

Link-building: How to get your site seen

People look for sites in different ways: many people have a set of addresses they can remember (like google.com, bbc.co.uk, hotmail.com) which they type straight into the browser's address bar. Other ones they can't remember, so they search for them by name (for instance Amazon, Twitter or National Geographic). Other sites, they don't know the name, so they search for keywords, like graphic designers Bristol, or bus timetables. Depending on their skills or patience, they may or may not find what they're looking for.

TASK 1: The name

Your first task is to choose a web address that people can remember. Google is a good example – it's a funny sounding word, but it's quick to type, easy to remember, easy to spell and easy to SAY – if your address was “qjumperonehundred.com” you'd get sick of explaining that it's spelt with the letter 'q' and it's “one hundred” not “100”! Especially if it was your email address too.

Using your business name is a good idea, because people who know you already will just need to remember whether it's .com or .co.uk etc at the end.

Sites like 123reg.co.uk allow you to type an address and will check to see if any of the .com, .co.uk, org.uk etc variations are available for you to register.

TASK 2: Get it known

Once you have your site name, and the site is all nicely built, GET THE NAME KNOWN! Print it on your correspondence, clothes, vehicles, cards. Tell people, put it at the bottom of emails and forum posts. And here's where Google and the rest of the search engines come in! Your designer should have made sure your web site is “search engine friendly”, but you can make your site more visible, if that's what you need.

Remember what your site's there for – who do you want to visit it, and how will they be trying to get there? The example of Google again: not a lot of people search for Google. They just go straight there.

It's better to have 10 visitors a day who find your site useful, than 10,000 who aren't at all interested: they'll just be slowing your site down.

Getting the right visitors is all about advertising in the right places. So, find other sites that are like yours and ask them to link to you. Offer to link back to them too. Put links in relevant forums, blogs, local lists of organisations and online documents. This is called “link building”.

The march of the robots

Search engine companies like Google need to come up with relevant results or people won't use them. If your search engine gave you links to gambling and porn links when you looked for “cake recipes”, you'd probably switch to a different search engine pretty quick! So the search engine companies use various methods to make sure the sites they are listing are actually what they claim to be.

One of these methods is the “friend-of-a-friend” approach. In the same way that we're more likely to trust our friends' friends than complete strangers, the search engines judge a site's reputation by which other sites are linking to and from it. Those with links to and from scam/porn/piracy/gambling/virus sites get a *low* reputation score, as do sites that are using cheating techniques such as linking to hundreds of sites that have no relevance to the contents.

Those with links to high quality *relevant* sites get a high reputation score. The careful link building you did earlier should put your site in this category.

Then, even if a search doesn't take people straight to your site (which hopefully it will, in time, as search engine companies update their search lists), it will take them to a page that has a link to your site. People will still be able to find your site, and they'll know that your site is approved of by another organisation, a bit like a recommendation from a friend.