Building 5,000 Links to Your Website

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from the Marketing Online Resource Center at www.zeromillion.com

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Ryan P. Allis, 18, is the founder of zeromillion.com. Ryan has worked in his own website development and ebusiness consulting firm since 1998. As Vice President of Marketing (of a company he cannot mention due to his non-disclosure agreement) he has taken a company from sales of $0 in third quarter 2001 to sales of US$1.3 million in 2002 (projected as of July 2002). More information on Ryan and his upcoming book can be found at http://www.zeromillion.com/about/book.html.

Note: This article is long and is intended as a all-inclusive text on effectively building thousands of links to your website. Reading the article alone will not make a single person link to your site, however. You will need to act, using the information as you go. You may also wish to bookmark our Marketing Online Resource Center at http://www.zeromillion.com/webmarketing/ and print this out as you will be referring to it many times as you build the links to your website over the coming weeks and months.

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1. The importance of having links

As I said earlier, if you want your company and product to be seen, you must make sure that your website is strategically positioned at many different intersections on the Internet. This positioning will come from advertising, search engine listings, and links. Let's first look at how to build links to your website.

Having incoming links to your website is yet another prerequisite of success. Without links your website is an Island, relying solely on someone typing in your website address. With links, your website can become a metropolis with highways, railways, and airports leading prospective customers right to your home page.

Links are not only important in bringing in traffic from other websites, they are critical to having high placements on a search engine. For ultra-competitive keywords such as health, sex, or shopping, if you do not have at least 50,000 links coming to your site you will have no chance at being in the top 10 in the search engines no matter how much optimization you do.

With less competitive keywords in niche markets, generally, a few hundred to a few thousand links should be plenty to drive you to the top of search engines for your targeted keywords (with the right optimization strategy, which we will discuss later).

So now that you know the importance of having links, how do you go about building them?

2. Developing Your Reason to Link

The first step in developing a linking strategy is to develop the reasons that another site would want you link to your site. Unless the benefits of linking to your site are clear, you will have a hard time convincing other site owners to take the time to put up a link to your site. Generally, other website owners will link to you for three reasons…

1.   If you provide great content (or a useful utility) and they want to provide a service to their visitors
2.   If they link to you, you will link to them
3.   If you are willing to pay them for traffic or sales they provide you

This third reason is what occurs when you run an affiliate program. We will talk more about these in a moment. For now, however, let's focus on how to build links to your site without monetary incentives.

Before you begin your process of building links, you need to determine whether or not you are willing to provide reciprocal links. As in all types of networking, reciprocity is essential. Why would you expect another site owner to link to your website if you will not link to theirs? Of course, if your site has enough top quality content, some sites may link to you as a service to their visitors. However, you will receive many more links if you offer

If you do decide to offer reciprocal links, you must now decide how to manage them. You can either add them by hand or install a link manager such as Zeus from cyber-robotics.com or LinkManger from aborior.com.

If you do decide to add them manually in your HTML editor, be sure to create a separate page just for links. To get the best response from potential link partners, you'll want to link to this page from your home page. Also, instead of calling it a Links Page, call it a Resources Page. This will give your visitors a sense that you are providing a service to them and also increase the desirability of having a reciprocal link on your site for potential link partners.

3. Contacting Potential Link Partners

The next step to building links is one of the most important. You need to contact website owners and ask for a link. Here's a sample contact email.

Greetings,

I am the CEO of My Company, a company that provides… I have developed a website on … that has lots of top quality content on …

I would like to exchange links with your site, http://www.yoursite.com. This will benefit us mutually by increasing our search engine positioning and traffic. If you'd like to swap links, just email me back to let

me know where I can find my link and I'll add yours to my site at http://www.mycompany.com/resources/ within 24 hours.

If you'd like to include a description, please use the following…
(describe your site in 20 words or less)

Warm Regards,
Your Name
CEO
My Company
http://www.mycompany.com
(999) 555-5555

4. Finding Potential Link Partners

So where do you find websites to send these to? Generally, just use your favorite search engine to search for related keywords. Then go to the websites and copy down the email address and site url for each one.

Doing it this way, however, can take a very long time. Here are the insider tricks the real marketers use.

5. Using Databases and Mail Merge Mailers

Don't send each email individually. Use a spreadsheet (either Excel or the one that comes with Works) and develop a database of websites and email addresses. Then, using mail merge, send all the emails at once using software such as Mailloop.

Note: Mailloop does cost about $395 but can be used for much more than sending out mail merged emails (you can also run and mail out newsletters and email lists, set up filters on your mail, clean, merge, and organize databases, and much more). It is a very good investment for any company that will be marketing online, will save hundreds of hours of your time, and will be used daily. It can be purchased through http://www.edgepromote.com.

In tab delimited format the database will look like:

[EMAIL] [WEBSITE]
john@aol.com http://www.site.com
ryan@hola.com http://www.hola.com

or if you save it as a Comma Separated Value (.csv) database it will look like…

"[EMAIL]","[WEBSITE]"
"john@aol.com" ,"http://www.site.com"
"ryan@hola.com","http://www.hola.com"

6. Save Hundreds of Hours by Using Automation Software

And here's the tip that will save you hundreds of hours, but you must follow instructions closely or you will find yourself in hot water. Do not use the search engines. Do use a program called Supersonic. Super

Supersonic gives you the ability to search via keyword using the search engines. It queries search engines and then visits the websites of the top results (you can set the depth of results, but unless the

keyword you are searching for is widely used, keep it to the top 100 results). Once this is done, it makes a database for you of the website visited and the email address to the website owner. Then you can use a mail merge mailer such as Mailloop (more info below) to send out these emails at 30 per second.

However, there is a catch. You must (read: absolutely must) visit each site to make sure the site is relevant to yours and that you have the proper email address. Using Supersonic, you simply double click on the database entry and the site will pop up in your browser. If you find any sites that are not relevant or do not have their own domain name (ie - they are on free servers such as Geocities) delete them from the list. Ensuring relevancy is extremely important. You do not want to be emailing any sites that that are not relevant to yours or else you may be accused of sending spam.

Note: You can purchase Supersonic currently for about $395. I am currently working out a deal with the software developers to provide it to you for much less. Email us at info@zeromillion.com if you would like information on how to purchase Supersonic. There are a few other programs that have similar features but I have not used any of these and have not heard from anyone that has.

For example, if you sold a back massager, you would be all right emailing chiropractor websites. However, you would not want to email a website on knitting. The standard of relevancy is of course subjective, but the close you keep to your subject the less chance you have of being accused of sending out unsolicited commercial email (aka spam).

Secondly, you do want to send email to more than one address at each website. Often companies will have an email address for every employee, one for sales, one for customer service, and one for general info. You do not want to send the same email to thirty different email addresses at the same company. Therefore, make sure you delete all but one email for each website.

For example, let's say you wanted to build a database of 10,000 potential link partners. Manually developing this list by going through the search engines would take you about 170 hours. Using a program like Supersonic to develop this list it will take you about 10 hours. Yes, it is possible to develop a list of 10,000 potential link partners in about thirty minutes however if you did this you would likely lose your Internet connection, make a lot of people angry, and have a non-targeted list that is unlikely to give you many links.

And as I said before, do not send these emails one by one. A mail merge program such as Mailloop, using a cable modem connection, can send out ten thousand emails in about ten minutes.

Warning: Do not spam. Although they can, email collectors such as Supersonic should never be used to build lists of consumer emails. Never collect emails from newsgroups or forums. Be sure to check each site for relevance before you send them a link exchange request. Even when taking these precautions, there is a chance you may be accused of spamming. If you accidentally send an email to an address that is not of a website or company and the recipient replies, apologize profusely, explain your error, and remove their name immediately. Sending unsolicited commercial email (UCE) is wrong and we all dislike receiving it. While there are different definitions of UCE, sending an email to a website owner asking to exchange links is generally considered acceptable.

7. Cutting a Few Weeks off the Process by Submitting Your Links to The Search Engines

As I've said before, there are two reasons main reasons to build incoming links. First, to receive the direct traffic coming from the sites that link to you. And second, to increase your rankings in the search engines.

Building quality links to your site can take a lot of time. If you have your eye on top positions in the search engines for very specific keywords (e.g. Durango Hot-Air Ballooning) then you will not need very many links (20-30 would be fine). However, if you want to have a chance at being in the top positions for more competitive keywords you better aim to have a lot more incoming links.

However, just having these links will do nothing to increase your ranking. The search engines must know that other sites are linking to you. Eventually, the website your site is on will be found. However, this can take months. It is a good thing to speed up this process by submitting the URL where your link is on to the search engines. You can do this for free at http://www.submitexpress.com/. It will take about 20 seconds for each link.

With five hundred links, this process may take a couple extra hours, but will shorten the time until you are at the top of the search engines by about three weeks. How do you know where your links are? Well, if you take another look at the above sample email you will notice that the website owner must let you know where your link is for you to link to them. Once they get back to you, simply submit their URL to the search engines via submitexpress.com, add their link and description to your resources page, and delete them from your database.

8. Doubling Your Response by Following Up

Often times, it will take more than one contact to spur a website owner to swap links with your site. It is therefore important to send a follow-up email about a week later to everyone that has not either said yes or no already.

To do this, you will need to read each response to your link request mailout and delete entries in your database of people who have responder. You will need to be organized and methodical to do this properly.

Then about seven days later, resend the original email with a "Just wanted to resend this to make sure you got it. I'd really like to swap links with you. Please would you let me know either way" attached to the top of it. Assuming you start with a list of ten thousand, maintaining your database may take a couple extra hours, but you will likely double your response on the second mailout.

You can follow-up a week later with those you haven't heard from, but generally by now the risk of annoying someone to the point they'll report you as a spammer outweighs the benefits of additional links.

In summary, any site owner that has invested some time in developing a professional design and quality content on their website should be able to build 500 links to their site with about 20 hours of work. Properly leveraging the use of software such as Mailloop and Supersonic to automate the repetitive tasks will save many hours in this process. These links will pay off very well as you begin to receive traffic from each link and in a 4-8 weeks when you see your site in the top positions for your targeted keywords.

9. But I Said 5,000 Links, Not 500: The Real Insider Tricks

This article is entitled how to build 5,000 links, not how to build 500. So how does one build the other 4,500? Well that is where the real tricks of the trade come in.

Here are a few insider secrets to building thousands and thousands of links to a website...

10. Using the Zeus Collective

Earlier, I mentioned Zeus from http://www.cyber-robotics.com. Zeus can be used to manage links to and from your website. However, even if you do not use Zeus on your website, you can still use their database of websites at http://www.zeuscollective.com/.

Simply go to the website and do a search for a keyword related to your industry, topic, product, or website. For example, a search for "health" brought up sixty-seven websites. These websites use the Zeus software to manage their links. All you have to do is go to each site, post a link to their site on your

website, and email the site owner to ask for a reciprocal link. Of course, you can do this with many more than one keyword. With about three hours of work you can build another 200 links to your site.

Note: Be sure to only link with and contact related sites. Un-related or low quality sites will not improve your search engine ranking and may even make it worse if you link to a site that has been blacklisted for spamming the search engines. It is hard to know if the site is "blacklisted" however if the site has good content and a professional design you should be safe. For your information, each search engine has its own rules against spamming. Offenses that may get a site banned from an engine include repeating keywords more than three times in keyword meta tag, using some forms of cloaking (directing each search engine to a different optimized page by their IP address than what a normal user would see), using the same color text as the background, having lists of keywords on a page that provide no added-value, and submitting to the search engines too many pages too often (don't submit more than five pages per day to any engine).

11. Stealing Your Competitors' Links

All right, you really can't steal your competitors links. However, you can get the same sites that link to your competitor to link to you. How?

Well first you need to find out who links to your competitors. To do this, simple go to http://www.altavista.com and type in "link:yourcompetitor.com" in the search bar. This will bring up all the sites that link to your competitor's website. Go to each one, and add their email address and website to a database. You can use the same mail merge database and time-saving tips as before or if there are not too many you may wish to email each site separately.

This can take some time, but from a marketing standpoint it is a good thing to make sure those that are currently linking to your competitors know that your company and product/service exists. The same goes for the visitors on these websites. You will not be able to obtain a link on every site, however, if you follow-up and provide a reciprocal link you should be able to get a link on at least half these websites. This process many be more time consuming and not give you as many links, however it is key to gain this mindshare and marketshare by positioning yourself wherever your competitors are.

12. Building Links by Posting to Discussion Groups

Another way to build up links to your website is to be a regular contributor to the message boards related to your industry/topic/product/company. You will not build hundreds of links overnight like you can with a well-executed related site mailing (read Finding Potential Link Partners above), however, if you only make five posts a day with a link to your website in your signature file (sig file) after your name you will build another 150 links to your site each month.

The key, however, is to follow the threads (messages) closely and answer questions. Become a contributing member that adds value to the community. Do not just post an advertisement for your product then never return. These posts will likely be deleted and you will not have developed any rapport, greatly decreasing the chances any member will purchase anything from you.

You can post replies to questions, ask questions of your own, and post quality (on-topic) articles that you have written. As you become a contributing member of the community you will have built trust and will be able to mention your product or service (as a solution to a posted problem) without being flamed (yelled at). This will bring you both new sales and new links.

To find communities, use search engines to search for "your topic message boards." Also, check out the communities at http://www.deja.com.

Once you've posted your messages, you can reduce the time it takes for the search engines to index the page (and increase your link count) by copying the exact page your post is on and submitting it (for free) to the search engines at http://www.submitexpress.com. This will not work for all your posts as some will be dynamically generated through databases, however, this will work for some.

13. Using Press Releases to Build Links

A well-planned and well-executed publicity campaign is an integral part of a successful marketing plan. Unless your company is a public company (your shares are traded in the stock exchanges) or a very large private company, you will need to be creative in creating newsworthy events and work hard to develop relationships to get coverage in the news. For more on executing a successful publicity campaign read my article "Publicity Success" in the Marketing Resource Center.

Sending out press releases can be a great way to build hundreds of links to your website, but only if this is part of a well-executed publicity campaign centered around a newsworthy story.

If you do not have something especially newsworthy, you can pick up a few links on news archiving websites by sending out a release. However, this is an expensive way to pick up a few links. With just a bit more creativity, work, and time (and money if you chose to hire a publicist), you can not only build many links to your site but more importantly receive coverage on these sites and in magazines and newspapers.

The top two services for disseminating press releases are PR Newswire (http://www.prnewswire.com) and Businesswire (http://www.businesswire.com). If you plan to manage your campaign yourself or in house, you'll want to visit Bacon's (http://www.baconsinfo.com) and MediaMap (http://www.mediamap.com), both directories of press contacts.

Once again, for more on executing a successful publicity campaign read my article "Publicity Success" in the Marketing Resource Center.

15. The #1 Best Way to Build Thousands of Links to Your Site: Affiliate Programs

At last check, amazon.com had close to 9,000,000 incoming links to its website. How did they obtain so many links? Well, quite a few are from contacting link partners (in the very very early going), sending out press releases, and getting coverage in the media. However, the large majority of their links come from their affiliates. Who are their affiliates? Well, website owners who have signed up to place a link to amazon.com on their website in exchange for a percentage (5-15% in this case) of sales that originate from their website.

They great thing about affiliate programs is that (in a Cost Per Acquisition -CPA- model at least) you do not pay a thing until after you've made a sale. So as long as your customers pre-pay and are not on credit, you already receive the revenue to pay the affiliate in your bank account before their commission is due. In other words, as long as your supply chain can handle it, you will be able to afford an unlimited amount of advertising and can potentially have a sales team of thousands marketing and selling your product. Sure beats the in house sales representatives of old (though they still may have a place)!

If you are not selling a product or service, then you will not be able to build links in this manner, however, for anyone selling a product online, having an affiliate program is a must.An affiliate program can not only do wonders for sales, but it can also give you thousands of incoming links.

Building a successful affiliate program can take time, effort, promotion, and (some) money. However, once you have your program running with a few hundred affiliates you can put it on autodrive and guarantee yourself many thousands of dollars in sales each month. For more information on building your own affiliate program read my article, "The Other Side of The Coin: Building, Promoting, and

Running Your Own Affiliate Program" in the Marketing Online Resource Center.

15. Submitting Your Site to the Search Engines

It is generally going to take at least two weeks (working 3-5 hours each day) to build your initial base of 500-1000 links. It will take 4-8 weeks more for the search engines to index these sites that have linked to you. After you have a few hundred incoming links (and you have submitted the sites that have linked to you using SubmitExpress and optimized your web pages for the search engines) you can go ahead and use a program such as WebPosition Gold at http://www.webposition.com to submit your website (submit five pages a day each day until all your pages have been submitted) to the search engines. For more information on getting top positions in the search engines, read my article, "Search Engine Optimization."

16. Tracking Your Progress & Seeing Who is Linking To You

As I said earlier, just because you have incoming links does not mean the search engines will know about each one right away. Even if you submit each page with a link to you to the search engines, it will still take between 4-8 weeks to "show up" in the search engines' databases.

So how do you check to see how many pages with links to your site have been indexed by the search engines?

You can use a utility at http://www.linkpopularity.com to determine the number of links to you from Altavista, Google, and Hotbot (however, due to recent changes in the search engines the hotbot and google results will not be accurate or present at all unless you click through to the actual sites).

You can also do this directly by typing in "link:http://www.yoursite.com" at http://www.altavista.com or http://www.google.com or by typing in "http://www.yoursite.com" at http://www.hotbot.com.

You can also use a handy utility called Alexa to tell you not only how many incoming links you have to your site, but also the "ranking" of your site by traffic levels. This is also a good tool to tell you very quickly how popular the sites are of potential affiliates, strategic alliances, and competitors. You can download the Alexa toolbar at http://www.alexa.com.

17. Complete Summary: 20 Steps to Linking Success

Executing a well-planned linking strategy will benefit you with increased visitors coming to your website, increased exposure within your target market(s), and better search engine rankings. However, to build lots of links to your website you must be willing to invest the time (or money if you chose to hire someone) needed to do it right. There are no "get lots of links quick without any work schemes," however there are many "build hundreds and maybe thousands of links to your site in a few weeks" techniques.

With your own domain name, a professional design, and lots of quality content on your site and by following the steps outlined in this article you should be able to build 500 links by spending about 30 hours over a two week time period. This link building process should commence AFTER the design has been completed, lots of quality content added, and a working site running (no broken links, easy-to-use navigation, etc.) and BEFORE you submit your website to the search engines (for top positions, submit your website to the search engines two weeks after you have submitted the first few hundred links to your sites).

In review, to build links your site, do the following...

1. Register your own domain name

2. Hire a professional to design and develop your site, or learn how to do it yourself by reading my article Domain and Website 101. Make sure the design is professional, the site loads under 15

seconds on a 56k modem, and the navigation is constant and easy to use.

3. Develop lots (at least 20 articles/pages but preferably much more) of quality (and related) content for your website

4. Develop your reason(s) to link. Why would a site want to link yours? What is in it for them? Will you be offering reciprocal links, paying those who link to you, hoping for links from those who see your site as a top quality resource, or all of the above?

5. Find potential link partners by either using the search engines to search for related sites or by using an automation program such as Supersonic (big time saver but you must be careful and follow instructions given in article closely)

6. Either email these potential partners one-by-one (very time consuming) or develop a database (in a spreadsheet such as Excel or Works Spreadsheet) or simply a comma separated value text file with the following fields: [email] [website]. Supersonic will develop this database automatically once you confirm each entry's relevance by double-clinking on each entry and viewing each website. Information on how to do this can be found under "Using Databases and Mail Merge Mailers" above. If you are interested in purchasing SuperSonic email us at info@zeromillion.com. You will want to develop as large as database as possible (with only related sites of course). You can expect somewhere between a 2-7% link rate from your first mailing and another 2-7% from a follow-up mailing a week later. So for example if you spend some time to develop a database of 10,000 related websites you can expect to receive between 400 and 1400 links after two mailouts (depending on the quality of your site and content and how targeted your list is).

7. Once you have developed your database, use Mailloop 5.0 to send out your email (email template found above in article) to all your potential link partners in a matter of minutes. Mailloop does cost about $395 but can do much more than just send out mail merge email and is a very good investment for any company doing business online and will save lots of time. You can purchase Mailloop at http://www.edgepromote.com.

8. In your email to potential link partners, be sure to ask them to tell you on what web page they have placed the link to you. Go to these pages to check your link is there, then add their link to your website. Never "forget" (either by mistake or purposely) to reciprocate the link or else your link will not last long and all this effort will have been for nothing.

9. Once you see your link on another page, take note (read: create database) of all the pages (use the exact web address, not just the domain) that have a link to you. Then, using http://www.submitexpress.com submit these pages to the major search engines (it's free). This will take about 20 seconds for each page but will reduce the time it takes for the search engines to recognize that these pages are linking to you (usually by a number of weeks).

10. When you receive responses to your email, if someone requests to not be emailed again, take them off your database immediately. In keeping your database updated you must be organized and methodical. If not, you may be accused of sending UCE (spam).

11. If someone has added a link to your site, add a link on your site to there site, then email them to thank them and tell them exactly where they can find their link. This is essential to make sure your link stays up. Install software such as Zeus or LinkManager to make the process of adding links less task-intensive. You can always do it all by hand but this takes more time and makes it hard to update links.

12. By now, you should have spent perhaps forty hours obtaining between 400 and 1400 links. This has been time very well spent. You will now (with the right optimization and submission practices) have a much greater chance at being in the top positions on your targeted keywords in the search engines. You can now submit your site to the search engines using software such as WebPosition Gold. For more information on obtaining top search engine positions read my article "Search Engine

Optimization"

13. You will also have a built a critical mass of an initial stream of traffic that will enable you to make your first sales, develop a mailing list, and give you feedback on your site. This has taken you about two weeks to do and will take another 4-8 weeks to be recognized in the search engines. Now let's focus on how we can build thousands more links over the course of the next few months.

14. Use http://www.zeuscollective.com to find related sites. All the sites in this database own the Zeus software and are willing to link to related sites. This should enable you to pick up a couple hundred more links.

15. Go to altavista.com and type in "link:yourcompetitor.com." This will bring up a list of all the websites that link to your competitors' websites. Develop a database of these sites and follow the same process as before to build links on these sites. It is important to position yourself wherever your competitors are if possible to build both mindshare and marketshare.

16. Find related message boards, forums, and online discussions and become a member. Post answers to questions and quality related articles you've written. Just five posts each day will build an additional 150 links to your site each month. Over time this can really add up. Don't blatantly advertise. Rather, become a contributor to the communities, visit often, post often, and offer your expertise. This will build not only links, but also rapport and sales.

17. Having a well-executed publicity campaign can also add many hundreds of top quality links. However, don't just send out press releases just to get links. Either hire a publicist or spend some time on your own building relationships, offering yourself as a resource, making contacts, and doing something that is really newsworthy BEFORE you send out your press release. Read my article "Publicity Success" before you begin your publicity campaign. Executed properly, publicity will not only bring you thousands of links, but also many many sales.

18. If you are selling a product or offering a service on your website, you must to have an affiliate program. Done right, an affiliate program can provide you with a sales force thousands strong whom you only pay after they make the sale (using only part of the profits from the sale) and provide you with thousands of incoming links. Read my article on affiliate programs to learn how to properly build, run, and promote your program.

19. You can use tools such as linkpopularity.com and the http://www.alexa.com to determine the number of links to your website.

20. Bookmark this page, print out a copy by clicking on the print button in the top left or going to File > Print, and most importantly, take action now!

Warm regards,
Ryan P. Allis
Founder: http://www.zeromillion.com

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