7 tactics to drive more links to your website

I recently presented at SMX East in New York. Aside from being one of my favourite cities in the world, it was a great conference and I want to expand upon my presentation and dive a bit deeper into the topic.

Below are seven link building tactics and ideas that we've used successfully at Aira to secure links for clients and increase rankings, traffic and revenue.

1. Develop reusable content campaigns

The traditional way of thinking about content-led link building campaigns is much like advertising or traditional PR campaigns – you run a campaign for a period of time, get as much as you can from it, then move onto the next one. This can work fine but isn't very efficient when it comes to budgets and resources because you often have to start design and development all over again.

Instead, you should be thinking of content campaigns that can be reused and revamped over and over again. This isn't always easy, but it's definitely possible. Here is an example of a piece that we built for Vouchercloud:

This data piece was originally populated with data from the World Health Organization in 2016, then, in 2017, a new data set was published. We simply took out the old data, plugged in the new data, updated the design which was minimal effort, then relaunched the content. This allowed us to go back to previous contacts with the new data, helping us secure more coverage as well as approaching brand new websites with the new data.

But it didn’t stop there. We pulled out Irish-centric statistics from the data ahead of St. Patrick’s Day and pitched in a newly developed story to generate more links.

Being able to reuse the existing content campaign allowed us

to relaunch very quickly and easily compared to a brand new build and design.

2. Don’t stop outreaching

Leading on from the previous point, in the same way, that you should try to reuse content campaigns and get more from them, you shouldn’t stop outreaching a campaign if it still has legs. Again, the traditional way of thinking about content campaigns is a time-limited activity which you will eventually stop and you’ll start on a new campaign, a bit like this:

You then start the process all over again with a new content idea.

This can work fine, but it can also be improved a lot by having a different mindset – a campaign is never finished.

We have an “always on” approach to content campaigns which means that we’re constantly looking for ways to get more links and coverage for existing client campaigns.

A good example of this would be back in September when the team launched a campaign which was slower than usual to generate links. They did some research and noticed it was Roald Dahl’s 102nd birthday, and we had specific stats on the writer which we knew the press would be interested in which gave us our hook. We went back out to the national press and helped a journalist add more value to their Roald Dahl article by sharing the stats with them which resulted in a link for our client in this article.

A key part of making this work is that our idea generation leans very heavily toward “evergreen” ideas as opposed to ideas where we have one shot at making them work.

One way to lean toward this is to use national days or yearly events to drive your ideation. Websites such as Days of the Year can help with this and give you inspiration for events which are related to your client.

Like the first tactic above, this is another one which works well if you’re on a limited budget because you can use it to get more links to existing content rather than having to spend it on producing more and more campaigns.

Having said that, the ultimate goal here is to build up a bank of content which lives on your client’s website and gives you lots of ways to get links on a consistent basis.

3. Learn what works across

industries

The team learns from campaigns and feeds those learnings into other client projects. One of the key value-adds clients expect from working with agencies is a benefit from your experience and knowledge of working with a range of clients. If something works well for one client, it may work for another and you need to look for these opportunities.

Over the last year or so, we've been doing this and we can an exercise where we mapped out the success of client content campaigns against the complexity of creating them. This gave us something that looked like this:

Each dot represents a content campaign. When we ran through this exercise, we could see patterns starting to emerge that were successful and not complex to create. This then fed back into our strategy and do more of the work that succeeds without being overly complex.

This has further developed to the point where we record a bunch of data about the campaigns we launch and the links that our content generate. I touched upon this in a previous post where I talked about the different content formats you can use to execute content. Essentially, we now have data that can tell us things such as whether using data visualization in a content piece leads to more links and coverage:

The data that feeds into the graph above is aggregated across all of our clients in a range of industries to help us spot trends.

If you're not doing this yet, the best place to start is simply to start recording data against all of your content campaigns such as:

- The number of links, nofollow links and brand mentions generated
- Date of launch
- The industry of the client
- What type of execution you chose
- If data was used or not

The list will differ for everyone, but the first step is to start recording this data and then start learning from it over time.

4. Target your golden publications for an exclusive feature

Before getting into the detail of this one, a quick side tip – when you kick off a client project, be sure to ask them this question:

"What are your top 10 dream publications to be featured in?"

This not only helps you get an understanding of what matters to the client in terms of coverage, but offers a very targeted list of sites where, if you can get featured, will make your client happy.

If you have this, you can pick and choose from the list and offer a single publication an exclusive when you begin your outreach. The idea is to find a journalist who values your idea or data highly enough (so it needs to be a good idea!) to want to be the first person to write about it online and share

it with their readership.

This works particularly well if you have a unique or different data set. The time between publishing the data story and other publications doesn't need to be that long – 24 to 48 hours can often be enough for a journalist to be happy that they've got it first.

There are a few benefits to this approach:

1. You can almost guarantee a "big hit" right at the start of the campaign which relieves some of the pressure on your when you start your outreach.
2. If you can secure an exclusive with a large newspaper, it can lead to lots of other newspapers/magazines following suit and also covering the content without you asking.
3. You can slowly but surely start ticking off the dream list of publications that your client gave you.

5. Outreach to 2nd-tier linking websites

One of the core goals of a content-driven link building campaign is to secure links from high authority domains which can then pass that authority (and traffic) to a client's website. The downside of this is that the high visibility and credibility of these domains means that they can often be credited as the original source of the story. Whereas in reality, your client is the original source.

This can lead to links pointing at third party websites rather than your own which is annoying to say the least! We had this recently with a client where they were covered in this article on Entrepreneur – great coverage with a nice link to our client. The content was covered again on this website but annoyingly, they credit Entrepreneur with the link:

This isn’t the end of the world, but if we can get them to link directly to the client source, we’d be much happier.

6. Use keyword research for more links

This one is more of a passive link building technique but the time you will spend is pretty minimal and has a few benefits.

The idea is to see if your content idea relates to any keywords which have volume. If it does, then you can integrate the keywords into the piece itself and potentially get traffic by ranking well for them. The core goal is rarely to rank

well, it is usually to secure links, but the benefits of direct traffic are obvious and shouldn’t be overlooked.

So where does link building come in?

If you are working on a content piece that is data-led, you have an opportunity to get in front of people who are trying to find this data. Amongst the people trying to find data will be the kind of people with the ability to link to you – journalists, writers and bloggers to name a few.

For example, one of our client content pieces ranks well for this keyword:

This keyword will have very, very little search volume. But someone who does use this kind of keyword (and related ones) are exactly the kind of people who may link to the content at some point.

By thinking about this, we’re giving our content a chance to generate links that we didn’t ask for.

7. Overcoming link building blockers

Driving more links to your content piece isn’t just about your own actions, it’s about the actions of others too. Sometimes,

their activity can actually get in the way of yours and and you secure fewer links. I've written about it in this article previously, but I wanted to share some tips specifically for overcoming barriers to outreach.

One of the most common blockers is when your client has either another agency working on their website or their own internal team. This can present challenges because you want to sync up activity and not over saturate contacts or worse still, both target journalists at the same time.

A way to overcome this is to share your outreach plans with the internal team and agree on who owns which contacts or publications. This helps to create clear boundaries and reduces the risk of something going wrong. If you're in Europe, you'll need to be careful because of data protection laws under GDPR.

Another tactic is to share your plan for content campaigns as far in advance as possible, then add any other campaigns so you can quickly highlight times when work crosses over. This means when you launch campaigns, you're less likely to hit blockers because you'll have overcome them already.

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