How To: 5 Steps to Link Popularity
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Definition: *Link Popularity* - the number of other web sites linking to yours or the number of inbound links to your site.

There's no way around it. Developing and growing your web site's link popularity is a must for any comprehensive Internet marketing plan. The benefits are straight forward:

1. **Traffic/ Visibility**: The more links coming into your site, the easier it is for people to stumble across you, increasing site traffic and visibility.
2. **Search Engine Rankings**: The more quality inbound links you have, the better your site will rank in the search engines as all the major search engines now have link popularity as a factor in their ranking algorithms.

So, how do you get people to link to you? A link building campaign is a step-by-step process involving lots of research and follow up. If you'll follow the steps below and then continue to do so regularly, your link popularity will increase over time. Be warned, however, that this is not an overnight process, but an ongoing effort to improve the visibility of your site.

Let's walk through each step in detail.

1. **Set Goals**
2. **Brainstorm**
3. **Research**
4. **Follow Up / Request Links**
5. **Keep Records**

This process needs to be repeated monthly. Ideally, you would appoint someone in your organization to be in charge of link building and would set goals with that person regarding the results of these efforts. This type of project requires ownership and responsibility.

#1 Set Goals

By assigning a person and a numerical target to this project, you will significantly increase your chances for success. A reasonable goal might be to get one *good* new inbound link to your site each month. It may be easy for you to get many more depending on the subject matter of your site, but one a month is an achievable goal for most sites. If you stay on target, you will have 12 good, quality inbound links to your site within a year.

#2 Brainstorm

At this stage, you need to think of all the other companies and organizations that you work with that may be possibilities for your linking campaign. A list to get you started in the right direction:

- Professional organizations (chambers of commerce, industry organizations, certifying boards or organizations)
- Business partners (vendors, re-sellers)
- Online directories (national, local, industry-specific)
- Online publications (if a story is written about you, your company, your products, make sure that the online version has a link to your site)
- Customer/client sites
- Other businesses similar to yours in different markets
- Other businesses in your market that offer complementary services/products (e.g. real estate companies, moving companies, mortgage companies, furniture sales are all non-competitive businesses that are serving the same set of customers)

Make a list of all the possibilities you can. Then, ask all key members within your organization to do the same thing. Once you have your initial list, move on to Step #3.

#3 Research

Armed with your list of inbound link possibilities, its time to turn to the Internet and begin your research. Start by finding web site addresses for all the businesses/organizations you listed in Step #2. Chances are that you will run across new ones along the way as well.

Next, do sample searches using your targeted keyword phrases in both Yahoo and Google. You are looking for two things:

1. Companies that are similar to yours and placing well for your keyword phrases;
   a. Write these companies and their site addresses down. You then check their link popularity using a tool such as this one: http://www.linkpopularity.com/. You will find among the sites linking to your subject site many good possibilities to approach for links to your site. Add these to your list. Keep repeating this process with as many well ranking competitors' sites as you can find.

2. Directories or information sites that are showing in the search results for your keyword phrases.
   a. There are loads of great industry-specific directories out there. Many only require that you link back to them in order to be included on their site. Also, the link request phase (discussed in Step #4 below) is more straight-forward with these types of sites as many have online forms in place to use for the link request. Simply look for a link to "Submit site" or "add your site" or the like and follow the instructions. Some of these directories will have a submission fee (paid inclusion it

is called). Depending on the quality of the site, these links can be valuable and can be worth the price of admission.
   b. At a minimum (this list is by no means all inclusive and does not include any industry-specific directories), these sites can get you started in the directory category:
      i. Open Directory Project: www.dmoz.org (free to submit and an important link if you can get it)
      ii. Business.com
      iii. Yahoo Directory (paid submission, but worth the price)

A note of caution: Only quality inbound links are of any value to your site. And, in fact, low quality links (such as free-for-all sites or link farms) can actually do harm to your site's position. Focus only on identifying quality sites that are related to your site, your business or industry.

At this point, you should have a good list of possibilities. These will be the sites that you approach about linking to yours in Step #4.

#4 Request Links

Requesting links to your site is a basic two-step process. These steps apply to sites that do not have in place a formal submission process/form.

1. Identify the contact email
   a. If there is a "webmaster" link, that is the one you want
   b. Otherwise, you will want to send an email using the general email address provided on the site
2. Write the request, to include at a minimum the following 5 items:
   a. The request (that you would like their site to link to yours)
   b. The reason you feel it would be beneficial to them as well as you
   c. Your company name and URL
   d. A "Thank You"
   e. Your contact information

Be sure to make a note in your link campaign log (see Step #5) for each request that you send.

#5 Keep Records

You can best gauge your link campaign's success by having a detailed log of all the links requested and the outcome. It will prevent you from duplicating your efforts and provide you with concrete, measured results.

On the following page, we provide a basic link campaign log for your use. You may choose to adjust it depending on your site and your campaign goals.

Link Campaign Log

Site Name	Site Address	Contact Email	Date Requested	Date Obtained