



TorontoSmallBusiness.com

Make your website work for you

OK - your site content is relevant, but is your site popular?

Building Incoming Links to your Site

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Why Links are Important

There are many beautiful websites out there - terrific artwork, wonderful choice of fonts, colour scheme and navigation bars, some with animated graphic elements and sounds.

A great deal of money has been spent on these websites, and most of them will never be found in search results, even if they have great content. The major reason:

The website has few or no incoming links to their site. If two sites have the same information, then the site with the better set of websites linking to it will be ranked higher in search results.

Here's a quote from Google about their proprietary page ranking technology **PageRank**, truly the core of Google's rise as the pre-eminent search engine:

PageRank reflects our view of the importance of web pages by considering more than 500 million variables and 2 billion terms.

Pages that we believe are important pages receive a higher PageRank and are more likely to appear at the top of the search results.

PageRank also considers the importance of each page that casts a vote, as votes from some pages are considered to have greater value, thus giving the linked page greater value.

We have always taken a pragmatic approach to help improve search quality and create useful products, and our technology uses the collective intelligence of the web to determine a page's importance.

To summarize that quote, there are three key elements to improving the rank of pages within your website:

- 1) The number of links linking to your site
- 2) The quality of each of those links
- 3) Quality is more important than quantity

Note that outgoing links (i.e. website links that you have placed on your pages because they are a useful resource or complement to your website content) are not counted.

Internal page links (i.e. the links you have between your pages within your site) count for something, but by themselves will not propel you towards a first page search result.

How Many Links Do You Need?

We know that, for a particular search term, your search engine will present you with a list of web pages. A link checker like Yahoo's Explorer (siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com) will show you how many in-coming links any site might have.

Using this kind of tool has two benefits:

- 1) You can discover what sites are linking to your competitors (a source for you making link requests)
- 2) You can determine how many links it may take you to get onto first page search results for that search term you used.

The site ranked first may have hundreds of incoming links. However, look at sites ranked five through ten. You'll see that the number of incoming links drops dramatically. Creating incoming links then becomes a more realistic short term goal to get your website moving up search engine rankings.

Warning! Be wary of buying links - Google strongly discourages link buying and contracting with "link farms" to artificially boost the number of incoming links to your site. Google actively seeks out and removes these link suppliers from their results.

Sources for Incoming Links

1) Local on-line geographic business directories

Each municipality, province and state has one or more directories that you can set up a profile on. The municipality itself may offer this as a service - other enterprising businesses such as a local ISP or web design shop may well have set up a business directory as a way to promote their businesses as well.

The key element here: Is the directory relevant to your business? For example, there's no sense in taking the time and energy to set up a profile on a beauty services directory if your business is landscaping.



2) Reciprocal Links

In the same way that businesses set up store fronts in high traffic areas along with other businesses to become a business community, you can reach out to businesses that are complementary to what you do.

If you distribute a manufacturer's product, linking between you and your supplier.

If you belong to a trade association, being listed on their site as well as having their link and logo on your site adds to your legitimacy as well as giving a relevant link.

Again, the key element is relevancy. Accepting invitations from essentially spam directory sites ("hey I saw your site, let's share links") dilutes the relevancy of your pool of incoming links.

3) Links to your web site's articles

People are looking for content - that's why they are searching on the Web. Building connections with people who are interested in sites with the kind of content you provide can result in links that go deep into your site rather than simply linking to your home page.

4) Posting your articles on Writer sites

You can recycle content from your website and shape it into an article. Most writer sites allow a link back to your site.

5) Having a blog imbedded in your site

This is a big commitment and means writing and posting regularly. The payoff is:

- search engines see that you are active in adding content
- blog aggregator sites update their indexes and categorize your posts, giving you links
- other sites and blogs will link to your blog

There are ways to generate content and post on a regular basis even if the number of thing you can say about your specific product/service is limited, or you feel your writing skills are not one your strengths.



- Choose one or two topics that you are truly interested in that relate to your business.
- Set up news feeds with Google that, on a weekly basis, present you a list of articles and links that relate to the keywords/subjects you have specified
- Choose the articles that interest you, write an introductory line or copy the first paragraph and then link to the source article.

In one fell swoop you are up to date with a topic that is important to your business that you enjoy learning about, plus you've created a link to someone who might be a candidate for a reciprocal link.

Also you've now created a news repository that has made it easier for visitors to your site who are interested in the same things as you are to stay connected with you and visit you on a regular basis.

When sourcing content from other sites, make sure you're respectful and acknowledging of another's work. It's one thing to share and comment on articles that you come across. It's another thing entirely to copy the article without acknowledging the source – that's copyright infringement. In the same way that search engines are analyzing content for topic relevancy, similar tools are available and being refined to search out plagiarism.

6) Tracking Results

It may take a while for your hard work to show up in increased traffic. One way to check on progress is to take advantage of tracking tools that are free from Google.

Have your web designer sign you up for [Google Analytics](#) and insert a piece of code at the bottom of each webpage on your site. The resulting reports will give you a wealth of information on how people find and enter your site, how long they stay and what other pages they look at.

Thanks for reading! Other articles on making your website work for you can be found at the [TorontoSmallBusiness.com website](#)

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