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INTRODUCTION

We've covered the practice of executing PR campaigns [elsewhere](#), but what we're going to look at here is specifically what these campaigns should target and achieve in order to have the best impact on organic search SEO. While it's reasonable to say that PR campaigns will not succeed without quality content, we're going to assume you either have the perfect content of the best possible quality (or at least the capacity to produce it at your disposal) and look instead at how this content should be delivering for your traffic and rankings.

WHAT IS A DIGITAL PR CAMPAIGN?

A PR, and more specifically digital PR, campaign is the process by which brands seek to gain exposure through content placements with media organisations, journalists and industry influencers. This is differentiated from content marketing mainly through the status of the individuals that are approached – with a digital PR campaign likely to prefer established news and media companies, and well-recognised journalists and influencers.

As a result of the higher aims of a digital PR, the requirements are also different – requiring specific news, current affairs or zeitgeist capturing content.

WHAT IS SEO?

The core of search marketing services, SEO refers to the methods, markups and technology used to achieve a high position in search engine results pages (SERPs) or to improve rankings across a number of algorithmically driven search engines.

Though, in the past, this took the form of gaming search algorithms by taking advantage of their weak spots – with keyword stuffing and link farming representing much of the industry's early work – successive algorithm changes by Google and others have continually pushed for (and mostly achieved) more organic and representative search engine results pages (SERPs).

HOW CAN DIGITAL PR HELP SEO?

While digital PR is not primarily focused on SEO factors, the two obviously overlap in one important area – and that's links. Links, despite the many advances made by various search engines, have remained one of the top ranking factors. For that reason, digital PR can offer some immediate benefits to a brand's online visibility.

HOW CAN WE CREATE DIGITAL PR CAMPAIGNS TO BEST HELP SEO?

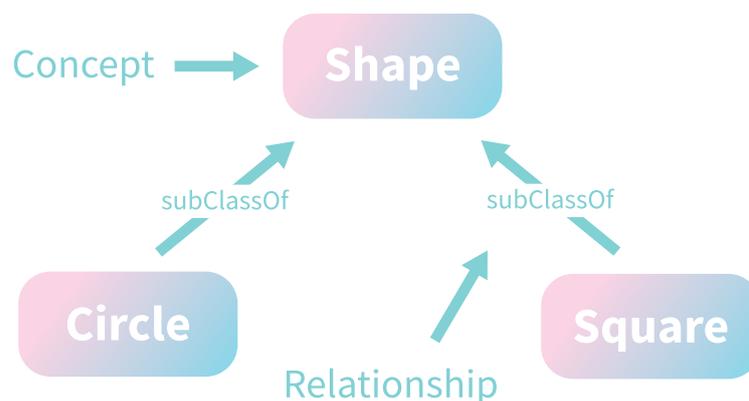
While the aim of both SEO and digital PR is to increase a brand's visibility, they seek to achieve this in different, but not incompatible ways. For digital PR, the aim is to place stories with the most reputable, far reaching organisations or individuals – building brand recognition and trust, the requirements of SEO in this regard are the accrual of links and the building of authority.

As you can no doubt see – the two are far from mutually exclusive. However, what is often forgotten with a digital PR campaign, or any kind of link building endeavour, is that the links and authority required for good SEO differ subtly.

WHAT LINKS FOR SEO NEED TO DO

In the past, when we think about links and how they relate to SEO, we have essentially taken the approach as an industry that 'high domain authority (DA) and lots of them' is the best approach. To some extent, this process will still work – lots of high authority sites linking to your brand will improve your ability to rank for key terms. However, as the internet matures and methods of information retrieval and organisation develop, the amount of information that links convey to search engines is also increasing.

The construction or establishment of 'ontologies' is a phrase you are likely to have come across if you have been studying SEO, and link building will play a major part in this. The definition of ontology is:

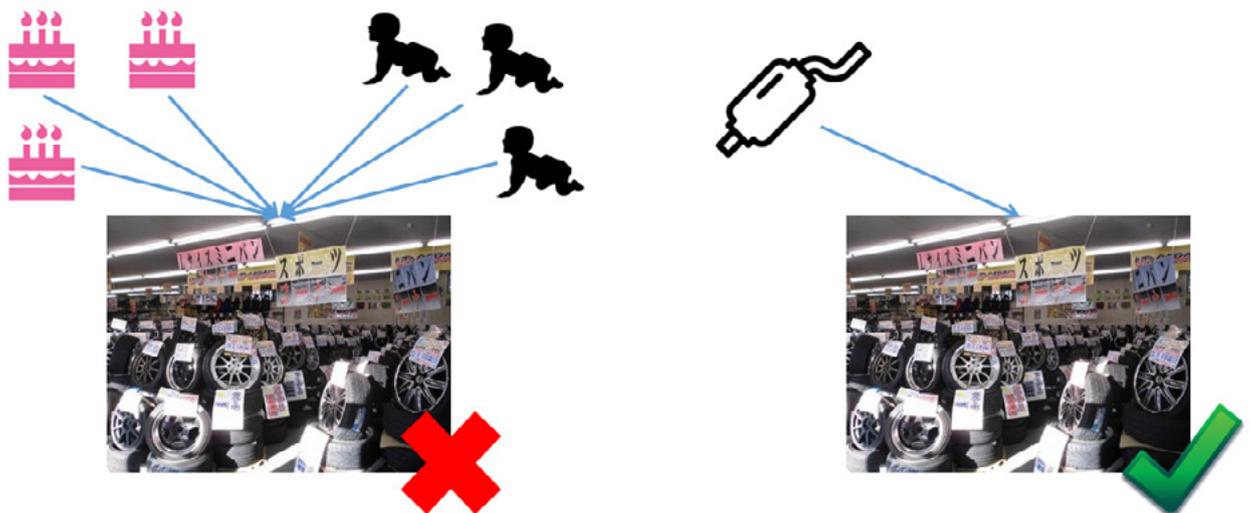


[A] set of concepts and categories in a subject area or domain that shows their properties and the relations between them.

In this regard, links will be the connective tissue between 'category' and 'concept', and, for this reason, the importance of where a link is placed will need to be calculated in a new way. Though, as stated previously, the authority of a site would be paramount (often calculated by and leading to an over-reliance on DAw), this needs to become secondary to the relevance of the linking domain in most instances.

Let's say you have a car parts auction website with content that is expertly written, with beautifully targeted anchor text etc. Let's also say that your competitor's site is on parity with your own.

If a link for your competitor's site is placed on another that is predominately about baking, it will be less useful for the brand's part in the overall industry's ontology than the one to your site from a blog half as well written, half as authoritative but which is focused entirely on car parts. The calculation of link relevance will need to take in the relevance of the entire linking domain, not just the paragraph surrounding the link or the anchor text itself.



There are, of course, exceptions to this – and many of digital PR's top targets can reasonably be placed within the 'excepted' bracket. News organisations, for example, are expected to be fairly liberal about the industries they link to. For this reason, many news organisations are 'seed sites' – essentially fonts of authority.

That is not to confuse this authority with any kind of 'Trust Rank' – it is simply the case that sites like Wikipedia, The New York Times, The Guardian and similar are imbued with a degree of implicit authority and that a link from one of these organisations confers a level of esteem that can influence rankings through an inferred acknowledgement of 'expertise'.

As such, for digital PR campaigns that are pitching exclusively at the top end of the journalistic totem pole, you can rest easy knowing that the outcome of achieving links from such sites will be SEO friendly. However, conversely, if you are pitching a campaign with influencers of any stature, you will need to prioritise their relevance to your industry above the authority of their website for the best results.

To put it in a slightly more philosophical sense – a link from a seed site has 'worthiness', an ineffable quality which can be passed on regardless of industry, while a link from an influencer has 'worth', a calculable value which is directly proportional to the relevance of the influencer to the industry or

WHAT DOES A GOOD RESULT LOOK LIKE?

Obviously, from the preceding sections, the absolute best outcome for a digital PR campaign would be a host of links from the BBC, Guardian, Times etcetera, but that is not always possible. As such, a good campaign will generate a mix of links – but it must necessarily attempt to engage with the industry relevant to the brand.

Your links communicate your place within an industry, so your digital PR should do the same. To this end, digital PR campaigns should centre on subjects that matter to your industry in an attempt to earn links from industry relevant publications and influencers. A level of non-industry relevant links is to be expected, not everyone who likes your content will be employed by the industry or sector you operate in – possibly even most of them.

However, even if the majority of your brand's link profile is made up of sites outside of your area of expertise, it is important to build links from industry experts in order to communicate to search engines the authority you have within the industry. Search engines are getting better at parsing meaning and relationships – so you need to offer them what they need to make the right decision about you.

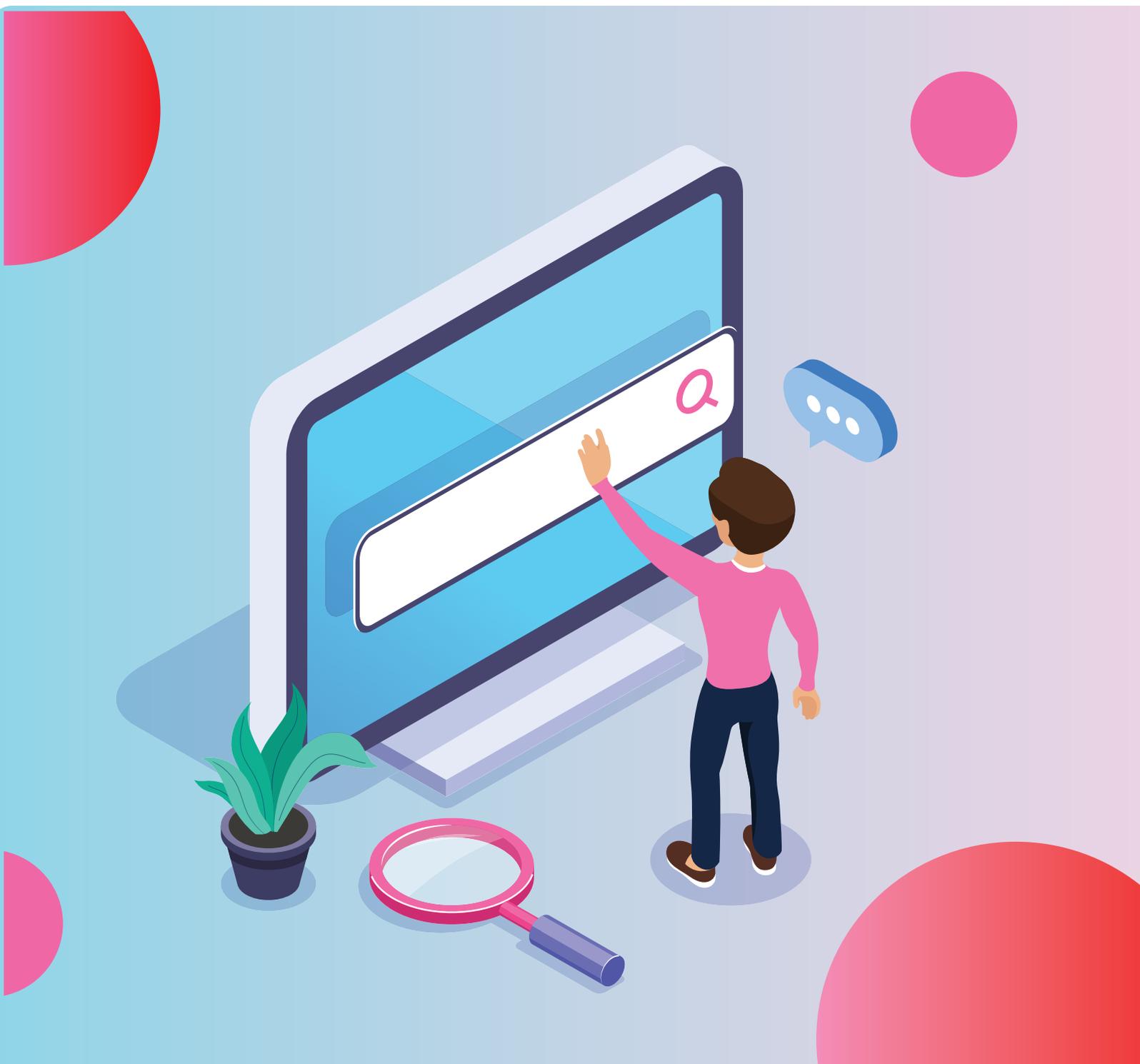
There may be no definitive figures on the numbers you need, but you can fairly assume a level of importance for each of the three types:

- **General, non-industry links:** - are important as they communicate a host of usefulness and authority signals to search engines.
- **Industry specific links:** - are more important, doing everything above, but also firmly establishing your brand within the industry's network of meaning (ontology).
- **Seed site links:** - these are, as things stand, the most important as a link from a site chosen by search engines as representative of authority can confer expert status on a site.

CONCLUSION

Links are and will remain one of, if not the, most important ranking factors for search engines. However, as things develop, the signals that those search engines can take from the links are expanding; this makes it important for brands to consider where those links are coming from.

Relevancy of links will become increasingly important, and the scattergun approach to link-building will become less effective over time. For this reason, when approaching digital PR, it is necessary that we develop a way for relevance to enter the weighting of attractiveness for outlets and influencers we approach with content and collaboration ideas.



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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.

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