

How to Find Authority Websites & Get Links From Them

[Julie Joyce](#), August 28, 2012

Links are easy to get, if you don't care where they come from or whether they'll actually help you. I'm literally besieged by emails offering cheap links. I can grab 100 one-way PR 4 links for \$200 or less. I can also buy links from this or that domain hoarder who is happy to make a quick deal with me. I can participate in "safe" link networks where I'm assured that I will see an amazing increase in my rankings and traffic.

These are not authority links. Authority links aren't easy to get. They are not \$200 for 100 of them, I can assure you.

So where are these elusive authorities, how do you identify them and, most importantly, how do you go about snagging a link from one of them?

What Is An Authority Site?

Let's start by defining what an authority site is not. It's not always the top result in Google. It's not always even found on the first page, depending upon the day and the latest algorithmic changes. Certain niches tend to be spammier, too, with the top results being utter trash. As SEOs, we know not to immediately trust the "best" results that are served up. But what about your average small business owner or, as I like to say, what about my mom? Bless her heart. If my mom were looking for the best hotel in Pigeon Forge, she'd book the first result she found, then fuss at me for its craptastic bed and lack of closeness to a McDonalds. I run the Internet, to her.

Think about gossip. If you hear something, you generally do consider the source. If your friend Karly is known for spreading false information and she tells you that your other friend Jamie just got fired, you probably won't immediately leave Jamie a message that says "I'm so sorry you got fired!" right? You'd either ask Jamie or, if he couldn't be reached, you'd ask Jamie's roommate as he always knows what's going on with Jamie.

An authority site is just like a person that can be trusted to give you what you're looking for. Sometimes you get lucky with a search and the first results are true authorities. But generally speaking, using placement as a defining way to identify an authority can seriously backfire, especially when there's a lot of volatility in the SERPs.

Let's now look at a truly amazing authoritative site that I can personally vouch for so that we can dig into what does make an authority: BackyardChickens.com. I have no association with them at all. My husband asked one question in the forum (our "hen" suddenly began crowing last

year...poor little Pearl was actually Mr. Pearl and had to be rehomed) but other than that, my involvement with the site has been limited to reading the forums, looking at coop plans, and reading articles. I've never actually done research before getting a certain type of animal but I thought I should with chickens, and this site came up every single time I did any chicken-related search.

As of this moment, they have 148,622 members. Every time I check back, that number has increased.

What makes this site an authority is the fact that it ranks for just about everything related to raising chickens in your backyard, and it doesn't do this through keyword stuffing or clever file paths, it does it through the collective knowledge of its users.

It's just a really, really good site, period. You instinctively know that you can trust the information here. It's good enough for its 148,622 members, which is good enough for me.

Past vs. Current Ways to Identify an Authority Site

Back in the day, you could usually depend on top listings to be authorities. However, that's when we started to manipulate the web in various ways.

In 2004 I could rank just about any site that I worked on through cloaking, for example. Given a truly poor site that was not user-friendly, was full of nothing but boring product descriptions, and wasn't one I'd ever buy a thing from, I could help them easily make money.

Today, it's much harder as there have are frequent algorithm updates that are designed to combat the latest overused technique, sometimes completely screwing up and accidentally pushing decent sites further down into the results pages. Some people still rely on metrics such as Google's Toolbar PageRank or MozRank to determine a site's authority, but it's simply too easy to employ methods that mean most metrics are about as reliable as Alexa.

These days we have social signals to consider, which can be manipulated too of course, but genuine user engagement through social media channels and the site itself is discernible if you take the time to check it out.

You have to work harder than you did years ago, because now, you can't just trust that someone with 15,000 Twitter followers has legitimately gained those followers by being an authority. You may find a post that has 500 tweets and zero comments, and when you dig into who tweeted the post, you'll see that they're mostly automated spam accounts.

Today, as much as I hate to say it, you simply can't rely on any metrics to identify an authority site. You have to do the hard work and dig into it.

You can't use a tool to accurately find these sites all the time. If you spend some time on the site and trust it, it's probably the type of authority you're looking for.

What are the right signals of trust then? For me, social engagement is key. If a site has regularly updated content that is well liked, with people tweeting it, Facebooking it, spreading it on Google Plus, and commenting, that's a great sign that the community trusts it.

I'm big on looking at everyone's backlinks (naturally) so if you're well versed in digging into that, go for it, but many people aren't into that and don't have the time, so for those guys, social is your best bet I think.

Major Types of Authority Sites

With the way the online world works these days, you have to use as many methods as possible in order to find the information that you really want. (My current combination consists of about half traditional search and half social media search. However, I'm leaning more and more towards using social media because the results aren't as volatile – no algorithm changes on Twitter! – and interaction is quick and easy.)

Let's go over a few types of authority sites then follow it up with some real life examples that include tips about what to look for.

Authors/Bloggers

If you're in an industry that produces a lot of online content often and you have the time and energy to keep up, you probably know who your authority writers are. If you attend a lot of conferences, I imagine the same holds true for speakers. However, not everyone has those luxuries.

Here's where I love social media tools like [Crowdbooster](#), which gives you tips on people to follow and engage with based on their influence levels. You can also view your influential followers and see who's retweeting you the most.

These are great ways to find active social media users in your area, and many times, those are great authorities. Once you find one, check him or her out with a simple Google search.

Quick tip: If someone is an authority author, you'll most likely see that they have a strong social presence in a good amount of Google+ social circles, an active Twitter account, and a good amount of articles, as you don't become a great industry writer by writing five posts. Look for writers who create content that is interesting, accurate, useful, and engaging.

Local

These are sites like your Chamber of Commerce, local education sites, local news sites, trade organizations, charities, radio and news stations, etc. If you wanted to find out what was going on with something locally, think of which site you'd trust, and this is probably your local authority.

To find these, you can simply search for topics like "my city news" and "my state school." Many times sites like your Chamber of Commerce will lead you to other great local authority sites through their own links, so make sure you check out any sections like "Related Links" or "Resources."

Industry

Whatever your industry, you probably know of a site or a few sites that you'd go to for relevant information. There may be sites such as umbrella organizations, certification agencies, governing bodies, etc.

Searches such as "my industry" can bring these up but also force you to wade through loads of spam at times. Tacking on keywords like certification, agency, meeting, rules, laws, and annual conference may help you find these authorities. You can also easily use social media to find these. Many times, your authority bloggers will be writing for these sites.

One way I love finding authorities is through an amazing iPad app called [Zite](#), which is like a customized magazine that you can cater to your interests. You add topics to your profile and see relevant (and recent) articles. These are usually from really good sites.

News

If you don't immediately know whom to trust with online content, set up some [Google alerts](#) for your search query and check the News box. Searches for "keyword news" will also help you find some good news sites.

There are also the typical news sites like CNN, BBC, the New York Times, and your local newspapers.

News sites can be tricky since people don't just submit their latest post to CNN. You need to establish a relationship and get noticed, so how can you do this? You obviously need to be writing newsworthy content of course.

You can [submit your site to Google News](#) for one thing, and sites like PRWeb allow you to submit press releases. If you want to be picked up by news sites, you need to make sure you're feeding them your content.

Real Life Examples

It's not always easy to know where to look to find your authorities. In SEO it's pretty easy as we have loads of great industry publications and conferences.

Let's take a look at three examples where it's not so easy and see how we can find what we're looking for.

The Bed & Breakfast

Let's say you've just purchased a giant house and renovated it to become a new bed and breakfast. I may be wrong here but I'm not sure there are loads of conferences. You're located in a college town and are hoping to attract parents of students who want somewhere nice to stay when they're visiting the kids.

You've spent a load of money on the renovation and don't have much left for marketing. What should you do to get some great authority links?

I'd contact the local universities and let them know that I was open for business and that students could get a 10 percent discount on a two night stay when booking through a link off the university's housing page. There's a great .edu link that's good for authority in terms of rank and traffic. I'd do the same thing with the alumni association, with boarding schools in the area, and with any major professional sporting arena. When you combine a discount with a great resource, it's a win-win situation.

I'd also look into getting listed with a site like the one for the Professional Association of Innkeepers and find out how to sponsor a B&B conference. These would all be great authority links.

The Car Dealer

I have a friend who sells cars locally so let's look at what he could do: he does have his own website and he works for a big dealer. I'd again suggest using the discount + student angle here and offer a small discount to currently enrolled students at the local colleges who contacted him through his website from a link off the university's site.

I'd also recommend that he create a blog where he could write about topics such as reasons to buy new vs. used (or vice versa) and create fun quizzes that match a user to a car, then reach out to authority bloggers found through social media. He could ask specific authority bloggers if they'd like to guest post and, in return, offer them a test drive on my highest end new car.

Maybe there's a great site dedicated to the green movement in town and one of the bloggers could drive a new hybrid for a week and write about her experience.

[Followerwonk](#) is a great tool to use to search Twitter bios, which could be really useful here...I'm thinking a search for city + "living green" or "environmental" might turn up something interesting.

The Dog Groomer

What if you are a dog groomer? I'd contact all the vets in the area and see who doesn't offer that service, then ask for a link on their site. If they do offer the service, ask for a link anyway in case one of their patients lives 30 miles away from their office but only 5 miles away from you and needs to get Fluffy trimmed on a tight schedule. I'd do the same with local pet stores and shops that sell pet food and accessories.

I'd also volunteer to help groom dogs once a month at the animal shelter in return for a nice link off their resources page.

I'd create a service where I worked with local high school and college students who'd drive to help elderly people bathe their dogs and submit this as a press release in order to get some news links. I'd also make sure the local AARP or Senior Services agencies knew about this service and linked to it on their websites.

The Hard Part

So now that we know what to look for, how do we get links on these sites?

- **Ask for it:** The most argued-about tactic that I write about is emailing and asking for a link. Many people point out that they ignore these types of emails, but we get plenty of links this way. I'm not suggesting that you limit yourself to this method but from my experience, it is a successful way to build some great links.
- **Use broken link building tactics:** If a link on a site points to a page that no longer exists or a site that isn't in operation any longer, most webmasters do appreciate being informed of that, especially on authority sites with large communities as those webmasters really do want to give their users a good experience, and [broken links](#) aren't good experiences.
- **Produce something interesting or useful and promote it:** If you're rehashing the same topic as everyone else, you probably aren't going to generate a ton of links. However, if you're offering something different or exceptionally useful (like disparate groups of related information all contained in one big well-edited list) then you'll naturally attract links.
- **Get links on sites that these authorities do link to:** If you want a link on a popular news site but can't get it, see if there are any sites linked to from that site that are good potentials, and use whatever tactic you like to get a link there. You won't get all the benefit of the target authority but you'll get a bit of it through the links.
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If Content Is King, What Makes Authority Content?

And last but certainly not least, let's talk about what makes authority content. You want links from authority content but you also want to author authority content since that can easily lead to great links for you.

Authority content needs to be something that can be verified elsewhere. If all the big sites are saying one thing and you say the opposite, you can't hope that anyone will think that you're the one who's correct, even if it happens to be the case. Authority content needs to be able to back itself up whether it's by citing other sources or by proving a case.

The thing to remember is that one great link is worth many lower-quality ones. For example, I write for a few sites that send me fantastic leads each month. These links do help my site rank higher but for me, the important thing is the direct, qualified leads that I get whenever an article comes out.

There are links to my site on many sites that have never once sent me any qualified traffic. They all work together to boost my site's profile but still, I'm not generating business from them for the most part. That's the goal right? You want to have converting traffic, whatever defines your conversion.