

online marketing white paper



Link Popularity
Campaigning



You may freely distribute this white paper to anyone whom you feel may benefit from it, as long as the **entire** white paper remains intact, as is (without any modification) including our logo, contact data, terms of use and copyright information.

Terms of Use

This white paper is intended to be used as a guideline, but not as a substitute for the online marketing services of a qualified professional. We are providing this white paper to assist you as you attempt to implement your own online marketing campaign. For professional online marketing campaign services, please contact us (toll-free) at **866-493-3693**.

We do not offer any support services (including, but not limited to: responding to white paper questions by phone, email, fax or mailed letter; or technical support inquiries) regarding the use of this white paper. We do, however, welcome service inquiries regarding implementing and managing online marketing campaigns or other online marketing needs. Please contact us at (toll-free) **866-493-3693** for a free, no obligation consultation.

We make no guarantees or warranties, implied or otherwise, regarding any of the following information. We do not endorse any product, service, company or organization, whether or not it is listed in this white paper. By using this white paper, in whole or in part, you accept any risks associated with the concepts, ideas and resources contained within it. And, you release us from any liability as a condition of your use of this white paper.

BY PROCEEDING WITH THIS WHITE PAPER, YOU AGREE TO ABIDE BY THE ABOVE TERMS AND CONDITIONS WITHOUT LIMITATION.

Getting Started

Before starting your link popularity campaign, it's helpful if you already know a lot about your website, your online competition, and even the top 20-100 key phrases most relative to your website. We typically start our link popularity enhancement programs by gathering a great deal of information about the website that we are trying to enhance with links. A basic list of information about your website should answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the subject or theme of your website? (e.g. What is your website about? Dogs? Shoes? Finance? Posters and Fine Art? Something else?)
- 2) Who is your average consumer, and what kinds of things do they buy related to your specific industry or product line? (e.g. Women over 40 who purchase designer clothing. Complimentary items include jewelry, handbags, scarves, etc.) Keep in mind that you want to know a great deal about the general demographics of your target audience, rather than the typical customer that will frequent your site.
- 3) What are the top key phrases or key words which are most relevant to your site? (A good suggestion here is to make sure that you have already optimized your website, and pull your key phrases from your optimization efforts.) Come up with a list of no less than 20 phrases or words. If you haven't already optimized your site, then use our free Key Phrase Analysis Tool which will greatly assist you in building a comprehensive list of relevant key phrases—typically 100 or more. (If you don't have our Key Phrase Analysis Tool, send an email to info@capturehits.com with "need key phrase tool" in the subject line).
- 4) Who are your online competitors? Use your key phrases in the top search engines to see who ranks higher than you in the search engines, as well as who is in the top 20 positions.
 - a. What is their ranking across various search engines? (e.g. Competitor 1-ranks #1 on Google, #10 on Yahoo and #4 on MSN for the key phrase "Italian Shoes.")
 - b. What is their Page Rank score on their home page? (Don't know about page rank? Page rank is a system designed by Google to determine the ranking of pages—not websites—based upon over 100 points of criteria. You can read more about Page Rank by visiting <http://www.iprcom.com/papers/pagerank/>.) By downloading Google's free toolbar at <http://toolbar.google.com/> you can see the Page Rank of any of your competitors. Page Rank, in a nutshell, determines the importance or relevancy of a given search defined by a key phrase. The higher the Page Rank, the more relevant the site.
 - c. What is their Alexa traffic ranking? (You can download the free Alexa toolbar at http://download.alexa.com/index.cgi?p=Dest_W_b_40_T1.) Alexa's toolbar is probably the most helpful tool you will use in developing your link popularity list. In addition to finding the Alexa traffic ranking, Alexa also provides detailed information about your

competitor's site, such as the name and contact information of the site owner, how many links are pointing into the site, and other traffic-relevant information.

- d. According to Alexa's toolbar, how many links are pointing to your competition's site?
- 5) Which online companies offer similar, but not competing, products/services/information within the same industry/subject area? List a minimum of 10-20 complimentary companies. (This list will be used to build both link partners, and to identify other potential link partners within a similar industry.)
 - a. What is their ranking across various search engines?
 - b. What is their Page Rank score on their home page?
 - c. What is their Alexa traffic ranking?
 - d. According to Alexa's toolbar, how many links are pointing into each site?
- 6) What website directories, associations and vertical portals (or "vortal," which has focused and related information on a particular subject on a single website) are available online for your specific industry, subject area or product/service offerings?
 - a. What is their ranking across various search engines?
 - b. What is their Page Rank score on their home page?
 - c. What is their Alexa traffic ranking?
 - d. According to Alexa's toolbar, how many links are pointing into each site?

NOTE: Avoid free for all (FFA) link resources and link farms. These are simply not useful for websites serious about using link popularity to increase traffic and search engine rankings.

By the time you have completed the above items, your potential list of link partners should be broken down into several different categories:

- Direct Competitors (those who offer identical products, services or information).
- Indirect Competitors (those who offer similar products, services or information).
- Complimentary Associates (those who offer products, services or information within the same industry/field of study/subject area, etc.).
- Directories and Portals.

Now that you've been able to generate quite a comprehensive list of link resources, you're ready to get started building your link popularity.

Step One: Setting it Up

There are lots of wonderful programs such as Arelis and Zeus that not only help you generate links, but can also help you manage your link programs. While these software programs can consolidate your entire link prospecting efforts, there are many rumblings online about the issues involved with using link popularity software.

Of the greatest concerns is that many of these helpful link management software programs are adversely impacting the search engines. In general, it appears that sites that use automated link building and link generating programs are actually hindered, rather than helped, in terms of link popularity enhancement. Some of the biggest issues involve a decline in search engine ranking (one of the very reasons you are trying to enhance link popularity) and even banning or non-indexing by some search engines.

Therefore, it's better to be safe than sorry, which is why we opt to maintain the link programs we manage using alternate software programs and online services.

- 1) Develop a spreadsheet workbook using Excel or another spreadsheet program.

Working with Excel allows for a great deal of flexibility during the data-gathering process. A good amount of information can be captured, stored and sorted within the spreadsheet. Include basic columns such as:

- Name of Website.
- Website's home/index page URL (e.g. www.capturehits.com).
- Website Owner/Contact Name.
- Contact Email Address.
- Subject Area of Website.
- Ranking in the search engines.
- Number of Links Pointing into Site.
- Alexa traffic Ranking.
- Page Rank Score.
- Competition? (yes or no).

2) Learn to create and maintain your own HTML documents so you can easily update and maintain your links. (Check with your webmaster, as there are many new programs which may allow you to use a form to create HTML pages on the fly using a template set up by your webmaster.)

3) Use ACT!, Goldmine or similar contact management software to keep track of:

- Reciprocal Link Partners (those who have agreed to add your link to their site in exchange for having their link posted on your site.)
- Link Partners (those who have agreed to add your link—whether for free or for payment—to their site)
- Link Prospects (possible link partners who have not yet been contacted about linking to your site)
- Pending Link Prospects (possible link partners who have been contacted about linking to your site, but have not yet responded to your request)
- Pending Links (those sites that have agreed to add your site to theirs, but do not have a link posted yet on their site.)
- Old Link Partners (partners who are no longer exchanging links)
- Dead Links (those sites that used to have your link posted on their site, but due to technical, administrative or other issues, no longer link to your site.)
- Pending Dead Links (those sites that used to have your link posted on their site, but due to technical, administrative or other issues, no longer link to it. You have contacted them about the dead link and are waiting for a reply.)

4) Create a link-prospecting email message. This message should be short, simple and to the point. There are a number of sample messages available online by just doing a search for "sample link prospecting letter." This email message should include:

- Who you are/what your website is about (in 2 sentences or less, such as: "Our site provides relevant information on online marketing and promotion to nearly 120,000 unique visitors each month and has a Page Rank of 7.")
- Why you are contacting them (e.g. "I'd like to exchange links because you are one of the leading portals in online marketing," or "I'd like to add my link to your link directory")
- Your link's URL (e.g. most people want to see your website, have a chance to poke around and determine whether or not they deem your website relevant to their audience and subject area before replying to you.)
- A request to contact you if they are interested or willing to add your link to their site.
- HTML coding, which can be easily pasted, including your link's URL and a description to make the linking easier.

- Your contact information, including: your name, title/position, telephone number, mailing address and email address.

5) Sign up for an ONLINE (not software) link checking service such as: <http://www.incominglinks.info/>. Online link checking services charge a monthly fee, however, you don't have to pay for software upgrades, run the risk of being disciplined by your ISP for using bandwidth, and the reports are automated.

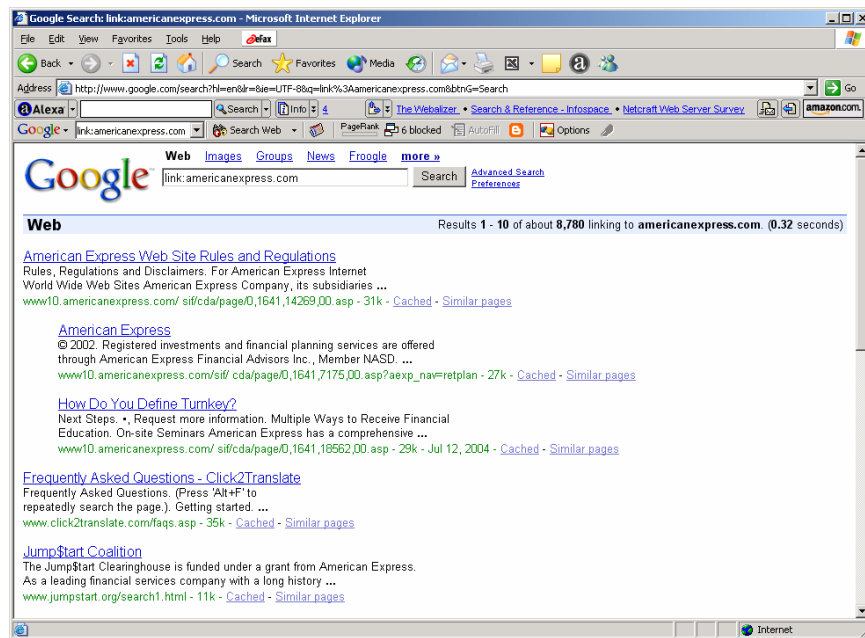
Step Two: Using Your Link Prospect List

As you read in the "Getting Started" section, we encourage you to seek out your online competitors, directories/portals and complimentary service providers. This will provide you with the first tier of link prospects.

But, to make the most of your link prospecting opportunities, you should expand upon your first tier of link prospects. We recommend that you sort your data by determining which of your first tier link prospects have the most links pointing into them. (More links equal higher page rank. Higher page rank equals higher search engine positioning. Higher search engine positioning means more traffic.)

Then, we recommend that you use Google (which is the most utilized search engine at the time of the last update of this white paper), to find out exactly what links point into your first tier link prospects.

You can do this by simply typing into Google's search box, "link: domain.com", where "domain.com" is the URL of one of your link partners. (NOTE: This search works best if you omit the normal "www" in front of the domain name.) The result should look something like this:



Now, you can begin the link harvesting process. There are software programs that can harvest links for you, but we have found that you will have greater success with quality (and relevant) websites if you perform the harvest yourself manually.

Use the results of your search to build your link prospect list. Simply click on each link and capture the data about the site using your installed Google and Alexa toolbars. This will give you a good start in

developing an ongoing list of tier-two link prospects. Be sure to include ONLY those tier-two sites that are within your subject area/industry, appear to be legitimate sites with valuable information, and do your site justice. Remember, just like running in any popularity contest, allying with the best websites in your industry or field of study will earn you the highest popularity votes.

You can repeat the same process with your tier-two link prospects to see who links into them. And, you can create tier-three, and four, and five, and so on. In the end, you will have an almost unlimited list of potential link prospects.

You can also use an online service such as www.linkpopularitycheck.com to perform the searches on the website URL's which you specify—whether those of competition, directories or complimentary providers.

Step Three: Link Prospecting and Contact Management

Earlier in this white paper, we recommended using a contact management program such as ACT! or Goldmine to keep track of your prospecting efforts. We advise using a contact management program for many reasons, including the ease in which you can sort data; the ability to keep track of detailed correspondence (by date) and conversations (if any); batch email capabilities (which allow you to send multiple, personalized emails with a single mouse-click); and the customization of fields.

If working with a contact management program isn't your choice or doesn't fit into your budget, rest assured! You can accomplish many of the same tracking functions by adding a few more columns to your spreadsheet and putting in some additional time and effort. But, for the purposes of this white paper, we will discuss the use of a contact management system.

Before working with your contact management system, it is important to first qualify each field you want displayed. We recommend adding fields that match the columns in your spreadsheet and calling those fields by the same names. This will make it much easier for you later when you are ready to import your data from the spreadsheet.

If you are unsure about how to import your spreadsheets or how to set up your contact management system, please contact us and we will refer you to someone who can help you.

Using Contact Management Software

The contact manager will help you keep track of which prospects have been contacted, their status (e.g. have replied, waiting for reply, not contacted, etc.) and their current link relationship to you (e.g. link partner, reciprocal link partner, etc.). You can also use the contact manager to determine where your link has been established (e.g. what URL is your reciprocal link partner using to post your link) and any other relevant information.

As indicated earlier in this white paper, there are many link popularity software programs available that can provide similar management capabilities, but we really prefer the flexibility and features available with contact management software.

Step Four: Working Your Link Prospect List

Well, we're getting close to adding link partners to your website. Congratulations on your diligent efforts thus far!

Using your link prospecting spreadsheet(s), you are now ready to send out your link request letter. Some key things to remember are:

- 1) Send each letter individually. Don't use the blind carbon copy (BCC) function within your email program to submit multiple letters at one time. Doing so looks unprofessional and may actually be flagged as spam.
- 2) Personalize each letter. Instead of writing "Dear Website Owner" personalize each email message with the website owner's name, when available. In addition, the best prospecting letters are those that are not only personalized with the website owner's name, but are personalized with the website's URL. (Ideally, this URL should be the page you'd like to have your link appear on.)
- 3) Be respectful. Don't draft lengthy request letters that include too much information about your site and its statistics, or make unreasonable demands. We receive hundreds of requests from site owners who want us to include their links on our site, and give us deadlines on when we must place their link on our site. Even if the site is a good one, we will often decline these types of messages simply because they are rude and demanding.
- 4) Offer to provide more information if needed. Some website owners want more information than what might be available on your website or than what you can comfortably put in an email message. We suggest creating a "website specification" page on your website which details data about your website (e.g. traffic, number of links pointing in, how long you've been online, your industry, demographic data about your visitors and/or clients, etc.) and offer this link with the request letter.
- 5) Give them the option to request to not be contacted again. Let's face it. Whether we like it or not, we live in a world where spam messages are frustrating at best. And, not everyone may be eager to hear from us. We typically include a phrase right below our signature line which reads something similar to:

"If for any reason you don't want me to contact you again, email me with the words "NO EMAIL" as the subject of your message."

- 6) Make sure your "From" line and "reply to" addresses specify who you are, in order to add credibility to your request. We receive volumes of link requests each day and over half of these requests contain bogus or undeliverable "reply to" email addresses and/or one word names (e.g. "snoopy" or "links"). You can legitimize yourself by making sure that your full name (first and last) appear in the "from" line, and ensure that you are using an email address which can be easily replied to. Before sending out a link request, send yourself several test messages to ensure that your email "from" line and "reply to" address are valid and displaying properly.
- 7) Do NOT send link requests from Hotmail, Yahoo or other free email accounts. In fact, your link requests should come from your domain name, rather than from a free email account or ISP email address. If your website is www.myshoes.com, then your email should be name@myshoes.com rather than name@hotmail.com or name@ispemail.com. Again, this adds credibility and legitimacy to your link request. Your webmaster and/or web hosting company should be able to help you set up a domain name email address.
- 8) You can also run your letter through a spam checking program. There are a number available online. Using a service like this can help you determine if your letter will be flagged as spam before you even send it out. A service you can try is: Content Checker by Lyris at <http://www.lyris.com/contentchecker/>

Step Five: Checking Your Links

If you have signed up for an online link monitoring service, such as <http://www.incominglinks.info/>, you'll soon discover that your inbound link partners may have dropped your site, whether intentionally or accidentally. Using a link monitoring service can diminish your time by determining which links (that should be pointing into your site) are missing, inactive, dead or have otherwise disappeared.

It is extremely important to check your links on a weekly basis to ensure that your website is gaining as much exposure as possible, and isn't losing popularity ranking due to invalid links from external web sites.

Wrapping it Up

Link popularity enhancement is an ongoing process. You should constantly prospect for new link partners. We advise that a minimum of 80 link requests be sent out each week to ensure the best response rate over time.

Keep in mind that link prospecting is a long and grueling process, but one that will reap rewards long term. Don't become discouraged if you aren't gaining thousands of link partners in the early stages of your link prospecting. If you are diligent in your efforts, you will gain the desired return.