

A Link Building Primer: A Filetonic.com White Paper Exploring White Hat Link Building Techniques

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Summary

According to VeriSign's December 2009 *Domain Name Industry Brief* report (VeriSign Inc., December 2009), over 187 million top level domain names are registered on the Internet. With nearly 200 million Web sites all vying for Internet traffic, it's no wonder that there's more involved to marketing a Web site than simply building a site and waiting for the masses to discover it.

Search engine optimization (SEO) techniques such as constantly adding fresh, unique content to sites, incorporating keyword phrases, making good use of each page element's metadata fields, and link building work together to match a Web site's content with a Internet user's search terms. Even when properly optimized, your site will be competing with millions of other sites, also optimized to capture the user's attention. If your Web site is buried several pages deep in the search engine results pages, the likelihood of a visitor landing on your page is slim.

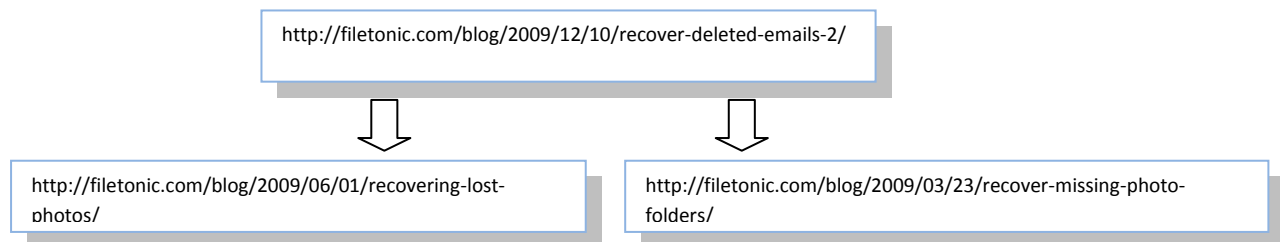
While you can spend months, if not years, studying SEO, this white paper looks at one of the most powerful search engine optimization techniques available: link building. When implemented properly, inbound links pointing to your Web site persuade search engines like Google to value your site over others lacking quality incoming links.

Building a Case for Link Building

With over 187 million domains registered, the Internet has become a crowded place. Each Web site built, regardless of niche, is competing with hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of competitors. While it's crucial to implement basic SEO on every Web page you create, keywords and metatags are not always enough to get your page to stand out from the crowd. Yes, your site needs to incorporate as many tried-and-true SEO techniques as possible; however, once the page is published, there's more work to do: link building.

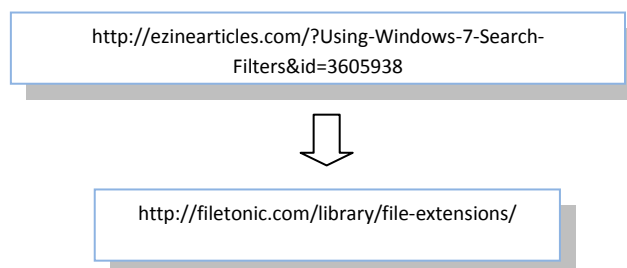
Types of Links

Before exploring how to build links, let's look at the different types of links and their importance to SEO. We'll use the Web site www.Filetonic.com as an example. This site is loaded with hundreds of individual Web pages, many of which are articles advising computer users how to solve common computer problems. A Web page discussing data recovery may contain links to other related articles on the site as illustrated below:



These links are *internal links* because they point to other pages within the Web site.

Filetonic.com also has *external links* which are also known as *backlinks*, *inbound links*, or *incoming links*. For example, an EzineArticles.com article links to a Filetonic.com Web page as shown below:



Both internal and external links have value. According to the Google Webmaster Central Blog (Google Webmaster Central Blog, 2008), internal links are crucial for ensuring that Google knows about all of the pages on your site. Internal links ensure that the Googlebot finds your links and indexes the pages while also providing users with easier navigation.

External links play a crucial role in determining your site's PageRank, or PR. PageRank is a value assigned to Web pages ranging from 0 to 10. Sites with higher PR are considered more

important than sites with low PR values. For example, CNN.com with its PR of 10 is considered more important than OnlineNewspapers.com with its PR of 5. Google uses incoming links as part of its criteria for setting a site's PR. Each incoming link is considered a "vote" for the Web site under the theory that people link to sites with relevant content. The more links, the higher the likelihood that the site is relevant and authoritative.

In addition to looking at the number of backlinks pointing to a particular Web site, Google also looks at which sites are casting these "votes." For example, if a site with a PR of 10 links to another site, that will carry more weight with Google than a site with a PR of 0 linking to the same site. Think of it this way, what would impress you more: CNN.com linking to your site or some random person who just set up his first blog? Google is impressed by higher PR sites because these sites tend to be well established, with many votes of confidence expressed via incoming links.

PageRank and other criteria are used to determine where a site is listed in Google's search engine results pages when relevant keywords are entered by a user. Sites with higher PR fare better than those with lower PR because the higher PR sites are deemed more authoritative and relevant.

Clearly, incoming links are important as they influence your site's potential position in the search results pages. However, not all incoming links are created equal. Because webmasters are aware of the value of links, link abuse has taken place. Link farms, which are essentially sites created for the sole purpose of boosting link popularity of participating sites, and other questionable linking techniques have prompted Google to mark link farm links as spam. Participating in link farms could get your entire site banned from Google.

In addition to being penalized by Google and other search engines for dubious linking, there are two main types of incoming links to be aware of: "nofollow" and "do follow" links. Whether an incoming link is nofollow or do follow isn't necessarily going to hurt you as far as Google is concerned, but the link's status determines whether or not Google treats the link as a link or ignores it completely.

Originally, all incoming links were do follow links. The Googlebot would find a link, follow it, and add new site to its index. If the referring site had a high PR, the linked site would see some benefit from that strong vote of confidence. However, with Web 2.0 and the abundance of user generated content, it soon became easy for webmasters to go to high ranking Web sites and add a comment or post a forum entry complete with links to their own sites. Not only did comment and forum spam become a problem, site owners resented lending credibility to random sites. In addition, while you aren't penalized when a dubious site links to you, you could be penalized when you link to a dubious site. If a link farmer visits your Web site and leaves a link to his link farm, you could be held accountable and penalized by Google!

Because of issues like these along with the fact that each link that a site makes devalues the site's future links, the nofollow attribute was created. The nofollow attribute is a line of code that tells the Googlebot not to follow the link. When Google encounters a nofollow link, it is completely ignored. Therefore, the link has no value in terms of SEO. The nofollow link itself is clickable and can drive some direct traffic to your site, but it will not boost your PageRank or improve

your chances of a higher position in the search engine results page. With that in mind, when you start your link building strategy, you will want to focus on building do follow links.

Link Quality

To complicate matters, links have different values in terms of quality. In general, link quality takes the following characteristics into consideration:

- **Relevance** – A quality link is a relevant link. If your Web site is about the coffee industry, backlinks from other coffee industry sites are far more valuable than backlinks from sites about UFOs.
- **Context** – A quality link is surrounded by content and keywords related to your Web site. The surrounding content, along with the link's anchor text, provides context.
- **Credibility and authority** – A quality link originates from a credible or authoritative Web site. For example, if a respected Web site or blog links to your site, your site earns a degree of credibility from the recommendation. Likewise, if your Web site is about local weather conditions, a link from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association would be an authoritative link – and extremely valuable!
- **Time investment and difficulty to obtain** – Quality links often take time to obtain or require extra effort on your part. For example, it only takes a few minutes to create an online profile on a social media site with a backlink to your Web site, but it takes much more time and effort to write an original article for an article marketing directory. In general, the most valuable links require a greater time investment.
- **Human generation** – Automatically generated links are less valuable than those that require an actual human to create. After all, humans are far more selective than automated programs. The more selective the human controlling whether or not your link appears on a site, the more valuable a link becomes.

Where to Get Incoming Links

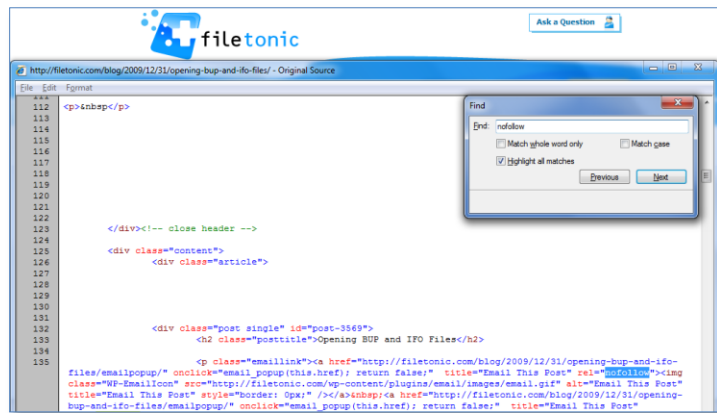
Getting incoming links takes time and effort. While your site will likely attract some organic links, that is, links that users create on their own because they found your pages useful and wanted to share the information with others, you'll need to manually create backlinks to your site. Places where you can place links to your site include:

- Blogs
- Forums
- Online press releases
- Article marketing directories
- Relevant directories such as DMOZ.org and business directories related to your site's topic
- Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter
- RSS feed directories
- Other relevant, and willing, Web sites (use care with reciprocal links)

We'll discuss link building and places where you can build links in greater detail in the Link Building Action Plan section of this white paper.

How to Tell Whether a Link is NoFollow or Do Follow

Because a link's status as either nofollow or do follow is important, you'll need to know how to tell if a site is going to grant you with a do follow link or not. How can you tell? The easiest way is to view the page's source code and look at how existing links are treated. For example, if you plan on posting a link on a business directory, right click the page where you link will appear and choose View Source. Once the source code appears on your screen, click the Control + F keyboard combination to open the Find dialog box. Enter "nofollow" in the Find box.



If any "nofollow" results are found, they will be highlighted. Pay attention to which links have been marked as nofollow and which are not. If links similar to yours are nofollow links, it's likely that your link will also be marked as such.

Another approach is to actively search for do follow sites. Many bloggers have opted not to use nofollow attributes with the intention of rewarding users for placing meaningful comments on their sites. This is a win-win situation as long as you are careful to contribute relevant comments to the discussion and avoid spamming the blog. Several "do follow" directories have been created where you can find link-friendly blogs. Do an Internet search and you'll have several directories to explore.

Software is also available that will help you find blogs where you can place do follow links. For example, depending on the program that you use, you can enter keywords to find blogs related to your topic and then filter the results based on page rank and whether or not do follow links are allowed.

If finding places to place links, creating additional content such as article directory articles and press releases, and posting comments seems like a lot of additional work, you're right. But is it worth it? Let's take a look at how basic link building can make a dramatic difference to a site's position in Google's search results pages.

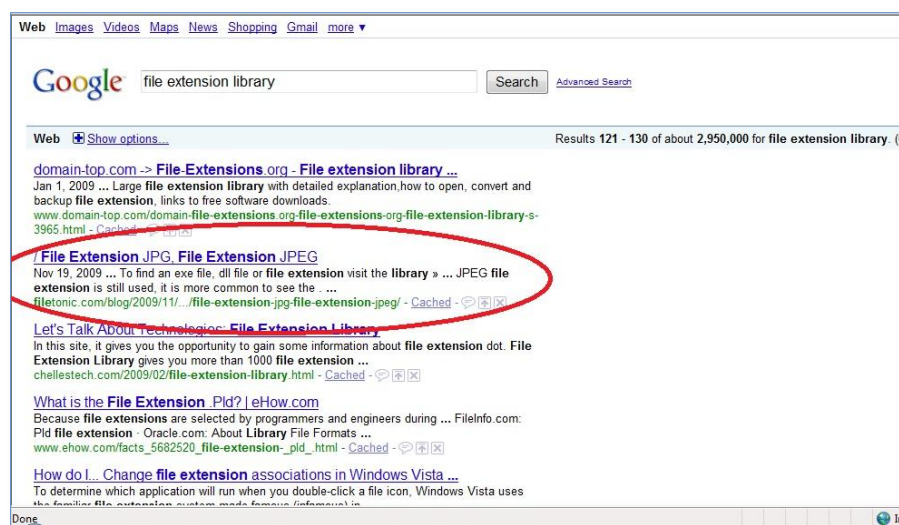
Case Study: Filetonic.com

Filetonic.com is a Web site devoted to helping computer users solve common computer problems. The site is loaded with unique content, with hundreds of pages of fresh content added monthly. Despite its abundance of fresh, unique content, the site has yet to become a major contender in the search results pages of Google.

In mid-2009, Filetonic.com began linking each new page created externally, with the goal of at least three incoming links per page. Whenever a new article is created and posted on the Filetonic.com site, Filetonic searches for relevant blogs and forums, posting a link to the new page on three different do follow sites. This is a long term strategy that gives individual pages votes of confidence and should eventually give the site as a whole a stronger presence. Because of the long term nature of this strategy, measuring success is slow going.

Linking to individual pages has helped those pages perform better. To get a better idea of how linking could impact a single page, Filetonic performed a test in December 2009, focusing on one specific page: <http://filetonic.com/library/file-extensions/>.

This page had a PR of 0 on December 8th. When entering the search phrase “file extension library” into Google, this page was nearly impossible to find in Google’s search results. One similar Filetonic.com page appeared on page 13 of Google’s search results but the actual file extension library page was nowhere to be found.



Screenshot taken 12-08-2009 (Page 13 of Google)

You’ll see that competition for this keyword phrase is strong with 2,950,000 Web pages appearing in Google’s search results. While holding a spot in the 122nd position is certainly more impressive than holding the 2 millionth spot, the likelihood of getting any meaningful traffic to Filetonic from the 122nd position is extremely low. Few users are going to click through 13 pages of Web results and ultimately land on Filetonic’s page. Plus, this wasn’t even the test page.

After checking the page’s PR and dismal position within the search engine results pages, Filetonic’s writers began writing articles, not for the Filetonic site but for article directories such

as EzineArticles.com. In total, 20 original articles were created in the month that followed and then each article was posted on five different article marketing directories. Each article featured a link to Filetonic's file extension library page resulting in 100 incoming links. In addition to the initial onslaught of links, many of the articles were picked up by other publishers which increased the number of inbound links to 160 within the first month. The number of links will continue to increase as the articles will continue to attract webmasters.

Once all of the articles were posted, Filetonic re-checked the page's PR and position in Google's search results. If you recall, on December 8, 2009, the page had a PR of 0. By January 26, 2009, the PR had moved up one spot to a PR 1. While this small boost in PageRank is far from dramatic, the page's position in the search results is. On January 26th, the Filetonic test page appeared to page 1 of Google's search results for the phrase "file extension library." Not only that, it landed in the top 5 spot out of nearly 3 million Web pages!

If you look at the <http://filetonic.com/library/file-extensions/> page, you'll see that the page features very little content. It is essentially an alphabetical list of internal links pointing to pages that further define each linked entry.

On its own, the page's content isn't likely to impress Google as it appears as a list of internal links. The page is useful to the site's visitors but its usefulness isn't readily apparent to Web crawlers.

However, thanks to votes of confidence from other Web sites, Google has been able to determine that the page must have value; otherwise, why would other sites link to it?

Link building clearly optimized Filetonic's file extension library page, placing it in the top five position out of millions of competitors.



Link Building Action Plan

Because quality incoming links are crucial to a Web site's position within search engine results pages, the need for a link building strategy becomes apparent. Rather than relying on site visitors to take the initiative to link to your Web site, you'll need to put forth the effort to both encourage others to link to your site as well as go out and build your own inbound links via appropriate avenues. Though building links takes work, the payoff can be dramatic.

Explore the following link building strategies can come up with a specific action plan of your own. Once you have a plan in place, you may need to designate a specific person to implement it or you might want to revise your Web content posting policies to include specific link building steps that you expect each writer to perform in addition to writing and posting content to your site.

Quality Content

Filling your Web site with quality content is a fundamental part of doing business on the Internet. If you want others to link to your site, your site must be "link worthy." Other webmasters are extremely picky about which sites they exchange links with (and you should be too). In order to give your site the best chance of attracting backlinks possible, provide unique, useful content. As you continue to build your site, providing original, relevant content, visitors will see the value that your site has to offer and you will eventually become viewed as an authority on the topic. If you want organic backlinks, focusing on quality content is crucial!

Not only does quality content impress viewers and lead to incoming links, it also keeps search engines happy. Fresh content is one of many factors that search engines analyze when pulling up results. For example, if you're searching for information about the top-selling cars in America, wouldn't you rather see results that are current rather than five-year-old Web pages discuss the "new" models of the time?

As you're creating your action plan, determine:

- How much fresh content you will add to your site each month
- What type of content you will add
- Where you will find that content
- How often you will post new content

How Much Content Do You Need?

The amount of content to add each month varies from one Web site to another. Consider what's realistic for your organization and your site's ultimate goals. Don't over analyze this step. Start with a realistic number of articles, pages, or blog posts and get moving. You can always adjust as you go.

Types of Web Content

Once you know that you want to generate a specific amount of content each month, what type of content do you want to create? Among the many types of Web content are:

- Blog posts
- Articles
- White papers, eBooks, and other downloadable content

- Newsletters
- Press releases
- Testimonials
- Product information
- Videos

No matter what type of content you focus on, make sure that the content is *unique*. That is, the content should not appear elsewhere on the Internet, even if you own the rights to it or the information is available for free redistribution. This is because Google penalizes “duplicate content.” According to Google (Google Webmaster Central Webmasters Tools), Google works to “index and display pages with distinct information.” In other words, Google’s not going to list identical pages in its results pages because it results in a poor user experience.

In addition, duplicate content can penalize your site. Google explains:

“In the rare cases in which Google perceives that duplicate content may be shown with intent to manipulate our rankings and deceive our users, we'll also make appropriate adjustments in the indexing and ranking of the sites involved. As a result, the ranking of the site may suffer, or the site might be removed entirely from the Google index, in which case it will no longer appear in search results.”

Play it safe and generate unique content. Use services such as Copyscape.com or Plagium.com to make sure that your text is completely unique.

Finding Content

Now that you know how much and what type of content to add to your site each month, where are you going to get it? Do you have staff members that can contribute to blogs or write articles? Can you use existing materials such as your company’s printed newsletters or press releases and repurpose the text into Web content? Do you have writers on staff who can write product information pages, how-to articles, and other informative pieces?

One of the best ways to get fresh Web content is to hire a freelance Web content writer or use a service such as Constant-Content.com where you can have writers write articles for your consideration. One of the benefits of using professional freelance writers is that not only are they good with words, grammar, spelling, and composition, they also understand the nuances of writing for the Web.

How Often to Post Content

While there’s no right or wrong posting frequency, it’s smart to post regularly. For you, this may be daily, twice a week, or even once per week. Each page you add is fresh content that can potentially draw additional content to your site and attract incoming links. When you have a large batch of articles to post, consider spacing them out so that you are continually adding fresh content to the site and showing Google that your site is active and current. This will also increase the frequency that your site gets indexed by search engines.

Organic Links

Once you have your content live on your site and are actively adding fresh content on a regular basis, your site's visitors may be compelled to link to your site. Make it easy for others to create backlinks on your behalf by inserting a "Share This" feature. Share This features are readily available as site and blog plug-ins. When integrated into your articles and posts, the user sees a series of icons representing popular social media and social networking sites as well as other means of sharing such as email. The user then clicks an icon and shares a link to your Web page with the world.

You can also create your own "link to us" page and provide prewritten descriptions and hyperlinks. By providing users with the content, not only are you ensuring that your site is described accurately, you can control the link's "anchor text." Anchor text is an extremely important part of link building. Rather than posting a URL such as <http://filetonic.com/library/file-extensions/>, use a keyword phrase and hyperlink the phrase to the URL such as [File Extension Library](http://filetonic.com/library/file-extensions/). Not only is anchor text more meaningful to readers than a long URL, it provides your site with improved SEO. Search engines rely on the anchor text to determine relevancy for the keywords used. Search engines then associate your site with the specific keyword phrases used in the anchor text.

For example, which of the following "link to us" descriptions would be best?

- <http://filetonic.com/library/file-extensions/>: Your one-stop destination for learning about file extensions.
- Visit Filetonic's [File Extension Library](http://filetonic.com/library/file-extensions/), your one-stop destination for learning about file extensions.

By providing your site's visitors with a convenient, prewritten way to share your links, you are taking your first step toward building backlinks. But don't stop there! Organic links are terrific, but relying on organic links is a passive link building method that takes time.

Reciprocal Links

Reciprocal linking is a process where two webmasters agree to post one another's links on their respective Web sites in a "scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" spirit. When considering reciprocal links, be aware of link farms and stay clear! Manually review all sites that you are considering and make sure that you are exchanging links with sites that are relevant to yours. For example, if your Web site is about caring for dogs, you might exchange links with dog groomers, veterinarians, dog obedience schools, and pet supply sites. However, linking to a site unrelated to dogs such as a computer tech support site wouldn't make sense and could confuse Google due to its irrelevance, possibly making Google think that something dubious is going on.

Legitimate Link Exchanges

Closely related to reciprocal links as well as to link farms are link exchanges. Link exchange sites are not necessarily link farms. Rather, they are more like matchmaking services that match like minded Webmasters together for swapping links. When used appropriately, a link exchange service can facilitate a mutually beneficial partnership between two webmasters. As with

reciprocal linking, when using a link exchange to find potential webmasters to exchange links with, be choosy about which sites you link to.

RSS Feeds

RSS feeds allow site visitors to subscribe to an area of your Web site and then receive updates whenever you post fresh content through RSS feed readers. For example, the Filetonic.com site features an extensive list of categories such as: Anti-virus, BIOS, Computer Error Messages, Data Backup, Data Recovery, Device Drivers, DLL Errors, Email, File Extensions, Gaming, and so on. Each of the categories can be subscribed to via an RSS feed. When a new article is published within that category, a link and brief description of the article appears in the user's feed reader.



RSS Feeds by Category

While useful to individuals, RSS feeds can provide your site with backlinks. This can happen both passively and proactively. For example, your feed may be picked up and posted by other users on their blogs. Depending on where the feed is posted, the links may be either do follow or nofollow links. If you want to take a more active role in distributing your site's RSS feed, you can submit it to RSS feed directories as well as use it to feed your social media accounts with status updates. While many of the links will be nofollow links (for example, both Twitter and Facebook use nofollow links), RSS feeds are easy to set up and automate. As the feeds drive traffic to your site, they are performing a valuable traffic generation service that can lead to new feed subscribers and new organic backlinks.

You can find RSS feed directories simply by entering the keyword phrase "RSS directory" into a search engine. Another term to enter is "submit RSS feed."

Article Marketing

One of the most effective ways to get immediate backlinks from high PR sites is to submit articles to high PR article marketing directories. Not only will your published articles contain links that you've created with your specific keywords included in the anchor text, the links will come from sites with a high PR. Better yet, the articles are meant for distribution as is, which means that other sites may publish your article and provide you with yet another backlink.

Article marketing accomplishes several things. First, it provides you with yet another platform for spreading the word about your product or service. Second, it can help establish you as an authority on a topic. Third, the links that you include in the article's "resource box" provide your site with incoming links.

As you saw in the case study, Filetonic generated 160 backlinks in about a month by posting 20 articles on just five article directories. How far you take article marketing is up to you as the Internet is filled with article directories that you can submit your articles to. However, not all article directories are equal. EzineArticles.com, which is considered by many as the top article marketing directory available, has a PR of 6 and allows do follow links. ArticlesBase.com has a similar PR of 6, but its links are nofollow links. New directories are created regularly, each of which starts with a 0 PR.

While some of the article directories use a nofollow tag in the author's resource box, if the directory is popular, consider submitting your article regardless. You won't benefit from an immediate link, but you will receive additional backlinks when other publishers publish the article on their own sites.

In addition to PageRank and whether the site allows do follow links, check to see if the site is still active. Because most of these types of sites review articles before accepting them, it's a waste of time submitting articles to directories that are no longer actively supported by their creators.

Popular Article Directories

Some sites to start with include:

- EzineArticles.com
- GoArticles.com
- ArticleDashboard.com
- UPublish.info
- ArticlesBase.com (uses nofollow)

You will need to set up an account at each directory. As part of the account setup process, consider using the same username/password combinations so that you don't need to manage a huge list of credentials. If you're not comfortable using the same exact password, use a base password and then add the site's initials to the beginning or ending. For example, if your base password is "password," then individual passwords would be: EZpassword (EzineArticles), GApasword (GoArticles), ADpassword (ArticleDashboard), UPpassword (Upublish), and ABpassword (ArticlesBase).

Fill out the profile and add a picture. If the directory allows it, add your site's URL. A complete profile will lend an additional air of credibility to your articles while also providing your site with another backlink.

Each article directory will have its own set of guidelines that your articles must conform to. These guidelines vary from one directory to the next. In general, your article will need a title, an author name that is not a company name or phrase, a short summary, body text of at least 400

words with some directories specifying word count ranges, a keyword list, and a resource box. The guidelines specify where you can place links as well as how many live links you can include in the article body.

Because each directory has its own unique guidelines, you may need several variations of your article. For example, if your article is 500-words long, its length may be fine for most directories. However, you may need to add a paragraph when submitting to a directory with a 550-word minimum.

Article Submission Software

As you explore article marketing, you're certain to stumble across article submission software. While these programs can automate the process of submitting articles as well as submit your articles to hundreds of directories in a single shot, take the time to become familiar with some of the top directories before turning to automation. This is important to ensure that you understand the guidelines and how the directory works. Once you're comfortable article marketing in general, then you can consider software to speed the submission process. Until then, if your articles do not conform to most directory guidelines, it won't matter how fast your software can submit them because the articles will never go live.

Like most software, article submission software usually comes with a trial version. Demo several different programs before committing to a particular one. While you may be impressed by ads that promise to submit your article to hundreds of directories, you may also be disappointed when you find out that most of the directories are low ranking directories or that the software is clumsy to use. That's not to say that you won't find an excellent article submission program; just make sure to try before you buy.

Once you find a program that you like, set it up with your favorite article marketing directories. Since you're already familiar with the process, you'll be able to use the software with confidence with those directories. From there, you can start becoming familiar with the directories that the software recommends. By now, you should have a better general sense of submitting articles and will be able to set up new accounts and start submitting articles to more directories relatively easily.

What Type of Articles to Submit to Article Directories

In addition to finding the right article directories for your needs, it's also important to submit the right type of content.

For example, when Filetonic ran its article marketing test promoting its file extension library page, each of the articles discussed computer files with titles such as: *What in the World is that File Extension?*, *How to Make a PDF File*, *How to Set Office 2007's Default File Formats*, *Zips and Rars – Opening Archived Files*, and *Managing File Extensions with Windows Folder Options*.

Don't be afraid to give away information. In fact, you'll want to give publishers a good reason to publish your article on their Web sites and providing useful information will prompt them to do just that. Just as you want quality content on your site, so do webmasters that post the occasional

article found on article directories. The more useful your article, the more likely it will be picked up by other publishers which translates into more incoming links to your site. In addition, readers will be more likely to follow the link to learn more about your Web site.

The article itself should not be overly promotional. In fact, the article will likely be rejected if the editors deem it too promotional. Save the promotion for the resource box where you are allowed a brief blurb about you, your company, or your Web site. The resource box is also where you'll be allowed to place links to your site. Again, use keyword phrases in your anchor text.

While it's ideal to write an original article from scratch specifically for article marketing, you can also repurpose some of your existing content and turn it into a standalone article. For example, if you have an eBook, consider publishing an excerpt from it as an article for distribution. In the resource box, you can indicate that the article is an excerpt from your eBook and then link to a landing page featuring the eBook for sale.

Another great way to repurpose existing content is to take articles from your company's print or ezine newsletter and post them on article marketing directories. You can do the same with old press releases and other marketing materials.

Article marketing is excellent way to get immediate backlinks to your site. Take the time to find out how important an article marketing directory is, whether or not it passes on PageRank, and what its guidelines are before you spend time submitting articles. Before you start a mass article submission campaign, submit articles manually and go through the learning curve.

Posting Comments on Forums and Blogs

Another immediate way to build external links is to post comments with appropriate links on forums and blogs. However, this is a delicate process requiring extreme care not to come across as a spammer. Not only do spammy messages annoy, they don't last long. Moderators will block messages that they perceive as spam either immediately or eventually. Make sure that your comments are useful and relevant to the conversation and read the forum or blog's guidelines about links. While you're at it, check to see if the place where you intend to place a link uses the nofollow attribute or not.

Forums are particularly tough on new members who appear out of nowhere and post links in their communities. If you plan on building links on forums, consider becoming an active member of the forum before posting a link. Forums typically allow users to create profiles where hyperlinks are allowed. Joining forums and creating profiles where do follow links are allowed is a good first step. In addition, some forums allow hyperlinks in signature lines. If so, create a signature and use anchor text to create a hyperlink to your Web site.

As you become more active in the community, the occasional link to your site when appropriate may be tolerated. However, if every post you make is self-promotional, other forum members and the forum's moderator may call you out. Because of the work involved with linking in forums, you may want to look for forums that have specific sections where members can promote their sites, articles, and other promotions.

Blogs frequently contain a comments section where viewers can comment on whatever the blog post discussed. What's neat about the "add a comment" features of most blogs is that you can create a user name and enter an optional URL. When this happens, the user name becomes hyperlinked to the URL that you entered. Rather than composing a post that ultimately includes a link to your site, your user name becomes the anchor text and hyperlink! This makes it much easier to create a non-spammy comment. Take a look at the following screenshot and notice how the Name field is a keyword phrase. When this comment is posted, the URL will be linked to this anchor text, providing Google with relevant information about the URL.



The screenshot shows a "Leave a Comment" form. It has three input fields: "Name" with the text "File Extension Help", "Mail" with the text "info@filetonic.com", and "Website" with the text "http://www.filetonic.com". Below these fields is a large text area containing the following text: "This is excellent advice. It's especially important to look at an attachment's file extension as malware makers are known for tricking users with double extensions such as filename.gif.exe. If you have real file extensions hidden, you'd just see filename.gif and think (mistakenly) that the file is a harmless photo file - not a self-executing piece of malicious software."

In addition, notice how the comment does not need to include any self-promotional information or a link? Notice also that the comment shows that the person commenting has read the article and has something to contribute to the conversation. This approach is far preferable to a comment such as, "Great post! Check out www.filetonic.com for even more help with file extensions."

While the above illustration is a good example of how to add a non-spammy comment with a hyperlink to your URL, simply commenting on dozens of blogs does little good SEO-wise if the blogs that you comment on use the nofollow attribute. Rather than wasting your time on nofollow blogs, look for do follow blogs and focus your efforts on those that are relevant to your site.

Viewing each blog's source code and manually looking for "nofollow" entries is tedious and time consuming. While you can certainly do that, it's easier to use software designed for the task or bookmark a few do follow blog directories.

When you first begin commenting on do follow blogs, you may feel a little squeamish linking your URL and adding a comment. As long as your comments are relevant to the blog post, you have no need to feel bad for placing your link. After all, the reason that bloggers are allowing do follow links is to encourage people to comment on their blogs. It's another one of those "scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" moments. Yes, you're getting a valuable do follow link, but you are also providing the blogger with something that he wants: useful comments.

Many bloggers also use a plugin called “Comment Luv.” If offered, not only will your initial comment be posted but your most recent comment or tweet placed elsewhere as well. This has the potential of providing you with additional backlinks.

Guest Blogging

Guest blogging is another excellent way to receive valuable incoming links. This strategy involves finding blogs covering a similar topic as your own site and asking the blogger if he is interested in a guest blog post from you. If so, in exchange for getting free blog content from you, you receive a link to your Web site, preferably a do follow link. Look for high PR blogs that frequently feature guest bloggers. This strategy can be used in conjunction with commenting on blogs. For example, if you have a few favorite blogs where you regularly post relevant, useful comments, you are slowly building a relationship with the blog’s owner. As the blogger sees the value of your comments, he may be open to a guest post.

Online Press Releases

Online press releases serve a primary purpose of spreading the word about a newsworthy event that you are involved with. In addition, they can also serve a secondary purpose: backlinks to your site. Online press releases are similar to article marketing with your press release containing a link to your site (usually in the “About” section at the end of the press release, but often allowed in the body of the press release depending on the service) and being distributed to other sites which may post the release in its entirety – link included.

Free and paid press release distribution services exist. For example PRWeb.com is a well known paid press release distribution service with packages ranging from \$80 to \$360 per press release. PRLog.org is similar site, but it’s free. The Internet is loaded with free and paid services, so do some searching and explore your options. Once you have a press release site (or a few), sign up for an account and fill in your profile. Upload a photo and make sure to include a link to your site. Even if you never create a press release, the profile’s link may be providing your site with a backlink.

Next, start writing press releases. Think that your organization isn’t newsworthy? You’d be surprised at what constitutes news. Has your site, one of your employees, or one of your products recently won an award? Have you released a new product? Have you recently conducted a survey? Have you hired a new employee? Have you promoted an employee? Have you published an eBook? Are you sponsoring an event? Have you raised money for charity? Any of these achievements are newsworthy! Write a press release and distribute it via online press release sites. Not only will your site likely see traffic directly from the press release’s distribution, it will benefit from any do follow links it picks up along the way.

Like article marketing directories, you’ll want to explore each press release distribution site and become familiar with their guidelines. Press releases have a specific format with a headline, summary, dateline, “who, what, where, when, and why” opening paragraph, supporting body text, “about” section, keyword tags, and contact information for media inquiries.

Press releases use a journalistic writing style with third person voice and sourced quotes. For example, rather than writing, “We just released a comprehensive eBook for women wanting to learn how to perform basic auto repairs,” your press release would need to be phrased in the third person such as, “Women’s Automotive World has released a comprehensive eBook, *Performing Basic Auto Repairs without Ruining Your Manicure*, especially for women.” Instead of saying, “We knew there was a need after our site was bombarded with questions from women,” say, “Joe Jones, editor of WomensAutomotiveWorld.com said, ‘We knew there was a need after our site was bombarded with questions from women.’”

Using press releases regularly is an excellent strategy that provides your company with exposure while also building valuable backlinks. Plan on writing and distributing press releases regularly (at least monthly) as part of your long term link building plan.

Online Videos

Another terrific way to build external links is to produce online videos. Whether you host your videos directly on your site or use a video hosting site such as YouTube, you can encourage other users to share your videos or link to your Web page containing the video. Different techniques, media players, and plug-ins are available for embedding videos into your site. Use solid SEO techniques such as giving your video a relevant, keyword-rich title, assigning keywords to its meta fields, and placing the video in a relevant Web page. Make sure that the video is easy for users to share or link to by incorporating embed codes or “Share This” features.

If you plan on using YouTube, your videos will be hosted on YouTube’s site rather than your own. Even if you embed your YouTube video onto your own site, when users grab the embed code and embed the video onto their own sites, they will actually be linking to YouTube, not your URL. Because of this, you are not building direct links to your site. However, that doesn’t mean that you should ignore the YouTube phenomenon. If you go the YouTube route, create a YouTube channel and brand it to match your site’s look and feel. While YouTube does use nofollow links, video channels and shareable videos can drive traffic to your site while also helping you set yourself up as an authority on your topic. Make sure to embed your YouTube videos on your own site as well as on the YouTube channel.

In addition to using online videos as a way to attract more incoming links to your site, online video embedded into relevant pages on your site takes advantage of video search results now commonly listed on search engine results pages. While your Web page may not rank well on its own, the presence of a related video may help your site get listed in the video results section of the search engine’s results page.

Online Profiles

Another great way to get backlinks is to sign up for accounts at popular Web sites that allow you to create a profile complete with do follow links. Web 2.0 is a term coined to describe the second generation of Web sites where user interaction and user generated content are plentiful.

For example, PollDaddy.com is a popular PR 7 site where users can create interactive polls and surveys. This site allows users to create profiles with links to their URLs. Best of all, these links

are do follow links. Create polls with keywords related to your URL and help Google to better understand what your site is all about when it crawls your link. In addition, your polls are shareable. Other users may opt to embed your poll onto their blogs or Web sites further spreading the link love around.

Similarly, you can also embed the PollDaddy polls into your Web site which adds an element of interactivity to your site and could encourage viewers to return later to view the poll results. Likewise, after you close the poll, you could create an online press release announcing your findings or write an article marketing article discussing your poll results.

While you're at it, consider taking part in related polls and adding your comments to them. Polldaddy allows do follow links in each poll's comments section. Keep in mind the same protocols as when posting comments on blogs: Your user name becomes the anchor text and link to your URL and post relevant, non-spammy comments only. It's best to comment on polls containing information that's relevant to the site that you're backlinking to. For example, if your Web site is about high tech gadgets, then you'll want to post comments on polls containing words such as "cell phones," "PDAs," "iPad," and "MP3 players."

In addition to poll sites, other sites where you can create profiles with backlinks to your main site include: user generated content sites such as Squidoo.com and Hubpages.com as well as social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. While there are hundreds, if not thousands, of potential sites where you can create a profile, use the "view source" trick to see if member URLs use the nofollow attribute or not.

Social Networking and Social Bookmarking Sites

The Internet is filled with social networking and bookmarking sites. Among the most popular are: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Bebo, Digg, MetaCafe, Scribd, Technorati, Flickr, Gather, ShoutWire, Furl.net, StumbleUpon, and Reddit.

Though some of these social sites are specifically for sharing content and interacting with other users, social bookmarking sites are used for promoting links. For example, StumbleUpon users share links to their favorite Web sites. When using social bookmarking sites, make a point to share links to other sites as well as to your own URL because if you only promote a single URL, your account could be closed.

Remember those "Share This" plug-ins discussed earlier? Include popular social bookmarking sites as well as social network sites so that your site's visitors can add your Web pages to online bookmarking sites such as Digg and del.icio.us. Not only is this convenient for your users, it places more backlinks pointing to your URL!

Keep in mind that some social networking sites such as Twitter use nofollow links. In Twitter's case, there are workarounds. Specifically: Twitter directories. For example, Twibs.com allows you to create a free business listing that provides you with a do follow link to your URL as well as to your Twitter profile. Not only that, your Twibs page will display your current tweets, creating do follow links to each link within your tweets! Another Twitter directory that allows you to create do follow links is TwitterPages.com.

Professional Directories

Another way to create backlinks to your URL is to submit your site to professional directories. For example, if you are a real estate agent, list your site on Zillow.com and not only will you put yourself in front of local home buyers and sellers, you will also receive a do follow backlink pointing to your Web site. Look for professional directories in your area of expertise on both local and national Web sites. Local examples include your local chamber of commerce, local business associations, and even local Internet Service Providers. National examples include trade associations and well known industry sites catering to your niche. If you're a work-at-home-mom (WAHM), look for WAHM directories; if you're an architect, look for architectural directories; if you're a home builder, look for construction directories.

Consider joining the Better Business Bureau as well. Not only will you be able to use the Better Business Bureau accredited business seal on Web site, you will also receive a valuable backlink.

While you're looking for directories, be wary of link farms. Your best bet is to choose professional organizations and specialized directories. If a site requires that you place a bunch of links on your site in exchange for being listed in the directory, it's quite likely a link farm.

Perhaps the granddaddy directory site of all is DMOZ.org with its PageRank of 8. DMOZ.org bills itself as the "Open Directory Project, the largest, most comprehensive human-edited directory of the Web." Getting listed in the Open Directory Project requires submitting your URL under the appropriate category and filling out a brief description. From there, you'll need to wait a few weeks for a human volunteer to manually review your Web site for potential inclusion in the directory. If your URL is listed in DMOZ, you'll receive a do follow backlink.

Other good directories include:

- [Yahoo! Directory](#)
- [Best of the Web](#)
- [Business.com](#)
- [Starting Point](#)

White paper Directories

Did you know that white papers can generate backlinks? White papers are an important part of online PR. For example, not only does a white paper provide your site's visitors with useful information, you can also distribute your white paper to white paper directories where you may receive backlinks back to your site.

Free and paid white paper directories exist. Among the many freebies you'll find are: White papers.org, FindWhite papers.com, OnWhite papers.com, TechRepublic.com, and WebBuyersGuide.com (by Ziff Davis). Most of the free sites also offer commercial options. Among the top paid white paper directories are: CNET's ITPapers.com, KnowledgeStorm.com, and Bitpipe.com.

While you'll notice that many white paper directories focus on IT topics, don't be discouraged if your white paper is for another niche. For example, enter the search term "submit a white paper"

into a search engine and you'll find dozens of Web sites and directories where you can submit your white paper. Add your industry to your search term (such as "submit a white paper real estate") and receive better targeted results.

As a hybrid between an informational article and a company brochure, a well crafted white paper can influence readers and drive traffic to your site. Like Web sites, your white paper's success starts with quality content, but that's not the end of it. Like a Web site, your white paper must be marketed. White paper directories are but one way to get your white paper noticed. Start by posting your white papers on your own Web site and then post them to white paper directories.

Next, make sure to fill out the user profile for each white paper directory so that you can take advantage of any do follow links that may be available. Whether or not you'll receive a do follow link varies by site. For example, WebBuyersGuide.com places the nofollow attribute on your profile's URL. However, this directory is huge and searchable across all Ziff Davis Web properties.

Other steps to take include using online press releases to announce the publication of your white paper, incorporating a "share this" message to encourage others to share your white paper, blog about the white paper as you're developing it and after it's live on your site, and use social media to get the word out. Sound familiar? Many backlinking techniques are interconnected. Keep all of the possible link building activities in mind as you develop your site and mix and match as needed.

Black Hat vs. White Hat Backlinking Strategies

As you explore ways to build incoming links to your site, you're sure to run across link farms, scams, and black hat techniques designed to game the search engines. Black hat backlinking strategies will come back to burn you sooner or later, so steer clear of any technique that seeks to trick the search engines.

Your Link Building Action Plan

Now that you understand the basics of link building, it's time to put these strategies to work for you. Start your own link building campaign by:

- Identifying URLs to promote
- Creating anchor text for each URL you are promoting
- Identifying which link building strategies you will use
- Identifying high-PageRank, do follow sites as potential homes for your links
- Assigning staff members to perform specific tasks such as writing and submitting articles to article directories or commenting on blogs. Provide specific guidelines and expectations such as "submit one article marketing article to EzineArticles each day" or "comment on five blogs per day."
- Start linking!

It's smart to track your progress and measure your success along the way. By understanding which strategies are making a positive impact and which ones are not, you can fine-tune your efforts and focus on those that are working. One way to do this is to check the URL's PageRank and position on Google's search engine results page for a specific keyword phrase before you

begin just as Filetonic.com did in its file extension library test. Periodically check your progress, keeping in mind that PageRank isn't updated regularly and that PageRank isn't the most important thing. What's most important is this: Is your URL getting more traffic as a result of your link building efforts?

Conclusion

Building links isn't the easiest undertaking you will take as you work to get your Web site noticed. In fact, link building is hard work! But all your efforts are for naught if you do not start with value. Keep value in mind from the beginning by creating a Web site filled with useful, relevant content and then maintain that theme as you incorporate some of the link building strategies discussed.

Remember the following points as you build backlinks:

- Links vary in their ability to draw traffic to your site as well as their overall quality.
- Each backlink reflects your site's value and represents a vote of confidence from the referring site.
- Whether the referring site is credible or a spammer matters!
- Whether the referring site has a high PageRank or not affects how much weight search engines will give to that vote.
- Whether the link is nofollow or do follow makes a huge difference.
- Anchor text is crucial because it tells the search engine what your site is about and adds associates these keywords with your site.
- Links should be contextual.

There are dozens of ways to get backlinks ranging from creating online profiles, commenting on blogs and forums, and exchanging links with other webmasters to distributing online press releases and articles, guest blogging, and getting listed in professional directories. Keep in mind that many of the link building techniques are used in conjunction with others. By understanding the different ways that you can build links, you'll be able to apply different strategies as needed. For example, when you publish a white paper or post a new marketing video on your site, issue an online press release to ensure that word spreads (and you receive additional backlinks). These are but a few of the many possibilities.

As you're fine-tuning your link building strategy, focus on quality backlinks over quantity. After all, what would you rather have: one backlink from an authority site or one hundred backlinks from random low-page rank sites?

Start your own link building campaign and keep track of your progress. As your link building progresses, ask yourself: What link building strategies work for you? Which strategies do you enjoy doing? How can you take the enjoyable strategies and fine-tune them for even better results? Which tools are available to make link building easier? Which processes can be automated and which need the human touch? How can you encourage your site's visitors to share links to your site?

Finally, approach link building as you would any long term commitment: Give it time. You may not see an immediate boost in PageRank but you should have incremental successes along the way. At first, link building will be difficult but as you become more experienced you will get it down to a science. Continue building links using white hat strategies and your site's traffic will improve.

In fact, you'll want to record your site's average traffic, current PageRank, and position in the search engine results pages for your top keyword phrases before you begin and then periodically revisit these statistics every few months.

Filetonic.com's December 2009 test showed its owners that link building can greatly improve a URL's position in Google's search engine results pages. While the test focused on article marketing, Filetonic.com is committed to backlinking in an ongoing effort to rank well in Google organically. Link building is a long term strategy that works for Web sites and blogs of all sizes. After all, with over 187 million domain names registered, getting noticed online isn't going to happen without votes of confidence from other Web sites or loads of advertising dollars.

About Filetonic.com

Filetonic.com is a resource for computer users struggling with common computer problems. The Filetonic Web site provides users with free computer help from its team of "Tech Jocks" who answer technical questions in an easy-to-understand manner that's as free of technical jargon as possible. Free and commercial computer tools and system scanners are available for download throughout the Filetonic.com site for identifying computer problems due to computer viruses, registry errors, malware, and faulty device drivers as well as for recovering lost data and protecting privacy online. In addition to personalized help and useful computer tools, Filetonic.com also features an extensive resource library consisting of DLL, process, and file extension directories.

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