How Outbound Links May Affect Rankings by @martinibuster

Someone asked me if his linking patterns could cause his site to lose rankings. He said that his informational site is consistently linking to commercial pages. He asked if he should be exclusively linking to informational sites or mix of commercial and informational. Here are the five outbound link factors that I believe can impact rankings.

1. It’s Not the Site. It’s the Page

Sometimes a site can be about multiple topics. So if the site isn’t an exact match to your niche but had some overlap, then it should be fine. What’s more important is that the site has overlap and that the page is relevant and useful to someone clicking from your site to the other site.

Majestic has a tool that displays what they call Topical Trust Flow (TTF). https://majestic.com/reports/site-explorer?q=example.com&IndexDataSource=F TTF is a measure of the topical niches that a domain is in. This is one of the handiest tools I use for understanding what niche a site is in. For most sites you will see that they are members of multiple niche topics. And that’s totally normal.

This screenshot of Majestic's Topical Trust Flow metric shows the different niches that the inbound links reside in. It gives a detailed snapshot of the kind of site you're dealing with in terms of relevance and spam.

So the point I want to make is that if the site is somewhat related but the page is on point related from your page to the linked page, then linking to that page should be fine.

2. Relevance is Important

What you link to should ideally be an **exact match** for the content being discussed on YOUR Page. An exact match between the context of the paragraph from which the link is on to the linked site, means that it's good for both. The reason is

because what you link to is a signal of what your page is about.

3. Your Links Defines How Legit Your Site Is

Who you link to defines what side of the spam/normal wall your site is on. Spammy sites tend to link to other spammy sites as well as to normal sites. Normal sites rarely link to spammy sites. Because of this fact, spammy sites tend to create tight link communities with each other, despite almost consistently linking out to normal sites.

Spammy sites have a mix of outbound links to spammy and legit sites. Normal sites less so.

4. The Negative Side of Outbound Links

The following is an image from a patent showing the linking patterns of spam and normal sites. What YOU need to do is create a site with normal inbound links. Then you need to make sure that the sites/pages you link to also have normal inbound links.

Spammy links and normal links tend to form communities with their linking patterns. While spammy pages may link to normal pages, normal pages rarely link to spammy pages. This creates a map of the Internet that makes it easier to find linking patterns between normal pages, while rejecting the spam links.

If the sites you link to have spammy outbound links, then maybe you should reconsider linking out to those sites.

The point of this is that low quality sites link to normal sites all day long and into the night. Links to normal sites never sleep. But normal sites do not tend to link to low quality sites.

If the site you administer is a normal site, then focus on quality of sites that you link to. Content quality is

important. But so is understanding who the other site links to and what kinds of sites they are involved with.

For example, if the other sites appear to have a lot of inbound links that appear to be paid for, then you might not want to link to them. This is kind of tricky though because any successful site acquires spam links. But there's a difference between automated links created by spammers and paid links.

What Does a Paid Guest Article Look Like?

The typical pattern of a paid link within an article is that the article features three links. Is there a spammer handbook somewhere that says there has to be three links, no more no less? Because this is the pattern. The paid link is usually the first and sometimes the second link. If you see a lot of these, then the site is probably engaging in poor linking practices.

5. Does linking to .edu and .gov sites help?

Linking out to .edu and .gov pages is ok as long as it's relevant. If you're topic is European vacations, in my opinion you're better off linking to something useful for a traveler, whether that's something on Instagram or a blog. How likely is ther going to be good travel advice on a .gov site?

People believe that linking to .gov and .edu pages will help you rank. This idea has been around since about 2001. If you think Google is so easy to spam that linking to a .edu or .gov site is going to help you, then go ahead.

Googlers have consistently debunked the idea that that .gov and .edu pages have a special ranking benefit. There is no patent or research that explicitly or implicitly says that sites with links from .edu and .gov sites are considered

better. The entire idea is pure myth.

When Google creates a map of the web, pages linking to each other form interlinked communities. It's like those images of galaxies. Each galaxy can represent a niche topic. Some galaxies are bigger. Some niche topics are smaller and the link communities are smaller. The takeaway is that website linking patterns tend to organize themselves into communities aligned by topic.

So if you are wondering if whether linking to a commercial site from an informational site makes a difference, as long as the topics are the same then in my opinion it the link is fine as long as the site/page receiving the link is itself part of a similar link neighborhood.

Link neighborhoods overlap, so linking to a related but not an exact match page is perfectly normal. Informational sites routinely link to commercial sites. So it's not really the consideration of whether it's a commercial site that should be a worry. What you should worry about is the inbound/outbound link patterns of the site you are linking to.

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