

30+ More Tools to Automate Your Link Building

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Link building automation tools can help you manage relationships and outreach, enhance link building best practices, and eliminate some of the information management overhead that might otherwise bog you down.

Tools can make link builders more effective by automating routine work, thus saving time, and freeing us to be more human, as discussed last month in “[50 Tools to Automate Your Link Building](#).”

In the bad old days, some link building tools led link builders to indulge in spammy outreach that has stained the reputation of SEO. The worst tools worked like this:

- Automatically identify 500 sites linking to a competitor (*don't review the sites or even bother to look at them!*).
- Lookup the email address of the site's contact from their whois record (*hey what's the cost to me if I email the wrong person?!?*).
- Automatically blast out a form letter (*you think I have time to personalize a note to 500 webmasters?!?*).

The only good thing about the old ways is they serve to heighten the effectiveness of relationship-based link building, where each site is carefully hand-screened for relevance, the exact right person responsible for the site is found, their motivations understood, “[gives](#)” are made before “[asks](#),” an appropriate contact method is used (email, phone, sometimes postcards), and personalized note is crafted for each contact individually.

Contact Research

So you've found a perfect prospective link partner, the exact right person to contact. Now you just need their email address, and you aren't a big fan of CTRL-F and copying and pasting. Enter contact research tools.

- Tools like [Raven](#), [Tout](#), and [BuzzStream](#) (Disclaimer: I co-founded BuzzStream) offer one-click contact research from a bookmarklet or toolbar. This means that link builders click a button while viewing a link prospect's web page, and these tools extract the contact information they find. Some tools visit every page that looks like a Contact or About Us page to find contact information, others stick to the current page. Some tools can spot email address conventions such as “name AT foo DOT com,” as well as find Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook profiles. But no tool is perfect, and you should expect to manually review *all* of the contact information found.
- [Broadlook Diver](#) and [Web Data Extractor](#) are crawlers that automatically search for email addresses across the web and via Google searches. This can be valuable if you're trying to find the email address or other contact information for a particularly challenging contact.
- BuzzStream offers a free [Email Research Tool](#), which is similar to a link building query generator but designed for email address searches. After inputting a prospect's name, company, and domain, the system creates a list of 20+ queries. BuzzStream offers paid subscribers a way to run those searches automatically.
- [Ontolo](#) extracts email addresses from web pages it visits in the course of discovering link prospects. While this might sound spammy at first, if used properly, a link builder can often spot the promising email addresses (typically a person's name), and devote their attention first to vetting those prospects.
- [Amazon Mechanical Turk](#) is being used heavily by large link building outfits to automate contact research. While your mileage will vary with this approach, it can be a useful tactic to find the lowest hanging fruit. Ben Wills at Ontolo put together a nice guide on [how to create a Turk campaign for link building](#).

Relationship Markets

If link outreach feels like [picking up women in a bar](#), then you might want to check into link relationship markets are link building's version of online dating.

- **Eightfold logic Linker:** Described by TechCrunch as “Match.com for SEO people,” [Linker](#) helps website owners develop link partnerships with relevant partners. In other words, by joining Linker

you agree to engage in consensual link exchanges with partners that match your interests and you have pre-screened.

- **MyBlogGuest:** Created by one of my favorite SEO writers, Ann Smarty, [MyBlogGuest](#) matches bloggers with quality guest posters and vice versa. Why spend all your time hunting for guest post opportunities the hard way, when MyBlogGuest connects you with blogs who want guest posts. But link builders beware, Ann has written, “guest blogging...to build links is being so much abused that it makes me shudder.” If you join MyBlogGuest, don’t plan to float some spun or low quality content, as you will quickly be shown the door.
- **Zemanta:** This Wordpress plugin is used by many bloggers to find relevant pictures and articles as they write their posts. In other words, [Zemanta](#) acts like an agent for your content, matching your existing content against new content when they are being written (which incidentally is a fairly good time to get a link). Great, right? Unfortunately, there’s not much you can do to influence this other than to produce great content and make it available to Zemanta [via RSS](#).

Link Management (CRM)

If you create relationships with hundreds of websites, you will quickly discover that staying on top of follow-up and tracking status is a real chore. For most folks, spreadsheets work up to a hundred or so contacts.

At this point, you realize it would sure be nice to be able to search for all link prospects you emailed once in the past three months who run sites with mozRank of at least 5 where the domain registration is California and where you have their Twitter ID. Whoops, now you have two choices: just give up any hope of ever having that kind of flexibility or start manually collecting and entering the data you need. Enter link building CRM tools. These tools eliminate much of the data entry overhead, reducing your upfront work to simply bookmarking sites. These tools make it easy to search contacts, track conversations, and automate reporting.

- **Spreadsheet:** Almost every SEO creates an Excel or Google Doc spreadsheet at some point to track link building. A simple spreadsheet with a URL, link metrics, contact information, and status will get many first time link builders pretty far.
- **General CRMs and “Inbox CRMs”:** You can use any CRM to track link building contacts. [SugarCRM](#), [Salesforce](#), [CapsuleCRM](#), [BatchBlue](#), [Xobni](#), [Rapportive](#), and [Gist](#) provide extensive contact management and conversation tracking. The main feature of a general purpose CRM is automatic conversation and status tracking. Don’t underestimate the power of having your outreach history at your fingertips at all times – it may be the difference between quality personal outreach and a spamtastic faux pas. Where these solutions break down is that they don’t allow you to track link-building specific metrics such as ACRank or mozRank, or if they support custom fields, you’re on your own to enter all that data.
- **CRM’s Designed for Link Building:** The two major online link building CRMs, [BuzzStream for Link Building](#) and [Raven’s Link Manager](#), were designed to ease the collection of contact information, track your communications across email and Twitter, make your contacts easy to search and filter via link metrics, and provide task management to help you manage a large team. [Advanced Link Manager](#) also has a capable link management module that runs locally or via a server on your local network. Link research tools like [AdGooroo Link Insight](#), [Linkdex](#), [Ontolo](#), [SEOClarity](#), [WhoLinksToMe](#), [Wordtracker Link Builder](#) also offer (or are adding) link management features.

When choosing tools, a few factors to consider are:

1. The ease of getting information into the system (both initially and as part of your ongoing process).
2. The ability to track all your communications without copy and paste.
3. The ability to track all of the link metrics you need.
4. Task management features like assignment and reminders.
5. The ease with which you can sort, filter, and find contacts.
6. Integration with your SEO platform and any reporting benefits that confers.
7. The ability to create projects manage security to control which link builders can see into which projects.

But above all, find a CRM solution you can stick with over time, regardless of your link research choices.

Link Outreach Management

So far we've eliminated all the friction surrounding researching a link prospect and tracking them in our CRM. Now all that's left is to draft personalized, relevant, persuasive email (or postcards).

Four things that should be on your wish list:

- The ability to have your notes in front of you while drafting your note.
- Not having to retype your site description in every email.
- Being able to track the message so you can remember what you wrote.
- Making it easy for others on your team to find out if you've made contact.

Here are a few tools that can help with these issues:

- **Gmail Canned Responses:** Gmail allows you to write a "[Canned Response](#)," but "response" is a misnomer. You can insert a templated message into *any* email. This can be a time saver if you tend to write outreach email that start with a personalized introduction and then incorporate some element of boilerplate.
- **Tout:** [Tout](#) makes templating email outreach an art, and quite an efficient one at that. While viewing a prospect's website, you simply click a button, up pops a window to select one of your email templates, then you enter the recipient's name and email. Tout fills in the blanks within the message, you add personalization, and off your message goes. Like an email service provider, Tout adds click tracking to your links so you can tell who has click and who has not, which is very powerful information to help you improve your outreach messages.
- **WebCEO:** One of the first SEO tools, recently added an online subscription-based service. One of its services is called Link Partner Finder, and their website says, "you can use...Partner Finder - to email a personal request to exchange links or send bulk template-based messages." But [WebCEO](#) warns, "you should create personalized letters to those who are more important for you."
- **BuzzStream:** If you've ever used Word's mail merge, BuzzStream's recently added [mass personalization email tool](#) will be familiar, but there's a big difference – BuzzStream allows personalization. To use it, you select a group of contacts, choose a template, and then you're presented with a split screen (your contact's history and notes on the left and the templated email on the right) where you can personalize it.
- **ThankThankNotes:** Offers an interesting alternative to email. Send a handwritten note to a link prospect. For \$3 per message, [ThankThankNotes](#) will handwrite a note of up to 75 words, put it in an envelope, address it, and send it for you. They offer an API and spreadsheet upload, so you can automate this process.

Link Monitoring

Lastly, it's important to track which links are live and when. Clients want to see progress, executive management wants to see KPIs going up and to the right, SEO directors want to know which link builders on their team are most productive, and link strategists want to see which campaigns are working and which aren't.

There are no standalone link monitoring tools, but it is a feature of most of the tools we've discussed: Adgooroo Link Insight, Advanced Link Manager, BuzzStream, Raven, seoClarity, WebCEO, and Wordtracker Link Builder, all offer some form of it.

If you don't have access to these link building tools, but want to track your links, one option is to use Google Reader's "[follow changes](#)" feature with pages where your links appear. Google Reader will monitor the page for any changes. Paid tools like [Femtoo](#), [Verisionista](#), and [ChangeDetect](#), also offer this service with more powerful line-by-line analysis of changes and email alerts.

When evaluating link monitoring tools, a few features to look for are:

1. Automatic discovery of new links across a prospect's domain (not necessarily just at the URL where you thought it would appear).
2. Monitoring of your link's anchor text.
3. Monitoring of the number of other links on the page with your link.
4. Monitoring of other links that appear on the same pages alongside your links (so you can avoid pages that link to things you dislike, like bad neighborhoods).
5. Monitoring for features that rob the link of value such as robots.txt blocking, nofollow meta, nofollow rel tag, etc.
6. Daily or weekly monitoring of all the above, with alerts for negative changes.

Aside from reporting, monitoring makes you aware of link problems immediately, giving you a much better chance of getting a resolution to the problem.

Conclusion

Today's best link building tools enhance our outreach processes without substituting automation for personalization. To develop better relationships, we need to lower the overhead to manage our relationships, which means offloading work to automation tools anytime they don't compromise the human touch. [Ross Hudgens](#) said it best: it's all about "...automating 90% of the process, and then leaving the 10% to humans who will create 99% of the value."

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