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# The Do's and Don'ts of Link Building

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*For the purposes of this paper, we'll use Google to represent all search engines (Bing, Yahoo, etc.). The same principles apply, regardless of the search engine.*

**Google's goal is to deliver the best search results to their searchers, but before they can do this, they need to understand which websites are "the best."** Google monitors this by looking at things like relevance, credibility, activity and popularity. Though all of these are important, this tool will focus specifically on popularity.

Popularity in the Web world is much like popularity in the real world—it's determined by what you provide and how many people like you. Essentially, Google looks at how many websites link back to your website in a legitimately positive way (i.e., they like you and what you do, and their comments reflect as much). As has been mentioned in some of the other tools, blogging is a great way to build popularity because it gives your readers something to talk about. They can link to your site (this is called "inbound links") and begin discussions on their own websites. As these discussions become more frequent across the Web, your site gains more and more popularity, and your search rank increases.

So, you need people to find your website in order to talk about it, but you need people to talk about your website in order to find it. Is there a way to create links on your own? Yes, with a process known as link building. Unfortunately, years and years of "experts" trying to cheat the SEO system and find shortcuts have put Google on defense, and they have to be very picky with inbound links. Building links inappropriately won't work—and even worse, it will get your site blacklisted. You will have no luck showing in search results once that happens. So, here is what NOT to do when it comes to link building:

## THE DON'TS

### Link Farms

These were popular several years ago, touted by SEO professionals as a cheap and fast way to build thousands of inbound links for your site. Essentially, a link farm is a website that provides links to other websites. Having a link in these link farms is now harmful to your website, and many companies are scrambling to get these links removed, or abandoning their URLs altogether to start fresh, depending on how many of these bad links they have.

*Blog spamming is meant to trick search engines.*

### Blog Spamming

It's important to distinguish the difference between blog spamming and blog commenting. Blog commenting, which we'll go over later, is one of the best ways to build legitimate links to your site, and it is very helpful when done correctly. The real difference between blog spamming and blog commenting is the tone you use. We'll discuss more on this later.

### Press Releases

Press releases have been used a lot in recent years to build links because they are legitimate news efforts made by legitimate journalists. Unfortunately, as they often do, SEO professionals became wise to this practice and began taking advantage of press releases. They would stuff links into the content and post press releases around non-newsworthy events, building thousands of links with zero value. As a result of this, press releases don't carry SEO value the way they used to. However, press releases can still be used—they are a legitimate business practice. Just make sure your topics are actually newsworthy.

Are you seeing a pattern? Google doesn't like cheaters. Google doesn't like liars. If you want to build your site value, you cannot take shortcuts. This cannot be overstated. Shortcuts may provide temporary boosts, but in building a successful business, it's important to build links that are truly valuable. Here are a few tips for building proper links:

*Reach out to other organizations in your area. Join the chamber of commerce and link up with doctor's offices and hospitals.*

## THE DO'S

### Build Relationships

The more credible a website is, the more valuable it is for them to link to your site. So, for example, if you're able to build a relationship with your local hospitals and they place a link to your website from theirs, Google sees this as a valuable link, and your site rank improves because of it. Google doesn't know you personally, so they're looking for people to vouch for you. Reach out to other organizations in your area. Join the chamber of commerce and link up with doctor's offices and hospitals. Provide links to their services from your site, then reach out to them and let them know. Be sure the relationship is in place, and they have your trust, then when you reach a point where you feel comfortable, ask them for a link to your site.

### Comment on Blogs

When commenting, most blogs require you to fill out three fields: your name, email address and website. The blog will then display your name above your comment, usually linking to your website. Google counts this as a link, but the value you receive from it depends on the comment you make. This is where it's important to know the difference between blog spamming and blog commenting. Blog spamming is meant to trick search engines; blog commenting is you, expressing your opinions, sharing experiences and asking genuine questions.

A spam comment will look something like this:

"Wow! What great thoughts and opinions on this subject. I also have thoughts on home care, which you can see here: [www.myspammywebsite.com](http://www.myspammywebsite.com)"

While a genuine comment is more like this:

"What a wonderful article. I especially love where you talked about your mother with Alzheimer's. I can tell she means a great deal to you, and it reminded me of one of the patients I once cared for. These are wonderful people who have spent their lives helping others, and it makes me happy to see how much love and care you give her."

There's nothing spammy about the second comment. As business owners, we may look at that and think, "But how are these people going to find out about my business? Shouldn't I tell them more about the services I provide?" While talking about your business can be appropriate in some blog comments, generally speaking, you should leave it out. This is about building a valuable link. By your tone, Google can discern that this is a genuine comment, and because of the info you input before making the comment, your website will reap the benefits. We're used to traditional marketing efforts, where you try to shout the benefits of your organization loud enough for someone to hear. Proper blog commenting requires a complete shift in your mindset. Be genuine.

## Press Releases

Yes, press releases are in "the don'ts" category, but as we mentioned, they are still a legitimate business practice. Google doesn't want to penalize legitimate acts of business, so they essentially ignore press releases. Unless the release is picked up by a large news site, that is. If The Wall Street Journal picks up your press release, Google now sees it as a valuable link and will reward your site accordingly. To increase the likelihood of your release being picked up, make sure it meets the following criteria:

- The topic is newsworthy.
- The release is well-written.
- The release is short (3-4 paragraphs).
- The release contains valuable quotes.

As with all SEO efforts, building links is a matter of being genuine. You're trying to show Google that you deserve their attention, and this takes time. But as you comment on blogs and build relationships with other relevant services in your area, you'll begin to see an increase in your Web traffic and sales. Coupled with the SEO efforts outlined in other VANTAGE tools, this increase will compound month over month, building a solid base of steady Web referrals for your business.

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