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## **Not All Links Are Created Equal**

**By Rob Francis**

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When it comes to any website promotion campaign, there are two main areas to focus on. The first area to focus on is your internal campaign, which deals with anything you can do to the pages of your website, such as content, meta tags, and titles. This is completely within your control even if you use a Web designer to do any changes for you, as you can dictate what is on your website. The other area to focus on is your external campaign, which largely deals with getting links from other sites – something that is mostly out of your control and is usually a lot more work.

#### **Internal Campaign**

Links, or hyperlinks to use their full name, are often misunderstood by people wanting to improve their search engine ranking. Links from your website going out to other sites will not boost your search engine ranking, although some relevant, on-topic links to prominent sites can help. Also, creating lots of links to your internal pages is not the same as links from other websites in the eyes of search engines. These two misunderstandings have caught out many a website owner.

The important thing to remember is that you do not want to have too many links on your pages. This does two things that can be deemed harmful to your goal of improving search engine ranking. Having a large list of links on a single page can cause search engines to suspect a link farm, Web ring, or other such unnatural linking structure and your site may be penalized for this. It would be safest to keep the number of links below 50 for any page. The second reason that you don't want too many links is because they drain PR (PageRank). This basically means that the importance of the page, the PR, is divided by the number of outbound links. So you would be better of getting a link from a website page that has a PR of 6 and only 10 outbound links rather than a PR 6 website page with 200 outbound links.

#### **External Campaign**

The real value in links, as far as gaining better ranking in search engines comes from external links. External links are also known as backlinks, and they basically are just links to your website from someone else's website.

There are two types of external links – reciprocal and one-way. Reciprocal links are links from a website in exchange for a return link to that same website. Hence the term reciprocal. Reciprocal links were very popular a few years back but are not as valuable as one-way links. If another site is relevant to the theme of your site then a reciprocal link is still useful so don't dismiss it entirely. What you really want is a one-way link to your website in order to boost your rankings. Gaining one-way links usually comes from supplying a brilliant resource or software. If your site is deemed to contain lots of excellent information that is freely available and original then many others will be happy to place one-way links to your site.

When someone creates a link to your site the text that is used for the link is very important. This is known as the link anchor text. If someone kindly offered to place a link to my website on their homepage, I would ask if they would use specific anchor text for the link. This makes the link much more relevant. My website is about website promotion in New Zealand, so I would want something similar to the following:

Website Promotion New Zealand

as opposed to:

Good NZ promotion site. Click Here

You can see that in the first example, the anchor text is relevant and would help me to rank well for terms such as "website promotion", "website promotion New Zealand", and "New Zealand website promotion". In the second example, I would be improving my ranking for the term "click here".

## Conclusion

There are lots of very technical requirements to getting the right linking strategies and nobody really knows for certain what the exact requirements are. This is because search engines do not disclose information about their ranking algorithms in great detail and also because these algorithms change with time. Different search engines have different requirements that they are looking for, which further complicates matters. Unless you are happy to get involved in SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and spend absolutely ages on it, simply following my advice in this article will improve your search engine rankings and save you a lot of time and headaches.

Rob Francis is currently working towards a Ph.D in E-commerce and Website Management through Rushmore University (USA). He obtained a BSc in Computer Science from Canterbury University and gained Microsoft Certified Professional status. Rob has written two published books "Starting with Microsoft Visual Basic" & "Rescued by Active Server Pages and ASP.NET". He has had over eight years full-time experience in systems administration/development. Rob has also been included in the New Zealand Who's Who Literary Edition 2003.

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