

# Web Promotion - Mini Tips

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## **Increasing Link Popularity**

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Search engines are the gateway to the Internet; they are the first tool that potential customers use to find the products and services they need. This is why link popularity is so imperative. If the customers do not find your website, you have no possibilities of making any sales.

You're probably wondering what the blazes is popular about a link! Well, in a word - plenty! Link popularity refers to the ranking assigned to your website by the search engines, and it determines the ranking your page gets when keywords are entered into a search engine. So, you're probably wondering, how do I make my link popular?

Search engines are discretionary, giving status and ranking to sites that have links to their pages from related, quality sites. It's a simple formula, but a very important one. Google created the system, and now virtually all the most popular search engines employ it to rank your web pages in their indexes.

The more commonly used your keyword is, the harder it will be to achieve link popularity, but without achieving this step, it is almost certain your site will never rank highly on any search engine. But don't be discouraged; there are tried and true ways of achieving link popularity using the most competitive keywords.

There are a few things you should be aware of. The first is that just linking up with a large number of other websites will not achieve link popularity. In fact, it may have quite the opposite effect. This is particularly true when pertaining to websites that are nothing more than "link farms" - pages containing line after line of indiscriminate links. Search engines may aggressively discriminate against your website if you are associated with a link farm, so steer clear of them!

The next thing to bear in mind is the quality of the site you are linking to. Never link to a page you have reservations about your visitors seeing. The last thing you want your website to appear as is

indiscriminate and cheap. Linking to sites of poor quality will only lessen your link popularity, if not completely destroy it.

So let's get to what you need to do to achieve supreme link popularity and improve your rankings to stellar status on all the popular search engines.

The first step, and the fastest way to get your foot in the door, is to get a listing in a popular directory, such as Open Directory Project and Yahoo. If your site is business-related, you will want to be listed on Yahoo, and despite the fact that it will cost you around \$300 a year, it will be money well spent. If your site is non-commercial, the listing will be free, but it will take time and follow-up to actually get it listed. Open Directory is gives you a free listing whether you are business-related or non-commercial, but be prepared to make a lot of follow-up inquiries before you see your site listed.

You are aiming to get listed in the highest level of appropriate category, and this just takes some common sense. For example, if your company ships Alpaca wool from an Alpaca farm located in the middle of Nowhere, Tiny State, do NOT submit your listing to "Retailers from Nowhere, Tiny State." BIG MISTAKE! All you have to do is look a little deeper - and submit your listing to the "Fine Alpaca Wool" category. You will not only associate yourself with culture and quality, but you will be listed in a national category.

The next step after you have attained directory listings is to locate other quality sites that will increase your link popularity. Try to find sites that are in some way related to yours, so not only will your link popularity increase, but your customer base may also be expanded. You want to avoid your competitors and look for sites that are useful to your site's visitors. Let's look at the Alpaca Wool site example. Linking up to a site that sells knitting supplies would be helpful to your visitors, and the chances of the knitting supply site wanting to link up to your site are also greater. By linking to a related site that will be relevant to your website's traffic, you are increasing both of your site's business prospects - and both of your sites' link popularity.

Not all sites want to link to other sites, so you will have to do some research when you are looking for possible linking partners. Google is an excellent starting place for your search. Make sure you enter keywords that you think quality customers will also enter to find your own site. Remember, your criteria are quality, highly ranked, non-competing websites that have a links or resources page. Go to these sites and objectively assess them. Look at the quality of the product, the graphics, and the ease of use. Then check out the other sites they are linked to, and determine if your own site would fit in with the crowd.

When you decide you have found a good prospect, you must set out to woo them. The first thing to do is to add a link on your own links page to their site. This is an essential first step; it shows good faith, and ups your chances significantly of their reciprocity. After you have added their link, you must contact the webmaster of their site. Since this is almost always done by email, you want to make sure it is immediately clear that your message is not junk mail. This requires that you tell them right off the bat that you have added a link to their page on your site. A hook like this almost always insures the reader will read on.

Next, be sure to be flattering and let them know how much you appreciate their website. Make sure you emphasize that you have actually visited their site, and that their site is not just a random pick. Give them the address of your links page, and ask them to check out the link for themselves. It's a good idea to mention that they will not only benefit from the increased traffic your website will direct their way, but you will also increase their link popularity. Briefly, explain why link popularity is so essential, but do this in a sentence or two so you don't sound like a professor! Finally, tell them you would greatly appreciate if they would reciprocally add a link on their own links page to your website.

Go through this process with as many appropriate sites as you can find, bearing in mind the criteria of quality and non-competitiveness. After you have emailed all relevant sites, be sure to check these website frequently to see if they have added a link to your page. Give it about a month, and if no link appears, try another charming

email. Then give it another month, and if your site is still absent from their links page, it's time to remove their link from your own links page. The only time you want to pursue a link further than this is if you believe a site is crucial to your link popularity and your business needs. Just remember to keep all your communications complimentary and cordial.

Then set up a schedule to check your ranking in search engines frequently to see if your link popularity has improved. This is not achievable in the blink of an eye. It will take some time and a good deal of work. There is no way around the labor-intensive quality of improving your link popularity, which is why search engines regard it with such importance.

By the way - make sure you have a beautiful, streamlined site or you will never persuade anyone to link up to you. Be prepared to keep plugging away at this process, as long as it takes, until you achieve link popularity stardom!

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## Monitoring Search Engine Positions

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Since search engines are the first stop for people on the Internet looking for goods or services, the position your website appears in search results is an important factor. If your URL shows up far down the results list, the chances of the consumer never finding you increase incrementally. Once you achieve a high search engine position, it is essential that you make sure you maintain the high ranking you have worked so hard to achieve.

This means you must come up with a strategy to monitor your search engines positions. This strategy is crucial to the success of any marketing campaign. Think of your search engine positions as your online portfolio. Would you let your stock portfolio be ruled by chance and market fluctuations, or would you keep close tabs on your stocks so you could buy and sell when the time is right? This is the way you must consider your search engines positions.

Be aware that at first, after you have launched your search engine campaign and done all the right things to increase your rankings, you will most likely see a continual upward climb. What you need to be on the lookout for is the moment that upward climb reaches a plateau. When this happens, your search engine position campaign moves into stage two, the monitoring and protecting stage.

In stage two, do not be concerned about the short-term fluctuations in your positions. These are similar to the subtle rising and falling of stocks in a portfolio. Short-term movement is an integral part of the whole process. It's the long-term changes that you must watch for and prepare to act on immediately.

Analyzing the long-term trends of search engines positions is imperative. The way in which search engines rank websites may change at the drop of a hat. If you are unaware of these changes - many of which are subtle yet can be deadly to your ranking - your position may drop to the bottom of the list before you can get your bearings. To prevent this kind of precipitous drop, you must create a system to monitor your positions on a monthly basis. Devise a chart to keep tabs on your top ranking positions or your top pages, and make sure to watch "the market" closely.

Each search engine uses a formula to compute website rankings. When a search engine changes this formula in any way, it may raise or lower your ranking. Some search engines use a number of different formulas, rotating them so that a formula doesn't become overused or outdated. Depending on which formula is being applied, your search engine position may suddenly drop or rise in rank significantly. Therefore, you must check your positions frequently in order to catch when a search engine changes formulas and what effect it has on your positions.

You must also deal with your competition - a crucial factor you must always be vigilant about. Your competitor's position may suddenly rise, automatically lowering your position. Or their position may drop, pushing your position higher. Each month, expect position changes due to the continual changes that are occurring in your competitor's position, and be prepared to adjust your marketing strategy to compensate for decreased rankings. Monitoring these fluctuations will also give you vital information about how to improve your website to increase your position in search results.

Of course, you must discern what the most popular search engines are in order for your monitoring efforts to be effective. Right now, there are ten popular search engines that direct most of Internet traffic to your sites. The challenge you face is that these top ten may change from month to month.

This means that you must not only monitor your search engine positions, but you must also keep track of the ranking popularity of the search engines you are monitoring. Find out which search engines people use most frequently every month and be sure to live in the present! People are fickle about their favorite search engines, and it takes constant vigilance to follow their dalliances. The search engines they loved when you first launched your campaign may be old news in the next few months. You must adjust your list of engines according to the whims of the Internet users. Check out <http://www.searchenginewatch.com/reports/netratings.html> for a current list of website favorites.

Another factor to monitor carefully is a sudden drop of your positions in all search engines. This is not the same as monthly fluctuations - this is a neon red warning sign! It could mean a number of different things.

If all your search engine positions have plummeted, it may indicate that search engines spiders - those sneaky programs that seek out your site and

rank their positions -have found some type of problem with your website. If you have recently changed the code, for instance, the spider may become utterly confused and consequently drop your positions disastrously. If a spider creeps up on your website when it is down for adjustments or changes, you may actually disappear from a search engine index entirely. Or a search engine may drastically change its formula, and suddenly all of your website come up as irrelevant. If that search engine is a current favorite, it may create a domino effect, causing all of your position to drop in all search engines.

Some search engines rely on the results from other search engines, and it is vital that you know which engines these are and keep track of all the engines they influence. The biggest problem here is that search engines will sometimes change affiliations, and this can create a major shift in the geography of the Internet. For example, recently Yahoo decided to display only results gleaned from Google. So you must not only monitor your own positions, but you must keep abreast of seismic shifts in the landscape of the Internet as a whole.

Finally, pay attention to your keywords. Keywords are the foundation bricks of the entire search engine system, and they demand individual scrutiny in your monitoring efforts. If you have found that a number of your positions have plummeted, it may mean that a page of your website has become invisible or inaccessible to search engine spiders. Or the competition for that particular keyword or phrase has recently rocketed into outer space. In either case, you must act quickly and efficiently to regain lost ground.

Your search engine marketing campaign is an investment. It costs you time and money on a continual basis. Protect this investment as diligently as you would your financial portfolio. In the same way, track your positions from an objective perspective, and monitor your positions on a regular basis. Make sure your time and effort reap rewards by keeping your eye on the big picture - your long-term marketing campaign.

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## Analyzing Website Traffic

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Analyzing your web traffic statistics can be an invaluable tool for a number of different reasons. But before you can make full use of this tool, you need to understand how to interpret the data.

Most web hosting companies will provide you with basic web traffic information that you then have to interpret and make pertinent use of. However, the data you receive from your host company can be overwhelming if you don't understand how to apply it to your particular business and website. Let's start by examining the most basic data - the average visitors to your site on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

These figures are the most accurate measure of your website's activity. It would appear on the surface that the more traffic you see recorded, the better you can assume your website is doing, but this is an inaccurate perception. You must also look at the behavior of your visitors once they come to your website to accurately gauge the effectiveness of your site.

There is often a great misconception about what is commonly known as "hits" and what is really effective, quality traffic to your site. Hits simply means the number of information requests received by the server. If you think about the fact that a hit can simply equate to the number of graphics per page, you will get an idea of how overblown the concept of hits can be. For example, if your homepage has 15 graphics on it, the server records this as 15 hits, when in reality we are talking about a single visitor checking out a single page on your site. As you can see, hits are not useful in analyzing your website traffic.

The more visitors that come to your website, the more accurate your interpretation will become. The greater the traffic is to your website, the more precise your analysis will be of overall trends in visitor behavior. The smaller the number of visitors, the more a few anomalous visitors can distort the analysis.

The aim is to use the web traffic statistics to figure out how well or how poorly your site is working for your visitors. One way to determine this is to find out how long on average your visitors spend on your site. If the time spent is relatively brief, it usually indicates an underlying problem. Then the challenge is to figure out what that problem is.

It could be that your keywords are directing the wrong type of visitors to your website, or that your graphics are confusing or intimidating, causing the visitor to exit rapidly. Use the knowledge of how much time visitors are spending on your site to pinpoint specific problems, and after you fix those problems, continue to use time spent as a gauge of how effective your fix has been.

Additionally, web traffic stats can help you determine effective and ineffective areas of your website. If you have a page that you believe is important, but visitors are exiting it rapidly, that page needs attention. You could, for example, consider improving the link to this page by making the link more noticeable and enticing, or you could improve the look of the page or the ease that your visitors can access the necessary information on that page.

If, on the other hand, you notice that visitors are spending a lot of time on pages that you think are less important, you might consider moving some of your sales copy and marketing focus to that particular page.

As you can see, these statistics will reveal vital information about the effectiveness of individual pages, and visitor habits and motivation. This is essential information to any successful Internet marketing campaign.

Your website undoubtedly has exit pages, such as a final order or contact form. This is a page you can expect your visitor to exit rapidly. However, not every visitor to your site is going to find exactly what he or she is looking for, so statistics may show you a number of different exit pages. This is normal unless you notice an exit trend on a particular page that is not intended as an exit page. In the case that a significant percentage of visitors are exiting your

website on a page not designed for that purpose, you must closely examine that particular page to discern what the problem is. Once you pinpoint potential weaknesses on that page, minor modifications in content or graphic may have a significant impact on the keeping visitors moving through your site instead of exiting at the wrong page.

After you have analyzed your visitor statistics, it's time to turn to your keywords and phrases. Notice if particular keywords are directing a specific type of visitor to your site. The more targeted the visitor - meaning that they find what they are looking for on your site, and even better, fill out your contact form or make a purchase - the more valuable that keyword is.

However, if you find a large number of visitors are being directed - or should I say misdirected - to your site by a particular keyword or phrase, that keyword demands adjustment. Keywords are vital to bringing quality visitors to your site who are ready to do business with you. Close analysis of the keywords your visitors are using to find your site will give you a vital understanding of your visitor's needs and motivations.

Finally, if you notice that users are finding your website by typing in your company name, break open the champagne! It means you have achieved a significant level of brand recognition, and this is a sure sign of burgeoning success.

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## Protecting Your Search Engine Rankings

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Your website's ranking on search engines is a vital element of your overall marketing campaign, and there are ways to improve your link popularity through legitimate methods. Unfortunately, the Internet is populated by bands of dishonest webmasters seeking to improve their link popularity by faking out search engines.

The good news is that search engines have figured this out, and are now on guard for "spam" pages and sites that have increased their rankings by artificial methods. When a search engine tracks down such a site, that site is demoted in ranking or completely removed from the search engine's index.

The bad news is that some high quality, completely above-board sites are being mistaken for these web page criminals. Your page may be in danger of being caught up in the "spam" net and tossed from a search engine's index, even though you have done nothing to deserve such harsh treatment. But there are things you can do - and things you should be sure NOT to do - which will prevent this kind of misperception.

Link popularity is mostly based on the quality of sites you are linked to. Google pioneered this criteria for assigning website ranking, and virtually all search engines on the Internet now use it. There are legitimate ways to go about increasing your link popularity, but at the same time, you must be scrupulously careful about which sites you choose to link to. Google frequently imposes penalties on sites that have linked to other sites solely for the purpose of artificially boosting their link popularity. They have actually labeled these links "bad neighborhoods."

You can raise a toast to the fact that you cannot be penalized when a bad neighborhood links to your site; penalty happens only when you are the one sending out the link to a bad neighborhood. But you must check, and double-check, all the links that are active on your links page to make sure you haven't linked to a bad neighborhood.

The first thing to check out is whether or not the pages you have linked to have been penalized. The most direct way to do this is to download the Google toolbar at <http://toolbar.google.com>. You will then see that most pages are given a "Pagerank" which is represented by a sliding green scale on the Google toolbar.

Do not link to any site that shows no green at all on the scale. This is especially important when the scale is completely gray. It is more than likely that these pages have been penalized. If you are linked to these pages, you may catch their penalty, and like the flu, it may be difficult to recover from the infection.

There is no need to be afraid of linking to sites whose scale shows only a tiny sliver of green on their scale. These sites have not been penalized, and their links may grow in value and popularity. However, do make sure that you closely monitor these kind of links to ascertain that at some point they do not sustain a penalty once you have linked up to them from your links page.

Another evil trick that illicit webmasters use to artificially boost their link popularity is the use of hidden text. Search engines usually use the words on web pages as a factor in forming their rankings, which means that if the text on your page contains your keywords, you have more of an opportunity to increase your search engine ranking than a page that does not contain text inclusive of keywords.

Some webmasters have gotten around this formula by hiding their keywords in such a way so that they are invisible to any visitors to their site. For example, they have used the keywords but made them the same color as the background color of the page, such as a plethora of white keywords on a white background. You cannot see these words with the human eye - but the eye of search engine spider can spot them easily! A spider is the program search engines use to index web pages, and when it sees these invisible words, it goes back and boosts that page's link ranking.

Webmasters may be brilliant and sometimes devious, but search engines have figured these tricks out. As soon as a search engine perceives the use of hidden text - splat! the page is penalized.

The downside of this is that sometimes the spider is a bit overzealous and will penalize a page by mistake. For example, if the background color of your page is gray, and you have placed gray text inside a black box, the spider will only take note of the gray text and assume you are employing hidden text. To avoid any risk of false penalty, simply direct your webmaster not to assign the same color to text as the background color of the page - ever!

Another potential problem that can result in a penalty is called "keyword stuffing." It is important to have your keywords appear in the text on your page, but sometimes you can go a little overboard in your enthusiasm to please those spiders. A search engine uses what is called "Keyphrase Density" to determine if a site is trying to artificially boost their ranking. This is the ratio of keywords to the rest of the words on the page. Search engines assign a limit to the number of times you can use a keyword before it decides you have overdone it and penalizes your site.

This ratio is quite high, so it is difficult to surpass without sounding as if you are stuttering - unless your keyword is part of your company name. If this is the case, it is easy for keyword density to soar. So, if your keyword is "renters insurance," be sure you don't use this phrase in every sentence. Carefully edit the text on your site so that the copy flows naturally and the keyword is not repeated incessantly. A good rule of thumb is your keyword should never appear in more than half the sentences on the page.

The final potential risk factor is known as "cloaking." To those of you who are diligent Trekkies, this concept should be easy to understand. For the rest of you? cloaking is when the server directs a visitor to one page and a search engine spider to a different page. The page the spider sees is "cloaked" because it is invisible to regular traffic, and deliberately set-up to raise the site's search engine ranking. A cloaked page tries to feed the spider everything it needs to rocket that page's ranking to the top of the list.

It is natural that search engines have responded to this act of deception with extreme enmity, imposing steep penalties on these sites. The problem on your end is that sometimes pages are cloaked for legitimate reasons, such as prevention against the theft of code, often referred to as "pagejacking." This kind of shielding is unnecessary these days due to the use of "off page" elements, such as link popularity, that cannot be stolen.

To be on the safe side, be sure that your webmaster is aware that absolutely no cloaking is acceptable. Make sure the webmaster understands that cloaking of any kind will put your website at great risk.

Just as you must be diligent in increasing your link popularity and your ranking, you must be equally diligent to avoid being unfairly penalized. So be sure to monitor your site closely and avoid any appearance of artificially boosting your rankings.



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