

Linking For Your Site Is Crucial

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Your website can be near perfect in every way. It can be full of great content, great pictures, testimonials, and a perfect shopping cart system. But if you don't handle linking correctly, your great site will get little traffic. In fact, if linking is done incorrectly it can actually hurt your site.

There are three types of linking – internal, incoming and outgoing. Internal linking is important for two reasons. The first, and most obvious reason, is that internal linking adds to your visitors' experience. For example, if one of your pages is about dog arthritis, this sentence may be found in it: "Consult your Vet if your dog exhibits signs of dog arthritis". In this sentence I would make a link out of "signs of dog arthritis" and point it to the page I had written and optimized for the term "signs of dog arthritis". In fact, as I write content for new pages I often find I can reword sentences with keyword phrases I have already optimized other pages for. I will then create links within the content which point to those other pages. These kinds of links increase the "stickiness" of your site. In other words, visitors are more likely to visit more of your site's pages with these kinds of links. And the longer you can keep a visitor on your site, the better chance you have of them clicking the BUY button.

Another important advantage internal linking offers is that it helps improve page rank. Many people think page rank is only determined by the number and quality of incoming links to your page from other sites. Although a one-way link from another site with high page rank is the best kind of link, linking to pages within your site can improve page rank. The spiders are smart. The pages must be linked in a logical and meaningful way. In other words, an internal link from a page about dog arthritis medication to a page about the signs of arthritis can be a valuable link. On the other hand, linking from a dog arthritis page to one of your other product pages, cat collars, would have little value since the two pages' content would have little in common. You may have many page links within the template of your site. In this case every page will have these links to other pages within your site. This does not seem to help your page rank. I believe Google recognizes this type of linking structure and doesn't give much if any credit to it. Only links embedded with your content seem to have relevance.

Incoming Links Offer the Most Value

Have you ever typed in a search term and found the number one site returned did not even contain the term you searched for? For example, search the term "black" in Google. There are 1.7 BILLION results! The number one site returned is blackplanet.com. The title of the page is "blackplanet". Their home page does not contain the word black at all. The only place "black" shows up is in the title. In fact, most of the home page is just an image with very little text at all. It may appear that Google has let down those searching for "black" since the page does not even mention black. But this is a great example of the power of inbound links! There are thousands of high quality pages across the web with

content for Blacks which link to BlackPlanet.com. These links from quality pages convince Google that BlackPlanet.com will be very relevant to those people searching for “black”. This example tells us that incoming links to a page can be even more important than actual text on a page.

The best way to get great incoming links to your site is to create the type of content other sites will **want** to link to. Offer unique, interesting, and/or usable content and sites will be beating down your door with incoming links! These are the very best kind of links to have for your site.

There are many sites and software companies offering a means for sites to exchange links with one another. Cactus Canyon receives several emails a week from webmasters of other sites wishing to exchange links. In the past this kind of linking strategy was very effective. But the search engines have caught on to this practice. Although it is still good to have incoming links, one-way incoming links are worth far more than reciprocal links. I don't spend any effort with exchanging links anymore. If Google sees a link to your site, but then finds a link on your site back to that other page, it knows what is going on. What Google really wants to see are other sites linking to you on their own free will. So what about paid links?

There are many sites with great page rank who are selling text links. For around thirty-five dollars per month you can have a one-way text link from a page with a page rank of five or six. I have successfully implemented this practice before with Cactus Canyon. The trick is to find a site which will place your ad in a way which Google won't know it is a paid link. Remember, Google likes it best when sites link to you because they like your content. So if the site you paid places your link near words like “Sponsors”, “Advertisers”, or “Ads”, Google will think it is a paid ad and give your page less credit for it. Also, make sure if you do pay for an ad that your link will end up on a page with content relevant to your pages. It does little good to have your link on a page about airplanes if your site is selling plant seeds.

We've all seen ads like this: “10,000 text or banner links for just \$19.95!”. Never fall for this. Not only is a waste of your money, it could actually hurt your site. Most of these offers involve getting your link onto SPAM sites. You do not want Google to see your link on one of these sites. You can't control every single page linking to you, but you don't want to go out of your way to have your good name show up on these types of scummy sites. Those 10,000 text links will not result in one sale. It would be far better to buy a one month \$19.95 link on a site with a page rank of 4 which had relevant content to yours. Trust me on this.

Outgoing links are important also. If one of your pages has content related to the bicycle helmets you are selling, try to find an external link to a page promoting the use of bicycle helmets. You of course don't want to link to a competitor's page, so it can take some searching to find just the right page. In this case, I might do an advanced search in Google for “bicycle helmet safety” but limit the search to .edu and .gov domains. This will provide you a list of informational sites which have content about bicycle helmet

safety. Also, when I link to an external site, I code the link to open a new browser window. This way my visitor still has my page showing in one of their browser windows. The external links you put onto your page need to be linking to relevant pages, and they should have good page rank too. Google likes to see pages with original content, some incoming links, and a few links from your page to more quality content out on the web. Google feels these things are what make for a great user experience. Remember, Google is in the business of pleasing searchers and not webmasters.