut short since most backlink tracking tools max out around 1,000. If that's enough to get the job done, then great. If it's not, you can get your hands dirty by using the "link:" command in Yahoo, Google, and Alta Vista.

For example, if your competitor is Forbes.com, you need only go to Yahoo.com and type in "**link:http://www.forbes.com**". The difference with this method next to Yahoo! Site Explorer, is that with this method you are getting all inbound links, whereas with Yahoo! Site Explorer, you are getting the first 1,000 most credible links. Doing it this way, you are getting more results, but they aren't necessarily in order of credibility to a search engine.

13 Link-Building Sources & Strategies

If you want people to organically link to your site (as in, without you suggesting a link exchange or barter) here are a few things you should do:

1. **Get found.** Research highly searched phrases using a tool like the **Google Keyword Tool**, and SEO your articles using those phrases, so that reporters and researchers will find YOU when they are looking for references in their own articles, (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>).
2. **Stay current.** Whatever your target audience is, report with news-worthy articles and stay up to date on all the latest related gossip. Again, this is for outside references.
3. **Promote shamelessly.** Encourage readers to digg and del.icio.us your articles. This puts links to your site on some very credible news feeds.
4. **Let users generate content.** Allow comments on articles and blogs, make your site the water cooler for search engines.
5. **Make lists.** There's nothing is more link-able than a good list.
6. **Start controversy.** That's right, don't be afraid to be controversial. Like they say... "any press is good press".

How to get bloggers to write about you

In the last few years, this technique has become the epitome of link building. It might seem like bloggers have their own clique when it comes to cross-linking, but much like any social gathering, it's all about taking a sip of wine and getting out there.

If your list of blogger prospects is small (or non-existent), do some target shooting in Technorati, Google Blog Search and Ask.com's blog search engine.

Here are a few ways that you can get bloggers to notice you and link to your articles:

1. **Contact the blogger.** This is a bold move, but if you really think that something you've written will be of interest to the writer, then by all means, put yourself out there. Contact details can almost always be found on a bloggers site or contact page.

2. **Comment on blogs.** This has multiple benefits. First, if you are writing genuinely interesting comments, people will feel inclined to learn more about you.

Most blogs link to your website if a user clicks on your comment name. The other benefit of this is that you immediately have a backlink to your site. However, steer clear of leaving obvious promotional comments, as they are likely to be frowned upon and removed.

3. **Ask for a review.** If you are product-based, offer relevant bloggers a chance to receive a free product in exchange for their review. The risk is certainly that they will not be an immediate fan, but that doesn't mean that the backlink is any less valuable, especially if a user follows it and finds a different product they prefer.

With all that said... keep in mind that most bloggers don't get paid nearly enough, or at all, to do your profitable company a favor without getting something out of the deal. So you may want to remember this when you email them.

If you plan on emailing the blogger, start your email with a compliment. Talk about how much you enjoy their blog, and do your research beforehand. Make sure you provide them with all of the details they'll need to link to your site or article. For more tips, check out Ogilvy's Blogger Outreach Code of Ethics (<http://blog.ogilvypr.com/2007/10/the-ogilvy-pr-blogger-outreach-code-of-ethics/>).

How to get your competitors to write about you

This is good old-fashioned business. Your competitors are not going to give you traffic without something in exchange, so you need to think of something good to offer.

1. **Exchange links.** A non-threatening place to suggest a link-exchange would be in a blogroll or "partners" area of your competitors site. It doesn't distract their readers but it's still a valuable placement.

2. **Fill a void.** It is also likely that you have a complimentary article or product in your arsenal that they do not cover and may find valuable to their readers. If this is the case, that might be the sort of exchange you should be looking for and focusing on.

Many bloggers rely on other bloggers to fulfill their editorial needs by cutting and pasting, or speed-linking (a post composed completely of links to interesting articles and sites) to fill some white space. Fill that space.

However, if your site mostly consists of a blog, and is hardly product-driven, I would use the term "competitor" very lightly because your "competition" in this realm is likely your biggest ally, since you can help each other out the most when it comes to link-building.

How to get other inbound links to your site

This is the fun part. Remember all those user-generated sites you've been hearing about? Well... go get 'em tiger! This is the easiest way to create your own external inbound links. Forums, online communities, social bookmarks, online reviews.. these are all places where you have the opportunity to create a live link to your content, with the least amount of effort.

1. **Social networks.** We're going to make this part simple by pointing you to the next chapter on being a social network evangelist. It includes a link to our "evangelist toolbox" which shows you multiple places to set up shop and create links to your site from multiple domains, including Digg.com, MySpace.com, LinkedIn.com, Technorati.com and more.

2. **Online Press Releases.** One last resort is the realm of online press releases, which will automatically generate multiple links to your site from all over the web. Not only from the PR sites themselves, but also from any browsing blogger looking to pick up a story (score!).

We've listed an archive of free and paid resources in our Best Paid and Free Press Release Sites article here: (<http://www.mequoda.com/articles/internet-marketing/best-paid-and-free-press-release-sites/>).

How to Drive Traffic as a Social Network Evangelist

You can assign bar charts to it all you want, but being an evangelist is really about relationships—building your presence on the Web, interacting with the online community, and social networking. It's about being the face of your company or product and communicating with your users and potential users, because they're already talking about you.

These are some pointers that Anil Dash and Deborah Schultz from SixApart gave us during a Web 2.0 conference last year on the importance of having an official evangelist for your company, most importantly, instilling the Web 2.0 networking effect of community evangelism.

Your Biggest Critic and Your Biggest Fan

The evangelist role means being a foil for the company, after all, who wants someone who can't see where improvement is needed? The evangelist should be:

- **Your customers' biggest advocate** - knowing what your customers want and wanting to get it for them.
- **A listener and an educator** - interacting with them in their natural habitats (blogs, forums, etc.) and becoming a native to their world.
- **Cross-functional** - as a juggler of sorts, the evangelist has to feel confident and empowered across your company. They should be familiar with all aspects of what makes your company tick: customer service, products, development, etc.
- **A partial geek** - being a total geek may cause problems, but they should know how to use the tools, translate between human and machine, and as a partial geek, will tread lightly, not forcibly.
- **A catalyst** - wanting to connect and forge relationships.
- **Approachable** - no egos allowed! They should be able to detach themselves from their role in the business and be able to connect to customers as peers, not as experts or marketers.
- **Intuitive** - they need to have a genuine interest in your business development and should be inline with the company's bigger goals.

The Keys to Being an Evangelist

- **Be aware** - see what people are talking about and know what's going on in the world.
- **Don't be thoughtless** - nobody needs more email. Don't send thoughtless and inappropriate emails just because the tool is encouraging.
- **Think about yourself** - you are a human who understands how people react. Before sending an email or responding to a customer service call (even if unpleasant), think about what would impress you.
- **Make it meaningful** - you may not be able to invoke nostalgia like a song from someone's childhood or the smell of someone's perfume, but you should aspire to do it anyhow. Make people remember you, your website, and the good experience they have interacting with both.
- **Become invested** - if you get a bad article written about you, or you get an unpleasant comment on your blog, don't ignore it. Respond. Let your customers know you value their feedback and ask them about suggestions they have. Invite them to take part in improving their experience. A little recognition goes a long way.

Do's and Dont's of the Game

Pick and choose pieces that work for you. Starting a MySpace profile may not make a difference to your audience if your audience is 40-65 year old CEOs, but it may be very beneficial if you publish a magazine for teens, or technology.

- **Do** choose a platform that is beneficial to your users.
- **Don't** choose one just because you can.
- **Do** go out into the blogosphere, leave comments and make people remember your name.
- **Don't** try to sell your product, bloggers can see right through it.
- **Do** try to join as many communities, forums, etc. as you can.
- **Don't** join ones that aren't appropriate, if you aren't doing something honest for that group of users, don't do it.

Conclusion

So this is your assignment for today. Go out and analyze all of your competitors. Take the contact list for your link-building campaign to the next step and fill in the gaps that you missed by finding out who is linking to your competitors.

With this information, start building those relationships; partner up, and watch the backlinks start building up. We're confident that as those links grow, so will your online audience.

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