

The Ultimate Guide to Backlinks and How to Get Them

Having quality backlinks to your website continues to be an important, if not the most important, ranking signal, but many people find successful link building one of the most challenging aspects of SEO. In this 'Ultimate Guide to Backlinks and How to Get Them', we're going right back to link building basics as well as giving you 24 insanely actionable ways to attract high quality 'white hat' backlinks to your website.

Link building basics

What are backlinks?

Backlinks are incoming links to your website from another place on the Internet. In other words, these are inbound links that bring traffic to your site from an external source, rather than outgoing links from your site or internal links that connect two pages within the same website.

Why do backlinks matter for SEO?

Backlinks act like a vote of confidence in your website from an external source. If someone is prepared to quote you as a source of information or send their audience to your website, they're essentially saying to the search engines, "This is good stuff and we're prepared to vouch for it".

Backlinks are also important for telling the search engines how different websites and web pages are connected, a bit like a street map from one web property to another. If, for example, a high authority online marketing site backlinks to an SEO+ blog article, it's a signal to Google that both websites share a similar field and that the high authority site trusts SEO+'s content.

Trust and authority are two of the most important reasons that backlinks matter to search engines. Generally speaking, trustworthy sites will link to other trustworthy sites and avoid spammy, untrustworthy sites like the plague. This gives the search engines some valuable clues about how to prioritise a website in search results because they would far rather give searchers links to genuinely helpful, relevant sites.

Backlinks are also important because they bring referral traffic into your website, which is traffic that might not have found you in a search. If you can bring referral traffic in and keep people on your site with high quality content, it lets the search engines know that your content is valuable to visitors.

What is anchor text?

Anchor text is simply text in your content that contains a live link. For example, this piece of anchor text will take you to an article from Moz about anchor link SEO best practice. In the past, anchor text tended to be stuffed full of keywords but, these days, Google is sophisticated enough to understand the context of natural language in a hyperlink. This means that anchor text that says Find out more or Read here can be just as valuable as keyword-rich anchor text.

What ranking value do search engines apply to backlinks?

No-one can give a definitive answer to this question. All we know is that – based on search engine patent applications, testing, data, analysis, experience and anecdotal evidence – quality backlinks make a positive and significant difference to rankings, and may even be more influential than any other ranking signal.

Are some backlinks viewed as higher quality than others?

Absolutely. The search engines are on the lookout for backlinks from high authority websites. The higher the authority of the site linking to yours, the higher the quality of the link.

This hasn't always been the case. In the past, backlinking strategies focused on quantity over quality. People would attempt to play the search engines by buying backlinks and spamming the comments sections of blogs, but those days are over. Nowadays, if you have low quality backlinks to your site, Google will determine that you're keeping some pretty shady company and penalise your website for it.

What's the difference between black hat and white hat link building strategies?

Google Panda (February 2011) and Google Penguin (April 2012) saw changes to Google's algorithms that marked the beginning of the end of black hat link building strategies. By this, we mean tactics such as:

1. Cloaking hidden text on your website that can't be seen by visitors but can be seen by search engines

2. Hiding links on websites you don't own by using a gap in security
3. Buying links to your website
4. Adding your link to the Comments sections of numerous external blogs

Although some companies still use black hat tactics – or some grey hat tactics that push the boundaries of what's acceptable – this approach tends to deliver short-term gains and comes with substantial risk.

In a blog at the end of 2015, Monitor Backlinks identified 18 types of backlinks that risk violating Google's guidelines:

- Link exchanges
- Blogging networks
- Widget backlinks
- Advertorials
- Paid links that pass PageRank
- Article directories
- Hacking and hiding links in CSS and JavaScript
- Site-wide and footer backlinks
- Low distribution of anchor text/repeating the same keywords in anchor text
- Backlinks from foreign language websites
- Low quality guest posting
- Automatically generated backlinks
- Low quality web directories
- Bookmark websites
- Irrelevant backlinks

- Backlinks from websites with duplicated and spinned content
- Low quality backlinks from forum signatures, Wiki pages and free directories
- Any link intended to manipulate PageRank

White hat link building strategies, on the other hand, are preferable for anyone interested in long-term SEO success. Below, we'll be taking a look at some white hat strategies that work.

The right foundation for your backlinking strategy

Before you turn your attention to backlinks, it is absolutely essential that you create a website that has high quality content written with the needs of your audience at the forefront of your mind. Get this right and attracting backlinks should be a piece of cake. After all, people want to share great content, they want to talk about, and they'll be happy to be associated with it in the form of recommendations.

I know I say it a lot but quality content should be at the absolute core of any successful SEO strategy.

24 actionable ways to get high quality white hat backlinks

As we've seen, it's essential to take a white hat, strategic approach to achieving high quality backlinks to your site. This can seem daunting – after all, how do you entice a high authority site to link to your site over others in your field?

We've put together some tried and tested methods:

1. Keep a regularly updated blog

One of the most reliable ways to attract backlinks to your website is to regularly add fresh content to your own blog. If the content is informative and relevant to your target audience, they will want to share it and link back to it within their own networks.

2. Link to great resources

This approach is done in the spirit of giving without the expectation of receiving. Your audience will appreciate it every time you share great content with them – even if it's an article you've read elsewhere rather than your own – and your willingness to link to relevant websites may bring you to the attention of the people who host these sites.

3. Give testimonials

Back in October 2015, we posted our 'Definitive Guide to Online Reviews: Where to feature them and how to get them'. In this, we explored the power of online reviews as a marketing/sales conversion tool.

Most companies are delighted to receive testimonials from their happy customers. If you've used a product or service from a high authority site in your business, send them a testimonial and tell them they are welcome to feature it on their website and on social media. You may well be invited to add a link to your website to your testimonial to show potential customers that yours is a genuine review from a genuine business.

4. Feature case studies

If you have a client who has seen great results with your products or services, try approaching them and offering to write a case study about how your company has helped them. As well as the case study linking to their site, you could ask them to share it with their own audience.

Alternatively, if you've had a really great experience as a customer, you could volunteer to be the subject of a case study and attract a backlink to your site that way.

5. Reach out to bloggers

Many bloggers are looking for new material for their blogs, especially if they publish a high volume of content each week. Depending on the nature of your business, it may be a good backlinking strategy to reach out to bloggers in your industry to offer them free samples of your services, products or treatments.

Rather than asking directly for a review in exchange for the product, it's a good idea to keep the language casual. Simply say that you'd love their perspective and you'll leave it up to them to consider mentioning it on their blog. You can ask them to include your details and a link back to your website if they do decide to publish a review.

Most bloggers prefer this approach to a hard sell.

6. Write a guest blog

Back in January 2014, Matt Cutts – the then-head of Google's web spam team – famously wrote a blog about the decay and fall of guest blogging. This led to a slew of articles pronouncing that 'guest blogging is dead'.

In reality, what Matt Cutts was saying is that low quality, often duplicated guest blogs as a way to get backlinks had become too spammy, and Google would be clamping down on this sort of low-value content.

However, Cutts could still see a role for high quality guest blogs and, nearly three years after his post, they are certainly far from dead.

If you are going to contribute a guest blog to another website, it's important to make sure that your offering will be of value to the host website's target audience as well as your own, and that the content is 100% unique. Even if the article's host decides to make any backlinks to your site 'nofollow', you should still receive valuable referral traffic to your website.

7. Feature high authority websites in a 'Best of...' post

This is a common but effective strategy for gaining backlinks. The idea is that you write an article about the 'Ten best companies/blogs/websites for <insert topic>', specifically mentioning high authority, respected sites and linking to content that your audience will find valuable.

Before you publish the article, contact the companies/individuals concerned and say that you would like to include them in a 'Best of...' post – with the date you plan to publish – and provide details of the URL in case they want to share the post with their audience.

If everyone is happy to be included in the post, and to publicise it to their tribe, you have the potential for ten or more backlinks from sites that you've identified as high authority.

8. Link round-ups

Across the majority of industries there are blogs that regularly feature link round-ups, which are essentially lists of links to great content that they think their audience will love. To find bloggers publishing link round-ups in your industry, simply go to Google and run a search for "your keyword" + "link roundup" or similar (you could also try "your keyword" + "best of" or "your keyword" + "this week").

Work your way through the search results looking at the kind of articles featured in the link round-ups. Do you have content that would appeal to the audience of such a list? If so, I'd recommend contacting the curator of the link round-up to let them know that you've written an article that might fit well with their next round-up list.

9. Turn mentions into links

We know that even 'implied links' or mentions of your website/brand can be beneficial for your search engine optimisation, acting as a vote of confidence even without a clickable link. That being said, an active link from a high authority website to your content is still preferable.

One of the most effective ways to turn mentions into backlinks is to contact people who have mentioned you without an active link and ask if they could add a backlink to your site. My advice is to be friendly and casual in your approach – after all, they aren't obligated to feature a backlink. Just thank them for the mention and tell them that you appreciate it, then suggest adding in a link so that readers can easily follow-up by reading the content that's been recommended.

Buzzsumo and Mention.com both help you track online mentions and citations of your brand, and each offers a free trial (there is a monthly fee for the complete service).

10. Newsjacking

Newsjacking is best described as ‘the process by which you inject your ideas or angles into breaking news, in real-time, in order to generate media coverage for yourself or your business’.

If a big story has hit the headlines, you might want to explore if it can be connected to your business in some way. Do you work in the same industry? Would your products or services help someone in a similar situation? Are you an expert around some of the issues raised by the news story?

An effective strategy is to write an opinion piece about a current news story and get it published as soon as possible after the story breaks. As Google will be looking for fresh content around the story, your opinion piece may grab attention in the rankings and attract backlinks.

11. Blog comments

Now, I know we’ve mentioned leaving comments on other people’s blogs in the context of black hat link building but, with the right approach, it can still be an effective white hat strategy.

The difference dwells in the relevance of the comment. You can usually spot a blog comment based on black hat tactics – it’s littered with keywords, including as the commenter’s name, and only loosely related to the article, if at all.

White hat blog commenting does take more time and energy but can pay dividends. If you read an article on a high authority site with a similar audience to yours, it’s absolutely appropriate to write a response giving your thoughts on the topic or mentioning a related guide that you’ve written on the same topic that you think might be of interest to the writer. You might also want to comment to give your praise or discuss your personal experiences around a particular topic.

Such comments are written in the spirit of creating a dialogue and acknowledging the efforts of the writer, but can also be a powerful source of backlinks and a subtle way to introduce yourself to a new audience.

12. Directories

A simple way to attract referral traffic to your website as well as attract backlinks is to add details of your business, including a link to your website, to respected web directories such as DMOZ, Best of the Web, or Yell

Make sure that you list your business in the same way across all directories for consistency, as inconsistent listings can affect your page rankings.

13. Submission backlinks

As well as directories (see point 12), you can submit your details – including a backlink to your site - to other sorts of reputable websites. For example, if you're an artist or designer, you might want to consider submitting samples of your work to a portfolio website such as Behance or Sortfolio.

Submission backlinks can also come from blog aggregators, audio sharing sites, design galleries, business listing sites, and similar. Before you add your details to a site, it's worth checking out its Page and Domain authorities in Moz's Open Site Explorer.

If you do submit your details to these sites, it's worth taking time to fill your profile out in full, as barely populated profiles and missing 'About' sections are associated with spam profiles and may not make it past the site's moderators.

14. Broken links

Another way to secure backlinks is to spend some time identifying external links to pages of your website that no longer exist. The easiest way to do this is to log in to your Google Search Console (formerly Google Webmaster Tools) and go to **Crawl>Crawl Errors** in the left-hand menu. Under the section titled **URL Errors**, click on the **Not Found** tab, which will give you a list of broken links to or on your website. When you click on the individual URL, you will be presented with a pop-up box explaining the error and featuring a **Linked from** tab. Click on this to see which websites are linking to each page.

If you only have a couple of broken links, it's worth reaching out to the webmaster of the relevant website with details of the correct link.

If you have one or more non-existent URLs that are regularly linked to – perhaps because of a typo made by the first person who created the inbound link – you might want to consider setting up a 301 redirect from the incorrect URL to the correct page, so that the traffic finds its way to the right information on your site.

In addition, I always recommend setting up a custom 404 error page. This can be a great and unexpected way to inject some humour or help potential customers. To see what I mean, check out these fantastic examples [404 error pages collated by Creative Bloq](#).

15. Turning images into links

There are several ways that you can use images to generate backlinks to your website. If, for example, you are a photographer or designer, you might want to consider making a selection of images available for free download on sites like Flickr, Pixabay, Morguefile or Deviant Art in exchange for a credit and link to your site.

You can also create memes using free tools such as Canva or PicMonkey and add your URL to the image. If you download and use the image as a PDF, the featured URL will work as a live link. Do remember though that embedded hyperlinks won't work in JPEGs or PNG files that you post to your social media pages. That being said, just adding your web address to a meme you create can be a great way to attract referral traffic to your website and raise brand awareness.

You might find this [article from Monitor Backlinks](#) about building backlinks into images helpful further reading.

16. Create infographics

Infographics are hugely popular for a number of reasons – done well, they communicate a lot of information at a glance; they're quotable, shareable and translate well to mobile devices. As a result, infographics can be a great source of high quality backlinks to your website.

Before you create an infographic, you need to decide on the topic and what stats you plan to share, as well as how you want to present them. Try searching Google for infographics that already exist on the same topic. Those that appear on page one of your search probably have a good number of backlinks.

How can you make your infographic stand out from the crowd? What will be different about your design and content? What stats will grab attention? What stats will people want to share?

Free tools such as Canva have excellent infographic options if you want to have a go at a do-it-yourself design but, if design isn't your forte, you might want to outsource your infographic to a professional designer through platforms such as Fiverr, Dribbble, Guru, or UpWork.

Once your infographic is complete, the key is to make it easy for other people to share and link back to. Siege Media's Embed Code Generator is a free tool that will generate the code that people need to add and embed the infographic on their site.

You might also want to try SumoMe's Image Sharer app, which adds social media share icons to an infographic that appear whenever anyone hovers their mouse over the image. This app helps people quickly and easily share and link back to the infographic, earning backlinks to your website.

17. Run a survey

Running a survey can be an effective way to generate an array of backlinks. Using a free tool such as Survey Monkey, you can reach out to your existing and potential customers to ask questions about their needs, their attitudes, their buying habits, and much more.

Once the survey is complete, you could publish the data as a blog article, infographic, Slideshare presentation, YouTube video or press release, as just a few examples, all of which will link back to your website for the full story. Alternatively, you could turn the data into a whiter paper-style report available for download from your site, then get publicising this on social media, in your e-newsletter and on your website.

18. Run some free webinars

Webinars are not only a great way to showcase your expertise and provide your audience with helpful, actionable information, but also for attracting backlinks to your website, especially if you make the webinar available for download for an extended period of time after it's recorded.

As with infographics (see point 16), you could generate code to enable others to embed your webinar on their website.

19. Create a podcast

As with webinars, podcasts can be a fantastic way of giving your audience access to meaty, high quality content. In addition, it's content that they can listen to while in the car, doing the housework or even cooking the evening family meal. You can add even more value by providing a transcript of your podcasts for those people who prefer to read rather than listen.

Like other forms of high quality content, podcasts should attract backlinks in the forms of social shares or from the sites on which you choose to circulate your podcasts – for example, you might decide to launch a podcasting series on iTunes.

20. Give an interview

As an expert in your field, or even someone who's one step ahead in their journey than their audience, people will want to hear your story. For this reason, it's worth keeping an ear to the ground for opportunities to be interviewed, either in print or for a podcast. It's usual practice to provide the contact details of the interviewee with a link to their website for anyone who wants to find out more.

21. Create shareable templates

You may have some great untapped linkbuilding resources in the form of document templates you use to keep your business organised. People are always on the lookout for things like a self-made daily planner or to-do sheet, bookkeeping templates, contracts, briefing forms, social media planners or goal setting worksheets, as just a few examples. If you brand and share these with your audience, making sure to feature your contact details and a link to your website, you may be surprised by the number of shares and backlinks your offering attracts.

22. Respond to press requests

Did you know that the press regularly send out requests for people to contact them for quotable input into their latest articles? Responding to press requests can be a powerful, white hat way to build up your backlinks.

Search Engine Land have put together a brilliant article about responding to press requests for SEO/linkbuilding purposes – I'd recommend a read. They also highlight the following services for monitoring press requests:

5. HARO (one of the most popular free services)
6. ResponseSource (paid service aimed more at the UK)
7. Muck Rack (paid service)
8. Gorkana (paid service)
9. Source Bottle (free service)
10. Press Quest (UK free service)
11. Vocus (paid service)
12. #JournoRequest (Twitter hashtag used by journalists)
13. #PRrequest (Twitter hashtag used by journalists)

23. Explore co-marketing opportunities

Hubspot defines co-marketing as 'when two companies collaborate on promotional efforts for a co-branded offer'. One example I've seen of co-marketing recently was a collaboration between coaches, Leonie Dawson and Denise Duffield-Thomas, when they launched a new programme. Both coaches share a similar, but not identical audience, and complement one another's missions. They both have a huge following worldwide and were able to combine the power of their sizeable lists to sell the programme.

Co-marketing might be something to consider if you have a good working relationship with someone in a business that complements your own. Is there something that you could produce together? By each

marketing the same product, you can attract backlinks from your co-marketing partner's website to your own (and from their audience) and vice versa.

24. Add 'Tweet this' options to your content

Finally, a simple way of attracting backlinks and referral traffic to your website is to add a 'Tweet this' option to snippets of your content. If you have a WordPress website, plugins such as Inline Tweet Sharer or Tweet This make it super easy to turn quotes from your articles into tweetable content that will link back to your original article.

I hope you found this guide useful.

Hazel



Hazel Jarrett, SEO Specialist

Simplifying SEO to help you rank at the top of Google