## SUCCESSFUL LINK BUILDING

This article by Elisabeth Osmeloski reports on the Search Engine Strategy Conference that was held earlier this year. Elisabeth has detailed some important points about building a successful link strategy for your website, her article is reproduced here with permission.

Link popularity remained one of the hottest topics of discussion at the San Jose Search Engine Strategies conference, with two extensive sessions dedicated to the topic of successful link building.

This year's conference featured an interesting discussion about advanced link building between two search engine marketing consultants and representatives from Google and Teoma -- the two engines that place the most emphasis on link popularity in their search algorithms.

### BUILDING STRONG LINK POPULARITY

When it comes to the art of linking, Debra Mastaler of Alliance-Link.com reminded website owners that it is no different than any other aspect of marketing, since you must know your audience in order to find the types of sites that they come from. Your website traffic reports are an invaluable source of this information.

Avoid the common pitfalls of obtaining PageRank or link popularity, warns Mastaler. This means staying away from link schemes or free-for-all linkfarms. And don't use hidden links. Create an outbound links page on your website only if it makes sense for your company or your audience.

Patience and persistence counts in any link building campaign, as generating quality links from credible sources can take a long time.

### CREATIVE LINK CAMPAIGNS

Greg Boser of WebGuerilla, takes a pass on the time consuming task of finding reciprocal links, as larger clients rarely have a reason to swap links or find an appropriate place for outbound links on their websites. Instead, he offered alternate strategies to improve the inbound link structure for the long term, via organic SEO tactics.

"Distribute press releases and articles for syndication. When done well, these get archived in the heart of the web's structure", says Boser. The content contained within these text documents is invaluable, and can be essentially indexed indefinitely. These types of documents should also be indexed in an archive within your own site. Similarly, you should always ask reporters for a link to your site within articles that are going to be published on the Internet.

If you're promoting a web product or service, don't overlook the "powered by: link" for web tools distribution. Be sure to give visitors easy access to code that includes a descriptive text link that they can copy and paste on their own sites.

Boser mentioned that a prime example of this is Atomz Search, theorizing that their PageRank score of 9 comes in part from the free search box tool they provide via download and that features a link back to their home page.

A growing area of link building is now coming in the form of branded verticals and specialty directories. Companies are starting to build smaller portals with content and links, building something solid with long term value for their industry.

By the nature of the quality content included, they will get listed in ODP web directories and in the resources listings on Teoma. When built properly, a secondary site can pass the Google PageRank value back to those who get linked from it. On the defensive side, competitors can be blocked from inclusion.

### THE DARK SIDE OF LINK BUILDING

Boser also warned about the future of a commonly misguided technique in link building: guest book spamming. This isn't likely to trigger a spam penalty today, says Boser, but is a big waste of time, because guest book pages will eventually get reduced in value. Similarly, log file spamming, where referrals are passed through with fake header information imbedded, will have a short shelf life.

### LINK POPULARITY FROM A SEARCH ENGINE PERSPECTIVE

While Google is the most often talked about engine when it comes to link popularity, especially when their trademark PageRank is used as the yardstick for measurement, Teoma has made a significant impact on measuring quality links.

Paul Gardi, Senior Vice Present of Search at Teoma, says they are approaching link structures with a different method, looking for actual communities on the web with user interest and look for natural linking occurrences where good information is shared and linked to. Those sites indicate a measure of quality and association within the Teoma index, "It's just like making friends in college or your hometown, you seek out those who have similar interests," Gardi said.

Daniel Dulitz, a software engineer at Google, spoke candidly about PageRank and technical issues currently surrounding the use of the Google Toolbar, saying "0/10 is inaccurate at many times, and because data isn't on a consistent update schedule, it is unreliable, and a poor measure of content value."

Of the Google toolbar, Greg Boser strongly says "uninstall it!" Even though the toolbar offers a basic gauge of PageRank (and therefore link popularity), it's simply not worth the obsession if rankings are holding fairly steady and traffic has not dropped off.

When evaluating the weight of a link, Google wants to know as much as it can about it. Complicated issues such as Javascript, bad coding, image map links, and CSS hurt the process because these make Googlebot work too hard, which can lead to mistakes while spidering webpages. Link text puts sites into context, said Dulitz, and that's critical for determining places of importance related to a subject, even if a link doesn't contain the exact phrases associated with the web page it points to.

Google emphasizes that by placing a link on a site, you are associating your site with another, thereby lending credibility to the quality of content. However, certain linking situations can come with unwanted baggage, such as linking to trademark names while making false claims about the company or holder of the trademark.

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But if it's fair comparison, it might not be illegal - so check with a lawyer. One trademark owner in the audience said you can take advantage of sites that mention your trademark or brand name fairly, and require a link to the official website in exchange.

When in doubt, it pays to follow Danny Sullivan's golden rules of link building:
1) Get links from pages that are read by the audience you want.
2) Buy links if visitors that come solely from the link will justify the cost.
3) Link to sites because you want your visitors to know about them.

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