



# Bear Canyon Consulting, LLC

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## **Exchanging Links Have we all gone mad?**

By Keli Etscorn, keli@etscorn.com, ©2007 Keli Etscorn

I work extensively in the area of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). I've had great success in helping my clients, mostly Realtors® and attorneys, achieve good rankings in the majors: Google, MSN and Yahoo. Since Google considers a page's "rank worth" (which is based a bit on incoming links), establishing those links for my clients is high on my to-do list. (And yes, I know there are other ranking considerations on a Web site, but having great backlinks can really help a site's ranking.)

Recently I had an experience that made me gnash my teeth. The problem? No one is doing backlinks right. I went to evaluate a list of links one of my clients wants to investigate for "backlink/exchange worthiness." This client has a new Web site and wants to do the very best he can. He did his homework, sent me a big list of sites he researched on his own time, and has educated himself on SEO and what we do as SEO professionals.

However, when I researched his list, I was very disappointed in the results. My "field trip" prompted me to write this article on how to look for good sites to exchange with and how to do it right!

Link swaps are not a complicated process but it can be time consuming if you want to do it with success. Let's start from the beginning.

## **What is a Link Exchange?**

Link Exchange (aka Reciprocal Link Exchange, Link Exchange Request, Links Swapping, Link Trading, etc.) is the most accessible way to improve your Web site's link popularity and ranking in the Google search engine – and it enhances your users browsing experience. The Google algorithm uses link popularity in its ranking consideration algorithm.

By exchanging links with "like sites," you achieve better search engine positioning and increase your Web site's visibility/traffic. Building link popularity through link exchange (links swap) means identifying sites (in a similar industry) whose Webmasters are willing to add a link to your Web site in exchange for you adding a link from your site back to theirs. Pretty simple eh?

## **Link Exchange Partner Considerations**

It is important to find link exchange partners among Web sites that offer a good match with the content and the theme of your own Web site, in the same



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"neighborhood." For example, if you're an attorney, link with other attorneys - they don't have to be in your state or city. The link exchange partner's Web site theme/topic is the first thing to review, because search engines give more "weight" to a link from a Web site that has a similar topic to yours – remember: same "neighborhood."

It's possible that visitors may see a link partnership with another Web site as an "association" between the link swap partners, so make sure your Web site only "associate" with high-quality, credible Web sites. Exchanging links with poor-quality or low-content Web sites will not help your SEO goals – or your business goals!

## What to Look For in a Potential Link Exchange Partner

The following items are guidelines to follow when shopping around for a link exchange partner.

- 1) Can you click from the homepage to the page your link will be displayed on? If you can't, then the spiders probably won't find it. And if the spiders can't find it, no PR (PageRank) will be given. Spiders don't follow a graphic link as well as they do a text link.
- 2) When you find the page your link will be displayed on, is it more than 2 clicks deep from the homepage? Humans and spiders don't travel far; the mentality is that spiders try to mimic human behavior here. Both humans and spiders want all the good info right up front, not 5 clicks deep. Having a site map can easily sort this problem out on your own site.
- 3) What is the PR of the page your site will be displayed on? If you don't already have the Google toolbar installed, you can use this page to determine PR:

<http://www.freelance-help.com/google-ranking-report/pagerank-checker.php>

A page with good PR means that Google sees it... if Google sees the site, the spiders will pick up the new content (the link to your site) and it will benefit your linking strategy.

I like to link with sites having a PR 4 or more.

NOTE: PR isn't everything and is in fact pretty much dead. I use it as an indicator these days and not much else.

- 4) Does the links page have this type of URL?

<http://www.jeffhunt.com/Nav.aspx/Page=/FavoriteLinks/Default.aspx>

The link page here is 4 subdirectories away from the root/main directory, a far cry from:



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<http://www.jeffhunt.com/>

Again, spiders won't go that far – would you? This particular page also has hundreds and hundreds of links (see item #8.)

- 5) Is the link exchange page in a frame? It's been known for a long time that spiders have a hard time with sites in a frame. To do a PR check, you have to pop them out of the frame (right click over the link and "open in new window") to even determine the TRUE PR of the link page.
- 6) The intent of link exchange is to offer your visitors extra resources that benefit their browsing experience. Since it became public knowledge that Google's algorithm heavily weights sites linked to yours, people have really gone overboard with linking. So I ask you to consider this: Are you benefiting your visitors by adding a potential link exchange partner?
- 7) Does the potential link exchange partner have good rankings in the other search engines?
- 8) Is your link going to be on a page with hundreds and hundreds of unrelated links? If so, you don't want to exchange with them. Sites looking like a link farm may eventually get banned and hurt your site. Again, ask yourself, "what is my viewer going to benefit from hundreds of unrelated links?" Nothing.
- 9) Make your own link page attractive. You want it to be appealing to the eye so that your potential link exchange partners will want \*their\* site on this beautiful page.
- 10) A spider won't crawl/index past 100K. In the case of this site (which I can't even pop out of a frame, so a spider certainly won't see it):

<http://www.jeffhunt.com/Nav.aspx/Page=/FavoriteLinks/Default.aspx>

This page is 160K – it looks like a link farm. It has no PR because the spiders can't find it. This is a perfect example of what NOT to do. So whom is this link exchange benefiting? No one.

You've now researched and found some potential sites to exchange links with. Now it's time to submit a request – just follow this simple procedure:

- Find link exchange partners in search engines by typing in your keyword phrases. Mix your phrase up by adding other states and cities so you're not adding a direct competitor. People will be more willing to add your link if you're not perceived as a direct competitor.



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- Send an E-mail to ask for a link exchange with your Web site. Supply your Web site address (URL), and add the linking text (anchor text) and description you would like this potential link exchange partner to include. You might also want to send them the page their link will appear on. (Note: In some cases, it's beneficial for you to already have your potential partner's link on your site, and then just point them to the page where they can find their link.)
- If you get a reply back, add a link from your Web site to the link exchange partner's Web site. Some may even give you specifics as to what linking text to use and may supply a description.
- Send an E-mail to your new link exchange partner when you've added them to your site (supply a link to the page) and ask if they would add your link.
- Check periodically to see if your link is still on your link partner's site.
- Be sure to include all your contact information.
- Write a personal E-mail that indicates you've looked at the site. Don't send 100% "canned" requests – you don't want your E-mail request viewed as spam or it will end up in the trash bin.

## Creating Your Very Own Link Exchange Form

To make it easier for my SEO clients link exchange efforts, I create a form for their Web site like this:

<http://www.stephensanderson.com/site-partner-qualification-form.htm>

This way, the potential link exchange partner simply fills out the form, it gets shipped to me, and I approve or deny the link. My form stipulates that my client's link must be on their site before we consider an exchange. Note that we supply all the information that we want to include with our link.

## Other Backlink Ideas

### Directories

Directories are important because they are considered backlinks to your site. There are literally thousands of them out there for just about every industry you can think of. I have a list here I use <http://www.kelie.com/se>.

### Places to swap links:

<http://www.link-city.com/>

<http://www.reciprocallink.com/directory>

<http://www.reciprocallinkexchange.com/>

[http://www.fullpromote.com/reciprocal\\_link](http://www.fullpromote.com/reciprocal_link)

<http://linkpartners.com/>



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## Final Notes

As with all things SEO, don't expect instant results, especially with organic SEO. It takes time, patience and a knowledgeable SEO person to achieve your goals. Getting back links isn't the end-all, be-all of SEO either. It's just one of the many practices that go into a well optimized site. Also, quantity isn't quality. Go for good links... not hundreds of them.

## Resources

This free eBook tells you how to get the most out reciprocal links.  
<http://www.axandra-link-popularity-tool.com/increase-link-popularity.htm>

The Art of Advanced Link Building, By Elizabeth Osmeloski  
<http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/article.php/3100291>

## About the Author

[Keli Etscorn](#) is a search engine optimization specialist who focuses on organic search engine tactics. Former founder of a fiber optic ISP, she now runs her own company, [Bear Canyon Consulting, LLC](#). Keli has created nationally featured Web sites and Ecommerce sites since 1997. Her work is featured in publications such as PC Magazine, Parade Magazine and APC Currents magazine, just to name a few. She started concentrating on [search engine optimization](#) in 1999 and uses her master's degree in mathematics to get her clients top rankings in the most popular search engines.

Her endeavors include starting and managing the SEO unit for one of the biggest attorney portals online, including overseeing the optimization and design of over 2000 nationwide attorney Web sites. Her biggest projects to date are daughter Sage and son Seven, both future UNIX system administrators.

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