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Basic Principles of Link Building by Trevor Southwold

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Link building is the most significant way to improve search engine rankings for a given web page. When web pages make a sudden rise from obscurity to prominence, link building is almost certainly the cause, although perhaps not of the kind that a respectable business should engage in.

Web search engines tend to count links in order to determine page relevance for certain key phrases. In the early days of the internet, search engines placed a significant amount of importance on the number of times a certain key phrase was repeated within a web page - however, they quickly learned that this system was easy to abuse. Counting links proved to be a far better way to determine relevance, although the potential for abuse remains.

Counting links allowed search engines to see how many users with a web presence considered the content at the end of the link to be worth reading. Placing a link on your web site was not too different from 'voting' for the page at the end of the link. The uniform application of this system gave web site owners an incentive not to link to substandard sites. Not only could this damage the reputation of the linking site, it would also pass value and relevance to the site at the other end of the link, creating a chain that made outbound links important too.

When web sites become large, they accrue links naturally in a snowball effect. In the increasingly competitive environment of the internet, however, reaching that stage can be difficult. This is where link building comes in. Link building is the process of producing links that lead to a particular web page for the purposes of improving its SERP performance. Although every business would like to accrue its links naturally, the unfortunate fact is that if nobody can find your content to read it, nobody can link to it, feeding a vicious cycle in which the obscure remain obscure and the prominent, prominent. Link building is a way for businesses to break this cycle and begin to accrue links, prominence and authority.

There are many different approaches to link building, ranging from strategies that mimic natural link building very closely (i.e. those that rely on building relationships with other relevant web sites, offering to provide 'guest post' content and requesting a backlink in exchange) to those that are deeply unnatural (such as using software to automatically leave comments indiscriminately on blogs that are set to auto-approve).

Ethical link building is by far the more rewarding of these two approaches, despite the additional time and resources needed to maintain this type of campaign. Through ethical link building, a web site can establish itself as a legitimate part of the online community related to its subject matter - in much the same way as relationships between people contribute to the authority those people are seen to have, relationships between web sites contribute to the authority (and thus SERP rankings) those sites are seen to have.

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