



CLICK.CO.UK®

# LEARN FROM YOUR COMPETITORS' LINK BUILDING SUCCESS: THE WORKBOOK



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## INTRODUCTION

This eBook explains how you can use competitor analysis to inform your search marketing strategy.

Remember that your sector's search engine results pages (SERPs) are unique to your industry – so too should be your strategy for optimisation.

## WHAT IS A BACKLINK?

The term 'backlinks' refers to links from another site to your own that can pass on authority, trust and relevancy from the search engine's point of view. The process can also be called, link acquisition, or [digital outreach](#).

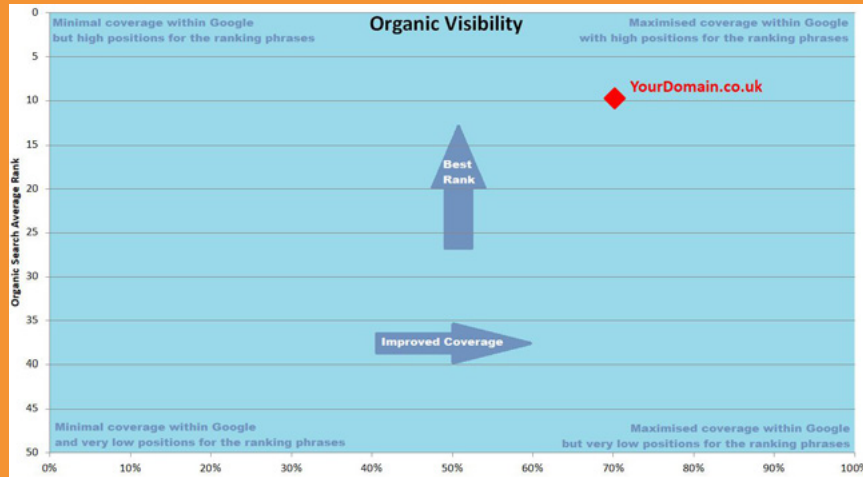


*Link features*

We'll go through the steps needed to carry out your own analysis of competitors' linking strategies, and the insights we pulled out through our own research on two industries: white goods and insurance.

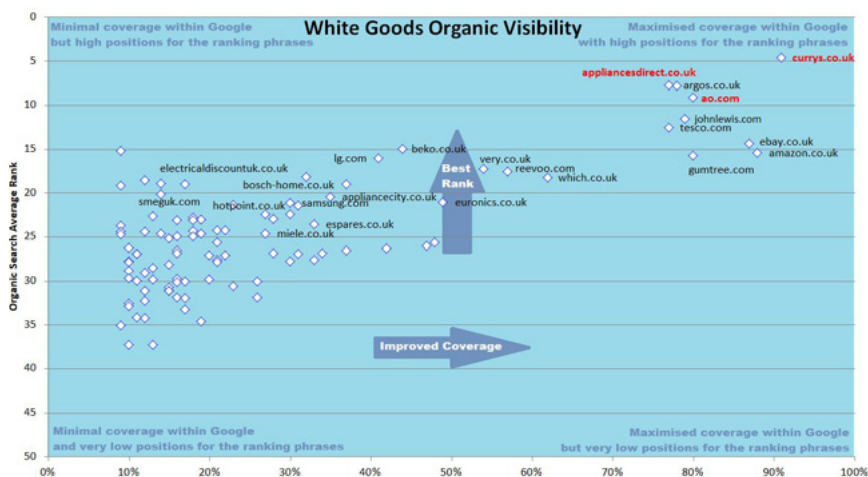
## CARRY OUT THOROUGH KEYWORD RESEARCH

Find as many relevant keywords as possible – a minimum of 300 – using tools such as Google Keyword Planner, SEMrush or Moz. Once you have a list you can identify your competitors. Find out who's ranking in the top 50 positions for each term. Then plot this on a graph – using a tool such as Tableau, as in this example:



X axis shows coverage, while the Y axis shows average rank. YourDomain.co.uk has an average rank of 10 and 70% coverage. As a simple example analysis of 100 keywords, this would mean they rank, on average, position 10 for 70/100 keywords.

We carried out this exercise with the white goods market, using a list of 2,300 keywords (such as washing machine, dryers, Smeg fridge, chest freezer, etc).



White goods industry's organic visibility

The market leaders appear in top right corner – these are the ones ranking for the majority of keywords and in the top positions. This is how they stack up:

- **Currys:** 91% coverage and average rank of 4.7
- **AO:** 80% coverage and average rank of 0.2
- **Appliances Direct:** 77% coverage and average rank of 7.8

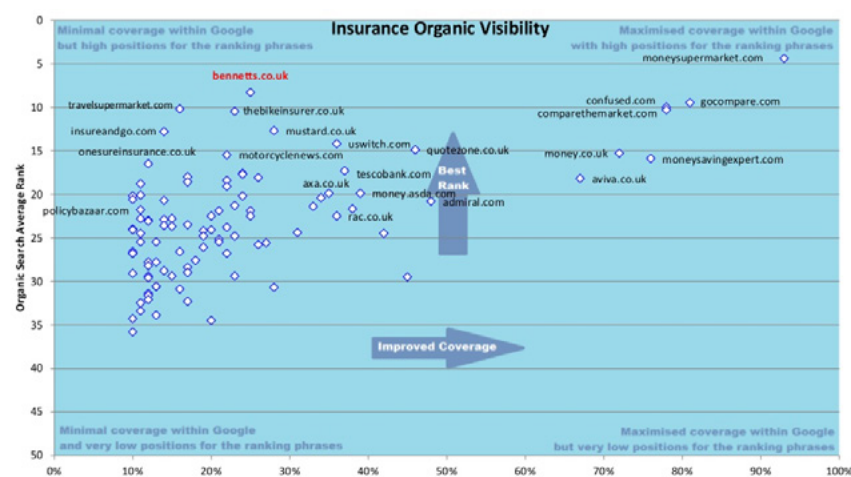
You should bear in mind that, as in this example, you will also be competing with other brands who may not immediately spring to mind when it comes to your product or service, but are still ranking for exactly the same keywords. In addition, Amazon and eBay always rank highly for eCommerce keywords in terms of coverage, but they don't always appear on P1.

In the second example, we looked at the insurance market covering car, home, travel, motorbike insurance etc, using over 2,000 keywords. As might be expected, the big four comparison sites appear in the top right quadrant.

- **MoneySuperMarket (by far the market leader):** 93% coverage and average rank of 4.4
- **Go Compare:** 81% coverage and average rank of 9.5
- **Confused.com** 78% coverage and average rank of 10.3
- **Compare the Market:** 78% coverage and average rank of 10

All of the market leaders above will have vast link profiles. For this eBook, we required smaller brands with smaller profiles to analyse.

The motorbike insurer **Bennetts** stood out:



Insurance industry organic visibility

We were intrigued that a couple of other motorbike insurance sites appeared in the chart. The graph wasn't a completely accurate representation of their marketplace because it contained keywords to do with travel and car insurance – which they don't cover. When we narrowed our research to just motorbike insurance keywords, **Bennetts** moved further to the top right, indicating them as market leaders, but still directly competing with the big four comparison sites.

The sites we decided to analyse were:

- **Bennetts**
- **The Bike Insurer**
- **Scooter Insurance chosen** (for comparison as it's not ranking as well as the others)
- **Carole Nash**

Use Searchmetrics to examine the visibility of keywords for which your competitors are ranking, their position (and weighted by search volume), looking for major drops in visibility around Google updates – specifically [Penguin](#).

Here's an example of a site that was hit with a Penguin 2.0 penalty in May 2013:



*Penguin drop graph from Searchmetrics*

If this is the case, discount the competitor in your analysis as it shows they've probably been using unnatural, manipulative linking tactics (which you obviously don't want to emulate).

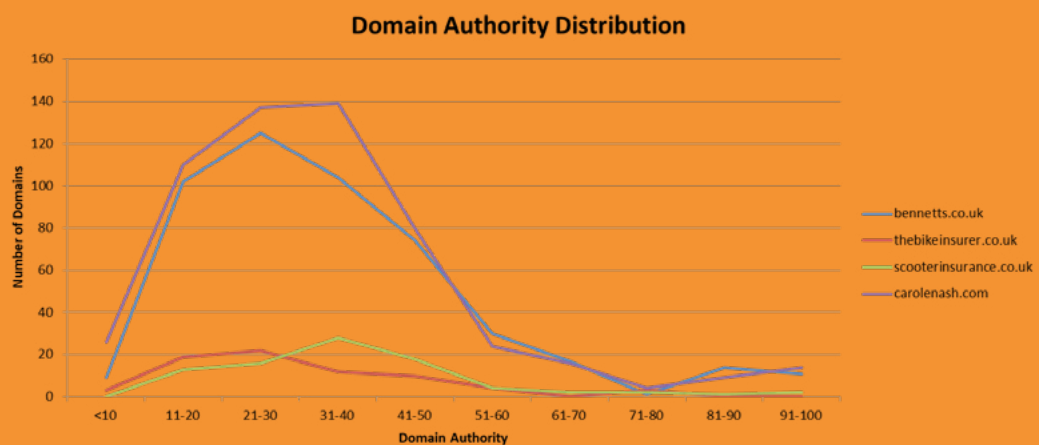




## IDENTIFY THE QUALITY OF LINKS YOU NEED

It's always better to focus on accruing links from unique, high quality referring domains rather than on the quantity of links alone. You can analyse your competitors' referring domains using tools such as Majestic, Open Site Explorer, Ahrefs and Google Search Console. (All of this information is publicly available and none of Click Consult's clients are used in this analysis).

1. Download all referring domains for each competitor
2. Categorise all domains into Domain Authority (DA) buckets (DA is a metric calculated by Moz and is their representation of Google PageRank so it's like an indication of authority of these sites)
3. Plot the results on a line graph



*Domain Authority distribution - comparison sites*

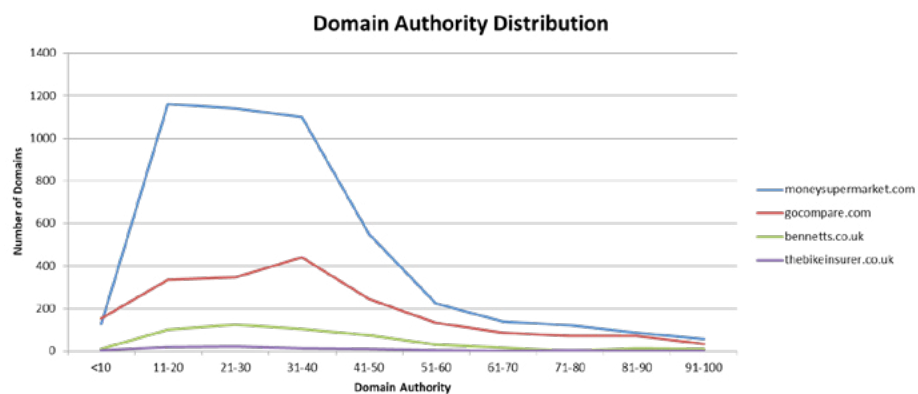


This tells us the **Bennetts** have authority from nine domains that have a DA between 0 and 10, and 100 domains that have DA between 11 and 20.

In most industries, you'll find that market leaders tend to peak at around the 20 to 40 DA area. This makes for a natural linking profile in this industry. When carried out for your own industry, this will give you a benchmark for the link profile you want to achieve.

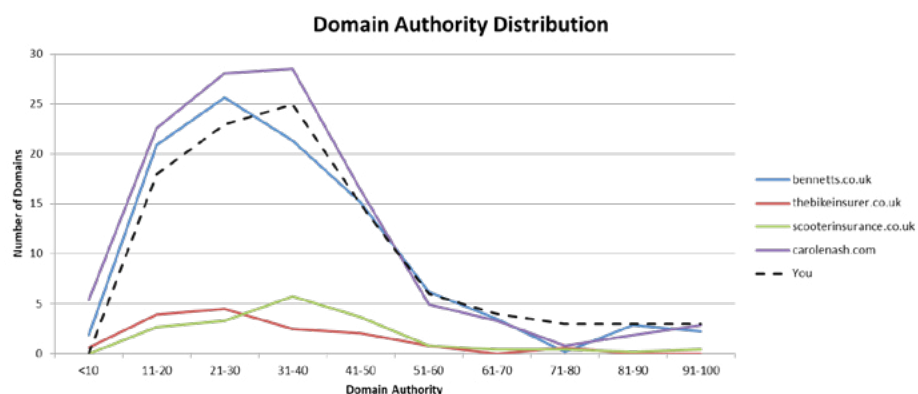
It also tells us that if you put all efforts into earning links on the higher end (or lower end); Google will see this as deviating from the norm and therefore judge the links to be manipulative and unnatural.

We carried out the same exercise, focusing on the comparison sites. The inclusion of **MoneySuperMarket** and **Go Compare** in the graph skews the scale as they have such a vast number of links, but we see the same shape in the graph:



Domain Authority distribution - comparison sites

The **Bike Insurer** was ranking really well in the XY graph, but only has a fraction of the links of other brands (more on this point later). All of this data allows you to plot a graph of what your backlink profile should look like.



Domain Authority distribution - what you should be aiming for

Go for quality rather than quantity of backlinks – but not to the point where it seems manipulative – keep the natural shape as shown in the graph.

This informs the type of content you need to create to achieve these links and will help you to plan the long term strategy for your [outreach and content marketing campaigns](#), your budgets etc. Developing a content marketing strategy that earns links to develop a link profile that is both natural but has quality over quantity is how you can steal market share from your competition. Working smarter rather than harder, get this right and you're on the right track.

You'll need to refresh this graph at least every six months as it changes all the time.

## IDENTIFY HOW QUICKLY THE LINKS NEED TO BE EARNED

This can't be done overnight, not least because it will appear manipulative to search engines. The next step is to look at how quickly your competitors are earning links from each referring domain. Ahrefs is a good tool for doing this as it shows links, when they were discovered and when they were discovered for the first time.

As part of our research, we reviewed the previous three months for each of the insurance providers, looking at new referring domains acquired per month.

Competitor	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17
bennetts.co.uk	100	87	112
thebikeinsurer.co.uk	13	12	12
carolenash.com	50	53	61
scooterinsurance.co.uk	12	11	16

### Number of 'new' referring domains per month

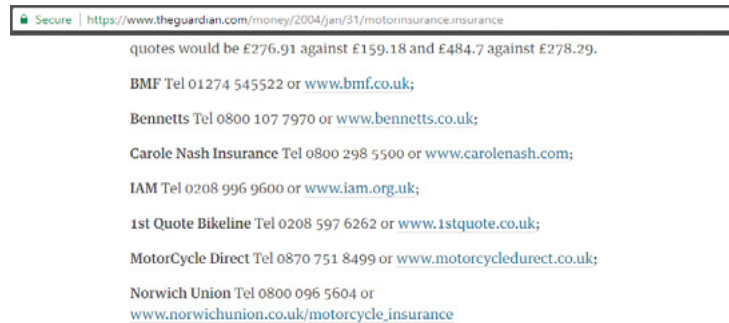
*This shows you how many links you need to aim to earn in order to compete, eg, this table suggests a minimum of 12 per month is required to compete.*

Keep in mind that your content marketing activity will need to supplement the backlinks your site is already earning from unique referring domains.

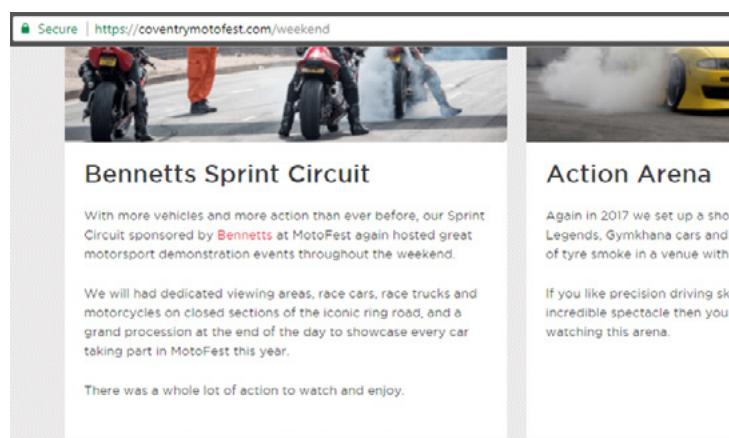
## IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF ANCHOR TEXT YOU NEED TO USE

Now look at all backlinks and the anchor text used for each one. Download lists of your competitors' backlinks, and organise their anchor text into the following categories.

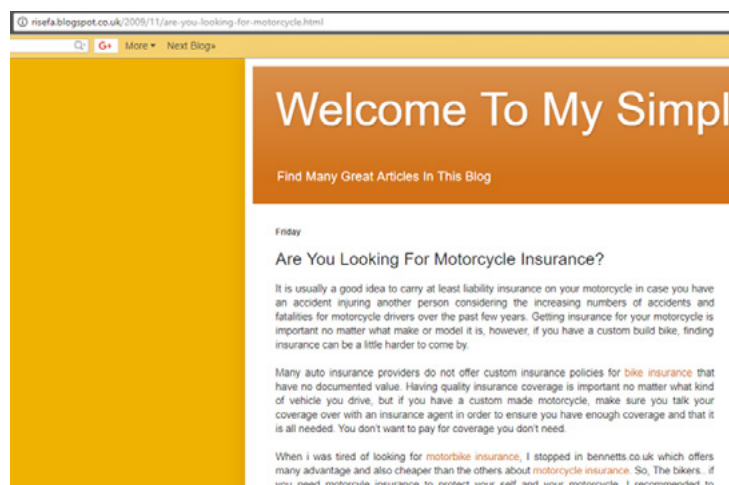
URL/naked links - Using the URL itself, eg:



Brand/domain name:




Generic/headline keywords - Or 'exact match' anchor text using the trophy keywords:



Long tail keywords:

www.friendlybikers.com/tag/motorcycle-insurance



for your pocket. However, there are some rather helpful hints and tips out there that can help ease the financial pressure that comes with making sure that you and your motorcycle are covered in the event of an accident, or even theft or damage for that matter.

Here, for your delectation, are a few of these insightful little hints which, assuming that they are right for you could help you to **save on your motorcycle insurance**.

Firstly, deciding which cover you actually need is very important. It might sound obvious, but many motorcycleists, particularly on their first attempt to provide themselves with the adequate level of cover will spend over the odds for an insurance scheme which is more than they need. By considering just how much cover you need, you

Hybrid/Brand + Keyword - Containing brand name and keyword:

roryskinner.com/2017-race-schedule/



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- Racing Steps Foundation
- Aral Europe
- Alpinestars
- Bennetts Bike Insurance
- Vroom Media

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repayments are low. Credit is subject to status and is only available to UK residents aged 18 and over. Peugeot Motorcycle Finance is William House, Tresillian Terrace, Cardiff, CF10 5BH. Finance offers and examples correct at time of publishing but may be subject to change.

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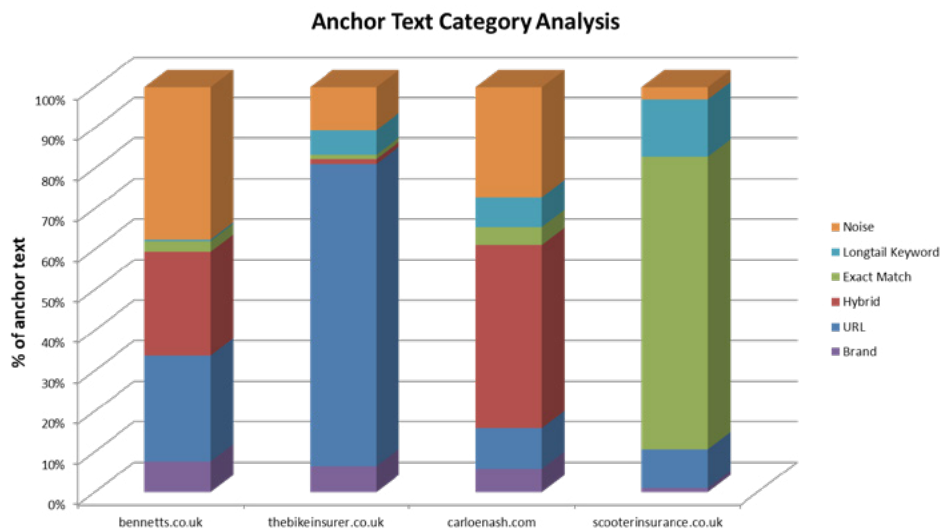
There's also a seventh category: spam. We suspect that **Carole Nash** had been hit by a spam attack, as each of these words appears as anchor text over 100 times:

sildenafil  
viagra  
medicines  
10mg  
treatments  
toradol  
100mg  
online  
suhagra  
20mg  
apcalis

Carole Nash's spam anchor text

Most of the spam links pointed to pages that no longer exist on the site. Therefore backlinks categorised as spam in **Carole Nash**'s backlink profile was excluded so as not to skew the data.

The link profiles can be visualised like this:



*Anchor text category analysis*

This tells us that 80/20 rule (brand vs keyword) when earning links is no longer reliable because:

- The majority of **Bike Insurer**'s anchor text is the URL itself (as mentioned earlier, this is the site that doesn't have anywhere near as many links but are ranking really well).
- **Scooter Insurance** has got a lot of exact match links, such as 'scooter insurance', but it doesn't rank on P1 for this term as Google isn't easily fooled and recognises that this term is not the business' domain or brand name.

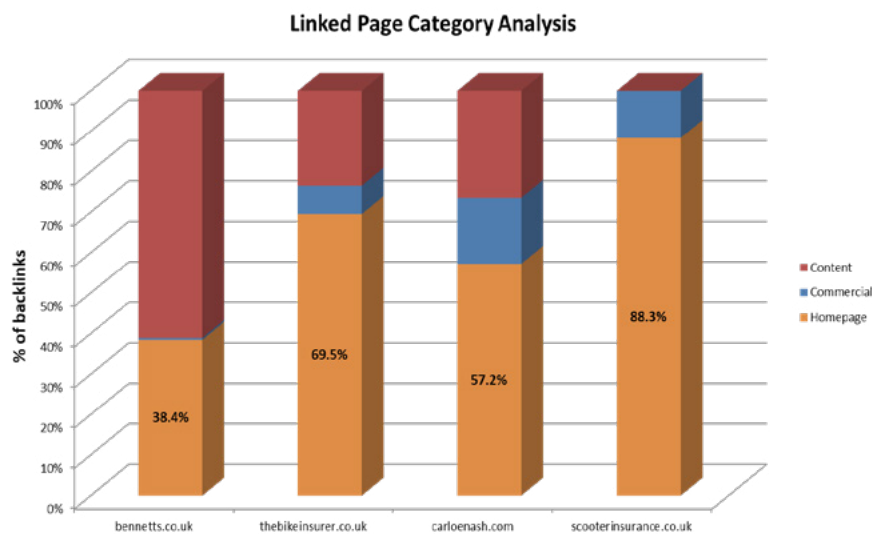
It also tells us that:

- In this industry - you should be looking for at least 40% of your anchor text to be your brand or your URL - ideally 80%. (Incidentally, we find that URL anchor text works better than brand for Click Consult's own clients.)
- Hybrid anchor text is the second choice to aim for as it includes brand or URL.
- You shouldn't be tempted to use your exact match or trophy keyword as an anchor: 4% should be the maximum in this industry, and long tail 7%.

## IDENTIFY WHERE TO LINK TO

Look at your competitors' backlinks and where they're linking to on their sites. First, download lists of your competitors' backlinks. Then categorise their linked pages into:

- Homepage
- Commercial Pages, eg, get a quote, product page
- Content Pages, eg, blog, FAQs



There are evidently two different types of tactic used by **The Bike Insurer** and **Bennetts**. **The Bike Insurer** has got a lot of URL anchor text which correlates with the fact that the majority of links go to its homepage.

Bennetts, on the other hand, takes a much more content-focused approach. The majority of its links go back to its resources section, Bike Social, and it's the great quality of this content that's earning the links.

Although it might sound counterintuitive, you should avoid 'forcing' links to commercial pages, as these are not necessarily the pages that you want to rank. Rather, link to these pages internally via pages that contain good content for a more natural linking pattern.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Link features are still commonly the most important ranking factors.
- Analyse market leaders to determine what makes the best link profile in your industry.
- Keyword lists should consist of a minimum of 300 keywords.
- Unless you are number one for all of your keywords (and even if you are), there are things to be learned from your competitors.
- Plot links by DA (Moz) to determine your industry's natural distribution curve.
- Focus content marketing efforts develop a natural but great quality link profile.
- Monitor link acquisition rates to determine how fast you need to accrue links, or what would be deemed as unnatural growth.
- Find out what distribution of brand/exact and long tail anchor text works best in your industry.
- Link juice flows, but where it starts is down to tactics – again, this will be unique to your industry.





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## ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning digital and search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

Our complementary services include content marketing, outreach, social media, conversion rate optimisation (CRO) and international/multilingual search marketing. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named Search Agency of the Year and Digital Agency of the Year 2018, adding to our long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, a Bing Select Partner and feature in The Drum Recommends.

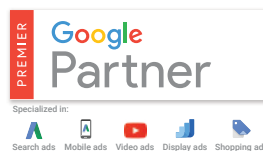
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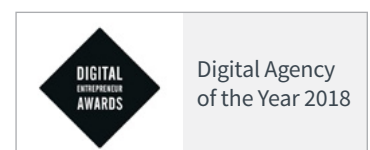
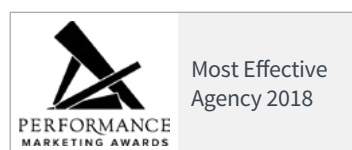
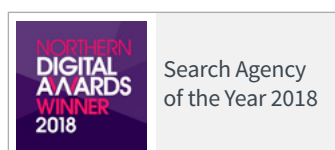
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