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# What Google says about nofollow, sponsored, and UGC

# links in 2020: Does it affect your SEO rankings?

## 30-second summary:

- While nofollow links solely dominated the web for 14 years, Google recently announced two new additions: sponsored and UGC links.
- Shortly afterward, Google made further amendments to all three links.
- This article breaks down where things currently stand.
- Joseph Dyson discusses whether the new link attributes impact rankings and concludes with suggestions on how businesses can improve online visibility.

Whether you're an SEO newbie or a seasoned pro, we're sure you're familiar with the cardinal rule of the game: evolution.

Stagnancy isn't a common sight in the digital marketing world.

Google is constantly releasing new updates as it moves toward more seamless and accurate crawling, indexing, and ranking.

On September 10th 2019, Google set the bar higher than before by adding two new attributes alongside the preexisting "nofollow" attribute, which had been in place for over 14 years.

Before we get to the new additions, let's break down the original nofollow attribute as a quick refresher.

# What's a nofollow link?

A nofollow link is a hyperlink with a rel="nofollow" tag.

What does this mean? To put it as simply as possible, the nofollow tag signals search engines to ignore a link. The destination URL doesn’t get a boost in search engine rankings, as nofollow links don’t pass PageRank (an algorithm that helps Google rank web pages on SERPs).

When it comes to link building, receiving a nofollow backlink can be a bummer, as your rankings are left in a state of limbo. While web users are redirected to your website, the domain that offers you the link simultaneously informs Google to not send any “link juice” your way.

However, nofollow links still have hidden perks. They drive traffic (despite leaving rankings untouched), increase brand awareness, and help leads discover and familiarize themselves with your business.

But wait, why are nofollow links used in the first place?

Google originally announced the concept of nofollow links in 2005 to fight comment spam. They were quickly embraced by the SEO world and are frequently used to avoid breaking SEO rules set by Google.

Links that added value to content but couldn’t be vouched for were categorized as nofollow links. In addition, paid links also included the nofollow link attribute. This announcement played a big role in preventing businesses from buying link juice.

## But what changed?

While nofollow links had been extremely effective thus far, they were an oversimplified solution to a complex problem. Instead of taking subjective intent for including hyperlinks into account, they offered a cleanly demarcated black and white scenario that proved to be a nuisance for many businesses.

The only two options were nofollow links or dofollow links, the latter being the default for all hyperlinks.

## The introduction of sponsored and UGC links

In 2019, Google announced two major additions to standard nofollow links: sponsored links and UGC links.

Marketers heaved a major sigh of relief in the announcement's wake, as they could now use the two new attributes to help Google better understand the link's intent and use.

But that wasn't all. In March 2020, Google made further amendments to its previous announcement.

Here's where things currently stand:

## Sponsored links

According to Google's latest update, the sponsored attribute (rel="sponsored") is specifically used for hyperlinks that are promotional in nature.

Prior to their creation, paid links were categorized as nofollow links, which proved to be extremely misleading. The new sponsored attribute helps Google identify advertising links separately.

The benefit? Enhanced categorization and less confusion. Link receivers and providers can easily decipher sponsored links from "untrustworthy" nofollow links.

## UGC links

The UGC (user-generated content) attribute was created to help Google determine which links are, as the acronym indicates,

generated by users.

This was a lifesaver (we’re not exaggerating) for webmasters who had been struggling to indicate that specific hyperlinks were not endorsed.

The UGC attribute is used to link to sections of websites where users generate their own content, e.g. comment sections, forums posts, etc.

## Nofollow links

Google’s latest announcement took the weight off nofollow links—quite literally.

Previously, the nofollow tag was used for both paid and user-generated links. However, the new categories (“sponsored links” and “UGC links”) made things much simpler by placing paid and user-generated content in different categories.

The nofollow tag is now solely used for non-trusted links.

While nofollow links were not used for crawling and indexing before, Google’s 2020 update indicated that they would be used as a “hint” for crawling and indexing. While people quickly began to consider this a win for ranking purposes, the picture wasn’t as rosy as it was made out to be.

Currently, each of the three links (nollow, sponsored, and UGC) is used as a mere hint, not a direct ranking factor. While they may be crawled, they will not substantially impact rankings.

## Which link attribute should you

## use?

While adding more options should ideally make things simpler, it can backfire if you're not sure about proper attribution.

Here's how webmasters should use the new attributes:

### 1. rel="sponsored"

Use the sponsored attribute strictly for paid or sponsored links. While affiliate links are also considered sponsored links, Google hasn't directly made that clear yet.

### 2. rel="ugc"

Use the UGC attribute for all user-generated content.

### 3. rel="nofollow"

Use the nofollow attribute if you want to link to a specific page but don't want to be associated with it for any reason (unreliability, incredibility, untrustworthiness, unfamiliarity).

The nofollow tag will indicate that you don't endorse a particular link and would not like to offer them ranking credit.

## How should you boost your rankings?

While using these tags is a great way to assiduously categorize your content, it's not a big win for your rankings… or your link building partners.

Granted, you may notice a slight boost. However, it'll be negligible at best.

Google’s public search liaison, Danny Sullivan, encapsulated this perfectly:

While the latest update came much later in 2020, it was already being actively discussed in 2019. Sullivan was quick to dismiss claims that rankings would go through the roof once the new “hint” model was released.

While all those nofollow links you’ve collected over the years will still help you generate traffic, you’ll ultimately have to turn to other strategies to notice a substantial boost in rankings.

Here are some effective ways you can climb SERPs:

# Maximize outcomes from link building

Link building is easily the most fast-acting and sustainable way to improve rankings. In short, link building involves receiving dofollow backlinks from websites with high domain authority (a score that determines a website's ranking on SERPs).

As you build quality backlinks, Google will perceive your website as an authoritative and trustworthy source. In fact, Google uses the quality and quantity of backlinks to rank websites on SERPs. The boost in rankings will help you increase conversions and improve brand identity.

It's important to note that your backlinks should come from a website with good to high domain authority. The higher, the better; however, 50–60 is a good starting point for small businesses.

In addition, make sure you receive dofollow backlinks as opposed to nofollow backlinks. As discussed before, the latter will help you generate traffic. However, your rankings will remain in a state of limbo for the most part (refer to Danny Sullivan's tweet if the blind optimism kicks in!).

## Recommended link building strategies

If you're new to the realm of link building, we recommend using these strategies:

- Leverage the broken link building method
- Build strong connections with non-competing businesses to offer and receive links
- Incorporate more internal links in your content
- Try your hand at guest blogging
- List your site in reliable directories
- Convert nofollow backlinks into dofollow backlinks by

contacting the respective business

## Create a mobile-friendly website

Google recently announced mobile-first indexing, which means that Googlebot will be using the mobile version of a page for ranking purposes first. While this may come as a surprise to some people, we're sure most of you are nodding your head "matter-of-factly".

The large majority of Americans (a whopping 96%) own a cellphone. If you've created a stunning and interactive desktop-friendly website but haven't been prioritizing mobile-friendliness, you may be inadvertently damaging your rankings.

Take Google's Mobile-Friendly Test to determine your website's accessibility for mobile phone users.

If you don't like what you see, your customers probably won't either.

Climb SERPs by creating an eye-catching and seamless mobile-friendly website that helps you generate quality traffic and grow your business.

When combined with link building, mobile-friendliness can go a long way in helping your business become more visible on search engines and break into the Google three-pack.

## Create, update, and optimize your content

While you may have checked off all the boxes, leaving the content section untouched can take a toll on your business.

Opting for web design and development isn't enough. If you don't create, update, and optimize your content, you'll fall

behind and get engulfed by your competition.

Create value-added and engaging content to make sure your website actively circulates SERPs.

## And that’s not all

We suggest updating old content on a monthly basis in light of new updates and announcements by Google. As we highlighted before, Google is constantly upping its game. Keep up with ranking factors and algorithm amendments to ensure you’re covering all the bases.

And, of course, don’t forget to optimize your content.

Get in touch with keyword specialists to master keyword research and incorporation. Use the right mix of short-tail, long-tail, geo-targeting, and LSI keywords to help your business become a frequent sight on the first page of Google for industry-specific and local searches.

According to research, over five million blog posts are published each day.

How do you make your content stand out? While keywords help, they’re not the be-all and end-all of optimization. In addition, use title tags, meta description tags, header tags, customized URLs, and canonical tags to master the art of on-page SEO. We don’t need to say much; your rankings will be all the proof you need!

# Conclusion

As the SEO world becomes increasingly competitive each day, claiming your spot simply isn’t enough. You *have* to go the extra mile to preserve it.

Whether you’re creating optimized content or leveraging link building, ensure consistency to retain online visibility and

SERP rankings.

Keep at it and you'll manage to not only achieve but also maintain your target KPIs over time.

*Joseph Dyson is a Senior Account Manager at* Search Berg *with extensive experience in lead generation and digital marketing. He offers link building services and frequently contributes to the Search Berg blog with marketing tips and insights.*

More about:

https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2020/07/24/what-google-says-about-nofollow-sponsored-and-ugc-links-in-2020-does-it-affect-your-seo-rankings/

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