

FREE RESOURCE — SEO GUIDE

Link Building Strategy Guide

A repeatable playbook for earning high-quality backlinks that move rankings. Learn how to evaluate link prospects, run outreach that gets replies, and track every won placement against the KPIs that actually matter to your business.

#3

BACKLINKS ARE
STILL
A TOP-3
RANKING
SIGNAL

8%

AVERAGE REPLY
RATE
ON COLD
OUTREACH

5

LINK TYPES
EVERY
PROFILE NEEDS

6

GUIDE
SECTIONS

LINK BUILDING

DIGITAL PR

OUTREACH

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01

Why links still move rankings

Backlinks remain one of Google's three strongest ranking signals alongside relevance and quality content. The algorithm reads every inbound link as an editorial vote, weighted by the linking site's authority, topical proximity, and the trust of its surrounding paragraph. A handful of high-trust links will out-perform hundreds of low-quality ones — quality has compounded over the last decade, not diluted.

SIGNAL	WHAT GOOGLE READS	WHY IT MATTERS	OPERATOR ACTION
Authority	Domain Rating / Authority of the linking site	High-DR links transfer ranking equity faster	Target DR 30+ sites in your niche
Relevance	Topical fit between linking and target page	Off-topic links carry far less weight	Prefer industry / adjacent-niche links
Anchor text	Clickable phrase used in the link	Over-optimised anchors trigger spam filters	Mix branded, partial, and natural anchors
Placement	Editorial body link vs. footer / sidebar	In-body links transfer the most equity	Aim for editorial mentions, never bulk-buy footers

QUALITY COMPOUNDS — VOLUME DOES NOT

One editorial link from a respected industry publication beats fifty links from low-quality directories. After the 2024 spam updates, Google's freshness signals demote sites that grow link velocity unnaturally fast. **Plan for slow, steady acquisition at editorial standard.**

Set the right baseline expectation

A healthy mid-market UK business should aim for **4–10 high-quality backlinks per month**, sustained over 6–12 months. Rankings respond on a 60–120 day lag — resist the urge to chase shortcut tactics that produce links Google will later devalue or penalise.

02

Types of backlinks

Different link types serve very different purposes. A healthy profile blends all five — relying on a single source (e.g. guest posts only, or directories only) is the most common cause of a link campaign that plateaus or trips a manual review.

Editorial links

Earned **in-body mentions** within a journalist's or blogger's article, with no payment or quid-pro-quo.

The **highest-value link type**. Won via digital PR, data studies, expert quotes, and HARO-style platforms.

Guest posts

Bylined articles published on a third-party site that include **1-2 contextual links** back to your domain.

Effective when targeted at **topically aligned, DR 40+ publications**. Avoid bulk guest-post networks — Google detects them.

Resource, listicle & directory links

Inclusion in “best of” roundups, supplier directories, and **industry resource pages**.

Plus core citations on **Google Business Profile, Bing Places, Yell, FreeIndex** for NAP consistency.

Brand mentions & unlinked citations

Existing mentions of your brand that don't yet carry a link — convert with a short, polite email.

Typically the **highest reply rate** outreach you'll run — the reporter already knows you.

AVOID THE TOXIC-LINK TRAP

Never buy links from PBN networks, link farms, comment-spam sites, or “cheap blogger” marketplaces. These are the most common triggers for manual actions. **If a link looks too cheap or too fast, it will hurt you.**

03

Prospecting methodology

Follow this systematic process to surface link opportunities at scale. Each step compounds the next — skip one and you will spend outreach hours on the wrong list, with the wrong angle, going to the wrong inbox.

Step 1 — Map your linkable assets

Audit existing content for **data studies, original research, calculators, and definitive guides**.

If you have nothing linkable yet, plan **one cornerstone asset** before starting outreach — pitching a thin page wastes opportunities.

Score each asset for **uniqueness, evergreen value, and shareability**.

Step 2 — Competitor backlink mining

Identify your **top 3–5 ranking competitors** for target keywords.

Pull their backlink profile in Ahrefs / SEMrush and filter for **DR 30+, dofollow, in-body links**.

Note any publication that links to **two or more competitors** — that editor accepts links in your niche.

Step 3 — Tool-assisted prospect discovery

TOOL	BEST FOR	FREE / PAID
Ahrefs Site Explorer	Competitor backlinks, broken-link prospects, anchor analysis	Paid
SEMrush Backlink Gap	Domains linking to competitors but not to you	Paid
Hunter.io	Finding journalist / editor email addresses	Free / Paid
Pitchbox / BuzzStream	Outreach automation, follow-up sequences, reply tracking	Paid
HARO / Qwoted / Featured	Reactive PR — journalist source requests	Free / Paid
Google advanced search	Resource-page and guest-post discovery via search operators	Free

03

Prospecting methodology (continued)

Step 4 — Score every prospect before you pitch

Build one consistent scorecard and apply it to every candidate domain before you spend an hour on outreach. The scorecard turns a pile of URLs into a defensible priority list.

High authority + high relevance — priority prospects. Lead with these; one win pays back the campaign.

High authority + low relevance — pursue only if you have a strong unique angle (data, expert quote).

Low authority + high relevance — easy wins. Useful for early momentum and varied anchor diversity.

Low authority + low relevance — skip. Spending outreach hours here is the single most common waste.

EVALUATING LINK AUTHORITY (DR / DA)

Authority scores from Ahrefs (DR) and Moz (DA) estimate how much equity a domain passes on.

DR 0–20 = Low — useful only for variety, foundation citations, or local relevance.

DR 21–50 = Medium — the workhorse band; these move rankings on mid-competition keywords.

DR 51–75 = High — strong impact, worth a tailored pitch and a follow-up sequence.

DR 76+ = Top tier — major publications & trade media. Lead with digital PR or proprietary data.

ALWAYS CROSS-CHECK ORGANIC TRAFFIC

Authority alone never decides a target — a DR 70 domain with no organic traffic is a sign of a manipulated profile. Always verify the prospect has **genuine organic traffic, topical alignment, and recent editorial activity** before committing the slot.

04

Link prospecting tracker

Use this tracker to log every prospect you research. Score each row before any email goes out — if the total is below your threshold, the prospect is removed from the pipeline.

Priority Score Formula: Authority (1–5) + Relevance (1–5) + Traffic Quality (1–5) + Replyability (1–5) = Priority Score (out of 20)

PROSPECT DOMAIN	DR / DA	RELEVANCE	ANGLE	SCORE
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Pursue (target first)

- DR 30+ with steady organic traffic
- Topically aligned with your services
- Editor accepts in-body editorial links
- Reachable contact (email or LinkedIn)
- Pitch angle ready in one sentence

Skip (do not waste outreach)

- DR inflated — near-zero organic traffic
- Off-topic or generic “general” blog
- Footer-only or sidebar-only links
- Charges for guest posts (paid-link risk)
- No editor name — only contact forms

Asset mapping — assign each prospect a target page

Every shortlisted prospect should be linked to **one specific page** on your site — the asset you want to rank. Match the prospect's editorial angle to the asset's topic. Diversify anchor text across prospects to keep the profile natural and reduce over-optimisation risk.

05

Outreach that gets replies

Cold link outreach averages an 8% reply rate. Personalised outreach with a clear value angle averages 20–30%. The difference is preparation, not volume — one well-researched email beats fifty templated ones every week.

Email subject lines that open

Keep subjects under **50 characters**, lower-case, no marketing words.

Lead with the publication's recent piece: **“Re: your Tuesday piece on remote IT”**.

Avoid “Quick request”, “Collaboration”, “Partnership” — flagged as cold-pitch templates.

The four-part email body

Line 1 — specific compliment. Reference an article they wrote in the last 30 days. Demonstrates real reading.

Line 2 — the why. One sentence on the unique angle, data point, or expert quote you can offer.

Line 3 — the ask. A single, low-effort request. “Would a 100-word data summary be useful?”

Line 4 — signature. Name, role, company, one credibility link (LinkedIn or recent feature).

Follow-up cadence

Day 0: Initial email. Personalised, four lines, no attachments.

Day 4: Bump — a single sentence above the original email. No new ask.

Day 10: Final follow-up — offer an alternative angle or assets, then close the loop.

Stop after the third email. More than three follow-ups damages your sender reputation.

NEVER PAY FOR LINKS DIRECTLY

Paid links violate Google's Webmaster Guidelines. Sponsored placements must use the `rel="sponsored"` attribute — which removes nearly all SEO value. **Pay for content production and outreach, not for the link itself.**

05

Outreach that gets replies (continued)

Different industries open with different angles — data wins in finance, expert quotes win in legal, original visuals win in lifestyle. Use the table below to pick a pitch angle that already converts in your sector.

Industry-specific outreach angles

INDUSTRY	HIGHEST-REPLY PITCH ANGLE	BEST TARGET
IT Services	Original benchmark data, downtime cost statistics, security incident analysis	Trade press, CTO blogs, SaaS comparison sites
Legal	Expert commentary on case law, employment-tribunal trend analysis	Legal trade press, HR publications, news features
Healthcare	Clinician-bylined explainers, regulatory updates, patient-experience surveys	Patient sites, public-health blogs, professional CPD pages
E-commerce	Trend reports, seasonal data studies, product-comparison guides	Lifestyle publications, niche review blogs, gift guides
B2B SaaS	Customer-stack data, integration tutorials, ROI calculators	Industry newsletters, listicles, alternative-product round-ups

BUILD A REACTIVE PR MUSCLE

Set up daily monitoring on HARO, Qwoted, and Featured.com and assign a named team member to respond within **2 hours of every relevant journalist request**. Replies that arrive in the first three hours capture roughly **80% of accepted quotes**. Pair this with internal alerts on **Google Alerts, brand mentions, and competitor names** — the fastest reactive link wins are the ones nobody else has spotted yet.

06

Outreach template & pipeline

Use the template below as a starting point. Customise the bracketed fields per prospect — never send the template verbatim. Then track every email in the pipeline grid to keep your follow-up cadence accurate.

Outreach email template (fill per prospect)

FIELD	YOUR INPUT
To (editor name)	
Subject line	
Specific compliment	
Your unique angle	
The single ask	
Credibility link	

Outreach pipeline tracker

PROSPECT	DAY 0 SENT	DAY 4 BUMP	STATUS

06

Tracking & SEO sign-off

Tracking & measurement KPIs

Referring domains — total unique domains linking to you (Ahrefs / GSC, monthly).

Domain Rating / Authority — the trend line that proves the campaign is compounding.

Outreach reply rate — opens, replies, and link wins as % of emails sent (weekly).

Anchor text mix — ratio of branded, partial, exact, and naked anchors across the profile.

Lost links — review weekly and reclaim by emailing the editor before the page re-indexes.

NOTES — REVIEW OBSERVATIONS

SEO LEAD SIGN-OFF

DATE

NEXT REVIEW

Need expert link building support?

Our SEO team runs end-to-end link building campaigns — prospecting, outreach, digital PR, and reporting that proves the work.

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