



Get more patients with backlinks

By soliciting and developing credible links to your Web site from other sources, you boost your visibility in Google search results—and can attract more patients to your practice. Here, tips to get you started.

Ron Romano and Neil H. Baum, MD

The medical profession has its jargon. So does the Internet world. Some of that jargon can be important to your success. “Backlinks” or “inbound links” are terms that should get your attention.

Why?

By developing them, you can attract more patients to your practice.

Backlinks are one piece of the Internet marketing puzzle that can help get your Web site on the first page of Google search results.

And just how important is it to be on page 1?

Well, consider that 91.5% of Web surfers do *not* go beyond the first page of results. That’s what an online advertising network called Chitika found when it examined tens of millions of online ad impressions in which the user was referred to the page via a Google search.¹

Just what are backlinks? They are links to your Web page from another site. In basic link terminology, a backlink is any link received by a Web page, directory, Web site, or top-level domain from another, similar site. In this article we discuss the importance of these links and ways to use them in your social media to attract new patients to your site and your practice.

Start with good site design

If you can get listed on the first page of Google search results for the keywords your patients are using, more traffic will come to your Web site. That won’t help if you have a

poorly designed site that has no patient conversion strategies, techniques, and systems to transform Web site visitors to patients.

You see, everything has to work together in a coordinated, integrated manner if you want to increase the number of patients who are looking for your services online. We’ve covered many of the basics in earlier articles on Web site design and improvement (see the box on page e3 for a listing). If you have a nonoptimal site, consider starting with these articles.

Why backlinks are important

Google uses more than 200 algorithms to rank your Web site. Some are more



Mr. Romano is President of YourInternetDoctor.com and CEO of Instant Marketing Systems. He co-authored *The Internet Survival Guide for Doctors* (2014, Instant Marketing Systems) and *No B.S. Direct Marketing* (2006, Entrepreneur Press) and contributed to the *Walking with the Wise* series (2004, Mentors Publishing). He is an Internet marketing consultant, speaker, and creator of “The Implementation Blueprint System.”



Dr. Baum practices urology in New Orleans, Louisiana. He is Associate Clinical Professor of Urology at Tulane Medical School and Louisiana State University School of Medicine, both in New Orleans. He is also on the medical staff at Touro Infirmary in New Orleans, and East Jefferson General Hospital in Metairie, Louisiana. And he is the author of several books, including *Social Media for the Healthcare Professional* (2012, Greenbranch), and *Marketing Your Clinical Practice: Ethically, Effectively, Economically* (4th edition, 2009; Jones & Bartlett). Dr. Baum is a Contributing Editor for OBG MANAGEMENT.

Mr. Romano reports that he is CEO of Instant Marketing Systems, which provides consulting advice, marketing plans, and Internet marketing services for businesses and medical practices. Dr. Baum reports no financial relationships relevant to this article.



important than others and have a greater influence on search engine positioning. Backlinks are one of those important influencers.

The number of backlinks you have is an indication of the popularity or importance of your Web site. Google considers a site more significant or relevant than others if it has a large number of quality backlinks from other directories, ezines, blogs, and social media Web sites. These backlinks must be relevant to your keywords. For example, because you are a medical professional, a link to your site from the American Cancer Society or the Mayo Clinic is considered more credible than a link from a local spa or health club.

A search engine such as Google considers the content of the sites it places at the top of the search results page. When links to your site come from other credible and popular sites, and those sites have content related to your site, these backlinks are considered more relevant to your site.

If backlinks come from sites with unrelated content, they are considered less relevant. You may even be penalized by Google for adding backlinks that have no content value.

For example, if a Web master has a site that focuses on urinary incontinence and receives a backlink from another site with information or articles about urinary incontinence, that backlink will be considered more relevant than a link from a site about mortgages that somehow also includes urinary incontinence on its page. Therefore, the higher the relevance of the site linking back to yours, the better the quality of that link.

Top 7 inbound links—and how to obtain them

1. Directories

Directories are indexes of online sites, typically organized by category. You want to ensure that each of your keywords is manually submitted to each directory so it is listed separately. This way you get maximum link value for each keyword.

Links back to your site from directories

such as Yahoo Directory and DMOZ.org are valuable. DMOZ.org is edited by humans. Although it is free, it may take some time for your site to be added. A listing in Yahoo's Directory costs \$299 per year.

2. Press releases

If you are writing press releases, make sure they contain keywords that someone would use to find a business like yours. Also ensure that they include links back to your site.

Once the press release is written, submit it to all the news agencies. Then you must wait and see if any of them pick it up and publish it.

You may want to consider having a press release professionally written and distributed by a public relations firm to boost your chances of having the release picked up. PRWeb.com has an excellent reputation. Its distribution network includes the search engines Google, Yahoo, and Bing; media outlets such as *USA Today*, CNN, and the *Wall Street Journal*; Associated Press distribution through major newspapers; and health and medical digests such as the Mayo Clinic, WebMD, Women's Health, and many more.

3. Article directories

By writing and distributing articles through high-traffic article directories, such as EzoneArticles.com, Articles.org, and Hubpages.com, you can attract valuable inbound links from a high-traffic site. Craft an effective link at the close of your article to drive traffic back to your site. An example of what your link might say is, "To view a short video on Kegel exercises for pelvic organ prolapse, visit our Web site at www.neilbaum.com/videos."

4. Social bookmarking

Like Web browser bookmarks, social bookmarking sites such as Digg.com, Reddit.com, and Del.icio.us.com store individual pages (bookmarks) online and allow users to tag (with keywords), organize, search, and manage these bookmarks as well as share them with others. If you bookmark your content



The number of backlinks you have—that are relevant to your site content—indicates to Google how popular or important your Web site is

on these sites, you get a link from the service. By producing content that your readers enjoy and bookmark to their friends, you gain a link that increases in search engine optimization (SEO) value.

5. Blog comments

To find blog posts on which to comment, you can use blog-specific search engines such as Google Blog Search. Make sure these are blogs read by your target market, not your colleagues. Brand yourself by always using the same name and remember to link back to your site. Always leave a comment that adds to the conversation.

6. Social media

Google also indexes your Twitter updates and social networking profiles. Add that to Web 2.0 hubsites like Scribd or HubPage and you've got a way to create many inbound links in a very short time. Scribd is a digital library featuring an ebook and audiobook subscription service that includes *New York Times* best sellers and classics. HubPages is a user-generated content, revenue-sharing Web site.

7. Video syndication

YouTube is one of the most visited sites online, and the number of sites that syndicate videos is growing every day. These sites often allow you to link to your site in your video's description, on your profile page, or both.

The importance of being consistent—and honest

For best results, you need to build these links monthly with regularity, and over time, you will reap the benefits of improved rankings. While it is fairly easy to modify your Web pages to make them more SEO-friendly, it is harder to influence other Web sites and get them to link to yours. This is the reason search engines consider backlinks such an important factor.

Moreover, search engines' criteria for quality backlinks have gotten tougher, thanks to unscrupulous Web masters trying

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to achieve these backlinks by deceptive techniques, such as hidden links or automatically generated pages whose sole purpose is to provide backlinks to Web sites. These pages are called link farms. Not only are they disregarded by search engines, but linking to one could get your site banned entirely. This strategy is often referred to as "black hat" linking and is to be avoided.

"White hat" methods to increase backlinks

Blog posting is one of the easiest, least expensive, and most effective ways to garner links from other sites. However, to reap this benefit, you must post blog entries consistently. We suggest posting at least once weekly. Your blog will gain more attention if you have something newsworthy to report. For example, if you attend a meeting where a revolutionary new development is reported, and you write about it *before* the media, you can be sure others will want to connect and link to your site.

Conduct a survey and share your results on your site. Others will want to link to your report.



For best results, build backlinks with regularity, and over time, you will reap the benefits of improved rankings

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Share any templates your office uses to be more efficient and productive. For example, Dr. Baum has a template, or checklist, for starting and ending every day in the office. It is shared on his Web site so that other sites can link to it and make use of it.

Show your funny bone. Humor often travels in a viral direction. If something funny happens in your practice, share it with others and they will frequently link to the source.

Join a forum. Forums are a great source of high-quality traffic and links. You can use a forum to reach out to a specific community. By placing valid, useful contributions, you gain legitimate authority for your site.

The bottom line

You want to attract as many visitors to your Web site as possible. Your own content and the frequency of your postings are mainstays of making your Web site relevant to existing and potential patients. Also useful are backlinks. The number and quality of your inbound links are major factors in SEO. Search engines place high value on trust and authority, and an inbound link from a very high-ranking and trusted Web site tells the search engine that someone trusted also trusts you. So start linking. 📌

Reference

1. The value of Google result positioning. Chitika.com. <http://chitika.com/google-positioning-value>. Updated June 12, 2013. Accessed June 9, 2015.