

What to look for in a link exchange

Link exchanging can reap rewards by giving you more 'link popularity' and increasing your search engine ranking. But not all links are equal. What should you be looking out for?

Firstly, links from pages with higher page ranks are normally better. But it could just be that the page is new and soon enough it will have a high page rank. So what is important?

Well, the link must be 'visible' to search engines. There are various ways that other sites could have unintentionally, or intentionally, made your link not visible to the search engines. This is because it is believed that it is favourable to have links pointing in from sites that you do not link to. So here are some warning signs to look for.

The first, and a very simple one, is there is a command that can be inserted into a link to tell search engines to ignore the link. If you see `rel="nofollow"` in a link then search engines will not follow that link - so it's not worth while accepting that link exchange.

Slightly more involved is that the page could be blocked from search engines. This can be because the links to that page include `rel="nofollow"` or that the robots.txt file blocks the page from the search engines. How can you check for this?

Actually, it's quite simple. Just search on your favourite search engine to see if the page is there. If it is, then you know it's not being blocked. You can check by searching on a unique piece of text; by clicking on the 'cached version' button on the Google Toolbar (if you have it installed) or by searching using the 'site:' command. Unfortunately, these methods tell you that nothing is blocking the page, but failure to find the page is cached doesn't mean it is blocked. It could just be too new.

The next trick to check for is whether the version presented to search engines is the same as you are seeing. Again, look at what a search engine has cached and make sure that your link is in place.

Another important check is that the link isn't using javascripts or redirects. It should point directly to your site, not to another file or page and definitely not to a counter. A lot of sites put the link through a counter to track clicks. This is fine if you are exchanging for traffic, but not if you are exchanging for popularity.

The last check I'll mention is that 'framed' pages are frequently not properly dealt with by search engines. If your link is not on the actual page but in a frame, then it's almost certain that the link isn't visible to search engines - and won't count.

So, check that the link page is cached; that on that cached site your link is shown in basic HTML and that it is not blocked. And then the link should count for you!