

Link Exchange: A Better Way for 2006

Contributed by John Schwartz
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While traditional link exchanges still hold some value, it may be time to add a different tactic to your link-building arsenal. Why? Because it appears that swapping links doesn't provide quite as much 'oomph!' for moving up in the search engine rankings as it used to, at least not for sites in highly competitive niches. Many sites that were on the first page of results and relied heavily on exchanging links have lost those coveted positions after recent search engine updates (especially the 'Jagger' update at Google).

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{bot_wrgoogle}Disclaimer: Only employees who are in the know at the search engines can say with certainty which factors determine rankings. The decrease in link exchange benefit is speculation based on testing and some consensus among 'experts' outside of the engines.

Build More One-Way Links

Assuming that it's true about link exchanges becoming an obsolete way to get higher search engine rankings, it's wise to find ways to build one-way inbound links. At the very least, no web site owner should rely completely on one form of link gathering. It's never smart to put all of one's eggs in the same basket, after all.

The rub here is that most site owners still pursue link swaps as their 'bread-and-butter' means of building links. That can play against you in your own link strategy if you don't continue to offer exchanges. What to do?

What you need is a sort of hybrid approach. That is, find a way to appeal to the barter mindset of exchanging something of value for something else of value that most web site owners have ingrained in their modes of thinking. Along those lines, here's a great way to continue building links without swapping them: offer original, unique content in exchange for a one-way link.

Trade Content for Links Instead

Here's how it works...

Instead of offering to exchange links on your links page, write a short notice that you will write a few hundred words of original, exclusive content (300-500 is plenty) that the other site owner may use on his or her site. In exchange, they must post a link to your site on either their home page or another important page that is linked directly from the home page. Make it clear that your link must not appear on their links page, where it would just share space with many others. For the value to be equal, your link should get special handling in exchange for that great page of new content.

Now, expect not to get too many takers at this stage. The link exchange notion is pretty ingrained in most site owners. That being the case, there's another part of this strategy you should definitely pursue.

Be proactive! Seek out related sites from which you'd love to have a link, and approach the site owner or webmaster with an offer to write a page of high quality content in exchange for a return link. We've been following this strategy for months with our network of sites and the results are impressive! You can expect a much higher rate of agreement from this approach than the tired old "I love your site! let's exchange links!" routine, which is increasingly too time consuming to be worth the effort.

Some Important Points

First, follow through and write truly excellent content. Don't just dash off a quick article that doesn't convey useful and interesting information. Savvy web site owners will quickly refuse to post your link if you abuse the situation in this way.

Second, make the content you give away original and exclusive. This is your 'hook' – your best selling point. If you try to give a site owner the same content that appears somewhere else, you'll lose a wonderful opportunity to get a great one-way link.

Perhaps the most important point of all is to use this strategy only with closely related sites that have high quality content. Be picky! Start by checking out the top ranked sites in your niche. Search Google or another major search engine to get a list of the top sites, then visit each one and, if you deem it worthy, find their contact information and send a short, polite inquiry to see if they are interested in an exchange of content for a link back to your site.

When other site owners approach you from the notice on your links page - again, be picky. You'll be spending some of your valuable time to write them a page of high quality content. You will want a high quality link in return. If a site does not meet your high standards, take a pass. In all cases, if you agree to the content-for-link exchange, always request a link from their home page. It's the best possible place for your link and, at worst, the other site owner will refuse and suggest a different page. It can't hurt to ask!

Ultimately, the real long-term value in following this link-building strategy is the return on your investment of time. The relatively short amount of time you invest in writing the content you give away may produce dividends in traffic and higher search engine rankings that last for years. Viewed from that perspective, doesn't this make good sense?

About The Author

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John Schwartz is a professional writer and web site publisher. If you need higher search engine rankings to increase web site traffic, you must have lots of original content and links. Find out how to get more of both - visit <http://www.web-article-writer.com> today.