

What Are Backlinks and How Do You Build Them?



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Want your practice to rank high on Google's search results pages? A secure, mobile-friendly site and fast loading speeds are important, of course, but even more critical is the number of authoritative backlinks your site has cultivated.

Good content and link building are the top two signals Google uses to rank your website. However, even with that ranking information readily available on the internet, you might be surprised that 91% of web pages never get any organic traffic from Google. Mostly, that invisibility is due to a lack of backlinks, according to statistics released by [iMPACT](#).

There are many ways to build links to your site in a short period of time, but some of those techniques are frowned upon by search engines. These "black hat" link-building methods can have the opposite effect of what you're trying to accomplish, and they can damage your search rankings.

In this guide we'll cover the right way to build links. These "white hat" (i.e., ethical) techniques are some of the same methods we practice in our own link-building efforts at Etna Interactive.

What Are Backlinks?

Let's back up a second, though. What the heck is a backlink again?

A backlink is a link from one website to your own. It's a way for one brand to provide your site's information (such as a procedure page, a video, a blog post, or an infographic) to visitors on their site via a link. Authoritative or "high quality" backlinks signal Google that your website is a good resource for specific keywords and search terms.

The key word here is authoritative, meaning the links come from sites that search engines deem credible because they have established expertise, authority, and trust with online visitors in their respective fields. Links from high-authority sites pass along some of their authority to sites that they link to.

Site authority is a spectrum. Typically, sites like MOZ or Ahrefs, which provide SEO tools to online marketers, have a system for ranking a site's authority on a 0 to 100 scale. But it's important not to rely entirely on those tools to determine whether a site is useful.



In short, the more high-quality and contextually relevant backlinks your site has, the better your page will rank in search results, assuming other site SEO is in good order.

“Links are really important for us to find content initially. So, it’s like if nobody links to your website ever, then we’re going to have a hard time recognizing that it even exists.”

John Mueller, Senior Webmaster Trends Analyst at Google | Source: Search Engine Journal



How Do You Build Backlinks?

Now that you know what a backlink is, it’s time to get into the field and start building backlinks, right? Wrong! Before you begin creating backlinks, it’s important to identify the type of backlinks you are going after. The three types of backlink opportunities we’ll review today are citations, guest posting, and “content” links.

1. Get a backlink from a directory.

First, let’s start with citations. Citations are backlinks buried within a site’s directory. These backlink opportunities not only include a link back to your site, but additional business information such as practice name, address, phone number, business hours, URL, and photos.

We like to refer to citations as “low-hanging fruit.” They are easy to acquire; however, they typically don’t provide as much value as the other two opportunities we discuss below.

Sites that allow citations generally make the process of creating a listing simple. Locate “add a business” or some iteration of the term, click the link, and you’ll be prompted to enter your business information. Hit submit, and you’re done.

Keep in mind that some sites will request that you verify your information before it can be submitted, which usually means answering a call placed to your business or confirming your email address. While some citations will go live automatically, sites generally have an internal review process to ensure the supplied information is for an actual business and not spam.

2. Reach a new audience as a sponsored author on a relevant blog.

Next up is guest posting. Guest posting is writing an article to be published on someone else’s site or blog. The trick here is finding an audience that will be interested in what you have to say and a site owner who will give you the platform to say it.

When you go in for the “ask,” you increase your chance of success if you already have a blog that discusses topics that are relevant to the targeted backlink site. We’ll address how to make that “ask” a bit later.

Did you know that companies that blog receive 97% more backlinks to their site?

Source: HubSpot



3. Contribute content to relevant sites.

Finally, there are “content” links. These are backlink opportunities you create when you provide content that is relevant to a topic of discussion. For example, imagine you’re back in school writing a book report on a topic you aren’t very knowledgeable about. How awesome would it be if someone reached out to you with a video or infographic that provides a little more depth to your paper? Pretty great, right?

That’s the kind of mindset you want to have. You are providing content that another person’s audience would love to hear about, which makes them happy. In the process, you get a backlink to your site, which makes search engines happy.

Quality blog posts, videos, and infographics can provide the meaningful content necessary to help you acquire backlinks.

It’s essential to keep in mind that each site is unique, and the process for acquiring a backlink varies greatly. This guide is to give you a starting point for your backlink-building journey.

Where Can You Find Sites That Offer Backlinks?

As discussed in the previous section, the sites that we discuss today will either offer a backlink through a citation, guest post, or link to relevant content. Ask yourself which type of backlink you want to acquire, and once you’ve determined your goal, it’s time to begin.

See our cheat-sheet for how to search for opportunities based on backlink type.

Places to Look for Backlink Prospects

CHEAT SHEET: How to search for different types of link opportunities

Citations: Search in Google using “industry” + directory

Guest Posting: Search in Google using “city your business is located in” + “adjective*” + blogger

**“Adjective” replaced with beauty, mommy, fashion, etc.*

Content: Search in Google for articles related to your industry, and find opportunities to provide a video, infographic, or blog post that can enhance the piece.

Once you’ve found a few sites, it’s time to determine which ones would provide valuable backlinks.

There are three traits to look for:

1. Does it come from a trusted/authoritative website?

- Some examples of trustworthy sites include Google, Bing, and Yelp.

2. Is the site/page where the link lives related to your website?

- For example, if you’re in the elective health care industry, you shouldn’t seek backlinks from a local real estate site.

3. Does the site provide “Dofollow” links?

- Use tools like ahrefs and MOZ to determine if a site provides “Dofollow” links to external sites. Google, Bing, and Yelp all offer “Dofollow” links. A site that doesn’t provide a follow link isn’t necessarily bad, though. It simply won’t offer as much value as a follow link. Google looks favorably upon sites which have a healthy balance of “Dofollow” and “Nofollow” backlinks.



Learn more about “Dofollow” and “Nofollow” links

Now that you know where to find backlink opportunities and how to determine whether they are valuable, it's time to begin building quality backlinks. Here are a few sites to help you get started.

- Google My Business
- Bing Places
- Yelp
- Superpages
- WebMD (US-based businesses only)
- MD.com (US-based businesses only)
- Mapquest
- Foursquare
- Infogroup/Express Update
- Neustar/Localeze (US-based businesses only)



When and How Do You Ask for a Backlink?

Let's talk about how to ask for a backlink without sounding pushy or overzealous. As mentioned in the previous section, some of the best ways to acquire links are by providing relevant content for related content on another site. When requesting a backlink, ALWAYS communicate why you're reaching out and how linking to their content is a good fit.

1. Enhance someone's existing content.

Scenario: You come across a blog post written by someone who receives treatments that you offer and notice that they left out key information about that treatment. You could contact the person with something along the lines of the following:

Hello [name],

I came across your blog post on [treatment]. I enjoyed reading about the topic from your unique perspective, particularly the [part of the article that stood out to you and is relevant to the link you're going to provide]. That point is something that we're asked about a lot at our practice.

I wrote a blog a few months ago that goes into more detail about that particular aspect of the [treatment] because we were receiving a lot of questions about the specifics. Please take a look at the post and let me know if you think this post could be a good supplemental resource to your followers [insert link]!

2. Provide an updated resource to outdated information.

Scenario: You find an article that is highly relevant to content you have already produced, but you notice that some of the linked information is outdated or inaccessible.

Hello [name],

I was doing some research for an upcoming blog post (or article) and came across your post on [treatment/procedure].

The post was well written, and I enjoyed reading it. I noticed that one of the posts you linked to for supporting your point on [procedure technique/treatment] was written [x-years ago], and some of the specifics outlined in that article are outdated. There has been significant advancement in this [procedure/treatment] since that article's publication, and I want to share with you a recently published (post/page) on my website that discusses the subject with more current information. You can find that post here: [insert link]

The information in the link above might be a better resource to reference in your post. Regardless, I appreciated reading your post and insight on [treatment/procedure].

Bonus: This type of outreach also works well when the referenced link is no longer available (also known as a broken link). In this case, you would state that the link is no longer active instead of having outdated information.



3. Use mentions in articles or blog posts.

Scenario: You find a blog post that mentions you or your practice by name, and it cites an area of expertise or treatment that you offer but didn't add a link.

Hello [name],

I came across your recent blog on [topic] and saw that you mentioned our practice. I am honored that you referenced our practice while writing about [treatment/procedure]—thank you!

I am reaching out to you to see if it would also be possible for you to provide a link on my [name/practice name] for your readers to reference.

I appreciate your time. Keep up the great work!

Note: Acquiring a link from a media outlet for a mention in a news story is extremely difficult but not impossible. Your best shot at obtaining a media link is to provide a link with more objective content like a case study or ebook—if it's relevant to the story. It's important to carefully craft your message to show the benefit of adding a link to your website.

4. Ask charitable organizations that you support.

Scenario: You notice that a charitable organization that you regularly support through donations or sponsorship has a page with a list of supporters/sponsors, but you're not currently listed. One of the best times to make this ask is when you're handing them a check. This can happen in person as well as in a follow-up email.

Hello [person you've built a relationship with at the organization],

It was great to work with you again and to see how [organization's] is improving our community. I'm truly grateful to be a part of an organization dedicated to [organization's mission].

As you can see from my contribution, I am in a position right now to be able to support the organization and hope to continue to do so in the future. You can help me continue to provide support by including a backlink on your [supporters/sponsors] page, which helps our SEO efforts and keeps our business fresh in the minds of our community.

I appreciate our partnership and look forward to working with you again in the future.

Do You Have More Questions?

As always, Etna's team of marketing experts is here to answer questions about link building or your online marketing needs.

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