How to steal your competitor's backlinks, rankings & traffic

There are literally hundreds of ways you can build backlinks to your website. Each tactic is worthy of it's own blog post.

One of the best white hat link building strategies is to steal your competitors backlinks, and along with it their rankings and traffic.

With some work, competitive analysis and a few backlink checkers you can quickly outrank your competition and optimize your content strategy.

Let's jump in.

Here's What We'll Cover –

- How to analyze your competitor's backlink profile
- How to use free tools to build a gigantic list of backlink targets
- How to steal backlinks from your top competitors
- How to leverage your competitors for link bait content
- How to set a rock solid foundation for your link building campaign

The Method To The Madness

Do a search for any keyword on Google.

Each of the sites in the top 10 search results have a backlink profile that pleases Google.

It is also likely they have fairly decent content and have taken care of the basics like on page SEO.

But for the most part each of the top 10 results backlink profile is powering the rankings.

Imagine what would happen if your site had the same backlinks as not just the #1 result, but every single page in the top 10 results!

Building The Perfect Foundation

Why spend time & money trying to figure things out when you can just steal your competitors best backlinks!

Performing competitor analysis like this allows you create a great foundation link profile to your site.

Replicating your competitors links takes a lot of the hard work out of link building & is very easy for anyone new to SEO to do.

This is a tactic I use all of the time with new sites before I do anything else. You build a very natural profile slowly but surely giving you a great foundation to leverage.

So, let's get started…

Step 1 – Get The Top 10 Results

The first thing you need to do is gather the top 10 organic results for the keyword you want to rank for.

Just do a quick Google Search and make a note of each URL.

We are going to run each of these URL's through the backlink checkers below!

Step 2 – Finding All Of The Backlinks

To find all of the backlinks for each of the top 10 results we are going to use some backlink checkers.

There are a number of them to choose from both free & paid. However, every backlink checker suffers from the same problem though and that is that no single one of them can provide a complete overview of your link profile.

At best you might find 1/10th of your entire link profile using Ahrefs but what about the other 90% of links pointing to a site? These make a big a difference.

The Solution

The solution is to grab reports from each service/tool and then combine them into one big master list of links to get the most complete overview of the link profile as possible.

Now obviously it is far to expensive to subscribe to every service but you can take advantage of the SEOMoz, Raven Tools and SEO Spyglass free trials to get you started and then use the limited free reports from Ahrefs and Majestic SEO and others as well.

Before you start, open a new excel file. You will be pasting the backlinks you extract from each of backlink checkers into the spreadsheet to create a master prospect list.

A Quick Look At The Tools

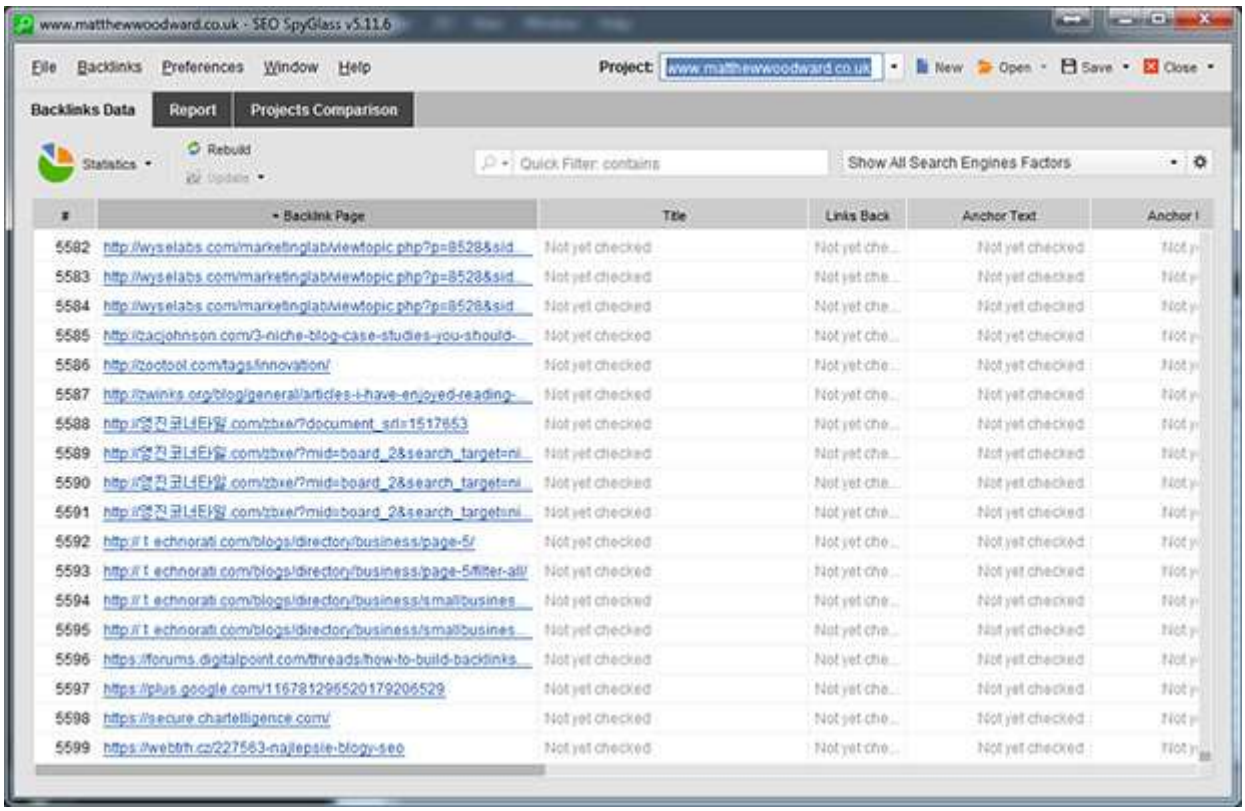
SEO Spyglass (free/paid)

Up until a year ago this tool might not have even made my list of backlink checkers. However, recent update has added a database of 15,000,000,000,000 links. That is more than Ahrefs & Majestic SEO.

Download a free trial of SEO Spyglass

SEO Spyglass is different than other backlink checkers as it runs as a piece of desktop software rather than a web based tool.

It downloads your backlinks from a number of sources and they even have their own database of links similar to the services above the software accesses directly.



The best feature of this tool is the analysis you can do for each backlink prospect. The free version will check if the links are live, display anchor text, page rank scores, social shares and alexa rank. All of this information is real-time fresh data.

The "linked-to page" analysis is my favorite piece of data. This shows which content your competitors are using to attract backlinks. This saves you a lot of guess work when tweaking your own content strategy.

The free version of SEO Spyglass is limited to 1,100 backlinks per URL but you can't export these links.

Where as the paid version goes all out allowing you to bulk check as many URL's as you want without limits!

It is available for a onetime fee which makes it a great investment compared to the monthly fees of most paid backlink checkers.

Download the Free SEO Spyglass Trial

Ahrefs.com (free/paid)

I will tell you now Ahrefs.com is a personal favourite of mine. They show some fantastic data and break it down in pretty much every way imaginable.

How many links you have, from how many IPs, linking to which pages with which anchor text.

They breakdown the links by types and provide all sorts of graphs and visualisation options.

The only real drawback with Ahrefs.com is pricing – starting at $79 a month upto $499 a month although the smallest package will suit most.

The free account gives you quite a lot of backlink based data but you can only see the top 10 backlinks of each report.

Go to *backlinks* > *external*, then *backlinks* > *new/lost* to export as many as you can with the free account.

The paid account allows you to export all of them into a CSV file in one click.

Once logged in, go to backlinks > external, then backlinks > new/lost in order to export as many backlinks as possible.

Check the "one link per domain" box to make sure you **maximize the number of unique results you get**.

Make sure you are checking through both the new/lost link and new/lost referring domains sections to maximize the number of link prospects that are returned. You also have the option to filter these results.

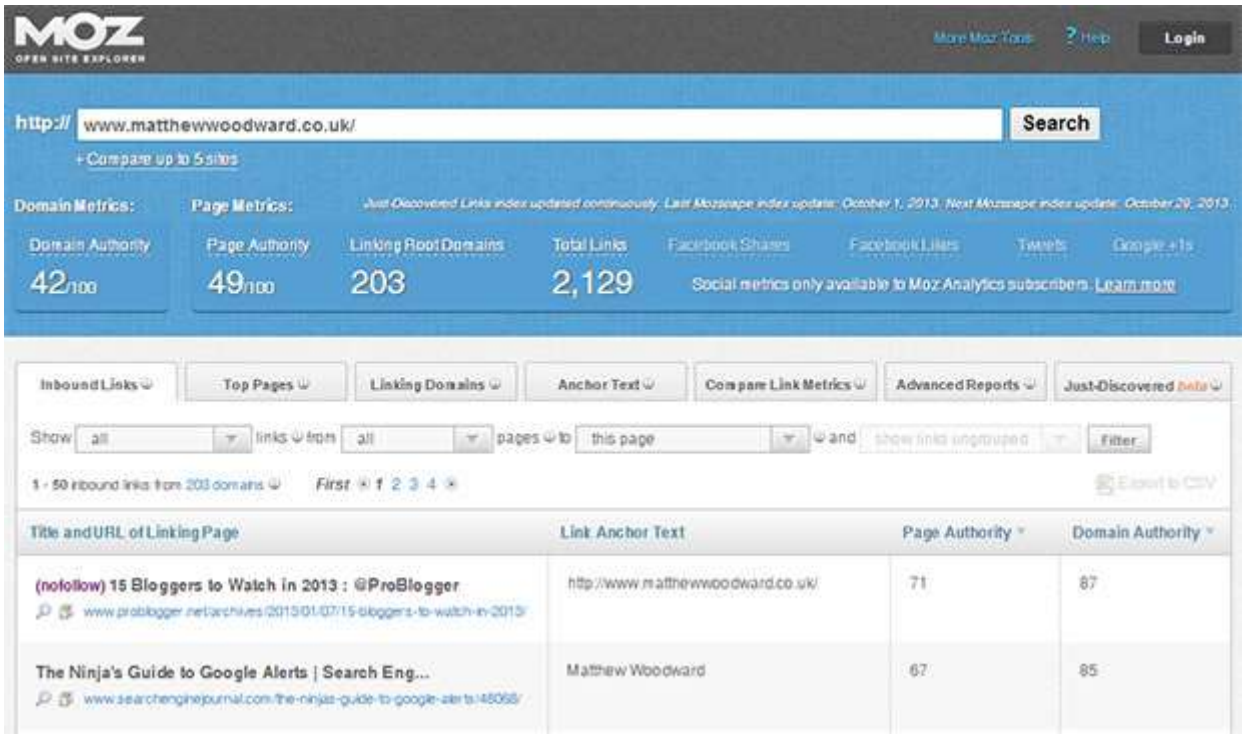
Set the filter to 60 days to capture the highest number of link prospects –

Hit the "backlinks" dropdown to get the referring URL and anchor text associated with each backlink.

Open Site Explorer (free/paid)

Open Site Explorer comes as part of the Moz suite of SEO tools which also includes rank tracking, weekly crawls alerting you to onsite SEO issues, on page recommendations, social media statistics and competitive analysis to see how you stack up against the competition.

It also includes a whole bunch of other tools, webinars, training videos and an expert community. And as they don't specialise in link checking the database isn't anywhere near the size of others.



A free search will let you get the top 50 backlinks for each URL. Clicking on the *just discovered tab* will get you an extra 5!

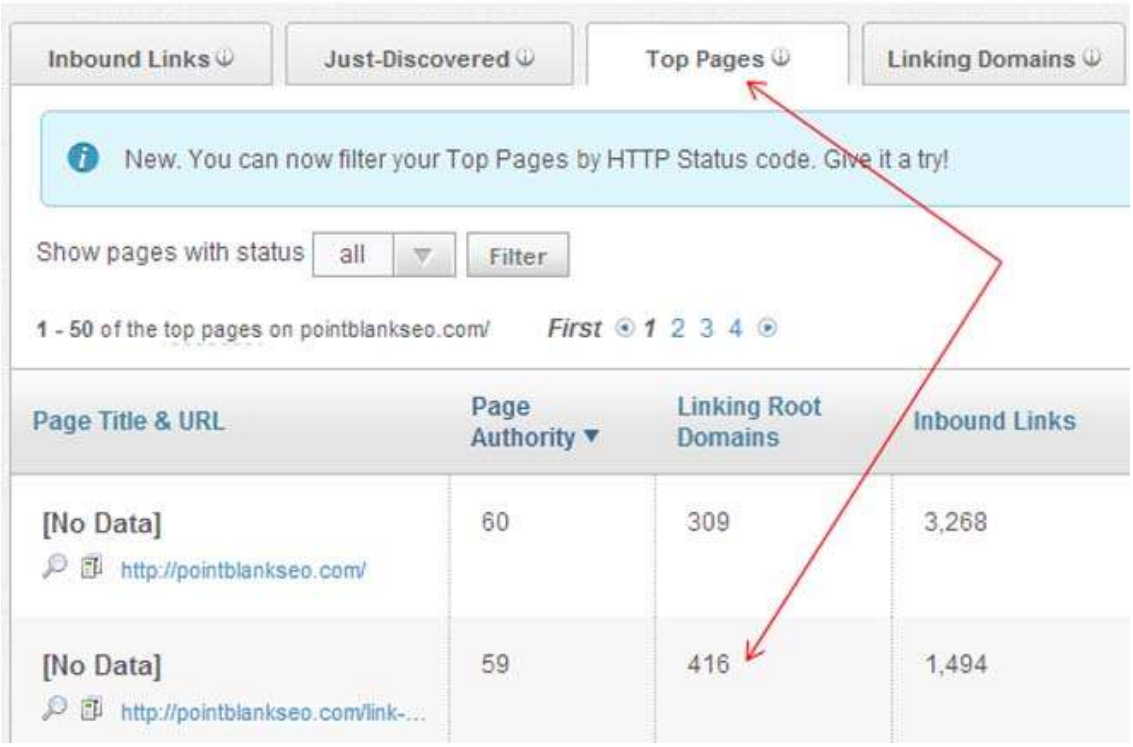
The paid version gives you the export to CSV option as well as access to the rest of the Moz suite of tools!

By default, Open Site Explorer provides a list of both internal and external links. In order to filter the list so that you only get external backlinks, **select "external only" from the "links from" dropdown**.

Pay close attention to the page and domain authority for each backlink. The higher the authority the more page rank (link juice) the URL will pass onto your site.

Higher authority URLs will also be harder to get backlinks from.

Open Site Explorer also allows you to filter a "top pages" report by clicking the tab as shown below –

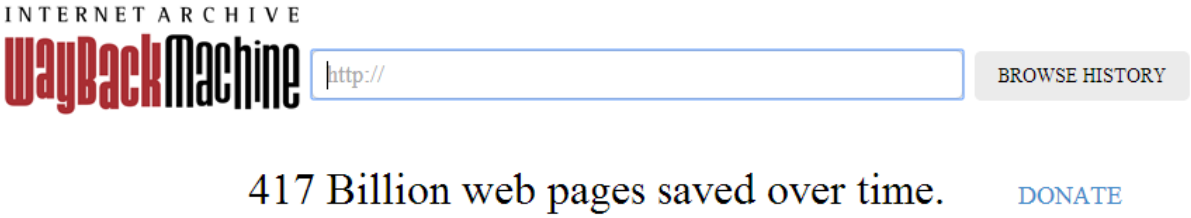


This is a fantastic tool for identifying the types of content that your competitors are using to attract the highest number of backlinks. This can help shape your content strategy moving forward.

If you want to take this strategy to another level hit the drop down next to the "filter" button. Select the 400 error option from the dropdown –

Make a note of the top pages that are returning 400 errors. These are dead links.

Next, enter the dead URL into the WayBack machine. This tool will give you an archived snapshot of what content used to live at that URL.



Now, simply plug the dead URL back into Open Site Explorer and filter the external links pointing to that URL.

This could give you hundreds of additional prospects for link poaching.

What's link poaching?

Essentially, you're replacing existing content (or dead links) with your own content.

Outreach to all the sites that are linking to the dead page and pitch your content as a replacement for the dead URL.

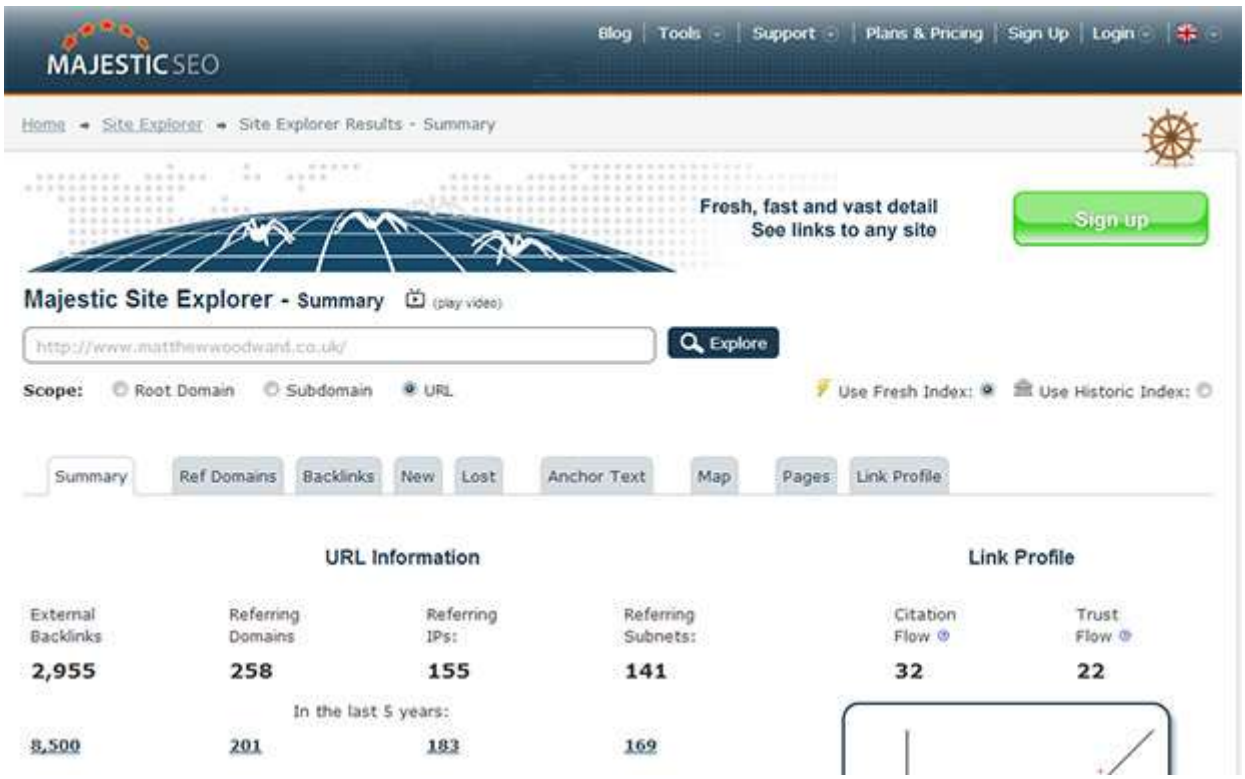
I usually get a 5-10% success rate with this outreach tactic.

Word of advice: make sure your content is just as good, if not better than content you want to replace.

Majestic SEO (free/paid)

I have a bit of a history with Majestic SEO but they are always one of the top performers in terms of the number of backlinks they provide.

It is very similar to Ahrefs in a lot of ways but in my opinion Ahrefs does a much better job all round.


MAJESTICSEO
Blog | Tools | Support | Plans & Pricing | Sign Up | Login
Home » Site Explorer » Site Explorer Results - Summary
Fresh, fast and vast detail
See links to any site
Sign up
Majestic Site Explorer - Summary
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http://www.matthewwoodward.co.uk/
Explore
Scope: Root Domain Subdomain URL
Use Fresh Index: Use Historic Index:
Summary Ref Domains Backlinks New Lost Anchor Text Map Pages Link Profile
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External Backlinks
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Citation Flow
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2,955
258
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141
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In the last 5 years:
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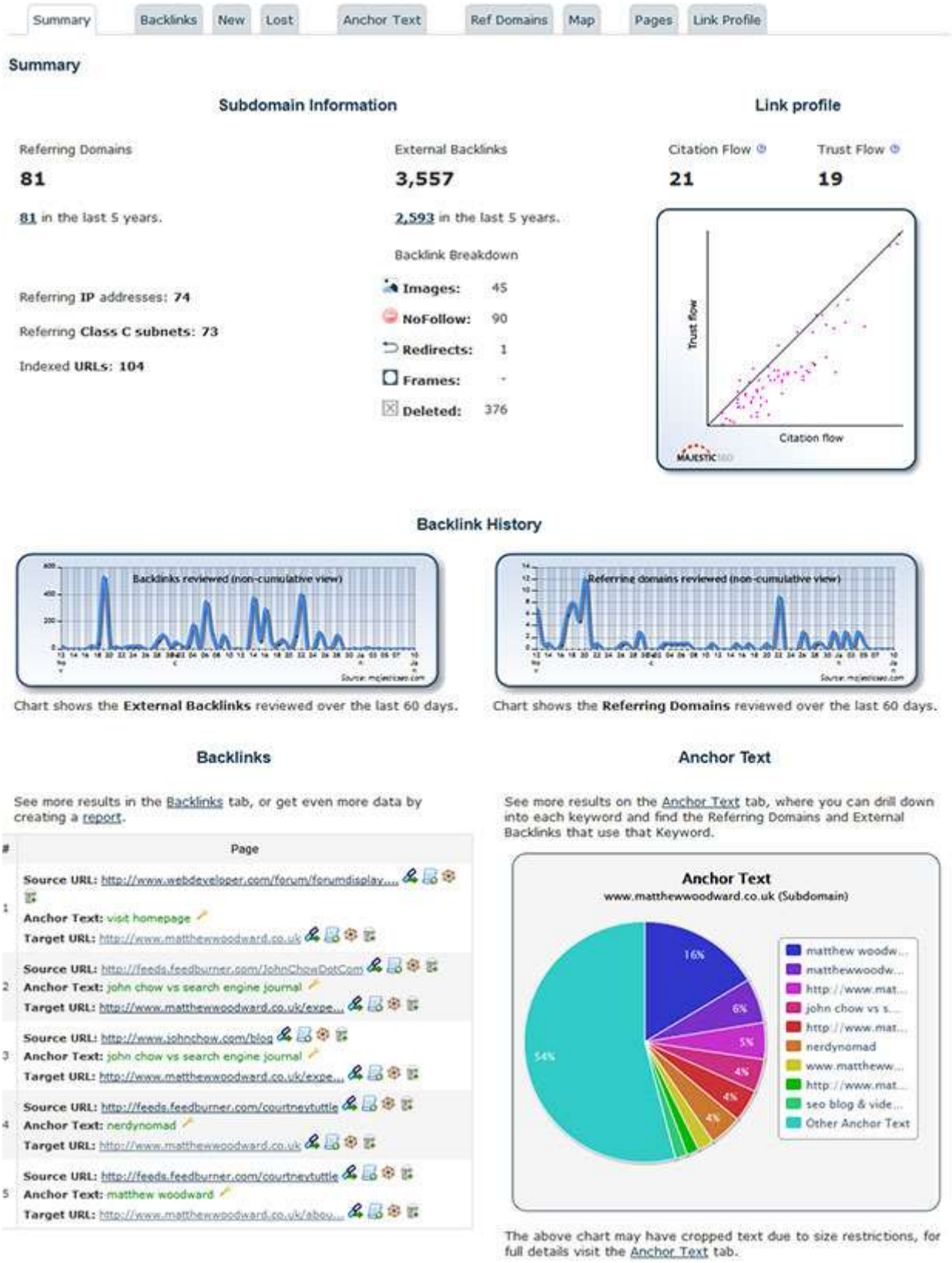


Prices start from around $50 (€39 EUR) to $400 (€299.99 EUR) per month. However there is a free account that lets you run more detailed reports for websites you own.

If you sign up for a free account you can export all of the backlinks for sites you own & verify which is sweet!

But to check other people's backlinks like Ahrefs it's limited to the top 10 backlinks. Get more by going to the *backlinks tab* & the *new tab*!

The paid account gives you 1 click access to export everything into a CSV file.

Pay close attention to the "trust flow" of each URL. This is proprietary algorithm that indicates how trustworthy Majestic SEO thinks the URL is. This is based largely on the quality of links pointing to the URL.

You can see a host of other valuable metrics such as the type of link, when it was first indexed and last seen. You will notice that Majestic SEO also lists 301 redirects and even checks for links to both the www and non-www versions of the site.

BacklinkWatch (free) – 1,517

Backlink Watch is a great free tool and delivers a pretty decent size of results no strings attached!

While you can't export the results easily you can copy them, then in excel *right click* > *paste special* > *text* > *ok*.

Backlink Watch actually uses Ahrefs to power its database so you can get some decent results.

You should **pay close attention to the "outbound links" (OBL) column** in the table of results. If the number is high very little page rank will be passed onto your site as it being split up between all the other outbound links.

Try and target PR2 URLs that have a relatively low number of outbound links to maximize the amount of link juice passed onto your site.

Small SEO Tools (free) – 599

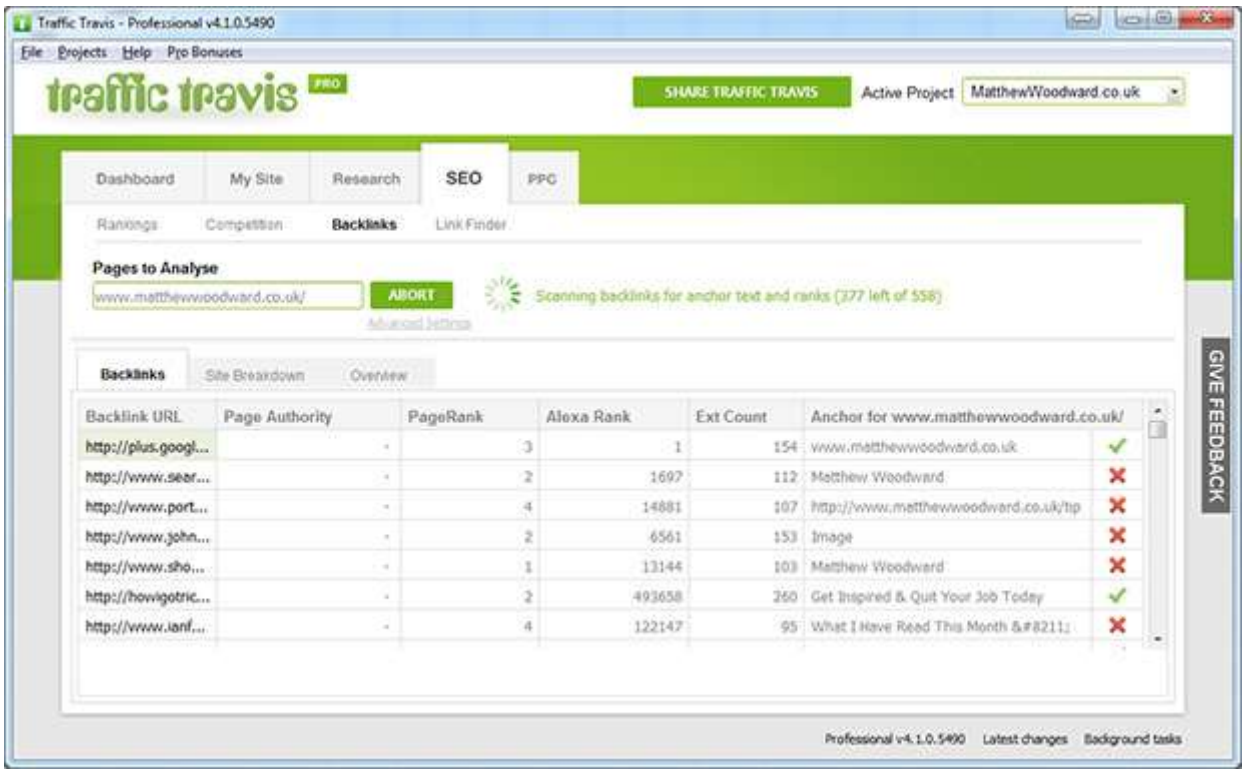
The Small SEO Tools backlink checker is also completely free to use!

While it does return some good results it is hard to export them, you have to click through 10 result pages one at a time to copy them out.

But it is free to use so you get what you pay for I guess =D

Traffic Travis (free/paid) – 558

Traffic Travis is like SEO Spyglass in that it runs as a desktop application but it also has a bunch of other handy SEO tools & features.



The free version actually lets you do quite a lot of things not just checking backlinks!

It uses Open Site Explorer as its backlink data source but also looks up real time data like page rank.

It is a great free tool to have in your arsenal!

Link Diagnosis (free) – 250

Link Diagnosis is also a handy free backlink checker although it did deliver limited results.

On the upside though it uses the Open Site Explorer database and if you install the Firefox extension it is really handy!

You can even export all of the backlinks easily in one click!

Bing Webmaster Tools (Link Explorer)

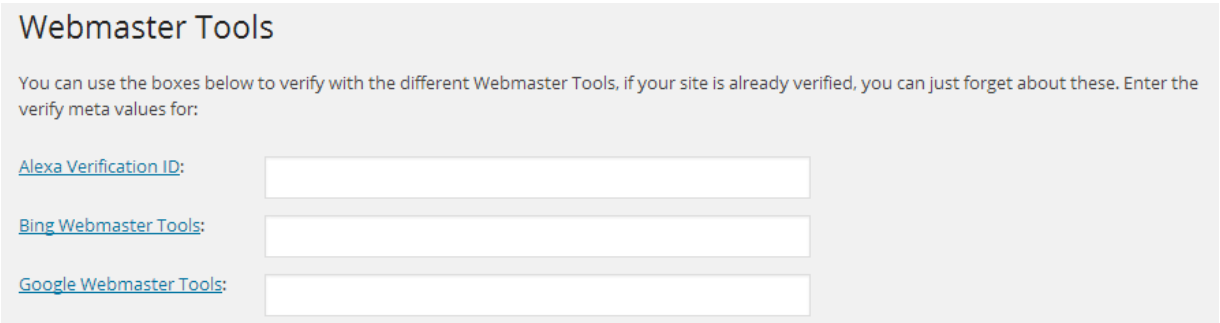
Bing's Link Explorer is a great tool for analyzing your competitor's backlink profile.

In order to use Bing's free Link Explorer tool you will need to first create a Bing Webmaster Tools account.

Once you have created your Bing Webmaster Tools account, the next step is to verify your site with Bing.

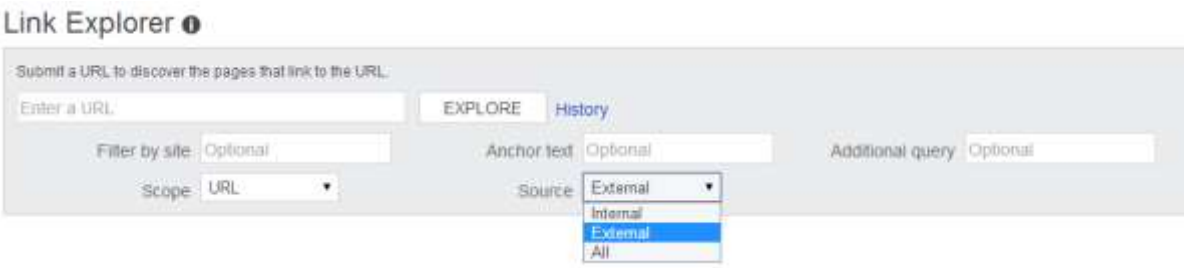
Log into BWT and click the "configure my site" dropdown and select "verify ownership". Copy the <meta> tag and paste it into the <head> of your website.

If you own a WordPress website and have the WordPress SEO plugin installed this process is extremely easy. Navigate to the WordPress SEO plugin, click settings and then paste the <meta> tag into the BWT field. Hit save changes, then navigate back over to BWT and click verify.



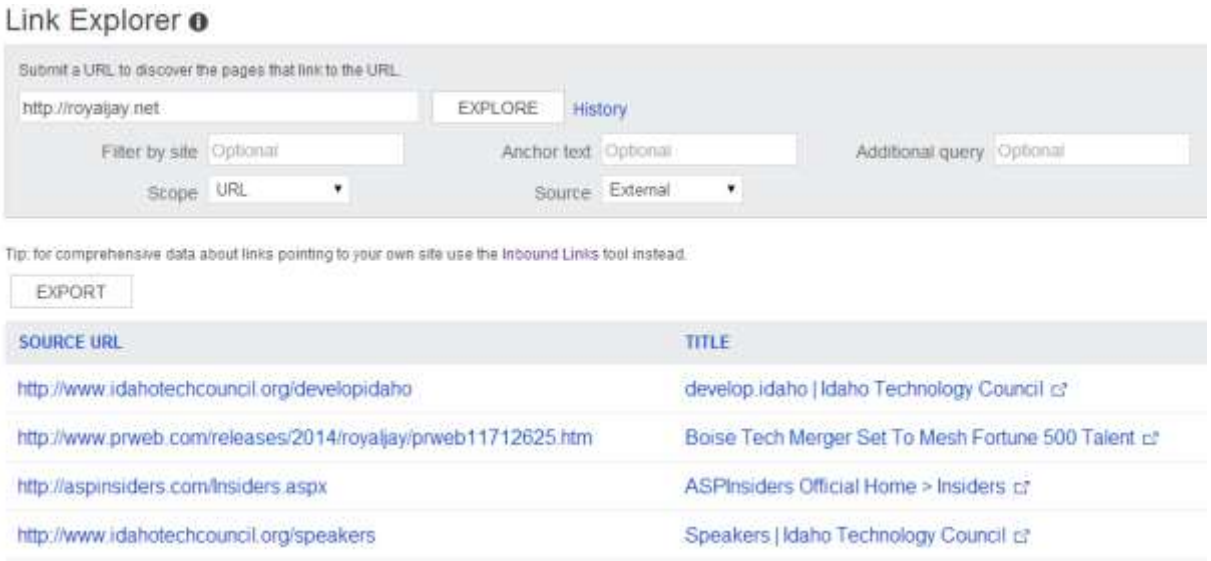
Link Explorer

Once your site is verified within BWT, click the "diagnostics and tools" dropdown and select "link explorer".



Enter your competitor's URL, select "external" from the source dropdown, and click "explore".

The Link Explorer Tool will give you a large number of backlink prospects. The only weakness is that it doesn't provide robust link analysis metrics such as page rank, anchor text or follow/no-follow metrics. You only get the source link and title of the page.



You are able to export the results.

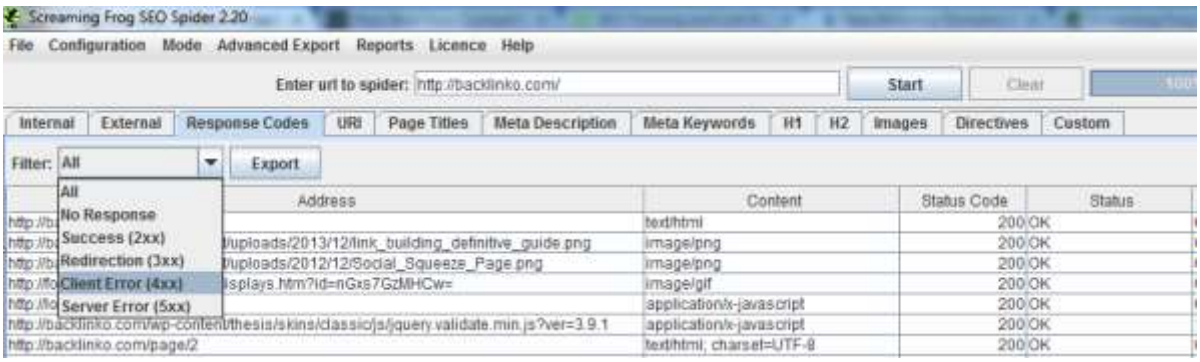
Screaming Frog

The Screaming Frog SEO Spider is a piece of desktop software that allows you to quickly analyze and audit your website's key SEO, including technical and on-page elements.

One way you can use this tool to steal your competitor's backlinks is to identify 400 response codes.

Enter the domain of your competitor into the spider and hit start.

Once the spider has crawled the website, select the "4xx" option from the response codes drop down –



This will give you a list of the site's pages returning 400 errors.

These are dead pages.

Now, export this list of 400 pages and enter each of them into the URL checkers to get a list of sites linking to these dead pages.

The next step is to write a piece of replacement content, pich it to the site's webmaster and get your backlink.

Rank Signals

Rank Signals is another great free tool that provides useful backlink data.

Simply enter the URL of your competitor's backlink and hit "explore links".

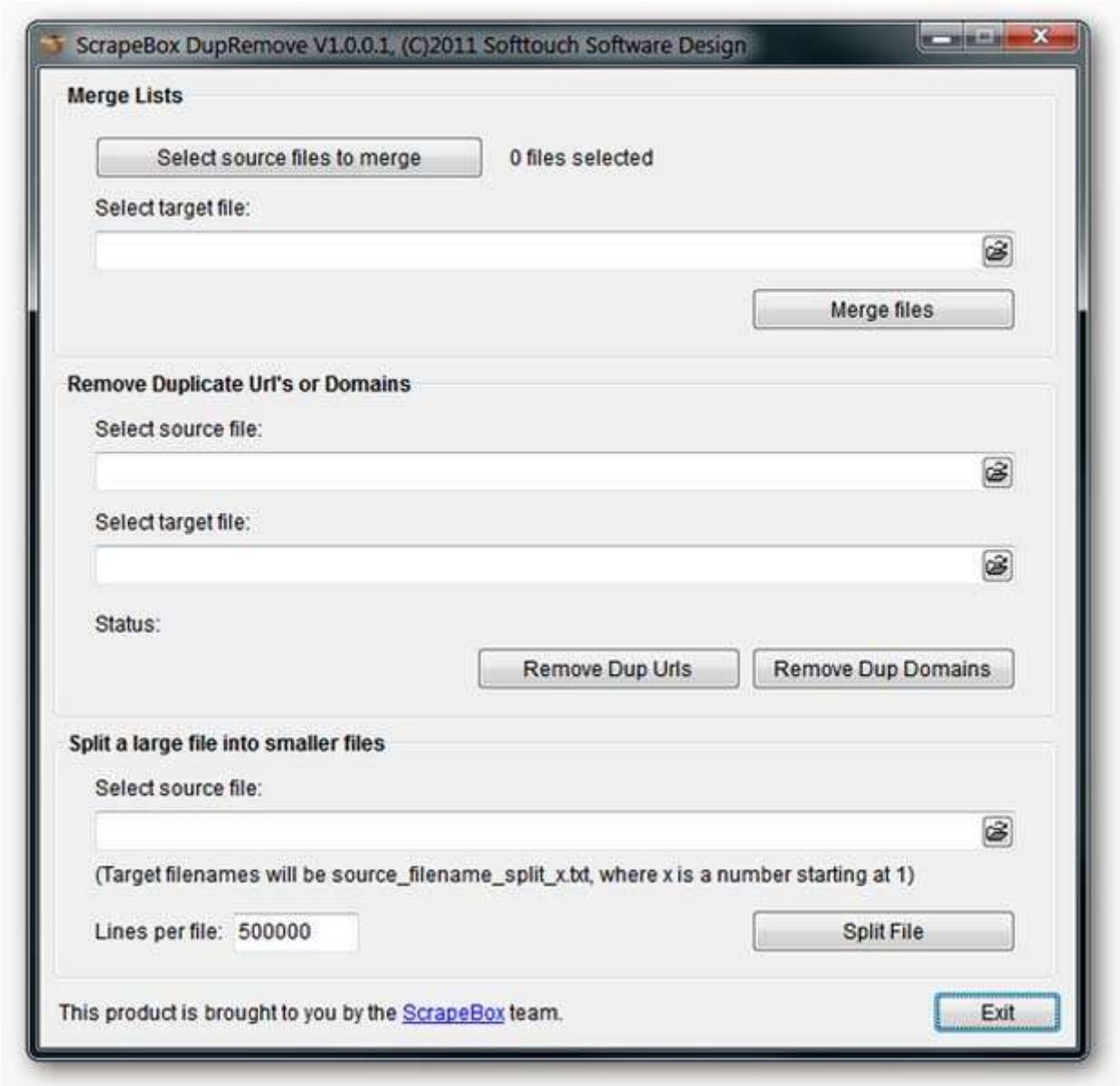
You will given the backlink URL, anchor text and PR value.

Step 3 – Creating A Master List

Now you have collected as many backlinks as possible from as many sources as possible for each of the top 10 results we can move forward!

Open notepad and copy all of your backlink prospects into a new .txt file.

Next, remove all of the duplicate URLs or domains using the free Scrapebox duplicate removal tool.



To remove the duplicate URLs or domains from your master prospect list, click the "select source file button" and select your master list. Then click the "Select Target File" button, and give your new dupe free file a name.

Finally, click the "remove dup URLs" or "remove dup domains" button and your prospect list will be duplicate free.

Once you have done that we can move onto some backlink analysis.

Step 4 – Analysing The Backlinks

Backlink Analysis

At this point your master list of competitor backlinks could be pretty large – so to make sure we are working efficiently we are going to do a bit of analysis to pick out the best backlinks.

Remember those two Chrome extensions (Mozbar and SEOQuake) I had you install earlier? You'll need those soon.

In general, I look for backlinks that are relevant, indexed and have a PR of at least 2. This way you can maximize the amount of link juice you can get from each backlink.

You can make a separate list of links that are indexed in Google but don't have a PR value as a secondary targets list.

Basically if its indexed in Google, it's good enough to link to my site.

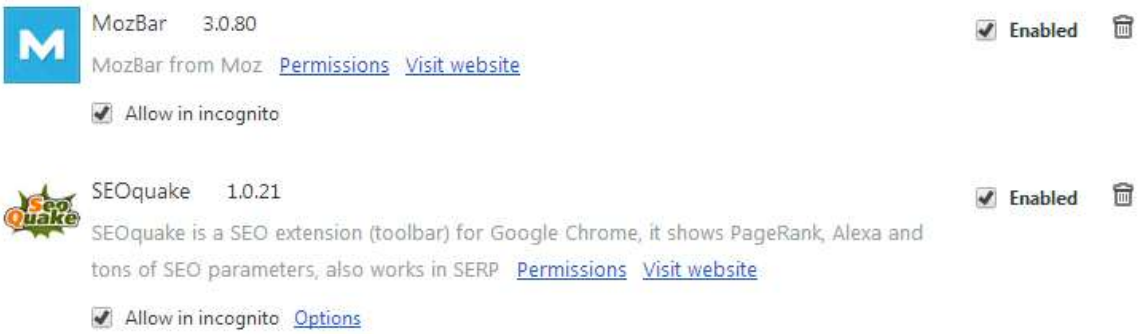
Here are the tools I use to analyze my link prospects –

Method 1 – Chrome Extensions

The Mozbar and SEOQuake extensions are useful when analyzing individual backlink prospects.

These are great if you have a small set of link prospects and want to to get a quick in-depth analysis.

Navigate to your chrome extensions page and enable the mozbar and SEOQuake extensions.

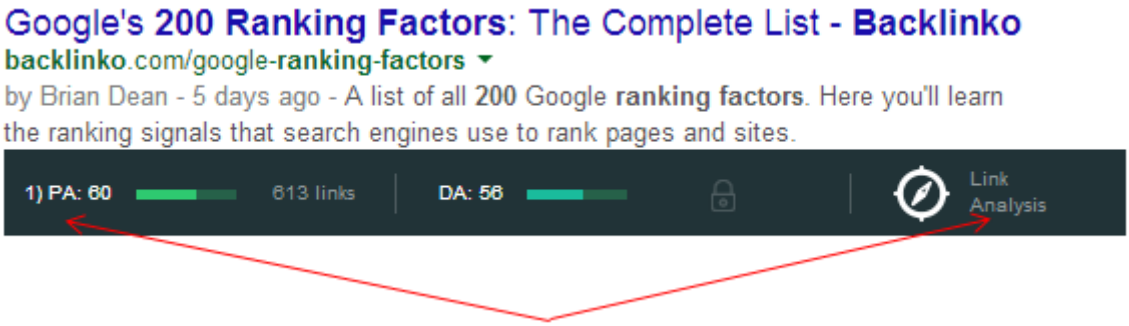


Open up Google (or Firefox) and enter the backlink URL and hit search.

You will see a number of SEO metrics listed with each search result, including domain authority, page authority, age, and the number of linking domains.

Note – Toolbar PR isn't updated very often. As a result, newer pages with high PR sometimes display "n/a" for that metric. Instead, focus more on the 'page authority' for the page. This metric is updated monthly and is much more fresh than the PR metric.

I've found that the Mozbar gives a much more accurate linking domain count compared to SEOQuake which pulls its data from SEMRush.



Hit the "link analysis" tab and you'll be taken to Open Site Explorer for an in-depth backlink analysis.

This is a slightly more tedious approach to backlink analysis and I would only recommend using it if you are working a handful of link prospects.

I've found this analysis technique better suited for the link profiles of smaller local businesses.

Method 2 – Excel / Scrapebox

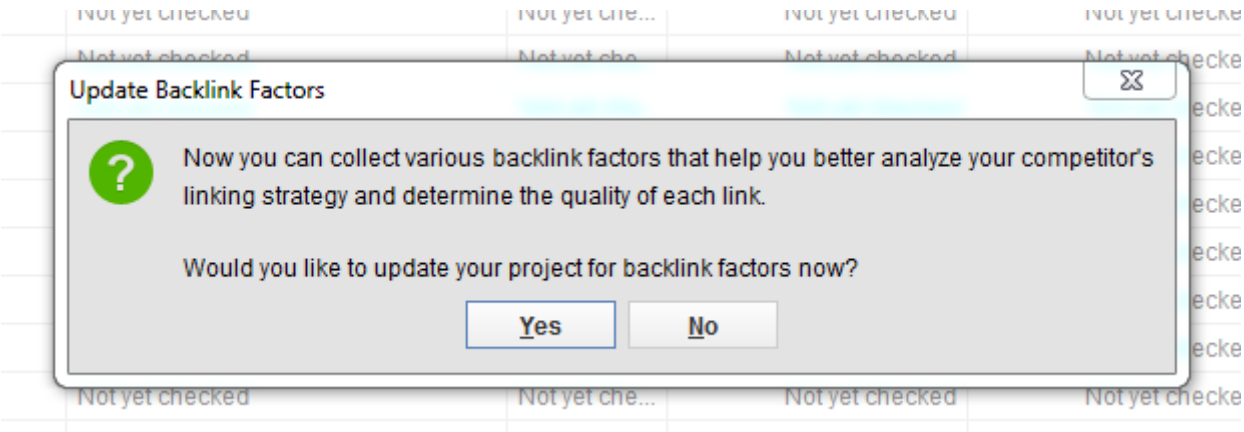
If you have Scrapebox then you can use that to look up lots of different data.

Follow my scrapebox tutorial to check if links are still live, which anchor text they use, what PR they are and if they are indexed in Google.

Method 3 – SEO Spyglass

One of the reasons SEO Spyglass is one of my favorite tools is it's ability to double as both a backlink checker and backlink analysis tool.

Paste in your backlink prospect URL. After the tool completes the backlink extraction you will see this pop up –



Click "yes" to perform the additional backlink analysis step, then select the SEO elements you would like analyzed. Click "next".

After the analysis is completed you will be able to see additional backlink information such as anchor text, anchor URL, the number of external links and page rank for each backlink prospects.

I like to click the PR column to sort the list in descending page rank order to get a quick look at all of the PR 2+ backlinks.

You can also click “view statistics for all backlinks in project” from the top “backlinks” dropdown and sort by TLD type (.edu, .com, .gov etc)

It’s no secret that a few .edu/.gov backlinks can give your domain authority a significant lift.

Step 5 – Replicating The Links

After you have cleaned your list and have a solid list of relevant high PR2+ backlink prospects, it’s time to start replicating as many of those backlinks as possible.

Open each link in your browser and identify how and where your competitor got the backlink.

If it’s a blog comment, you should get involved in the conversation and plug a link where it adds value to the conversation.

You might find that your competitor got a link through a forum post. Sign up to the forum and start engaging.

There may be backlinks from guest posts. You could reach out to the owner of the blog with an awesome piece of content and request your own guest post opportunity. Pay close attention to the guest post guidelines.

You will often find niche directories that your competitors are listed in, many of which are free. Create your listing and get your backlink.

In the case of ecommerce sites you might find that your competitors are getting backlinks from sponsor pages, product review sites, press releases or through partnerships.

Word of advice: you should never pay for backlinks. This includes sponsor pages and advertorials. Further, guest posts and press releases should be viewed as a channel for generating targeted traffic to your site.

It’s recommended that contextual backlinks from press releases and other advertorials be no-followed to avoid a Penguin encounter.

It helps to separate your link prospect list based on backlink type. This way you can filter the backlink prospects quickly.

As you move through the list replicating links you will quickly get a feel for your competitor’s link building strategies. Often, each competitor will have a different approach. Some of your

competitors may focus more on directory links, others more on guest posts, while some may be investing in private blog networks and advertorial links.

This is a great opportunity to beat them at their own game(s). You can combine and leverage all of their strategies in one go.

Step 6 – Creating A Golden Links Database

Getting as much value out of your time as possible is important.

So as you go through the list replicating links, make sure you keep track of everything and make a note of which you have replicated/submitted.

Once you have finished replicating the list of backlinks plug them into Inspyder Backlink Monitor and check to see how many of those links are live and indexed. Monitor this over the next month and track the number of new backlinks you were able to acquire.

Update this list of "live backlinks" as you continue your link building efforts.

The great thing, you can re-use this spreadsheet and link building strategy over and over again.

This is a highly valuable business asset to have.

I also add a column called Niche with options like Technology, Business, Finance, General to make it easy to filter them by topic.

If you replicate more than 50 of your competitor's backlinks, it's worth signing up for a tool such as Linkody. For only $5/month you get detailed backlink change reports emailed to you daily so you know where your links are placed, when they go live, and if they ever get removed. Linkody offers a 30 free trial.

Wrapping It Up

So there you have it – one of my favourite link building tactics that has stood the test of time & algorithm updates.

No need to learn spinning or any complicated software – it's perfect for anyone new to SEO & link building.

The end result will be that you will have all of the backlinks your top 10 competitors do pointing to your 1 site.

There are great tools out there to help you get started in spotting strong competitor backlinks. SEMrush, Ahrefs, Moz and Majestic are among them. Each of these tools have unique features; that is the reason why I love to use combination of them. Those tools can be used for free with limited features; but if you want more in-depth data, try their pro versions. Aside from more comprehensive services, you can download reports and have unlimited access to rival backlinks.