SEO BASICS

What are backlinks, and why do they matter for SEO?

Every time another website links to yours, it is a small vote of confidence that Google and AI tools notice. A few good ones can lift all your pages. Here's what backlinks are, what makes a good one, and how to earn your first ones.



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Read the latest version online: www.mandalytics.com/guides/what-are-backlinks/



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **A backlink is a link to your site from another website.** Google reads it as a recommendation.
2. **Quality beats quantity.** One link from a respected site in your field is worth more than many from random ones.
3. **Links help in AI answers too.** AI tools lean on sites that others mention and trust.
4. **You can earn your first links this month.** Profiles, partners and directories are a friendly place to start.

THE SHORT ANSWER

A backlink is a link to your website from another website. Google treats each one as a vote of trust, so sites with more good links from relevant sources usually rank higher.

Great pages are the foundation, and links are what tell Google, and AI tools, that other people stand behind them. Every link you earn is a step toward more visitors and, in the end, more revenue.

What is a backlink?

When a supplier mentions you on their "Where to buy" page, a local paper writes about you and links to your website, or a blogger recommends your guide, each of those is a backlink. Another site is pointing its visitors your way.

Think of it like references for a job. One glowing reference from someone respected says more about you than a dozen from strangers, and it says it without you having to claim anything.

Why do backlinks matter for SEO?

Google cannot judge a page on its words alone, because anyone can write "we are the best". Links from other sites are evidence that someone else agrees. That is why they are one of the strongest signals Google looks at when it decides which pages to show first.

- **They help Google trust you.** More independent, relevant sites linking to you means more reason to show your pages.
- **They help Google find you.** Google discovers new pages by following links, so a linked page is found sooner.
- **They bring visitors directly.** People click links, and those visitors already arrive interested.
- **They help in AI answers.** ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity search the web, and sites that other sites mention are the ones they tend to quote.

Counted for you, every week
The Mandalytics weekly report counts the websites that link to you and shows how that number moves, so you can see each new link land.



QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

A few strong links outweigh many weak ones

One link from a site your customers trust can count for more than a heap of links from sites nobody visits.

What makes a good link?

Not all links are equal. A few from the right places beat a pile from the wrong ones:

WORTH LESS

A link that anyone could add in seconds.

- × A site on a different topic
- × A page full of unrelated links
- × A link you paid for

WORTH MORE

A link someone chose to give you.

- ✓ A site your customers already read
- ✓ A link inside a page about your topic
- ✓ A mention in an article, guide or "Partners" page

How do I earn my first links?



Four friendly steps, and no technical skills needed. Tick them off as you go:

1

Add your website to your own profiles

LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and any forum where you take part. A local business should also claim its free Google Business Profile.

30 minutes | Your own accounts

2

Ask the people you already work with

Suppliers, partners, makers and happy customers often have a "Where to buy", "Partners" or "Customers" page. A short, friendly message is enough.

An hour | A few emails

3

Get listed in two or three good directories

Pick guides and directories for your field or your town that people really use. Skip any that charge only for a link.

An hour | Directories for your field

4

Create something worth linking to

A useful guide, a simple tool, a small piece of original research or a good local story. People link to what helps them, so make one page that is clearly the best answer to a question in your field.

A few hours | Your best page

Be patient: links arrive over weeks, not days. Each one is progress you can count in your next report.

Where can I find sites that will link to me?

It depends on what kind of business you run. Start with the card that fits you, then use the searches below to find your own list.

Local business

Customers come from your town or area.

- Your Google Business Profile and Bing Places listing
- Directories people in your country use, such as Yelp
- Your chamber of commerce, trade association or local business club
- Local newspapers, blogs and event pages
- Suppliers and partners who say where to buy

Online or global business

Customers find you from anywhere.

- Directories and comparison sites for your field
- Review sites such as G2 or Capterra, if you sell software
- “Best of” lists and resource pages in your topic
- Industry associations and communities where you take part
- Podcasts and blogs that welcome guest experts

Four Google searches to try

- `best [your product] [your town]` See which lists and directories Google shows first. Ask each one to add you.
- `[your field] directory` Finds directories that accept new listings. Try "add your business" next to it.
- `[a competitor's name] -site:competitor.com` Shows who writes about your competitors, so they may also write about you.
- `"your brand name" -site:yourwebsite.com` Finds pages that mention you without a link. Ask the owner to add one.

Choose a few good places over a long list. If a site asks you to pay just for a link, skip it.

What should I avoid?



Never buy links

Paying for links to improve your rankings is against Google's rules. It can get your pages dropped from results, and the damage is slow to undo. Earn them instead.

MYTH	REALITY
The more links, the better.	A handful from relevant, trusted sites beats hundreds from random ones.
Links only matter for big companies.	Small sites gain the most from their first real links, because each one is a new vote of trust.

MYTH	REALITY
Links alone will fix my rankings.	Links work together with clear, helpful pages. Good pages give people a reason to link, and links help those pages get seen.

Keep the flame alive!

Every link you earn is a step toward more visitors. Next, help your best pages climb with how to reach the top 3 in Google, or see how AI tools choose which sites to name.

Frequently asked questions

How many backlinks do I need?

There is no magic number. A new site benefits from every real link from a relevant site, and the first ones make the biggest difference. After that, a steady trickle of good links beats a one-off burst.

Does a link from social media count?

Links from social profiles are usually marked so that search engines do not count them as votes, but they still bring visitors and make it easy for people to find you. They are a good place to start, and a good way to be found by the people who might link to you later.

How long until backlinks help my rankings?

Usually weeks to months. Google has to find the link, and then your pages have to be re-evaluated. Treat links as a steady habit, not a quick fix.

Is it okay to buy links?

No. Google treats buying links to improve rankings as link spam, and it can lead to your pages being dropped from results. Earn links with something worth linking to instead.

How do I see who links to me?

The Mandalytics weekly report counts the websites that link to you every week. Google Search Console also lists them, under Links, for free.

Want steps like these as a weekly to-do list for your own site?

Reading this is already a step forward. Mandalytics checks your website in Google and in AI tools every week, then sends you up to five tasks that will bring you the most visitors.

- A weekly check of your site in Google, ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity
- Up to five prioritized tasks, each with who should do it, how long it takes and the exact steps
- More visitors, more customers and more revenue, one small win at a time
- No logins, no dashboards: one email you can read in five minutes

Start your 14-day free trial **Check my website for free**

From $12 a month after the trial. Cancel anytime before it ends and pay nothing. See a full sample report or see how Mandalytics works.

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Where this comes from

1. Google: link spam policies (buying and selling links to pass ranking value)
2. Google: link best practices for Google Search
3. Google: SEO Starter Guide, promote your website
4. Google Search Console: the Links report