



Lesson 7: Search Engine Optimisation - Off page

On completion of this lesson you should:

- Understand the difference between on page and off page search engine optimisation
- Understand the importance of gaining back links to your website
- Understand the difference between one way links and reciprocal links
- Understand different ways to build links

Introduction

In the SEO On Page lesson we mentioned that there were two types of search engine optimisation - 'on page' optimisation and 'off page' optimisation? Well as you will remember, the last lesson you completed was about 'on page' optimisation, which is what you can do to your website to improve its performance in the search engines.

This week, the focus is on 'off page' optimisation, that is, activities you can engage in external to your website which will also improve your website performance on the search engines.

Whilst on-page optimisation is about keyword research and working on your website, off-page SEO is essentially promoting and marketing your website. Perhaps the best analogy to explain this approach to search engine optimisation is that of setting up a retail store. You wouldn't dream of starting to market your store without first making sure the shelving was stocked, the signage was up, and the premises were generally presentable right? Well, so it is with a website.

First, you need to prepare the website (the shop) to be stocked, presentable and signed, and only once this is done can you start marketing it 'off the page'.

Links

Links are among the main building blocks off-page SEO. Put simply, a link is when one website links to another website.

While most of the links to your site will be gained gradually, as people discover your content through search or other ways and link to it, you may also want to let others know about the hard work you've put into your website. Effectively promoting your website will lead to faster discovery by those who are interested in the same subject.

In basic terms, there are two types of links: inbound and outbound.

- **Outbound links** - start from your site and lead to an external site.
- **Inbound links (backlinks)** - come from an external site and point at your website (links 'back' to your website)

For example: If yellowpages.com.au links to your website, the link from www.yellowpages.com.au is a backlink (inbound) to your website; however the link is an outbound link from www.yellowpages.com.au's perspective.

A link is like a 'vote' and your site's ranking in Google search results is partly based on an analysis of those sites that link to you.

Most search engines, especially Google, will consider the number of links and the quality of links back to your website when determining which position to give you on any given search query. The key point here is it is not just the number of links that you have (quantity) it is also the quality of the links that are important. The main factor that influences the quality of the link is 'relevance'.

For example: If you have a website about "cooking Thai food", and received a backlink from another cooking related website, then that would be more relevant in a search engine's assessment than say a link from a site about "grooming dogs". Therefore, the higher the relevance of the site linking back to your website, the better the quality of the backlink. In addition to the quantity and relevance of links, other factors that determine the quality of any given link are:

- The anchor text used in the link linking to you (more on this next).
- The popularity of the website that is linking to you.
- The type of link - i.e. reciprocal, one way, directory link etc.

We will explore each of these concepts in more details in the pages to come. In the meantime, we encourage you to complete the exercise below:

EXERCISE

a) If you haven't already got one, establish a links page on your website - you're going to need one to reciprocate all the new link exchanges you generate. This is basically just a page which lists links. Depending on how many links you will list initially and intend listing over time, you may need categories and sub pages.

Don't just link to people because they link to you. These are the only reasons why you'd want to set up a reciprocal link with another site....

- Their website can give you a lot of traffic
- They have a good archive of information that is related to your website topic/niche
- They are not in competition with your website
- They are a high quality website
- They appear in search results with the same (or approximately similar) keywords as yours

b) Organise the list of people you have decided to target to request a link into a table or database so you can track who you have requested a link from, who has linked to you, who has refused your request and who you need to contact for a second or third time. If you do this correctly and professionally, they should respond and will place a link on their website to yours.

There is a [Link Directory Spreadsheet template here](#) which is already set up for you to record you link requests.

c) Consider whether you need to contract a professional to run the searches for you and present you with a report on whom you need to chase. This is often known as a 'link strategy'.

d) Start sending out requests for links and keeping a track of who you've asked and who you haven't in this spreadsheet.

Anchor Text

Anchor text is a term that refers to clickable part of a link. Having a keyword in the anchor text is superior to a link that has words like "click here" or "read more", as the search engines read the anchor text to help understand the purpose of a link.

For example: If you had backlinks from multiple websites with the anchor text "red widget" that would help your website rank higher for the keyword "red widget"

Page Rank

The more 'popular' the website that is linking to you, the more valuable the link. It makes sense that a link from Wikipedia would have greater value than a link from a recently created website.

There are many technical ways that the "popularity" of a website can be assessed, but the main method is Page Rank.

Page Rank is a numeric value that Google assigns to each page on the web. The highest score is 10 and the lowest score is not having a page rank at all. We are not going to go in to much detail about Page rank but here are some resources if you would like to learn more:

- Wikipedia explanation of Page Rank - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PageRank>
- Free tool to check page rank - http://www.prchecker.info/check_page_rank.php

It's also important to note that the importance of Page Rank with reference to ranking in Search Engine Results has lessened over time, so don't get hung up on it

The most important thing to remember is that you should NEVER pay for a link that that is being sold because of its page rank . This is a direct violation of the Google TOS and can your site banned from the search results.

Types of Backlinks

The type of back links are also important when it comes to Off Page Search Engine Optimisation. There are basically two types of links: reciprocal and one way links. Explained further:

- Reciprocal Links (i.e. you link to a website and in return they link to your website)
- One way links (i.e. a website links to you and you do not link back to them)

Reciprocal Links:

A reciprocal link is a two-way link between two websites.

For example, Jane and Roger have websites. If Roger's website links to Jane's website, and Jane's website links to Roger's website, the websites are reciprocally linked. You obtain a reciprocal link by placing a link on your website and asking a website owner to link your website in return.

A good strategy to reciprocal linking is thinking about mirroring your off-line business relationships on your website.

For example; if you owned a bed and breakfast you may set out to create reciprocal links that:

- Provide information for your guests - i.e. you may link to the local bike-hire company (that you promote to your guests)
- Link to any professional accreditations, memberships or industry bodies

This type of linking helps to strengthen your relationship with local business providers and provides useful information to your customers. Although reciprocal links provide some value they are not as 'strong' as one-way links.

One Way links

One way links (links pointing at your website) are considered to be more valuable than reciprocal links. This is because search engines understand that it is much more difficult to get a one-way link than a reciprocal link.

Examples of places where you can get a one way link are:

There is a number of ways to get one way links on your website. We will have a look into a handful in the pages to follow, namely:

1. Submission of articles to article directories (also known as article banks)
2. Submission of articles or press releases to news wires
3. Submission of your site to free or paid directory listings
4. Forum postings
5. Blog posts or comments
6. Social media websites
7. Write AWESOME CONTENT that people will want to share!

Article Directories

Writing articles and then submitting them or placing them on article directories (also known as repositories and article banks) is a great way to increase the number of websites linking back to your website.

Most article directories are no where near as effective for SEO as they used to be (for link purposes). Therefore you should only write and submit articles if you can see that other articles in your niche are being read (viewed) by real people (your prospective customers).

Write about topics related to your website/business/area of expertise and then submit those to article directories. Make sure you include a 'call to action' at the end of the article (many article directories will set criteria on how many words, links etc you can include in these) which tells people who you are, what your company is, what you are an expert in and a link back to a relevant page on your site. This may or may not be the home page.

Articles should be 800 + words in length, include your keywords and be interesting! Don't just waffle about a subject. Provide the reader with insights they didn't already know, didn't realise, are topical, interesting, and different.

For example: if you have a tour company in the Gold Coast you may write an article about the top 5 things to do in the Gold Coast.

To find article directories to submit to, simply search key terms such as 'article directories' or 'article banks' on Google. Some examples include:

- <http://ezinearticles.com/>
- <http://www.articledashboard.com>
- <http://www.articlecity.com>
- <http://www.articlesbase.com>

No idea what to write?

Below is a short video from ezinearticles.com on 8 Steps to Writing and Submitting Your First Article. <http://youtu.be/MJqwTKoDgQw>

PR News Wires

Similar, but different to article directories, you can also write press releases to pr/news wires. News wires are often the source of where journalists - both online and offline - get either leads on stories, or actual stories they ultimately run in their publication or station. The difference between an article and a press release is that it usually focuses on an issue - something newswy, topical, different, unusual and insightful. It needs to be something that the journalists and readers do not already know, don't realise, would find useful etc. It can't be a blatant 'advertorial' about how great your company, product, service or event is.

For example: if your business was going to feature in a new regional advertising campaign or perhaps your business will feature in the Virgin Blue on flight magazine, then you could write a press release about this.

Here are a mixture of free news wire/press release services you might like to check out (though there are MANY more):

1. <http://www.przoom.com>
2. <http://www.24-7pressrelease.com>
3. <http://www.pr.com>
4. <http://www.pfree.com>
5. <http://www.free-press-release.com/>
6. <http://prwire.com.au/>

Paid press release services you might also like to check out:

1. <http://www.pressreleasenetwork.com>
2. <http://www.prweb.com>
3. <http://www.aapmedianet.com.au/>
4. <http://www.marketwire.com>

Free Directories

Listing on free directories online is also a good way to achieve back links to your site. Like article directories though, make sure that any links you get (and your information with them) is relevant to real people who might find you and click through to your website. A link for the purpose of a link has little value in today's SEO world.

To find potential free places to list your business and point back to your website online, simply search key terms such as 'free directory listings', 'free business listings', 'free beauty directory' or other related industry terms into the search engine. Many will appear for you to work your way through. Make a commitment to add your site to at least a couple of directories every week, or even more.

Look for directories that feature other businesses in your niche or are in your local area. You should come up with a suitable title, keywords and description to include within these directories and keep a copy of this on hand so that you can copy and paste and keep your directory listings consistently featuring the same key words and key terms you want to be known for.

You should work your way through the list, submitting your carefully constructed listing to them, including suitable anchor text links where ever possible.

Keep a track of which directories you have already submitted to, and those you haven't. By doing this, you can always get a junior, work experience student, family member or other staff member to assist you with this process on an ongoing basis.

Free directory listings you might like to check out:

1. <http://www.hotfrog.com.au>
2. <http://www.startlocal.com.au>
3. <http://www.webwombat.com.au>
4. <http://www.truelocal.com.au>
5. <http://www.dlook.com.au>

But there are many, many more! Simply search 'free directory listings' in Google (or your other preferred search engine).

Paid Directories

As you discover free directories to list your site in, you will probably find that many of these have a paid option, whilst others you stumble on may ONLY accept your listing if you pay money. So should you pay to list your website on these?

It really is up to you to decide whether a directory listing is worth paying for or not. Ask yourself, if I pay (for instance) \$300 per annum for this listing, will it lead to \$300 worth of traffic to my site, or business, or enquiries?

If you think the answer is yes, then do it!

More directory listings you might like to check out (note, use of these directories is at your own discretion and we are by no way recommending them):

1. <http://www.ineedto.com.au/> - I need to - Australian Business Directory
2. <http://searchengine.tiggy.com.au/> - Tiggy - Australian Search Engines
3. <http://www.clickfind.com.au/> - clickfind - Business Directory
4. <http://www.askted.com.au> - Ask Ted
5. <http://www.about-australia.com> - About Australia
6. <http://www.accessweb.ws> - Accessweb
7. <http://au.altavista.com/> - Alta Vista Australia
8. <http://www.answers.com.au> - ANZWEERS
9. <http://www.AOL.com.au> - AOL Australia
10. <http://www.aussieseek.com> - Aussieseek Search Engine
11. <http://www.bizdirect.com.au> - The Australian Business Directory
12. <http://www.blackstump.com.au> - Beyond The Black Stump
13. <http://www.citysearch.com.au> - CitySearch
14. <http://www.clickforaustralia.com> - Click For Australia
15. <http://www.eastman.com.au/ei/resources> - Eastman Internet
16. <http://www.fairdinkum.info> - FairDinkum.info
17. <http://www.gtp.com.au> - Gateway to Perth
18. <http://www.directoryaustralia.com> - DirectoryAustralia.com
19. <http://www.kangaroo.com.au> - Kangaroo.com.au
20. <http://www.lookle.com.au> - Lookle
21. <http://www.mysearch.com.au> - Mysearch.com.au
22. <http://search.ninemsn.com.au> - NineMSN
23. <http://www.ozebiz.com.au> - Ozebiz
24. <http://www.ozsearch.com.au> - Oz Search Internet Guide
25. <http://www.perthfavourites.com> - PerthFavourites.com
26. <http://www.search66.com> - Search66.com
27. <http://www.search-the-world.com> - Search-the-world.com
28. <http://searchenginez.com.au> - SearchEngineZ Australia
29. <http://www.sofcom.com.au> - Sofcom
30. <http://www.streetsofperth.com.au> - Streets of Perth
31. <http://www.gwb.com.au/gwb/enquiry.html> - Guide to Australian websites
32. <http://www.vicnet.net.au> - VicNet
33. <http://www.webwombat.com.au> - Web Wombat
34. <http://www.wilddogsearch.com.au> - Wild Dog Search

Forums

Whilst forums are not quite as prominent or active as they once were since the advent of social media, some forums are well established and will provide both traffic to your website and an additional way of securing back links.

You may encourage existing members to post about you on the forum, you may become a member and post on the forum, or you may even consider paying for a small advertisement within a forum or display advertising.

Search on the search engines for relevant forums by using "forum + {your keyword}" in the search bar of your preferred search engine.

Blog commenting and writing



This "Guest Infographic" was created by Brandon Rhodes through MyBlogGuest

Blogs are great tool for link building. You can create your own blog where you can add articles and links to your website, or you can participate on existing blogs by commenting on blog posts or arranging to be a guest post writer (in exchange for a link to your website).

If you would like to set up your own blog there are lots of free blog platforms such as:

- Blogger - Free weblog publishing tool from Google, for sharing text, photos and video. <http://www.blogger.com>
- Wordpress - Create a free blog and customise the look/design with a Wordpress template <http://www.wordpress.com> Though it is far better to have youe blog on your OWN website than on another!

- Tumblr - Tumblr lets you effortlessly share anything. Post text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos, from your browser, phone, desktop, email, or wherever you happen to be. You can customize everything, from colors, to your theme's HTML.
<http://www.tumblr.com>

However you can also create a blog on your own site, which is generally recommended for SEO as by regularly posting blogs to it, it will improve your on page optimisation. If you do include your blog on your own site, hit will not however be beneficial for off page optimisation.

If you would like to write posts on other blogs which will create back links to your site which will help with your off page optimisation, take a look at:

- My Blog Guest - You can also comment on other peoples blogs and (if relevant) add a link back to your website <http://myblogguest.com/>

Note: MyBlogGuest.com was recently hit with a manual penalty from Google due to the high number of 'thin content articles' written by its members and users. In a nutshell, people were writing cheap articles purely for the purpose of gaining links. This is a POOR STRATEGY and will not win you point with Google. The only value now in MyBlogGuest.com is to look for websites who may want to publish your HIGH QUALITY content.

If you would like to comment on blog posts search for a relevant blog post using:

- Drop My Link - Drop my link is a free search engine/tool that will help you find blogs related to specific topics that accept comments. <http://dropmylink.com/>

You could also just Google 'Places to do guest blog posts' or something similar and see what you can turn up in that way.

Social Media Links

Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Google Plus - are all types of social media websites where you can post and share links. If the social media page is "public" (which generally company pages are, and which generally individual profiles are not) then the search engines can read the information and the links.

At the end of 2010, amidst a lot of rumours, Matt Cutts from Google, posted a video on YouTube saying that Google was starting to use 'social media signals' in their search engine results and Bing followed.

Since then, many companies have become 'more social', with some aiming to appease the search engines, while others simply aware that a strong social strategy can pay off other dividends too.

So how much does 'social' affect 'search'?

In one example we are aware of, a company created several websites, in similar markets, and established different social media accounts per website property, with varying levels of social media integrations with the website i.e. icons and feeds, to better understand how much of an impact social can have.

Google +1 button

Probably not many surprises that Google's own networks i.e. a website that was linked to a Google+ business page helped its search position, as did websites that had Google +1 share buttons embedded. So there's tip number 1. If you haven't got a Google+ business page, and weren't so keen on it from a social networking perspective, consider the search perspective too.

YouTube video on front page

We've also had good word direct from Google itself that they LOVE websites which have a YouTube video embedded on their front page. Some kind of a 'show reel' video of who you are and what you do is obviously good for the user to better understand quickly and easily who you are and what you do, but Google owns YouTube, so more views means more advertising dollars to it. By enabling this on your site, Google may well be compelled to bring you more traffic to see that very video.

But apart from its own properties, who else does Google favour? Well this is purely opinion based, and like a lot of stuff when it comes to Google, even by making the next few statements, they could change the goal posts on us overnight.

Facebook

For the time being, we do notice correlations between those clients who are active on Facebook and have a high level of engagement attracting increasing numbers of users to their website, which in turn, also boosts their rankings. Out of the 200 factors that Google uses to rank, one is the volume of traffic going through your website.

Pinterest

Pinterest is also performing exceptionally well when it comes to providing 'Google Juice'. Ever since Pinterest launched its business pages at the end of 2012, and savvy businesses have found ways to promote their various business initiatives on this image driven network, we've established our own Pinterest business accounts and carefully monitored our Google Analytics to see how it's performed, and we've been surprised to see Pinterest outperforming Twitter as a key source of visitors in a very short time frame and with minimal effort invested. The bottom line is getting active in social networks can help you search engine results as for the time being, your social graph seems to be playing an important role. We explore social media in more depth in our social media modules.

Buying Links

There are some 'experts' who encourage the purchasing of links from high Page Rank websites or link farms and/or who disregard the quality of the links, the sources, and the long-term impact it will have on their sites. You may also have people contact you who offer these services to you as the owner of a website.

It is important to note that in most cases this is a violation of Google and other webmaster guidelines and can negatively impact your site's ranking in search results.

Examples of link schemes can include:

- Links intended to manipulate Page Rank;
- Links to web spammers or bad neighbourhoods on the web;
- Excessive reciprocal links or excessive link exchanging ("Link to me and I'll link to you");
- Buying or selling links that pass Page Rank.

You can read more about what Google thinks about paid links here:

<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=66736>

Google regularly discovers these link farms or blog networks and penalises websites that have participated in link buying.

Whilst it is not recommended that you buy links, it IS acceptable to buy links from reputable paid directories like True Local and Yellow pages. In these cases you are not 'buying a link', you are paying for a complete directory listing.

Watch this video from Google about paid links <http://youtu.be/12PP7bHnQ9o>

Which Sites Already Link To You?

If you would like to check which websites link to your website there are some free (and paid) tools that you can use to check this information.

Tools for Checking Links:

- Link Diagnosis - Free tool <http://www.linkdiagnosis.com/>
- Market Samurai - Free trial then \$149 once off cost <http://www.marketsamurai.com/>
- Who Links 2 Me - <http://www.wholinks2me.com/>
- Open Site Explorer - 30 day free trial then \$99.00 per month - <http://www.opensiteexplorer.org/>

- Web Confs - They have a free tool to review anchor text and much more. If you are interested to learn more try all of the tools on this page - they are free! - <http://www.webconfs.com/>

EXERCISE - Links pointing to your website and your competitors?

- a) Use one (or more) of the above tools to have a look at the links that are pointing at your website. Note these down. Note that different tools may give different results; use an aggregate.
- b) It might also be useful to use one of these tools to have a look at your competitor's links.
- c) Review the anchor text of your links.

Conclusion

It is important, like any goal, to commit to continuing to perform these off page optimisation tasks on a regular basis. Set yourself a target of how many sites you would like to link back to yours in the first instance and thereafter.

Place your new business goal somewhere prominent in your work space i.e. on your screen, a notice-board in front of you or as a reminder in your mobile or Outlook so that you are constantly reminded of the need to do this. Aim to get a handful of new links EVERY WEEK. If you find it isn't happening, find a way to delegate this important part of your web development/business development to somebody else to make sure it DOES HAPPEN.

Get help if you need it - Getting even one good link back to your website might take a bit of time, but really this should be an ongoing process that you engage in as part of your general business development if you want to continue to be competitive online. You may choose to delegate this job to another team member, to employ a work experience student or a junior to do this for you, or some people choose to sub-contract it out.

EXERCISE:

What off page optimisation strategy/strategies could you commit to on an ongoing basis to increase the number of links you have identified in earlier? Achieving 5 new quality back links a week? A month? Could you outsource this internally to someone in your team and use the Link Spreadsheet to keep tabs on progress (perhaps you could upload this to Google Drive's Google Spreadsheet so you can see progress and contribute where required). Could you outsource this task externally?

THAT'S ALL FOR NOW!