Links: To speed or not to speed

When we first started as an agency, our link builders were evenly split into two camps: One would send out a flurry of emails to all sorts of sites and deal with them if they responded. The other would spend a significant amount of time doing due diligence prior to outreach so that anyone who did respond had already been vetted.

I always thought it was a good idea to let each new link builder find his own way, so I didn't usually express a strong opinion about this divide. I could see the points of view of both sides, too. Why bother doing a lot of work up front if the webmaster wasn't even going to respond? Why disappoint webmasters who *did* respond when you couldn't work with them?

On the whole, I have grown to favor the prior due diligence approach as opposed to casting a wide net. I'm firmly of the opinion that some link-building tasks absolutely do *not* benefit from being sped up.

However, I do think other areas of link building can be made faster and more efficient. It's not always a bad tradeoff to invest a little bit less manual effort in one area to free up more time and energy for higher-priority tasks.

Today, I discuss several major link-building tasks in terms of whether they can (and should) be "sped up" – through automation, outsourcing or just spending less time on them.

Content creation

Useful, relevant content is what drives most link-building efforts, so content creation is a task that often falls to

link builders (especially when pursuing guest posting opportunities). Creating content is very labor-intensive, though, so it's understandable that link builders might look for ways to spend less time on it.

Can you speed it up? Yes. However, you can end up with some real garbage if you try to take shortcuts to create good content. I once experimented with outsourcing some content, and let me tell you, I got what I paid for (very little)! It was the most generic nonsense ever, and I had to correct a ton of typos and grammatical errors.

I'm not saying don't outsource here; I'm saying don't think that fantastic content usually happens quickly.

Should you speed it up? No! See above. I think that anyone can create decent content (for the most part), but not everyone can create *great* content that stands on its own. If you're going to outsource, understand that great content usually doesn't come fast or cheap.

Discovery of potential linking partners

Identifying websites from which you want to pursue links is an activity that involves a fair amount of research. There are programs that can automate parts of this process, however.

Can you speed it up? Yes. Discovery software can generate a massive list of potential linking partners much more quickly than if you were to do this task manually.



Should you speed it up? I'm 50/50 on this, actually. I was strongly against automating discovery in the past, but after using a tool that spat out a list of potential partner sites based on my criteria, I definitely understand its usefulness

and efficiency. Sometimes, programs like these find something you didn't see in your research. Just make sure you manually review your list of link prospects before reaching out.

Contact info gathering

Finding a potential linking partner is great, but not if you can't figure out how to contact them. Link builders often need to spend time scouring a site to figure out who exactly to reach out to.

Can you speed it up? Definitely. With the way we review sites, it's not usually a big deal to obtain contact info. However, if I had a big list of sites that I had vetted, it would be great to get the contact info quickly.

Should you speed it up? Yes, if you have a tool that does it. Just be aware that you may end up getting old email addresses or ones that aren't the ones you want (like the IT director instead of the marketing director).

Due diligence

Performing due diligence work on a potential link partner requires time and effort. You need to make sure the website is relevant, authoritative, legitimate, free from penalties and adheres to whatever guidelines your client may have about linking partners.

Can you speed it up? Absolutely not. No no no no no. I verify that my link team has checked all the guidelines for each client, as well as our in-house guidelines, before we build the link. They're good, but I catch a lot that they've missed. They do the same with me.

Due diligence for us is more than just metrics checking. We have clients who say, "No mommy blogs!" or will only accept links from sites hosted in certain countries, so it's

difficult to automate this well.

Should you speed it up? No. If you want great links, I would never speed up in this area. If you just want some crappy links for whatever reason, go for it.

Outreach

Reaching out to potential linking partners involves crafting emails (or private messages on social media platforms), which can often be quite time-consuming.

Can you speed it up? Yes – but I believe you should do so *only* if you have vetted the sites beforehand. You can speed it up no matter what, of course, but then you're going to get replies from sites that aren't the right fit if you haven't done some upfront analysis.



Should you speed it up? I'm split on this one. As mentioned above, I think you *can* speed up outreach *if* you have vetted the sites beforehand. However, I prefer a more personalized approach, and that can't really be sped up. I'd rather spend more time writing an email that gets opened and encourages a response.

Recently, a webmaster responded to me and said that while she couldn't give me a link, I'd written the best email she'd seen in a long time, and she wished me luck. I uttered a small curse, but it really made me feel good about doing so much work on the initial outreach.

Social broadcasting

Promoting your content through social media channels can often lead to traffic – and links. This is a task that can be automated, at least to some extent.

Can you speed it up? Of course. You can use different tools to broadcast whenever you want to broadcast. If you need to reach people in different time zones, it's probably easier to make that more automated. If you're just doing social broadcasting for a small site with one new article, though, I'd do that manually.



Should you speed it up? As long as you don't overdo it and bombard people with your content, I think it's fine. My main concern is that if you do use automation for this, you run the very serious risk of inadvertently tweeting something inappropriate. I've seen many brands get crucified on social when there's a mass shooting or earthquake, and they're blasting you with info on how you need to buy those shoes right now or they'll be gone.

The bottom line

People want new techniques or ways to make link building more efficient. Sometimes that just isn't doable. Building good links is one of the most labor-intensive processes in SEO, and that's one reason why it's so frequently outsourced.

However, if you take shortcuts when you shouldn't, you'll probably end up spending extra time either removing those links or disavowing them – so I'd rather slow down and really intensively and manually evaluate a site before trying to get a link there.

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