



# Paint-by-numbers guide to Link Building

Good quality links boost your SEO and drive valuable visitors to your site. Here's our guide to building great links.

## Step by step

1. Start with some interesting content on your site that you're building links to
  - a. No interesting content? See the **Paint-by-numbers Guide to Creating Linkworthy Content**
2. Read *SEO Lowdown*, *Pitfalls* and *Essentials* on this sheet
3. DIY links - post tantalising previews of your content to sites in *Directory* below
4. Earn links
  - a. Find influencers who are already talking about your topics using **tools 1**
  - b. Send each a personal message like our *Link request template* below
  - c. Watch for new links with **tools 2**
  - d. Send a thank-you note, build a relationship

You can outsource this link building process – find people using **tools 3**
5. Optionally, swap links with complementary businesses who have similar customers to yours
6. **Not recommended** but if you must, you can buy links - try **tools 4**
7. Measure using analytics
  - a. Identify link sites and site types delivering good ROI - ditch what doesn't work next time

## SEO low-down

- ✓ **Links vary in authority with search engines**

If it's trivial to add a link yourself, it may be of low search engine value. For example, search engines know that blog comments are easily spammed, so they carry much less authority than editorial on a popular site.
- ✓ **Focus on the value of visitors from the link**

Use analytics to see how many visitors a link brings you, and whether they converted well or spent good time on your site. If they did, the link was relevant and search rankings will follow.
- ✓ **Host content on your own domain**

Including excerpts on other sites is great, but try to whet people's appetite to visit your site for more.
- ✓ **Link to specific content**

An inbound link to a page that focuses on a single topic will help you rank better for topical keywords.
- ✓ **Diminishing returns**

You can post the same excerpt on multiple sites (for example, putting a video on YouTube, Vimeo and Blip.tv) but the additional value diminishes with each duplicate. Best to focus on the dominant source (see *Directory* below) and spend time getting the tags and descriptions spot-on for your keywords.
- ✓ **Inbound link anchor text matters**

If the text of an inbound link includes relevant keywords, it will have more SEO value than a link that simply uses your brand name or URL. For example, a link to your site with text "pack of 6 fresh haggis" will add more value than a link "tastyhaggis.com" from the same site
- ✓ **Swap links**

If you can't earn a link, offering to swap is an alternative, but the direct SEO value is less than a one-way link. Swaps can work well for you-may-also-like businesses: a kilt hire company swaps links with a haggis shop. If you're relevant to their customers you'll receive valuable traffic.

## Pitfalls

### ✘ Building only low authority, low quality links

A DIY tweet takes seconds but it may not drive much traffic or SEO value. On the other hand, earning a link on a prominent blog takes time, and can be hit-or-miss. Do both, balancing your time.

### ✘ Quality doesn't equal relevancy

Don't be seduced by solely domain quality factors: United Nations is PageRank 9, but their visitors aren't that interested in buying your organic haggis.

### ✘ Not personalizing your message

Great campaigns are all about personalization. When reaching out to influencers, take a minute to personalise each message and send 20 rather than spamming out 100 exactly... the... same: note the conversion difference.

### ✘ Buying poor quality links

Caution! Many paid links don't pass any SEO value, and some are even penalized by search engines. Exhaust DIY, earned and link swaps first.

## Essentials

### ✓ Create great, citable content

You're not ready for link building if you haven't anything original or unique to link to

### ✓ Think about what the linker wants

Help them solve a problem

Show *their* product or service in a new light

### ✓ Relevancy: target a niche, be less generic

Generic destinations like news sites may be high traffic but are harder to get and send less focussed visitors than other sites in your niche

### ✓ Send a thank-you note

Make a good impression by sending thanks to the person that's given you a great link

### ✓ Build a relationship

Become useful to them as an expert in your field, feed them notable links not just about your product

## Toolbox

### tools 1 Find interested influencers

**Google** – google.com    **Bing** – bing.com

**uberVU** - ubervu.com

Search for keywords related to the content you're promoting. Look for sites with regular updates (blogs, communities, social networking), non-competing businesses, and popular people.

### Or, the Plug in SEO way

Go to [my.pluginseo.com](http://my.pluginseo.com):

1. Add keywords to Keywords > My Keywords
2. Add competitors to Links > Competitor Links
3. Links > Link Suggestions is continually updated with relevant influential sites.

### tools 2 Track new links

**Google Analytics** - google.com/analytics

See current links in Traffic Sources > Referring Sites

### Or, the Plug in SEO way

The Reactor at [my.pluginseo.com](http://my.pluginseo.com) updates to show you when a site starts - or stops - linking to you

### tools 3 Outsource your link building

Find people to write your link request messages and thank you notes on sites like these:

**People per hour** – peopleperhour.com

**oDesk** – odesk.com    **Guru** - guru.com

- ✓ You'll need to carefully brief and manage any outsourcer to make sure the link requests they send are at the level of professionalism and personalization you want.
- ✓ Specify the links you want, so that you're not wasting your money on hundreds or thousands of low- or no-value links. An easy way to do this is to supply Plug in SEO's link suggestions.

### tools 4 Pay for links (not recommended)

If you must buy links, disclose them like [IZEA](http://IZEA) do in their sponsored tweets package

## Directory

<b>Video</b> #1: YouTube 59% market share <sup>1</sup>	<b>Photos</b> #1: Flickr groups, profiles, discussions	<b>Presentations</b> #1: SlideShare best of breed	<b>Documents</b> #1: Scribd community, powerful search
<b>Social Media</b> #1: Twitter real-time search	<b>Link discovery</b> #1: StumbleUpon best quality referrals <sup>2</sup>	<b>Audio</b> #1: iTunes Store market leader	<b>Q&amp;A</b> #1: Answers.com most popular

*Our advice:* Upload a taster (2 mins of a 30min presentation for instance) to these sites, and link back to your own domain (like [blog.tastyhaggis.com](http://blog.tastyhaggis.com)).

## Link request template

Don't mass-mail your link prospects. Use the simple techniques in our template to give your request the best chance of not going straight in the bin.

Send Save Now Discard Draft autosaved at 14:39 (0 minutes ago)

To: [frank@montrosetimes.com](mailto:frank@montrosetimes.com)

[Add Cc](#) | [Add Bcc](#)

Subject: Will kids ever eat haggis Intriguing, non-demanding subject

[Attach a file](#) [Canned responses](#) ▼

[Rich formatting](#) »

Hi Frank Personalized

I see you've written about your love of haggis at [montrosetimes.com/haggis-is-great](http://montrosetimes.com/haggis-is-great).

We've created a kid-friendly haggis burger and filmed the results (good and bad!) of our taste test at [haggis.com/kids-haggis-burger](http://haggis.com/kids-haggis-burger).

If you'd like to cover the story, or just link to us, and need more information call me on 07326 522857.

Thanks, Dan Always include a succinct ask  
Be easily contactable

Head Chef  
Haggis.com

Sent by a real person

You've read their work  
Mention why you're relevant to them  
This isn't automated

Very brief  
Hook them in a sentence

Send Save Now Discard Draft autosaved at 14:39 (1 minute ago)

## Deep dive

- Techniques that apply to all media: Mike Butcher's [15 ways to get on with TechCrunch](#)
- SEO Book on [building links through relationships](#)



Free for 30 days, [sign up in 60 seconds](#)

<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://comscore.com/Press\\_Events/Press\\_Releases/2009/4/Hulu\\_Breaks\\_Into\\_Top\\_3\\_Video\\_Properties](http://comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2009/4/Hulu_Breaks_Into_Top_3_Video_Properties)

<sup>2</sup> StumbleUpon has outperformed Digg and Reddit <http://www.blogstorm.co.uk/why-reddit-stumbleupon-are-better-than-digg/>

Thanks to Abby Lanes for her splattered paint image: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/abbylanes/>