

Buy Links or Buy Trouble?

The big debate raging on the Internet these days focuses on Google's recent campaign to ensure that paid links aren't part of the determination of popularity of a website. Their take is that if you buy links, you're trying to skew the results of any search in order to increase your presence in the rankings. But wait, isn't that what any successful company wants to do? Increase their presence and popularity? Taking a closer look at what Google's official stance is, you'll find that Google doesn't condemn outright companies who sell or buy links. In fact, they state on their website that, "Buying and selling links is a normal part of the economy of the web when done for advertising purposes, and not for manipulation of search results." And here is where Google's new campaign runs into trouble. How does one decide what links are for "advertising purposes" vs. "manipulation of search results?" It is inherent that any article, review or informational posting a company has on their website will have words and phrases that will register in search results. The information wouldn't be relevant to the reader if it weren't also relevant in searches, and vice-versa. The same can be said for articles and reviews that are on other sites but link back to a particular company's own website. The dilemma for Google is that there is really no way of knowing when and if a link was paid for. The fact is that the Google algorithm can't distinguish between a paid link and an equity link. Consultants often provide links to companies they are doing or have done work for. Authors link to bookstores carrying their latest work, and software firms link to client companies. These aren't paid links, but they sure do increase the rankings for sites that, quite frankly, improve the bottom line for them personally. The next blog you visit may have a few relevant articles on great ways to raise an all-natural garden. If the blog is associated with a site that sells all-natural fertilizers and pesticides, it's only natural that these articles will provide needed and valued information. If these sites link to other sites that have books about natural gardening, how can Google determine whether these are paid links or natural? The simple answer is, it isn't possible. These links could be because the writer of the articles actually uses and endorses the products mentioned in the links or the book publisher and the gardening supplies house have a reciprocal agreement. Other reasons could be because the book publisher paid for a link, the owner of the publishing house received a free load of fertilizer to try out (in hopes of being mentioned in a future book); he liked it; he thanked them with a link, or even the gardening supplies company is owned by a man whose sister is a sales associate for the book publisher. But the results are the same. The links are relevant, regardless of whether they were paid for in cash, as a favor, in trade or in sweat equity. It's this vary blurring of the lines that makes it so practical and helpful to buy links. The more relevant information you provide to consumers, the more valuable you become. If a link is relevant, helpful and trustworthy, it should and will increase the ranking of the site it's on. Google has asked that Internet users report sites that have paid links. It's a laughable suggestion. How does anyone else on the Internet know whether you have paid for a link or not? They can't. And this is why, although some people may temporarily "go underground" with purchased links, the practice isn't going to stop. It's a good thing, because these links increase competition and encourage growth and change, two very important aspects of a dynamic marketplace. Whether you buy a link or receive it unsolicited, it's going to be useful and relevant. If it weren't, the link wouldn't show up in Google's algorithm anyway. Finally, Google suggests that those who buy links are "buying page rank." Page rank isn't for sale, particularly since it is owned by Google. The algorithm removes or penalizes non-relevant information in search results. If the information is relevant, it will improve rankings. To that end, it doesn't matter at all whether that link was paid for in cash or trade.

About the Author

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