

White hat SEO Link-building – 14 step process

1

Business Analysis

Aim

Research the business and industry in depth to get a solid understand of what the business does, what their unique selling points are, and who the competitors are.



Process

- Interview with key individuals in client business; owner, customer service, finance, tech & marketing (ask questions that get them to give you their point of view of the market and how they see the company fitting in).
- **What are the businesses strength's & weaknesses**
- What do they/you think are the key things the business should be doing in the next 12 months).
- **Spend time on competitors websites**
- Read summaries of key competitors annual reports
- **Run competitors sites through SEO Spyglass to see what keywords they are focusing on (page headers & h1 tags) and also to understand the structure of their sites**
- Run backlinks checks on 3 or 4 key competitors in SEO Spyglass; then run a comparison; define the link building strategies of the competitors
- **create a list of what is impressive, creative, difficult to beat. This will show you the competitors strengths and weaknesses.**

2

Keyword Research

Aim

Find core target keywords for the company that take into consideration any unique aspects of the organisation.



Process

- From your research choose 5 terms that you would use to search for the companies core product/service.
- **Run them through the Google Keyword tool, ensure exact match, and only closely related matches & then check relevancy to business; use negative keyword to refine and exclude irrelevant terms. Once list is good then export to CSV.**
- Extract core keywords and run additional searches; if there are lots of different products sold on the site then run a separate search for every product category.
- **Run same process on Ubersuggest and extract the list.**
- Run a vlookup in Excel & delete duplicates.
- **Run additional keywords through Google keyword tool to get search volumes.**
- Keep all keywords that are relevant to the business and that have 50+ month searches (this criteria should flex depending on industry).

3

Match target keywords to pages

Aim

For each of the target keywords identified there should be a single page in the website that it relates to best.



Process

- Keep the process realistic - there is no need to do more than 100 pages as you will not be manually building links to more than 100 pages (usually).
- **If in future you find a new pocket of opportunity then you can just research and add in at that time.**

4

Audit Linkable Assets

Aim

Go through all of the content on your website to identify what is linkworthy - be objective



Process

List all of your assets; this could include:

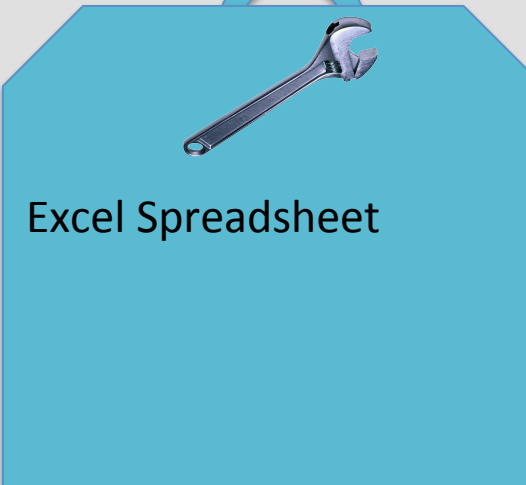
- Blog posts
- Guides
- How to's
- FAQs
- Image collections
- Well known investors
- Well known staff
- White papers
- Tools/apps
- Videos & audio files

5

Identify theme (target keywords) for each of the linkable assets

Aim

For each of the linkable assets in your website you match with keywords from your target list



Process

You have a spreadsheet with a list of target keywords and you have already applied a web page to them

- **Apply a linkable asset to them too.**
- If some pages do not have a linkable asset that fits them closely then do not try to shoehorn in - it just means you need more linkable assets.

6

Improve internal linking

Aim

Insert links from the linkable assets to the money pages that you want to rank for those terms on.



Process

In step 5 you will have matched the linkable assets (URL's, tools) to webpages in the site that they relate to or support.

- **Ensure that you have internal links pointing from the linkable assets to the pages that you want to rank (money pages).**
- The idea is that when you get links into the assets then page rank flows through easily to the related pages.

7

Identify content gaps

Aim

What types of content could you create that will benefit your customers and/or stakeholders in the industry?



Process

- Spend time researching the key problems that people in your industry are facing - you can find these through spending time on Linkedin groups, Quora as well as seeing which blog posts are most commented on and shared - there are likely to be unanswered questions that remain.
 - **Which pages in your site still do not have any linkable assets associated with them/ supporting them? What could be introduced to rectify this?**
 - Once you have an idea of these questions then run some Google searches around the topics to see if many people are searching for information/help on those topics - use searched such as "topic + advice" or "how to + topic"
- Once you understand what peoples needs are then you should be able to identify the types of content that would solve their needs.**

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8 Create a content building plan

Aim Based on the content needs of the industry put together a plan for creating the kind of content that there is a demand for and that will be of practical help to others in the industry

MSExcel
MSWord
Clockingit
<http://www.clockingit.com/>
Basecamp
<http://basecamp.com/>

Process

Content could be many things:

- Blog posts
- **Tools, widgets and apps**
- Infographics
- **Videos**
- Research papers
- **Guides**

Prioritise the work based on where the greatest revenue potential lies.

Many SEO strategies have the plug pulled on them before they start to bear fruit; it is not that the strategy was wrong; but the execution was not focused and fast enough.

Plan the content to be created on an ongoing basis and be prepared to invest heavily in terms of time and/or money (outsourcing content creation)

9 Research industry influencers

Aim You need to find out who the key people are in your industry that are trusted and respected and to build relationships with them. These people will then help your content reach the right people that will give you links

Followerwonk
<http://followerwonk.com/>
LittleBird
<http://getlittlebird.com/>
Twitter recommendations
https://twitter.com/who_to_follow/interests
Quora
<http://www.quora.com/>

Process

- Firstly you should build up a list of influencers through using Followerwonk or Twitter recommendations.
- **Follow them all in Twitter**
- For real key influencers (top 20) you need to go all out and spy on them - Create RSS feeds that pull into Google Reader for their Quora, Twitter, Google Plus and their blog feeds.
- **Read this:** <http://www.slideshare.net/wilreynolds/stalking-for-links>

10 Research link target prospects

Aim The idea is to build a map of the industry online and to determine which of the sites in the industry are worth getting links from

Link prospector
<http://linkprospector.citationlab.com/>
Google search
SEO Spyglass
www.seo-spyglass.com/

Process

- 1) Analyse high ranking competitors backlinks using SEO Spyglass – ignore low quality directories, article sites etc but pull out any high authority sites; especially ones that link to 2 or more of the competitors.
- 2) Use link prospector to build up a list of target bloggers, or sites that have lists of sites like yours, sites that do reviews for your industry etc.
- 3) Once you have a list of sites then download it into Excel and clean it up - delete any competitor sites, inappropriate/irrelevant sites and sites that are just too low quality to bother with - every site will have a slightly different criteria - e.g. you could set minimum Alexa rank of 100,000 and minimum PR4 for guest blogging.

11 Build a database of link prospects

Aim Once you have your target prospects you should start building a database that will streamline and organise your outreach efforts.

Buzzstream
<http://www.buzzstream.com/>

Process

- Import cleaned list from Link Prospector to Buzzstream
- Categorise & group sites carefully in Buzzstream
- Outsource process of getting contact details by giving the list of sites to a freelancer along with clear instructions on who the target type of person is (not webmaster usually) and they find the email address & contact name for each target site.

12 Match current assets to target websites

Aim You now have a list of sites that you want to get links from. Establish why they would link to you. If there is a solid reason within the existing linkable assets then that is the ticket; if nothing really cuts it then you are going to need new linkable assets.

Excel Spreadsheet
Buzzstream
<http://www.buzzstream.com/>

Process

- Go through each of the target sites and match a linkable asset to them
- Determine why they would link to you.
- If no clear reason why the target site would link to you then add nothing and mark it up as an area that needs attention (content producing).

13 Create outreach emails

Aim For each type of site that you will be contacting you need a separate type of email based on their needs and wants. Basically you need to provide them a solution for a problem they have or at least scratch an itch.

Buzzstream
<http://www.buzzstream.com/>
Read this:
<http://socialtriggers.com/persuasion-tips-help/>

Process

- Write emails for each group with clear incentive for recipient to respond & link to you.
- Different approach for different types of sites.
- Take the time to personalise every single email as each link could bring multiple visits per day so it is worth the effort. Be thoughtful and aim to help.

14 Set up alerts on influencers behaviour

Aim When a key influencer asks a question, sends a tweet, publishes a new blog post you want to be quick to answer, respond and help. You can therefore set up alerts based on their social behaviour that will tell you when they make a move so that you can be there to respond and get noticed by them.

IFTT
<http://ifttt.com/>
Google News Alerts
<http://www.google.com/alerts>

Process

- Once you have great content then you need to go after links direct from site owners but also from social media sources.
- This comes through relationship building - it may start out as a way to get links but it always ends up as more than that - you build connections with like minded people.
- When you see a target influencer asking a question or posing a theory then jump in and give your opinion first (or early on).
- Do not kiss ass - just communicate on equal terms and if you show you know what you are talking about then you will get noticed.