



CLICKCONSULT®

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SEO uncovered

An Advanced Guide to Organic Search

Chapter 4 - Relationships

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RELATIONSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

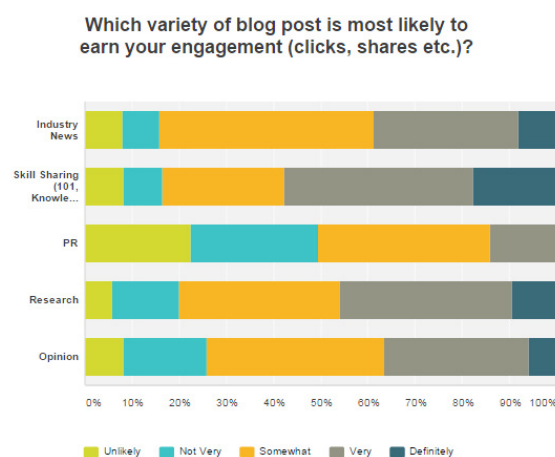
The building of relationships spans many areas of modern search marketing – it is both an extension of the increasing trend toward [personalisation](#) and an important part of improving a brand's link profile (as inbound links are a direct SEO ranking factor). Not only do brands and agencies need to develop relationships with publishers – those with whom they can place relevant links when subjects close to the publisher's interests align with the brand's – they also need to build and maintain relationships with their audience to ensure they know what is desired for dissemination to any relevant publisher.

One is almost entirely useless without the other – it is possible to produce content that your audience would love, because you know them so well, but without the other side, without the ability to promote this content through external relationships, you can find that this content is unlikely to garner the attention it deserves.

The inverse is also true – though you may be able to promote content with some of the world's most renowned publishers, if the content isn't what your audience is looking for, it will do little or no good at all.

It is for this reason we seek feedback from our audience to ensure we are keeping up with their requirements. While our network of promotional channels is extensive, it only takes inattention for the content to become irrelevant.

We surveyed our audience of over half a million in order to further develop our knowledge and understanding of what they know and want to know. As the data gathered shows, while there is an audience for all of the main varieties of search marketing blog, some are clearly more desirable than others – what we, as an information provider, seek to do is to ensure that our output matches audience desire:



OUTREACH

Outreach is the top level terminology generally applied to relationship building and maintenance within the search marketing industry – and it is undeniably a balancing act. Outreach effectively deals with the link profile of a brand's website as well as its relationship to a wider community of consumers and publishers.

Search marketing must attempt to push a brand not only to become a market leader, topping their targeted search engine results pages (SERPs), but also to become a thought leader and voice of authority within its industry. Remember, the manner in which the online population interacts with brands is changing, the level of trust in traditional advertisement has diminished, so to really reach an audience and build trust and loyalty it must be an exchange, the brand must offer the answer to consumer queries, interact with them, become a presence in their lives and remain conscious of the zeitgeist (or face the negative publicity Pepsi suffered for a [tone-deaf protest advertisement](#)).

These are all obstacles to overcome, of course, but the best way to do so is, again, to follow industry best practice. Your market research will have told you a lot about your potential consumer, their search habits, their likes, dislikes, passions and phobias. Make use of this – find thought leaders in your area and approach them, not in the pay-per-link spamdexing manner Google's former Head of Web Spam Matt Cutts declared unacceptable some time ago, but in a manner bespoke to your needs and those of potential consumers.

Build relationships within your industry's wider community, encourage consumers to offer feedback on your progress and, in turn, look to do what you can to promote work you enjoy to your own audience. Be humble and talk to them as you would to anyone else you wanted to keep around.

Add value with your outreach content

Probably the most important thing to remember, is 'success before scale' – it is more important that you succeed with each email than that you email a lot of people. It takes a lot more time to rebuild a burned bridge than to cross each one with caution. It is for this reason that building lasting relationships within blogging communities relevant to your industry is the best way to ensure your outreach endeavours are successful, but if one is just starting out, then it should be with the idea of building relationships, not contacts – your list of potential bloggers for outreach is not a business rolodex but an address book of colleagues and friends.

The best way to earn a link is to offer something of equal value in return – even if your outreach emails (discussed in more detail later) are of Wilde-like wit and make an argument for your content which leaves the recipient no option but to accept the chance to take a look, if said content isn't up to scratch, or offers them no obvious returns then the exchange is dead in the water.

Do you, or can you perform unique research which is relevant to them? Offer them the chance to have first access, or unique content worthy of a link citation. Is there a part of their role or industry you can make easier with a calculator or unique piece of programming? Then embeddable content may be ideal. Whatever you look to do, always attempt to make them look good, offer content you know, or can make a logical, educated guess, will do well.

Reach out to the right people

This will require research – and though there are tools mentioned later which can help, you will need the knowledge you accrued in the initial stages of planning and development to ensure that step is successful. It is not enough to be looking for high traffic and Domain Authority (DA). Though these are clearly important, it is also necessary that an outreach campaign approaches relevant third parties. There are online tools and directories which will allow you to refine your blogger search by keywords and interests; therefore the more you know about your target demographic and your brand's ideal consumer, the easier it will be to find the right person.

Only once you have narrowed down your list of potentials to a group of relevant publishers should Domain Authority (DA) and traffic become important. You will ideally be looking to approach thought leaders relevant to your brand's industry, so prioritise and look primarily to sires with DAs above 60 – but be aware that the more successful the publisher, the more you are going to need to impress, as they will likely be inundated and the last thing you want at an early stage is to be unfairly labelled as spam.

Make sure you are arguing the best possible case from the outset – not just as to why they should help you, but as to why you can help them, or may be able to in future. Relationships must work both ways, and it is vital not only that you convince them of this, but that you are able and willing to follow through on promises. Longevity is what you should be looking to achieve – a working relationship that has the potential to last.

OUTREACH AIMS



Authority building (SEO focus)

Authority building outreach is practiced in order to build a brand's Domain Authority (DA) and improve rankings through link generation. For this reason, the campaign will focus on achieving as many healthy DA links as possible to relevant sections or pages of the brand's site.

The aim here is to aid the site in ranking for key terms and so content produced will be more keyword specific, and anchor text for inbound links will need to reflect this. In doing this, the brand will be able to improve rankings on search engine result pages (SERPs) by benefiting from the received authority of inbound links (sometimes referred to as link juice).

Awareness building (branding focus)

Awareness building outreach seeks to expand the brand's audience by leveraging key industry influencers and publishers. This aims to reach an audience that, while they may be interested in your industry, may not necessarily know your brand.

One of the best features of using outreach for brand building is that trust in and loyalty to a blogger from their audience is already present (needing no additional work to establish by a brand) and, if selected appropriately, the blogger's or publisher's audience will have interests aligned with your own.

Hybrid

More difficult to achieve true success in than a campaign focused on one target or the other, hybrid campaigns seek to achieve both of the above aims with a single campaign. Difficulty should be no bar to endeavour, however, and a hybrid campaign can even save time and money by killing two birds with one stone.

The stone should, however, be perfectly rounded and polished. The aims of SEO focused and branding focused campaigns, while not mutually exclusive, do require serious thought. It is better to run two separate and well executed campaigns with each aim in mind than one which could be compromised by too little research and achieve neither.

OUTREACH VARIETIES

Blogger outreach

Blogger outreach adds a further strand to your content marketing activity by exposing your brand to a blogger's existing readership, allowing you to reach new, wider – and, most importantly, relevant – audiences. If your content appears on blogs that are read by your target customers, and offers them something new and interesting, the brand awareness potential is huge.

PR & editorial outreach

A website's ability to rank in Google is largely dependent on the quality of the websites linking to it (its backlink profile). Google analyses the link profile of websites, penalising those it considers to be in breach of its guidelines (those that it deems to be engaging in manipulative link building techniques) and rewards those with high quality, natural link profiles.

A website which has backlinks from a source of high authority such as national press, therefore, are seen by Google as a valuable and user friendly source of information, resulting in better rankings. For this reason, PR & editorial outreach focuses on generating links from traditional media websites as well as other high DA sites and reputable publishers.

Social media outreach

Social media outreach is an influencer marketing technique where brands identify and reach out to relevant social influencers across appropriate social media platforms. This aims to create a dialogue and develop a relationship through which your content marketing assets can, through these influencers, reach much larger audiences.

This ability to facilitate dialogue, relationship creation and content distribution within the social sphere can be a major benefit to any brand. Social outreach can enhance your content marketing strategy and reach through distributing relevant content to bloggers with strong social authority, gaining their endorsement of your content and consequent sharing with and exposure to the influencer's pre-engaged audience.

INFLUENCER IDENTIFICATION

You may already have a list of industry journalists or bloggers you follow and whom you would like to engage with any campaign you are planning, but it is always worth casting your net far and wide to ensure your hard work achieves the maximum possible impact.

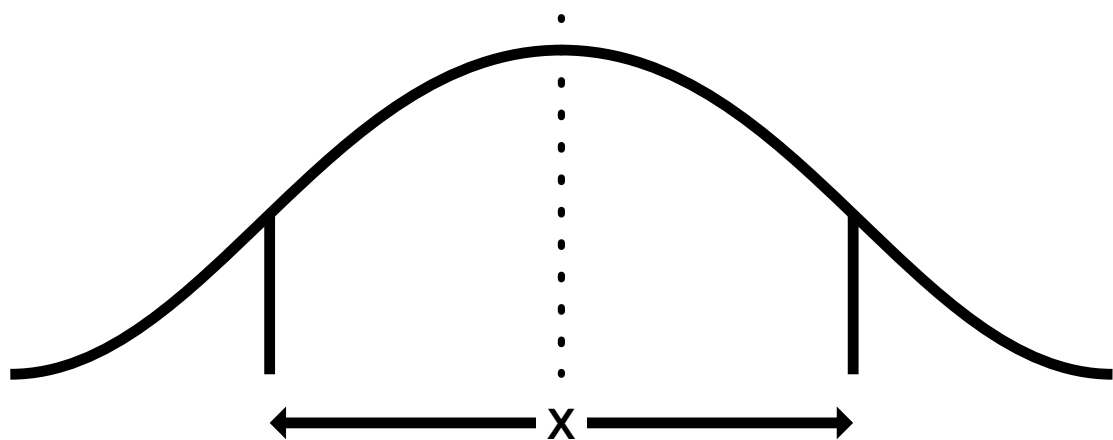
Whether you simply research yourself or use one of the many outreach platforms (BuzzSumo, GroupHigh), ensure you measure the desirability of influencers using several key metrics.

Finding your level

For lack of a better known paradigm, we're going to need to employ a football metaphor. Think of your industry as the English Premier League and industry influencers as transfer targets. In order to ensure the progress of your team, you need to capture the best talent you can.

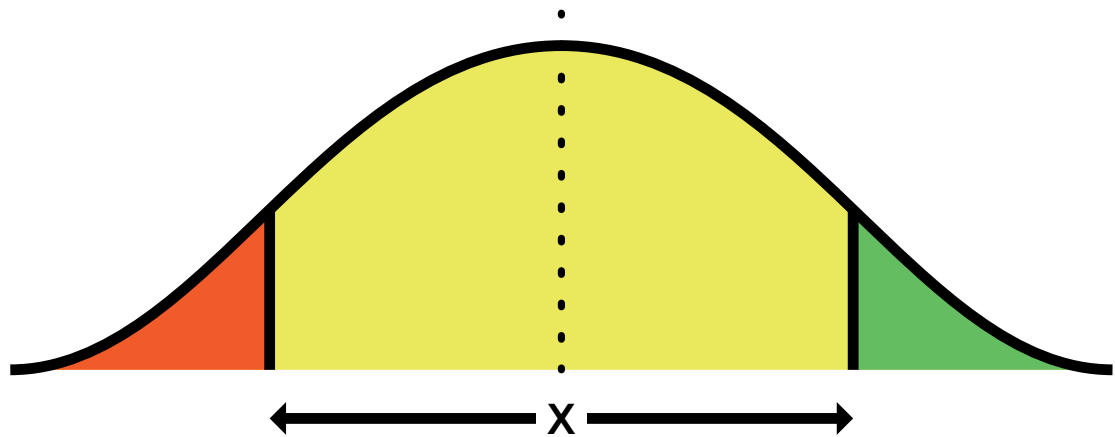
However, it is never a level playing field – and unless your team is already at the top of the league, the chances are you will have to look for talent that isn't already on the radar of your competitors.

This means looking for up-and-coming talent and talent that currently plays at a similar level to you.



Think of your brand on a bell curve – while your position is X, the desirability of the influencer increases to the right, along with their esteem in the industry and vice versa, decreasing desirability and esteem to the left. Your curve represents your ability to harness their influence versus the desirability of that influence.

With outreach, the best way of reaching a more desirable influencer is by shifting the position of X to the right and therefore the attractiveness of your brand to influencers (hence why Apple has no shortage of bloggers seeking to work with them at the launch of a new product). As this is tough to achieve in the short term, it is therefore best to target influencers around the top of the curve.



In this instance, that means looking to focus on influencers in this (albeit arbitrarily selected) yellow area.

Things to consider when deciding on your position along the axis, and therefore your target range, will be your site's DA, your brand's audience on each platform and your average reach on each, your general rate of link accrual and your position in SERPs for key terms. By comparing this to the same factors of potential targets (you can implement basic 1-10 or 1-100 scoring systems for each data point for a total desirability score, and different attainability multipliers above and below your own position in the rankings to achieve an actual workable curve based on desirability vs attainability by plotting a total score), you will be able to increase your rate of success when approaching influencers.

While we wouldn't discourage brands from reaching out to influencers in the green area (low attainability vs high desirability) as the quality of the content will at least contribute to influencer decisions. Equally don't dismiss approaches from the red area – as those who are there now may well be positioned in the green zone next time around. Whatever is done with these two outlying areas, however, it is still better to focus the main bulk of your efforts on the yellow section.

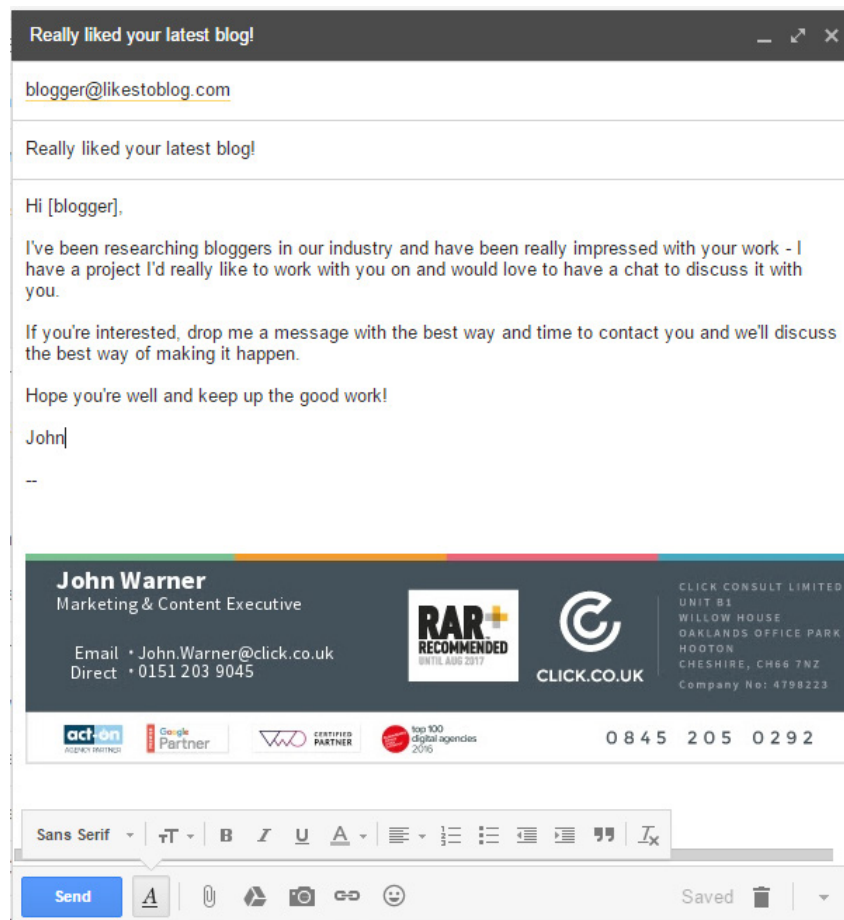
INFLUENCER OUTREACH

Once you have decided on your list of primary targets for contact, the next stage is to actually approach them. This is probably the most difficult part of the process and comes with a variety of pitfalls. It is important to remember that you are aiming to build relationships with influencers, and that you will not be the only one seeking to do so.

With this in mind, it can be tempting to try to explain everything in the initial email – what you want, how you think it will benefit you and them, what the process will involve, how great your content is, and on and on. However, what people often forget is that time is at a premium – while you may have the best proposition, it may not even be read if the influencer sees a wall of text in an initial communication.

To that end, make your first email simple, to the point and interesting – think of it like a PPC ad, with a restricted two or three lines, send a call to action that tempts the recipient into responding. Your first message should seek to intrigue, not seal the deal.

Therefore, if you've been impressed with the work of Joe Blogs, he occupies a good position in your curve and is relevant to your industry drop a simple message seeking only to initiate a dialogue.



Once you receive a reply, then you can look to begin making the case for collaboration, discuss content, compliment their past work – tell them what you've enjoyed and how you can add value to what they do. Remember that they have other options and that it needs to be an exchange of value, if people see the benefits as too one-sided they are unlikely to participate.

If they don't reply, however, don't give up! Flex your social muscles - continue to share their work, respond to them on your favourite social platforms and try to engage them in conversation before contacting them again.

Another problem that can arise with attempting to engage influencers is a lack of attention paid to their own positioning. It's important that the content which you're looking for them to work with you on disseminating, must gel with their own branding – so ensure you read their blogs, mention their past work when discussing projects you can work on together (I think this would work a little like your blog on [x] from back in [y]).

Remember that, while they may not feel drawn to your first proposal, it is a relationship with the influencer that will benefit you the most in the long run. Share their content, keep in touch and pitch them your next piece of content too, show them that your request to work with them is based on respect for their work, not just on what they can do for you. Someone who feels genuinely valued by you will be far more receptive to working with you. However, even if they do agree to work with you first time, maintain contact – check in with them from time to time and listen to them if they have any of their own suggestions.

Be receptive, too. If there's a project you're working on push a call to action (CTA) across your target social platforms, and use appropriate hashtags - you may, as a result, be approached by publishers you had not considered; and to ensure this happens, make CTA posts sticky for the duration of the targeting period.

REPORTING

Whether the campaign was a success or not, the process remains the same – each successive campaign must be dissected and evaluated as part of a constant cycle of trial and improvement.

Once data is collected it can then be decided whether the campaigns can be tweaked and improved (and, at least in the early stages of a brand's content marketing journey, almost all will be), and whether there are any more variations in style, content, tone that can be trialled with a view to ensuring that all the facts are in before commitment is made to a longer term strategy.

Even if a variety of marketing asset is a runaway success first time and the decision is made to commit to a longer campaign, the experience gained and the data gathered should still be cycled into the next phase of campaign construction to ensure that the success is replicable in future and not short-lived. Knowing what makes for a success is as important as knowing why something failed.

Did particular styles of design or tones of voice perform better than others? Which promotional channels were best suited to each variety? Which produced the best gains versus cost to produce?

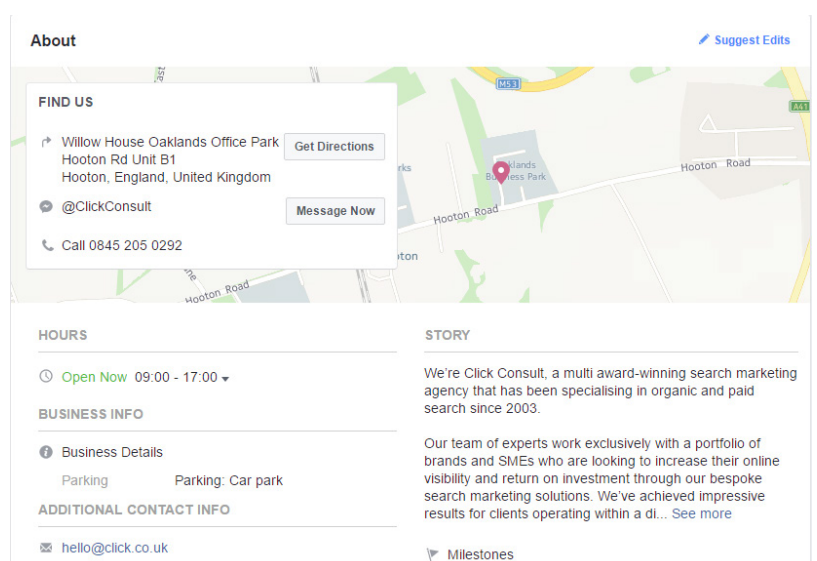
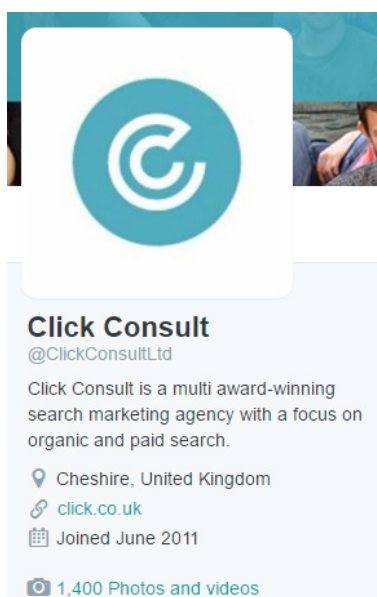
All of this information and the results across all metrics you may wish to measure must be communicated to the relevant people in the relevant departments to allow them to contribute to improvements in the next strategy. The best results are always going to be achieved when there is buy-in from all departments concerned – and autonomy in the gradual improvement of their areas of strategy is a fantastic way to achieve this.

ARE YOUR PROFILES OUTREACH-READY?

Whether or not you have approached social outreach in the past, it is important to make sure your profiles give potential targets everything they need to know about you. While you will almost certainly be the party to make contact, the chances are that if your contact provokes any interest or curiosity in the target they will check out your profile – and that’s where you’ll make the largest initial impression.

Ways to prepare:

- **Tell your story:** You may not have a great deal of room to work in, but try to explain exactly who you are and what it is you do. Your bio should leave any visitor no doubt as to your industry, position and USP. It should also, of course, link to your site to help them find more information.
- **Keep it professional:** Or at least maintain a consistent image – stick to the tone and style of your brand across all social media platforms; that includes wording, header images, profile images and profile names.
- **Use a sticky post during the outreach process:** If you have more details to offer than the bio room allows, make a sticky post to convey the information and a CTA significant within SEO. The content writer will not always be familiar with a subject they are writing about, or may not have an instant opinion or question about the topic, but good writing, engaging writing depends upon having something to say. Experience will make this easier for a writer, in terms of SEO, but whatever a brand is producing it must speak to the consumer.



ENGAGE YOUR LIST

The next stage probably the most difficult part of the process and comes with a variety of pitfalls. It is important to remember that you are aiming to build relationships with influencers, and that you will not be the only one seeking to do so.

It is tempting to pitch with a first contact – to make a request for help or share a post etc. However, with the building of relationships it is often better to share their posts, earn their buy-in with communication – you're looking to work with them for a reason, so compliment their work, share it with your audience and look to interact with them.

While it may not provoke them to share your posts without having to ask, the process of earning an influencer's trust improves the chance of them eventually agreeing to any request for help you may have.

BUILD A COMMUNITY

The final step in the outreach process – one which may not be taken for some time, but is achieved generally through persistence – is to build a community. Not only do you want a broad spread of inbound links and a broad range of audiences seeing your content, it also serves to avoid content fatigue – ensuring you have a base of influencers who do not become overwhelmed by or bored with your content.

Ideally you want to become a thought leader in the industry, a brand to whom influencers and consumers alike both turn for the best content in your industry. Not only does this build consumer trust and increase the reach of your content, it also has the benefit of slowly shifting your brand's position to the right on the x-axis, rendering more and larger influencers available to you for your next project.

ACCESSIBLE, ADAPTABLE CONTENT

While in some cases it is best to have influencer input into the content you're hoping for them to help you promote, it is more often than not beneficial to have something waiting – meaning that your design team can be working while you're engaging with the influencers.

This does mean, however, that the content should be easy to adapt to various audiences – if you're working on a project with ten bloggers, you don't want to have to create assets from the ground up for each of them. Instead you need a more generic basis which can be personalised or segmented by the interests of each influencer's audience.

Again, by having a versatile and adaptable approach with your content, you open up a level of trust with your target influencers – allowing them to feel that you are both well prepared and open to their input and feedback while being able to harness their understanding of their audience to make the content more relevant and therefore more likely to achieve the targets you have set.

Equally, don't over-brand your content – influencers work hard to build their audience and will fear losing it if they appear to be actively promoting specific brands and therefore losing their objectivity. So while you don't want to make your brand invisible, it's worth not pushing it too hard either.



CONCLUSION

Relationship management (outreach) is a vital part of modern day search marketing (but also, marketing in general), and should be treated as such. It isn't a method of achieving success, or a technique, it's a core part of marketing online and should be carried out ethically, continuously and with full commitment.

If you develop a number of different contacts – be they bloggers or journalists or any other content producer or publisher – ensure you do not adopt a blanket approach with any future content. The reason you contacted these people in the first place was that their individual interests and personalities were in keeping with your own and that of your ideal demographic.

Make sure you continue to treat contacts like individuals. As contact lists increase in size it is all too easy to allow a lack of personalisation to creep in to your approach, and in many ways this is understandable, but if you stop talking to each individually, they may stop listening en masse also.

Earn your links. If your consumers are to trust you then you must be trustworthy. There are, of course, companies that will acquire links in ways that border on black hat, but these methods will eventually lead to penalties – so the best way is to work hard to lead the way in ethical link building rather than to play tag with the Google algorithm, constantly looking to avoid penalties.

Link building has to be difficult for it to be worth doing. If anyone could earn easy links (which was the case pre-[Penguin](#), when link farms were able to manipulate SERPs with consummate ease), then there would be no competitive advantage to a good outreach strategy.

Remember that outreach – like all other spheres that concern themselves with relationship management – is a two way street. There must be give and take between the brand and the publishers and consumers with whom you're building relationships. While, ethically, there is no direct exchange of value – as in links exchanged for payment – there are plenty of ways you can offer value to publishers and consumers. A simple thank you, for example, is an important part of building and maintaining relationships.

Start with producing the best possible content, continue by maintaining non-transactional relationships (it never hurts to say hello from time to time without asking for something) and promote their content as they do yours, if you approached them for the right reasons, their content will be of high quality and relevant to your audience, there can be few negatives in aiding their success.

EXPERTS IN SEARCH. SIMPLE.

ABOUT US

Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi-award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC), with over 70 professionals employed and with a portfolio of over 60 clients from across the UK, Europe, Americas and Australia.

As well as winning an FSB Award, Drum Search Award and a Northern eCommerce Award in 2016, Click has been a finalist in the European Search Awards, the DMA Awards, and the UK Digital Experience Awards, amongst others. Click Consult also ranks within both RAR's and Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies' in 2016, and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies' 2016.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Blog

Click Consult regularly posts actionable insights on its blog – dealing with all aspects of search marketing. From technical SEO to PPC, content marketing and Analytics advice, the Click Consult blog has something for everyone of any ability.

eBooks

Click Consult produces in depth eBooks on aspects of search marketing on a regular basis, dealing with the latest best practices, changes to standard practices, methods of improvement and more.

Infographics

Sometimes what you need is a quick point of reference about complex subjects. Thanks to its team of highly talented designers, Click Consult is also able to distil its vast experience into easy to understand visual content.

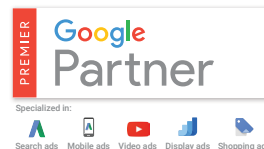
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