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LINK BUILDING

METHODS TO AVOID

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Through the first half of 2012, there are those that would argue that SEO changed greatly due to Google's crackdown on what are commonly called private blog networks (although they were never really private) and the release of Google's Penguin filter in April of that year. I say that is nonsense. While spammy link building techniques that worked in the past may have seen their ranking power diminished, it was not the massive change in the industry many people claim it to be. In reality, it was simply Google working towards their actual results aligning more with their often preached about best practices.

If you have ever watched the movie Office Space (and if you have not, what the hell is wrong with you?), think of the scene where the consultants (the two Bob's) are sitting with Lumbergh and discussing the fate of some of Initech's employees. They get to Milton (the guy with the red Swingline stapler that mumbles all the time) and have the conversation about how he was supposed to be let go a few years ago, but due to a glitch in the system he continued to receive paychecks. Rather than sitting down with him to discuss his new found unemployment, they just "fixed the glitch".

That is what Google did. Spammy links were never supposed to allow you to rank a website. However, due to a "glitch" in the algorithm, in some SERPs they did work. Google did not change the SEO industry. They just "fixed the glitch".

I am not going to argue whether or not they succeeded in their goal of improving search results or not. I am well aware that many out there feel that Google's search engine result pages (SERPs) actually got worse after Penguin. They will point out low quality sites now sitting at the top of some search query. My argument is that low quality sites sitting on top of some search queries existed long before Penguin came along. None of us have access to enough data to determine if that is a more or a less prevalent occurrence now.

I also cannot say I have found anyone arguing that SERPs got worse after the blog network massacre and Penguin updates who did not have a site negatively impacted by those changes, so I tend to take those arguments for what they are; bitter lashing out for some perceived wrong done to the accusers by Google.

I know some of you are going to try to argue that there are low quality link building techniques that still work. Guess what? You are right, but I would ask you, "Do you think they will always work?" I do not. That is why I have always stayed away from those kinds of link building methods for my clients.

We know that Google is going to continue to try to perfect their algorithm and release other major updates like Panda and Penguin to not only discredit low quality links that manipulate the search results, but also to go as far as to punish websites that utilize them. What Google does, the other major search engines are sure to follow suit.

Knowing that, I wanted to create a report from a slightly different point of view. You can find plenty of SEO and link building guides around the internet. This is not a report to discuss what is working today. I have no desire to get into a debate with anyone about whether or not Link Method A works better than Link Method B or if Link Method A and Link Method B even work at all. I will leave that to those with far too much time on their hands to debate back and forth on internet marketing and SEO forums. The aim of this report is to discuss link methods that are both likely to come under fire from the Google Webspam Team and that leave a clear, easily identifiable footprint. In other words, they are easy to target, often abused by marketers, and could be next on Google's chopping block (or already are).

In some cases, these are techniques that I know are used fairly frequently by internet marketers. You might even be using some of these methods. I know when you read this, you might be thinking, "But this is working for me. Why would I change it?" If you are just after making a quick buck, you may not want to change it. However, if you are looking to create a long-lasting, sustainable presence online, you might want to take a hard look at what you are doing and keep an open mind to what I am suggesting.

For those of you that do SEO work for a living, this is even more important. I know many people that considered themselves SEOs saw their business diminish in the beginning of the year when Google started removing major blog networks from their index, and then their business completely vanished in April when

Penguin was released. Not only did their client's rankings disappear, but so did their credibility and trust as their client's SEO.

My goal for you is that when Google unleashes its next major update you are not one of those webmasters left wondering why your website went from the top 3 in the SERPs to somewhere outside the top 500 listings.

For the SEOs reading this, I have never had a client negatively hit by one of Google's major updates. That should be your goal too. That is what the quote is about in the footer of this report.

If your primary concern in SEO is Google's ever changing algorithm, you are doing it wrong.

Of course keeping up with and understanding what Google is doing is the job of every SEO. However, if your methods keep you awake at night worrying whether or not your sites or the sites of your clients are going to drop in ranking tomorrow, you might want to rethink your link building strategy. If every time you hear about Google unleashing some major algorithm update, your heart skips a beat wondering if sites you were working on were impacted, you might want to look into linking strategies that are better suited for long-term success.

Your time should be spent researching your client's competitors, seeking out new linking opportunities, and researching new keywords, and not running a business that changes every time Google makes an update.

Having said all of that, here are eight link building tactics to stay away from and one bonus strategy to avoid at the end.

1.) The Obvious Blog Network.

If you have researched the backlinks of enough websites, you have undoubtedly come across the obvious blog network. These are the sites where as soon as you open the page it just smacks you in the face that it is a part of a blog network. There is no doubting it whatsoever. This is a pretty blatant one to stay away from after Google cracked down on networks like Build My Rank and Authority Link Network earlier in 2012. However, they are still out there. Some were not snuffed

out yet. New ones are also popping up. If you find someone you hired to build links for you is putting links on sites like this, fire them and run. Quickly.

For those of you that are unsure, and want to know, "How do you identify an obvious blog network?" Here are some clear giveaways:
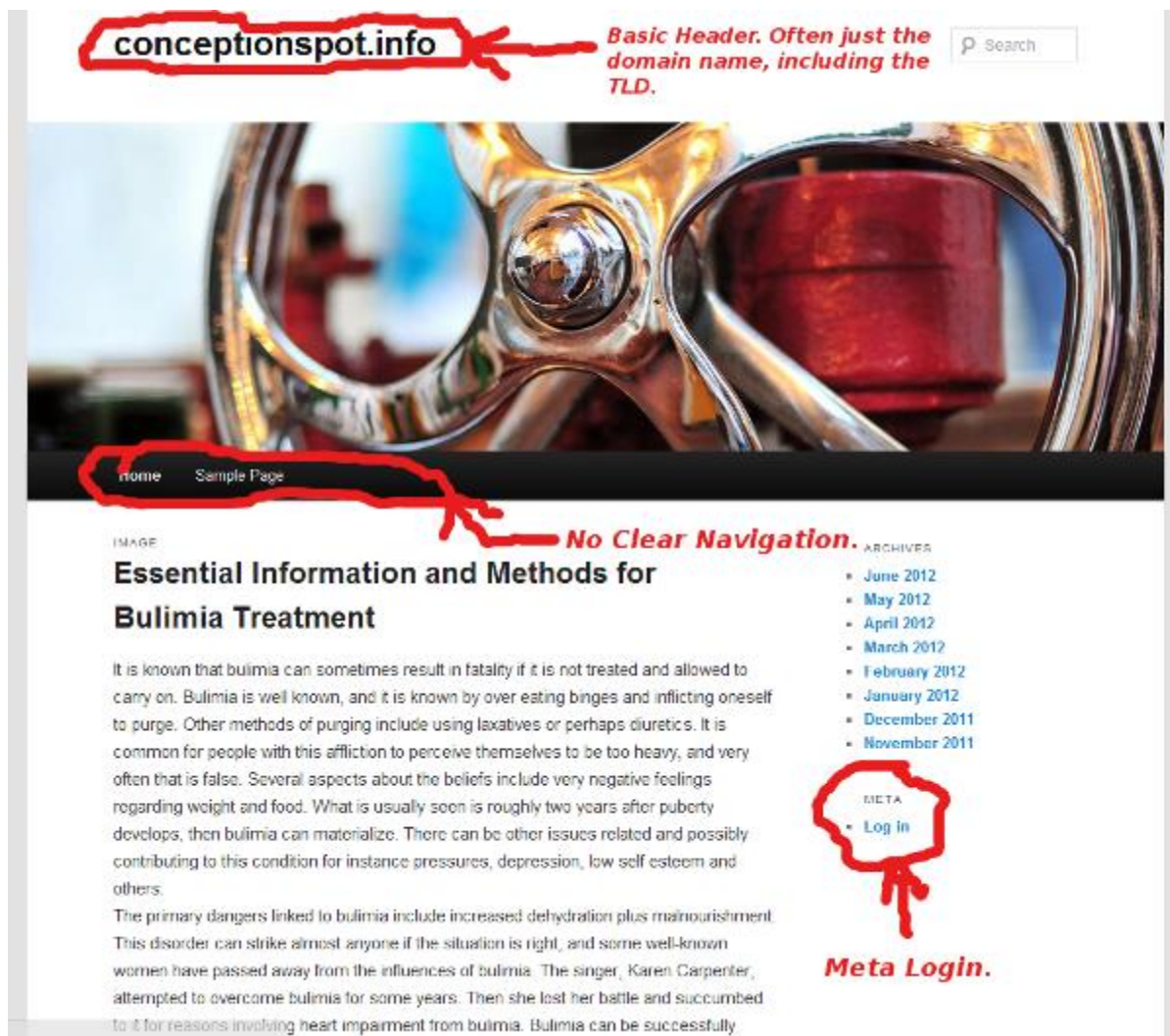
You will often find sites in a blog network do not have a customized header. Many times it is nothing more than the domain name, including the TLD. No graphics, or if there are graphics, it is just the stock graphics that are part of the Wordpress theme. Sometimes they do have a real navigation menu, but often times you will find nothing but a "Home" button. Other times they use categories as their navigation, but they will have lots of them. They have so many that normally the

navigation bar runs 3-4 lines deep. This example was extremely lazy. They did not even bother deleting Wordpress's Sample Page that is present when you first install Wordpress. They will also usually have the Meta Login information visible. There are some real sites that do leave this in the open, but nearly all real Wordpress webmasters remove this.
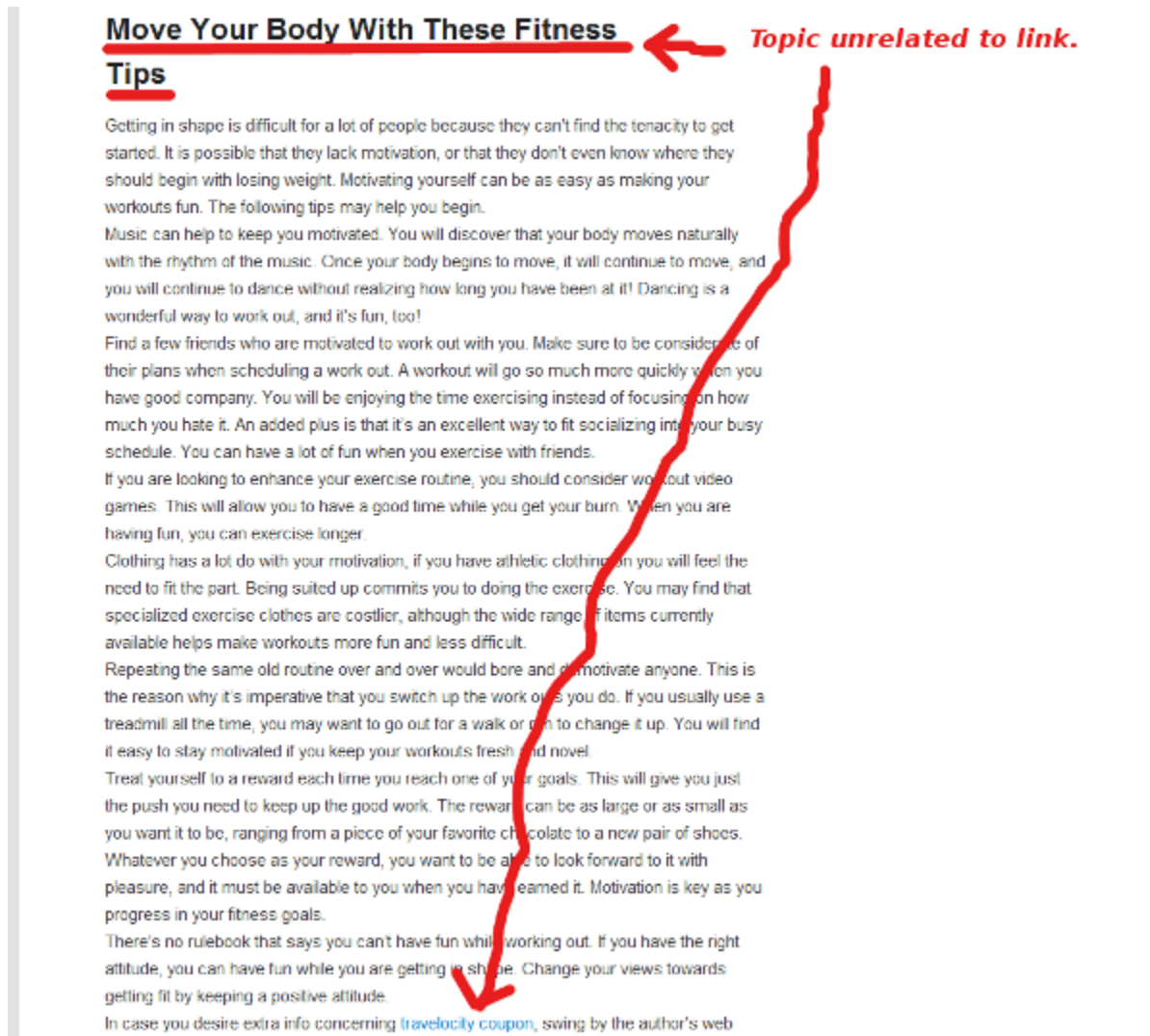
Another common giveaway of a blog network is links completely unrelated to the articles they are embedded in. In this case, you can see a "Travelocity coupon" link at the end of an article about fitness tips. Penguin has targeted these kinds of links to some degree, but not nearly as harshly as I think Google may target them in the future.

These types of sites have a clear, identifiable footprint that can easily be targeted by search engines.

This brings up the question, do private networks still work at all? The answer is most certainly yes, but you have to understand [how to build quality private networks designed to last](#).

2.) Profile Links.

While many believe these have already been targeted and discredited by Google, there is some evidence that points to the contrary. For those unfamiliar with these types of links, they are created at sites where you have to join as a member and are then given your own personal profile to maintain. They are most common on forums, but other websites support them as well. Many of these profiles allow you to fill out personal information about yourself and will also give you the ability to include a link or multiple links to a website.

Google could completely wipe these links out from their index any time they choose because they are easily identifiable. For example, many of the forum platforms like vBulletin or SMF keep their profiles in a subdirectory titled "members" or something similar. Other platforms have a distinct URL structure for their member profiles with something like "profile=usernameXYZ" at the end of it. Search engines could just discount links coming from pages in which the URL structure fits these categories matched with other incriminating factors like "Powered by vBulletin" at the bottom of the page.

These first two examples are fairly obvious. I think most people who used these tactics in the past have already gravitated away from them, but I know they are still in use. Now we get into some examples that are a little more complex.

3.) Syndicating Articles Containing Varied Anchor Text Links.

Many people believe in article syndication as a link building method. Some people post articles in popular article directories and ask webmasters for guest posting opportunities to distribute content and build links back to their websites. Other people take article syndication even farther and blast their articles to thousands of article directories.

What I see people often do with this marketing strategy is they place a link in the same place of the article, but they spin the anchor text to different variations in order to build links for multiple keywords. Search engines do not mind the same article showing up on multiple websites. Just look at the articles syndicated across the world from the Associated Press. However, if the same article is showing up on a lot of different websites with a link to the same webpage, but on some sites it contains a link to "weight loss tips", on others it has a link to "how to lose weight", others link to "lose weight fast", and still others link to "exercise tips for weight loss" is that not an obvious sign that someone is trying to manipulate the algorithm for multiple keywords? A similar situation is the same article linking to different pages on the same website or even to different websites altogether.

I know many IM courses out there teach you to vary your anchor text, but doing it in the same article is giving Google a clear sign that you are trying to manipulate your ranking for multiple keywords. I believe this kind of linking could be a future target.

Let's look at an example of what I mean. Here is a paragraph from an article about burning fat.

No matter what exercise you choose, there's only so much _fat you can burn_ during, say, a 30-minute workout. And research shows that the better trained you become, the more your body's "exercise efficiency" improves—meaning the same amount of activity burns fewer calories as time goes by. For instance, University of California at Berkeley scientists determined that to avoid age-related weight gain, avid runners need to boost their weekly mileage by 1.7 miles every year.

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The paragraphs are identical, except the anchor text I underlined. In the first example, the article is being used to target "fat you can burn", in the second "burning fat", and in the third "fat burning". This is a clear and easy target for Google. My advice is if you are going to syndicate articles, keep the anchor text you use and the page you link to the same in each original article.

4.) Linking From Different Places From Within The Same Article.

This is very similar to the above example, but it is a slight variation. An example of this would be distributing an article that in some cases has a link in the first sentence, in others a link in the second paragraph, and in others no links until the last sentence. In all of these cases the article is exactly the same, the variation is in where you choose to have the link in the article to your webpage. The anchor text may or may not be different in this case.

This is leaving the same kind of footprint as the previous example. It is something easy for a search engine to pinpoint and either discredit or penalize.

5.) Spun Content.

This is one I see debated a lot in internet marketing circles. Should you or should you not spin your content. Generally speaking, those who advocate spinning content are the same people who are selling some sort of software that spins content or makes use of spun content.

When I refer to spun content in this situation I am referring specifically to autospun content. That is the kind of spun content where you plug an article into some tool like The Best Spinner, hit a button, and it automatically substitutes synonyms and phrases in for single words or phrases of words. It is the lazy marketer's attempt at creating "original" content.

I have had many people argue with me in the past that Google cannot recognize this autospun content. The GooglePlex has a higher concentration of PhD's working there than NASA. If a program can be written to spin something with the click of a button, then I have no doubt that search engines can incorporate code into their algorithm to recognize autospun content. Trust me, if they want to start tracking this content down, they can do it.

Now it is entirely possible that the amount of processing power it would take to do this on a large scale is not worth it for them to do. I have had this very discussion with some programmers that understand a lot better than I the processing power involved to incorporate such a detection system into the search algorithm. It is a very real possibility that it takes up too many resources. However, as technology gets better and better, that may become a moot point in the future. Also, it is possible that Google could incorporate an update like that similar to the way they do with Panda and Penguin. Panda and Penguin are not real-time algorithm filters because of the resources they require. Instead Google simply does a data refresh on the filters from time to time. An autospun content filter could operate in a similar fashion.

Remember, this is only autospun content I am talking about. If you take an article and completely rewrite it into multiple variations, that is something completely different and likely much safer.

6.) Blog Commenting.

This one will probably be more controversial for some of you. I can hear you screaming now that you only leave comments that are high quality and provide value. I'm sure you do (</sarcasm>).

This is one that many internet marketers cling to as an entirely white hat solution to link building. A few years ago, you could rank a site almost entirely on blog comments for low to medium competition keywords. This is one Google has looked the other way on for a long time.

What is wrong with blog comment links? Well, nothing really, but let me point out that you will not find any large corporations ranking based on blog comments. As Google moves more and more towards a preference for authority sites, you could see these go away. I do not think that Google or any other major search engine will penalize sites that have blog comment links. What they might do is one day decide they have been abused enough by internet marketers and just discredit them all. Yep, with one fell swoop, they could choose to ignore blog comment links. It would be easy too.

The popular blog platforms like Wordpress, Tumblr, Blogger, etc. all have pretty easy to recognize code on their webpages for blog comments. All it would take is a little tweak in the algorithm, and Google could start ignoring any links recognized inside that code, and every single one of them would lose the ranking power that they had.

Many people would think their site has been penalized, when in actuality it just lost a large chunk of links holding it up. Remember I'm not arguing what works and does not work. I'm only pointing out links that could be easy targets for search engines in the future.

7.) Spammy Tier 2, Tier 3…. Tier 7 Links

First, for those of you not familiar with the term Tier 2 links, it refers to links pointing at your backlinks. It's an extra layer of links with the idea being to strengthen the links pointing at your main site. Some people do multiple tiers like this.

I know a lot of people that will take advantage of the mass quantity of links that can be built by tools like Scrapebox, Xrumer, and SEnuke X and point these links at their backlinks instead of their main website. The idea being that they are creating a layer of insulation around their main website and protecting it.

Google has been taking a hard look at the quality of links pointing to a website, especially with its Penguin update this year. The next logical step is to take a look at the links that point to those links, is it not? If you think Google is not paying attention to trends and is not fully aware that people are trying to exploit the SERPs through tiered linking, you are just fooling yourself.

If you are not willing to point the link at your website, then I would not point it at a link pointing to your website either.

8.) Signature Links

Similar to the blog comment links I mentioned above, you will not find any major business with their website ranking based on signature links. This is another one that is often abused by marketers, and that Google has also long looked the other way on.

I do not know that they will ever come down hard on this type of link, but one thing I could clearly see them targeting in the very near future are the unrelated links in the same signature. You have probably seen a lot of these links in different forums. I went searching for a few examples, and I found four of them in the same thread. Three of them were actually back-to-back-to-back.

Thank you very much. I will do it.

Cheap coach bags sale | Discount Tiffany sale | Luxury Replica Watches Handbags |Best Replica Watches

QUOTE   MULTIQUOTE   QUICK REPLY   THANKS

Thanks for the reminder on software creation. It's been on my to-do list for quite some time, but I have never taken the time to actually give it a try. It's now on my weekly to-do list.

real estate marketing Escondido restaurant
Mark's Wine Blog

QUOTE   MULTIQUOTE   QUICK REPLY   THANKS

yes very nice its really helpful but can abyone provide more information in this regard...

This is my favorite sites: Weight Loss tips | Online Prescriptions

QUOTE   MULTIQUOTE   QUICK REPLY   THANKS

Very nice charts. It helps to visually see them as opposed to just thinking what needs to be done next. Hopefully you will keep updating with suggestions as SEO changes on a daily basis it seems.

Thanks again

Ain't selling anything so.....
Milwaukee Accounting
Milwaukee Chiropractor
Milwaukee SEO
Guess you know where I live now.

QUOTE   MULTIQUOTE   QUICK REPLY   THANKS

In the past, I have found some with as many as 8-10 links in the signature all going out to unrelated websites. Now taking into account the fact that signature code is very easy to decipher in HTML on a page, it is easy to see how Google could target links like this in general, but especially when they see someone linking to things that are often not even closely related to one another within the same signature.

I am not going to argue whether or not using signature links is right or wrong. Just remember that Google is targeting sites that are blatantly trying to manipulate the search results. Do sites utilizing this type of link fit into the category of trying to manipulate search rankings? I will let you be the judge of that. I think you can agree though that if Google and the other major search engines decided to target sites with link profiles utilizing links like this, it would be very easy for them to do.

Personally, I have always found signature links to be a great source of direct traffic if you participate in a niche related forum. For anything other than that, I think they are a waste of time.

By the way, the signatures in the examples above were taken from a very popular internet marketing forum, a forum that clearly has a lot to do with "replica watches" and "Milwaukee accounting". </sarcasm>

Bonus →Pinging Links

I promised you one bonus tactic that I would steer clear from, and here it is. Do not ping your links. There are two things to consider here. First of all, if you are building good quality links, the search engines are going to find them without you pinging them.

Second, is pinging your links not a gigantic giveaway to search engines that you are link building? You might as well just write a letter to Matt Cutts and the Webspam Team and let them know what you are up to.

I never ping the links that I build. If Google cannot find the link on its own, it probably was not going to help boost my rank at all then anyhow.

Conclusion

I saw the Penguin update coming long ago; only I thought it would be much harsher than it actually was. You can rest assured that in the next few years Google will continue to refine its search algorithm with other updates similar to Penguin, targeting what they deem to be webspam.

You might be thinking that eliminating these tactics from your link building toolbox is going to make doing SEO a lot harder.

For some of you that might be true, but I would ask you this: Is it harder to eliminate these methods of building links, or is it harder to start over after your website has lost all of its rankings?