

Exposing a Link Selling Network in Minutes

How can Google find Millions of “unnatural” Links?



A Case Study by CEMPER.COM

August 2, 2012

Contents

Exposing a Link Selling Network in Minutes - How can Google find Millions of “unnatural” Links?.....	2
Finding the pattern.....	2
Picking a target.....	3
How it’s done	4
Backlink Profiler - BLP.....	4
Power*Trust™	5
Cemper Power™.....	5
Cemper Trust™.....	6
Google indexation	6
Money, money everywhere.....	7
Link location.....	7
TitleRank™	8
Type of site.....	8
Theme of page	9
Link Position	9
Working with the results	10
Link Juice Thief - LJT.....	10
Common Backlinks Tool - CBLT	12
What do these sites have in common?	12
Love letters from Google.....	13
How Google can find Millions of “unnatural” Links.....	13
10,000 “unnatural link” emails sent by Google x 815 suspect “link selling” sites.	14
That’s over 8 Million potential “unnatural” Links!	14
Conclusion.....	14

Exposing a Link Selling Network in Minutes

How can Google find Millions of “unnatural” Links?

As we all know by now, a big part of the major blog link networks were de-indexed by Google shortly before the penguin update. There has been a lot of talk and rumors that Google employees joined the networks, sent in their spun content, and manually de-indexed the offending domains. It could well be that they did, but they certainly didn't have to!

I'll show you how you can uncover a big link network in a few minutes (without joining the network). We will use the information that's proudly displayed on the networks front page and Link Research Tools!

Why would you want to uncover a popular link network? Well, we've all heard about the mass emails being sent out by Google for “unnatural” links. At first there was panic! What do we do? Google has told us not to worry, don't panic, and that they are just being “transparent”. Do you really want to set back and relax? My suggestion is to be aware of your own link neighborhood and find out if you are associated with any popular link networks, which could actually damage your rankings.

Finding the pattern

Most link networks can be easily found using the method I will describe. Link networks leave a massive footprint that can be easily found by anyone who's looking for it. It is almost unavoidable for a network to not leave a footprint when it grows to a commercial size.

Many years ago my mother told me two things that are just as true in the digital world as they are in the 'real' world. I'm sure she wasn't meaning to, but she did a good job at describing co-citation on the internet.

- **Stay out of bad neighborhoods!**
You can get away with spending *some* time in bad neighborhoods. But if you spend a lot of time in bad neighborhoods, you are more likely to run into problems.
- **You are known by the company you keep.**
Pick your friends carefully! You are not only known for who you are and what you do. You are judged even more by the people you surround yourself with. Think about it this way, would you buy a used car from a man who comes highly recommended by someone you know you can't possibly trust?

If there are just two things that you take away from the case study, please make it those two. It is very simple. If you have bad co-citations with a majority of backlinks from a spammy link network, Google will see the pattern very easily, and you will be penalized sooner or later.

Picking a target

My target 'seed' for this case study is a website who openly boasts, on the front page of the networks official website, of good success with using the freetrafficsystem.com link network. I don't really like to bash on small website owners. However, the owner of this website brags about bad linking strategies openly. So, I have no regrets giving this website a reality check.

I (randomly) picked mountaingear-reviews.com, one of the 'success stories' on freetrafficsystems.com, and gave it a quick review.

The website is a rather thin affiliate site that has a notice on the front page that they are still cleaning up after being hacked (6 months ago).



This website tanked in rankings in March this year, probably due to parts of its backlinks being de-indexed or devalued.

This network has a 'free subscription' (among others). However, I often use the term "link selling", even if there is a chance that the links were actually not paid for.

Outdoor and Mountain Gear Reviews
Reviews of high spec mountain and outdoor gear

Home | Buying Guides | Special Offers | Contact Us | Disclaimer

Home

Leave a comment

The guys here at Mountain Gear Reviews are sorry to inform you that our site has been hacked. While we sort it out, please check out our video reviews using the link below.

Tent Video Reviews

Welcome to the Outdoor and Mountain Gear Reviews website, where you will find interesting original articles about the outdoors and outdoor gear product reviews.

You can navigate the site by using the menus along the top or down the right hand side.

Reviews are organised in to categories both by the type of product, for instance tents. The range include the award winning Big Agnes **Copper Spur** and **Fly Creek** tents as well as the **Seedhouse** and larger **Big House** models. Our best seller is the superb **Fly Creek UL2**. All are available from our partner with FREE footprint to protect the ground sheet plus FREE shipping.

For family car camping or expedition base camp use we can recommend three excellent ranges from Big Agnes, the **Big House**, **King Creek** and **Flying Diamond** which has an 8 person model.

Don't miss our review of the NEW 2 person **Big Agnes Wyoming Trail** tents. Super light with enormous vestibules for storage or sheltering from the elements.

We are delighted to announce the opening of our new **Burton snowboard review** area. Featuring the ever popular **Burton Custom**.

Page Rank 2

pages

- home
- buying guides
- special offers
- contact us
- disclaimer

categories

select category

FREE FOOTPRINT with any TENT
MPGEAR.COM

How it's done

So here is brief summary of what we are going to do.

- Run our target website through Back Link Profiler (BLP).
 - Find a few suspicious looking links to this website. Open the websites, look for spun text, and see if the sites look like a part of a network.
(These websites will be our **suspect - link sellers**)
- Run our suspect websites through Link Juice Thief (LJT) and find out what pages these link selling **suspects** commonly link to.
 - LJT will output a list of websites who are all trying to get popular by using cheap links.
(I will refer to them as **link buyers**)
- Run our **link buyers** through the Common Backlinks Tool (CBLT).
 - This is what we are after, a nice long list of potential link selling websites.
 - Analyze this link network and decide if it is a good or bad neighborhood.

Now let's get started with the fun stuff.

Backlink Profiler - BLP

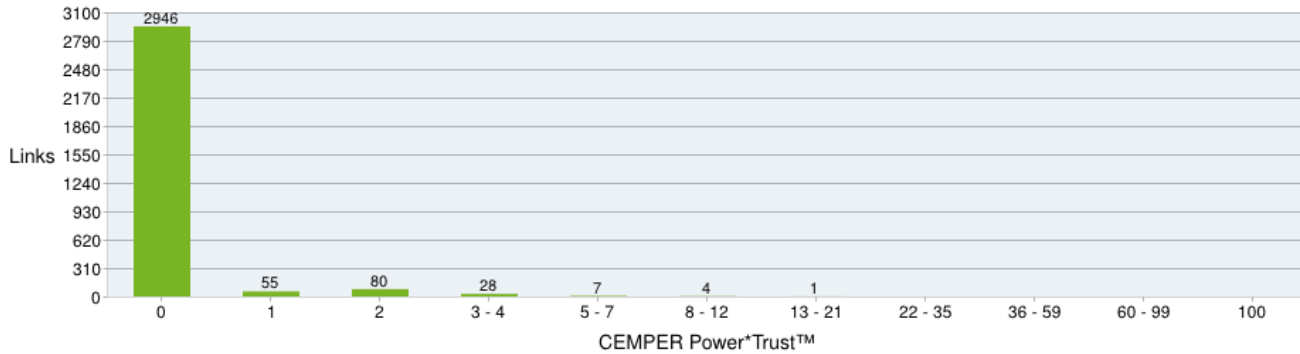
This is the longest part of the report so please bear with me; it gets a lot more fun a few pages down. I started with running our target website through Backlink Profiler and found out that most of the linking websites have a lot in common.

Let's take a closer look at the results.

(Please note: the PDF and XLS files for this document are included in this package)

Power*Trust™

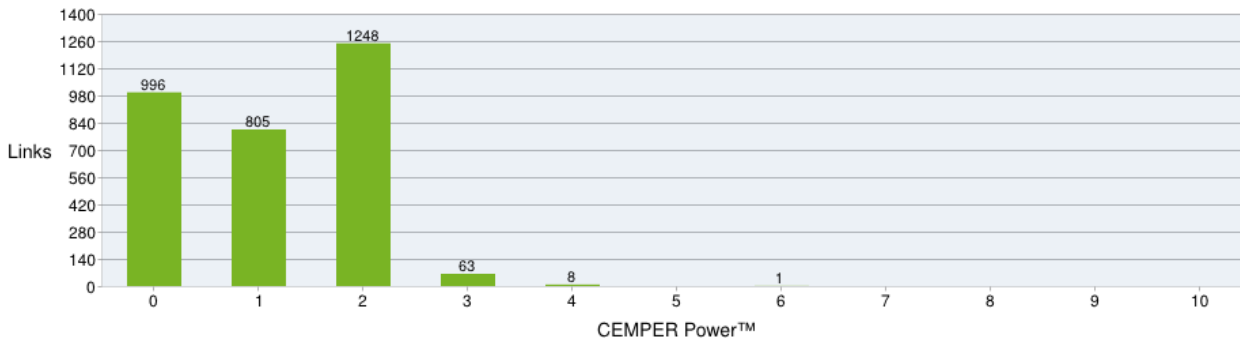
Link Profile for mountaingear-reviews.com
by CEMPER Power*Trust™



An overwhelming part of the links (**almost 95%**) have a **Power*Trust of zero!** This is a BIG indication that something is not right with these backlinks. Now, let's take a look at power and trust individually.

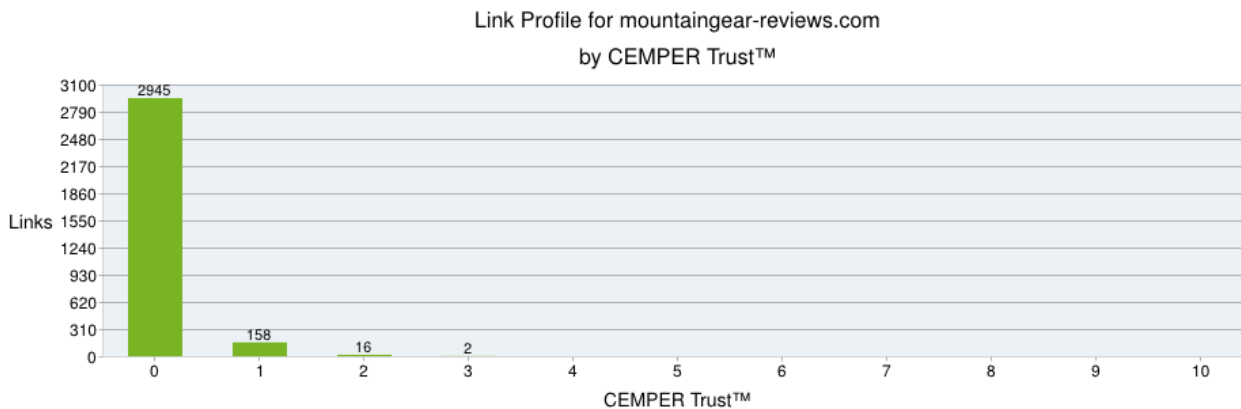
Cemper Power™

Link Profile for mountaingear-reviews.com
by CEMPER Power™



Almost all of the links come from pages with a Trust rank of 0 – 3, another indicator that something is not right.

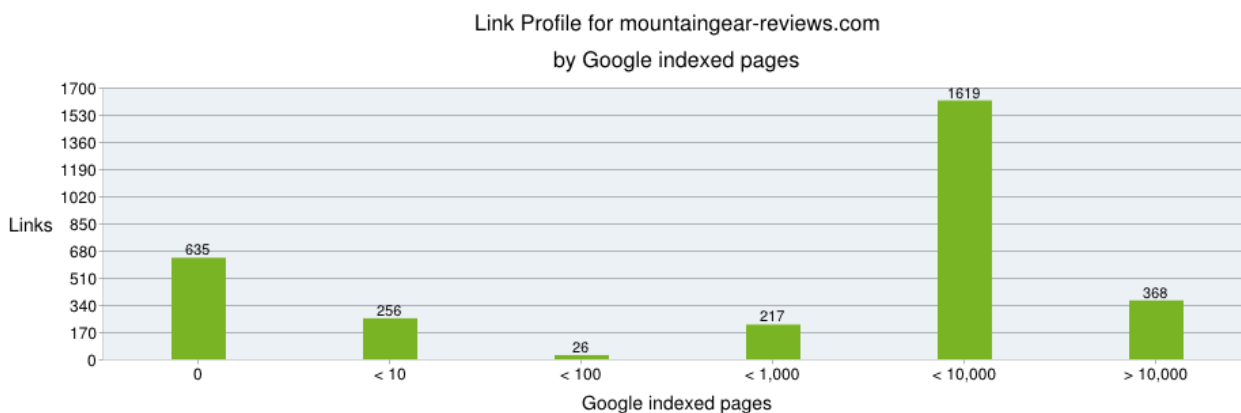
Cemper Trust™



This is very similar to the results from the Power*Trust metric. Over 95% of the links have no trust at all.

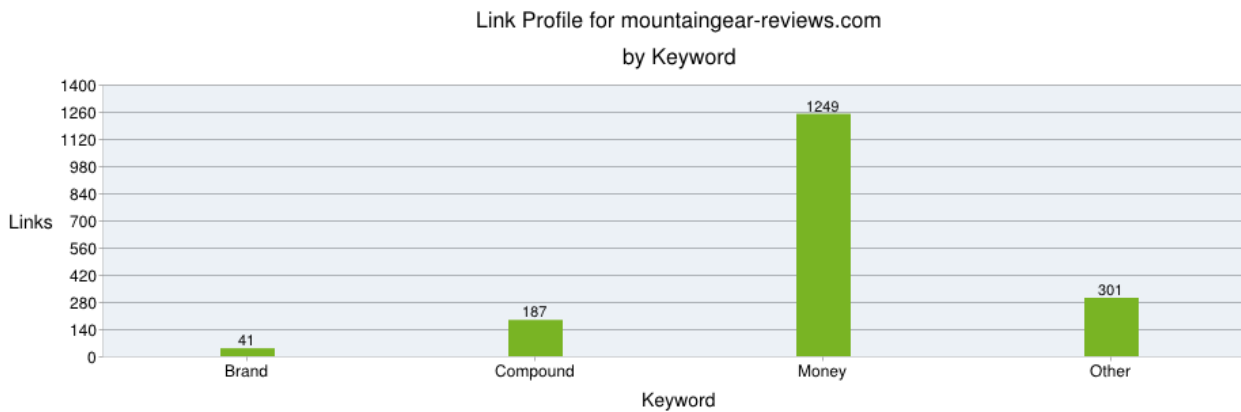
If there is nothing fishy going on, why would any website have 2945 links from non-trusted sources?

Google indexation



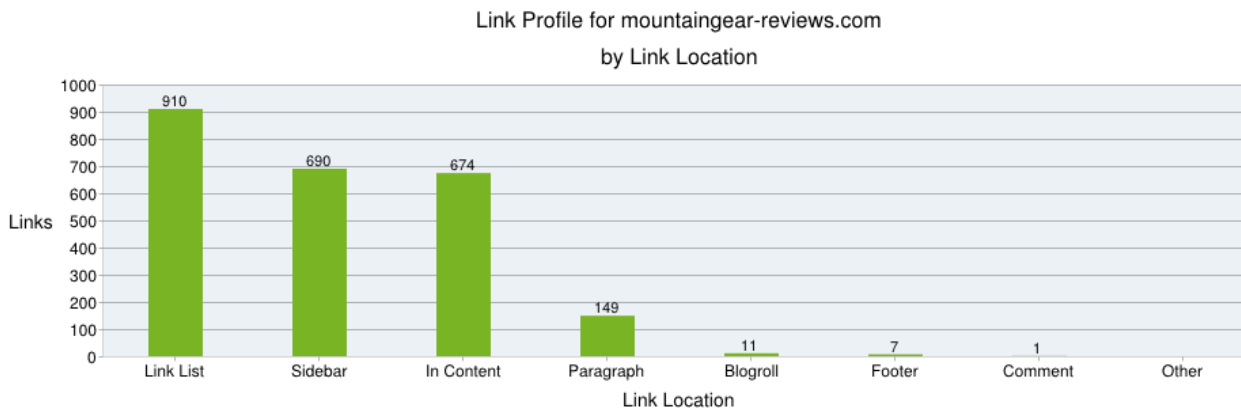
A lot the linking pages have been de-indexed. However, there are still quite a lot of links coming from pages with over 10,000 indexed pages. I'm going to dig deeper into this later on.

Money, money everywhere



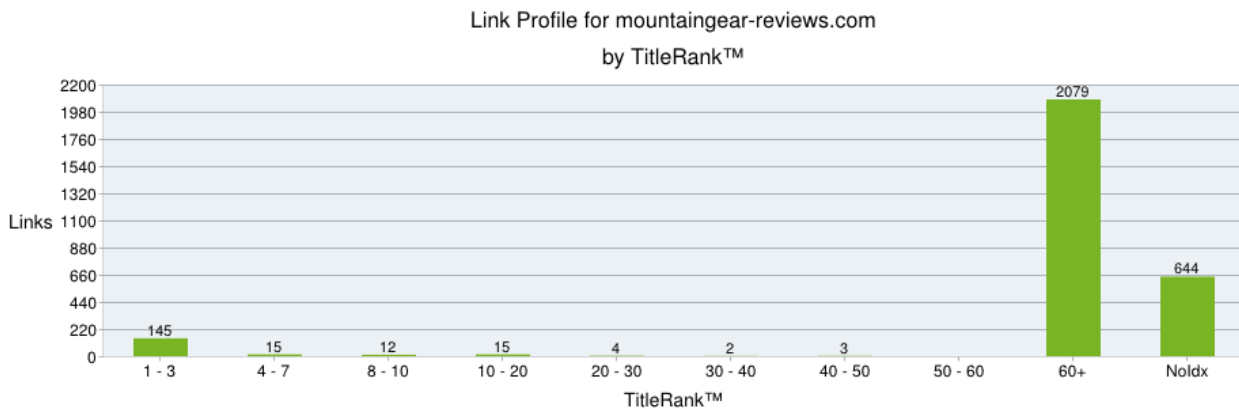
It's safe to assume that the de-indexation of links didn't help our target in the SERPS. Furthermore, having around 70% of the anchor texts with money keywords can certainly get you on thin ice with the little penguin.

Link location



It's very interesting to note that this network doesn't only have in-content links, quite a lot of the links are actually on sidebar widgets and link lists. I guess this helps out a bit with the distribution, but it certainly isn't helping them stay concealed.

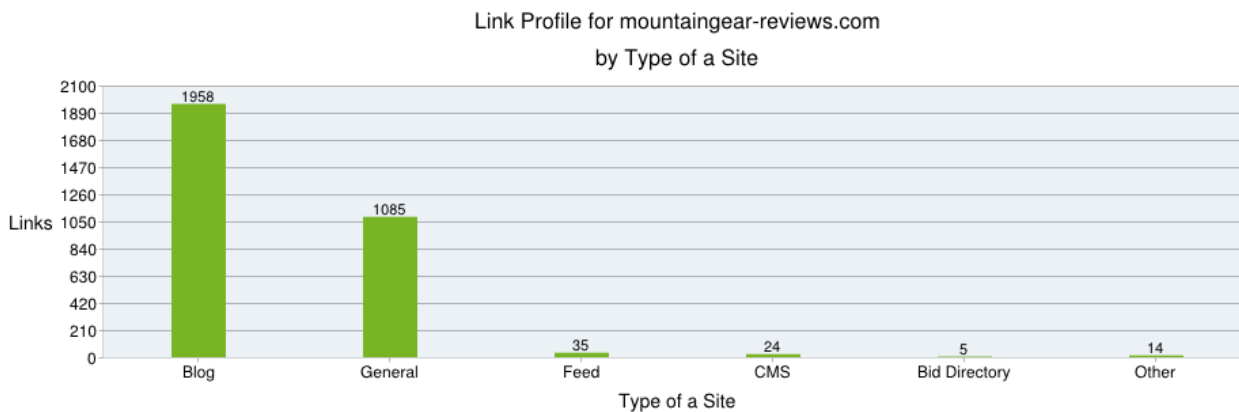
TitleRank™



TitleRank™ is new metric in the Link Research Tools. It measures how well a linking page ranks for its title keyword. If the page doesn't rank for the title at all, you should avoid getting a link from there, as it is most likely penalized in some way.

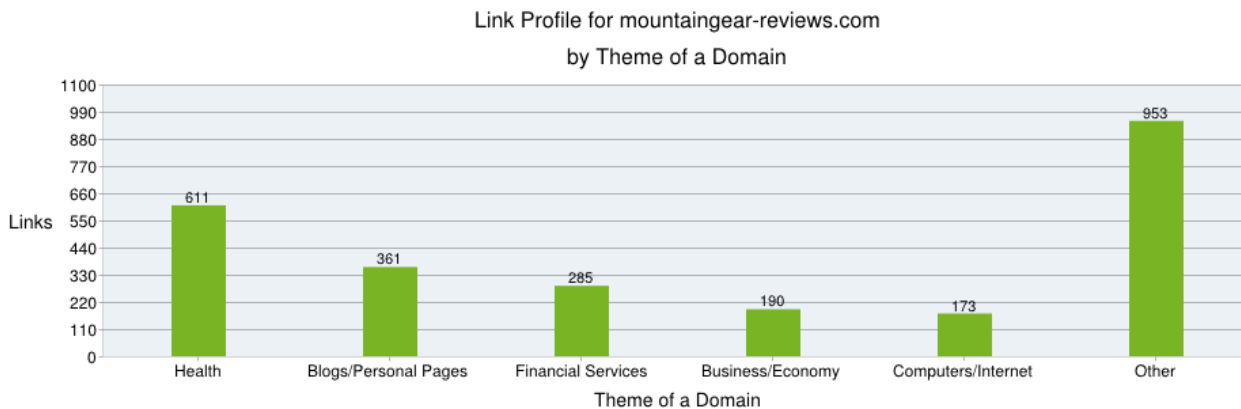
Only a handful of the linking pages rank for anything at all. The majority of links have a TitleRank™ of 60+ or are not even indexed. It's obvious that the pages aren't exactly of the highest quality.

Type of site



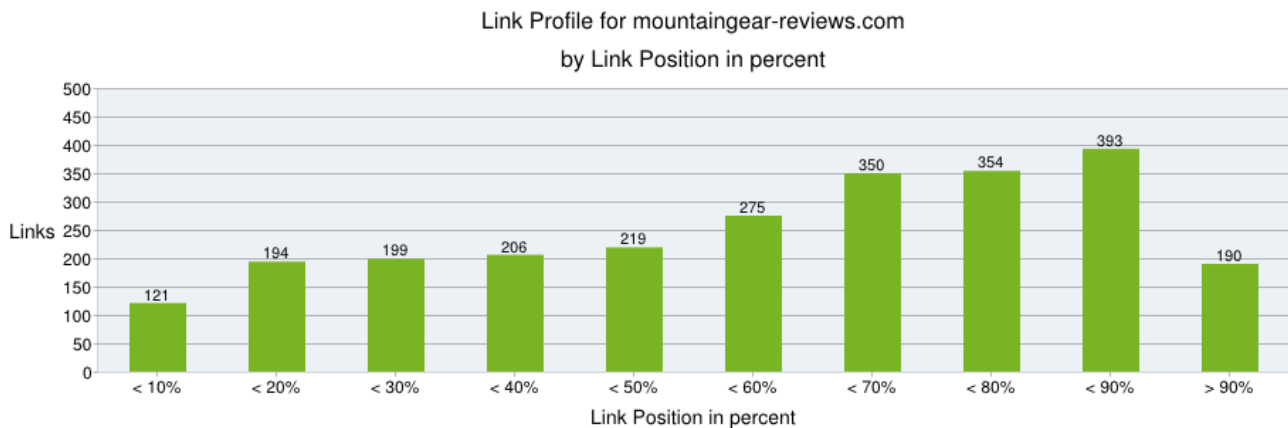
This is rather suspicious if you ask me; look at how uneven the distribution is! This website gets most of its links coming from blogs.

Theme of page



Here is another giveaway – The links are coming from basically all topics. When our target was selecting websites to drip feed onto in the control panel of the network, he must have selected a lot of sites that are not on topic; just to get links from more domains.

Link Position



This is a very cool metric for link position (shown in percentages here). It shows the link position based on the number of links on the page. For example, if there are 25 links on the page, and the link we are looking at is number 16 on the page, the link position will be $16/25$ or 64%.

Working with the results

The goal of this exercise was actually to find “suspects” – that are “link selling” websites. I arranged the results by the number of indexed pages and picked 10 suspicious looking websites that have a lot of indexed pages. Just take a look yourself. These don’t really look like websites where you would like to get a link from, do they?

<http://whyadivorce.com/>
<http://itsaboutacne.com/>
<http://itsanxiety.com/>
<http://gamesofknowledge.com/>
<http://thealexangroup-viralspiral.com/>
<http://theblogcatalog.com/>
<http://findinfoworld.com/>
<http://housingagency.info/>
<http://articlebee.net/>
<http://projectordlp.org/>

And this is where it gets really interesting.

Link Juice Thief - LJT

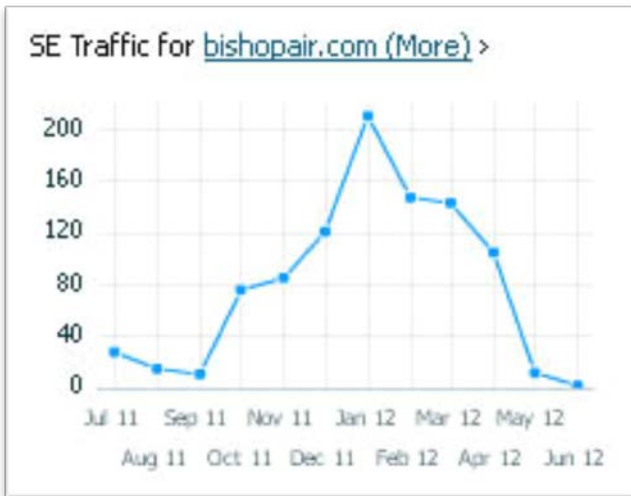
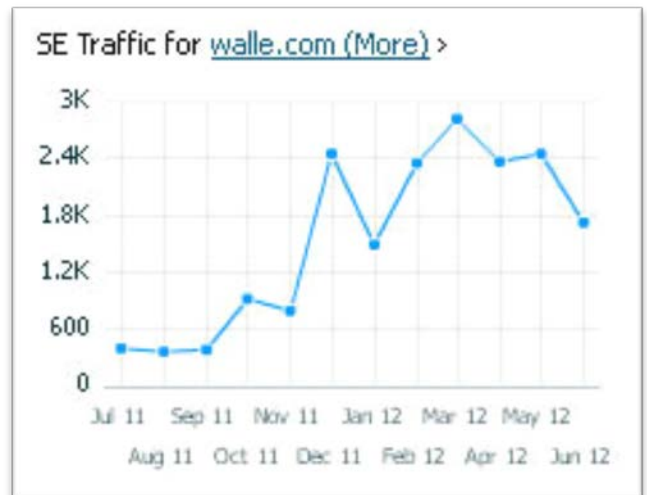
Link Juice Thief is a neat tool that finds out what outbound links’ websites have in common. This is mostly intended for “stealing” link juice from your competitors by getting a link from a page that your competitors link to (and thus getting an indirect link from the competition). What I did next was to import the 10 **suspect - link sellers** and find out if they have any outbound links in common.

These are the results.

<http://northernprintinginc.com>
<http://mxindustrial.com>
<http://phen375work.com>
<http://bishopair.com>
<http://cowaninsurance.net>
<http://greentealoseweightz.com>
<http://walle.com>
<http://bolehcapital.com>
<http://curlformers.com>
<http://expertsandempires.com>
<http://fuelgreens.com>

Domain ▲ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Co# ▼ BLdom DomPop Power-dom Trust-dom

type to search... ≈	frq to	from to...	from to...	from... to...	from... to...					
northernprintinginc.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	11,881	1,163		
mxindustrial.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	16,071	1,431		
phen375work.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	31,706	1,652		
bishopair.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	8,535	759		
cowaninsurance.net	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	6,267	594		
greentealoseweightz.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	12,742	1,338		
walle.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	1,053	470		
bolehcapital.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	5,619	746		
curlformers.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	2,709	389		
expertsandempires.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	4,252	338		
fuelgreens.com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	9,525	625		



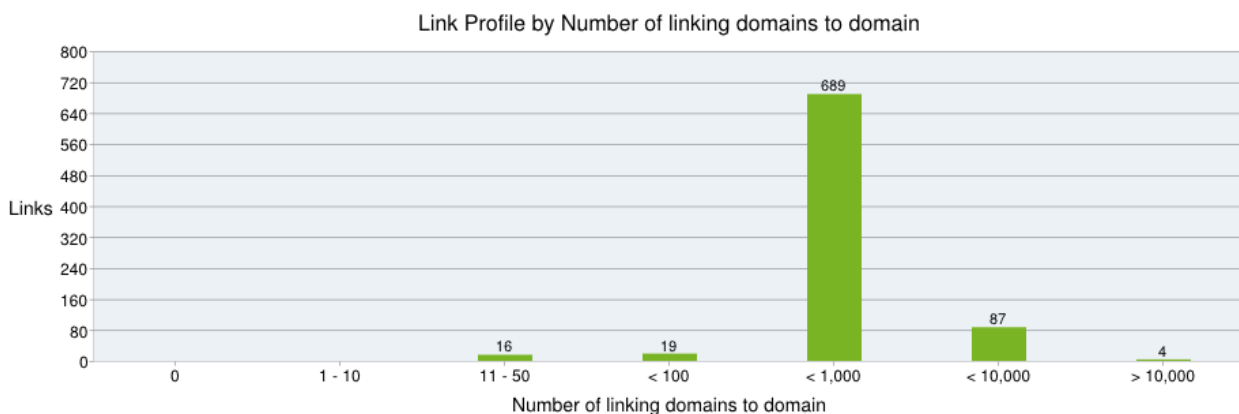
Common Backlinks Tool - CBLT

The Common Backlinks Tool is a tool that finds out what backlinks' pages have in common. This is not only a great way to identify a potential link for your website, but is invaluable in uncovering a big link network.

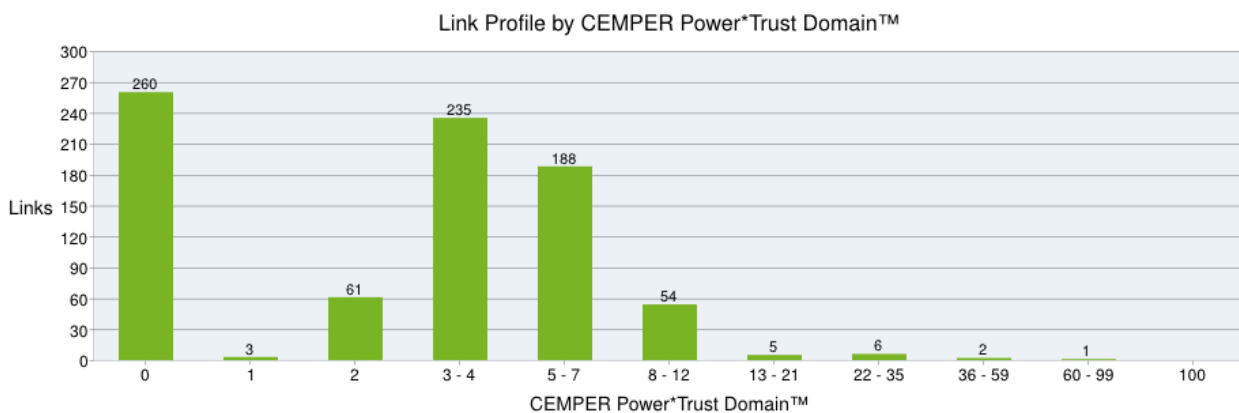
I ran a report with the 11 "link buyers" to find out what links they have in common and these are the results.

We uncovered 815 backlinking domains! I didn't check all of them, but all of the ones I did open up were indeed full of badly spun text with money keyword links!

What do these sites have in common?



Most of these websites have many links from different domains.



This came as a surprise. When looking at the Power*Trust, I found many of the domains actually have some strong and trusted links (5-21)! Presumably that won't last for long.

Love letters from Google

In January – February of 2012, Google sent out messages to webmasters concerning blackhat SEO techniques. There was some confusion about why the messages were sent out. Matt Cutts tried to clear things up by stating that these 700K messages were not ALL concerning “unnatural links”. [“In fact, of the messages that we sent out to site owners, only around 3% were for unnatural or artificial links”](#).

Well, it appears that all the confusion sparked a new interest for Google. Now that SEOs are starting to calm from fear of the Penguin, the Google Search Quality Team is sending out a new batch of messages directed toward the use of “unnatural” links! You have to love the “transparency” campaign being continuously promoted by Google.



Matt Cutts Jun 6, 2012 (edited) +12

+Lyndon NA we already do the work to find the spam, and we were already giving notice to the "Joe Bloggs" sites previously.

The fact that we're now sending messages for practically every action the manual webspam team takes that would cause a site's ranking to drop is a reflection of how we're trying to be as transparent as we can.

With cute names like Panda, Penguin, or Google Search Quality Team, do we have anything to fear? Well... If you live in the right neighborhood, then you can probably count on the police being helpful. But, if you're in a really bad neighborhood, then there isn't much the police will do for you. It is better to disassociate yourself and find a better neighborhood.

The same is true for your website. You can send a reconsideration request every day. However, Google is not going to help your site get back on track until you remove links associated with de-indexed or penalized sites.

How Google can find Millions of “unnatural” Links.

Out of the 700,000 messages Google sent in Jan-Feb, we were told 3% (21,000) were for unnatural links. On July 19th, 2012, Google started sending another round of unnatural link warnings to countless webmasters. Just like with the first round, this has caused a stir in the SEO community.

For arguments sake, let us assume that Google is sending out approximately 10,000 emails a month for “unnatural” links.

We uncovered a link network and found 815 potential “link selling” websites. This was done by simply choosing 1 target ‘seed’ and comparing the link profile of 10 websites that are suspected “link sellers”. Looking at the results, we could clearly see that these “link sellers” belonged to a bad neighborhood.

Of course, we don't have exact numbers. However, we do know that the Google Search Quality Team is not a one-man show. Moreover, as much as a large corporation tells you that they are being "transparent", it just means that there is a lot more going on in the background that we don't know about.

So, let's go with these numbers...

10,000 "unnatural link" emails sent by Google x 815 suspect "link selling" sites.

That's over 8 Million potential "unnatural" Links!

Conclusion

There is a high chance that not even Google can avoid false positives. Even SEOmoz received a notification about bad linking habits. It could be that it was mostly because Randy offered his corporate website as a target of a negative SEO experiment on the Traffic Planet forums.

Shortly after, Matt Cutts announced that not everyone who received this notification should worry, and updated the webmaster central so that it now shows more accurate information on if action is needed or not. Regardless, we know that Google is going to continue cleaning up spammy networks.

Today more than ever, I feel the need to point out the importance of natural links. You see how we uncovered a popular link network with weak, non-trusted, and "unnatural" links (just like Google does it).

I hope you take my mother's advice and decide to stay out of bad neighborhoods and choose honest "friends". It's a recipe for long-term success, both in SEO and in your private life.

If you want to analyze YOUR own link neighborhood, get a free trial here today for a tweet <http://cemper.co/8miotrial>

Or let us know what you think here about the case-study in the comments of the post where you got this <http://cemper.co/sej8million>

Got unnatural link warnings from Google and looking for help?
Want to be proactive and find your toxic links before Google does?
[Link Detox helps you clean up.](#)