



LINK-BUILDING FOR LAWYERS: IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Note: This is the second post in my series on link-building for lawyers. Read my first post to find out [why links matter to search engines](#). To get monthly tips on where you can get valuable links to your law firm website, just [subscribe to my newsletter](#).

Link-building always involves a *quid pro quo*. If you are using so-called black hat or grey hat techniques, you are giving something of value in exchange for the link (buying). If you are using so-called white hat techniques, you are trying to overcome a site owner's natural inertia so that he will link to or share your content (selling). (As I've [said before](#), I think the hat-color distinctions are bogus.)

You can increase your chances of success by understanding what motivates the type of person you are targeting. Like all communication, your link-building outreach should be directed to a specific audience. Knowing your audience will help you in all phases of link-building:

- When you are creating content designed to attract links (linkbait), you need to have a feel for [whether there is an audience](#) that will link to the content.
- When you are ready to promote your content, you need to craft your messages to appeal to a specific type of person that may link to the content.
- If you are using a guest posting strategy, you need to know what types of people are most likely to post on their blogs.

Do not start your link-building campaign without a clearly-defined audience in mind.

Note: Law bloggers are often the worse culprits when it comes to skipping this step. They recap various cases that no one cares about, adding no analysis of their own. They regurgitate the most recent legal news, hoping that a search engine will latch on to a few well-placed keywords and give them a top spot in the rankings. These strategies add little value to anyone and are not likely to garner links. Ultimately, they junk up the web and detract from the overall quality of the blog or website.

Don't make the mistake of thinking of the link-building market as "websites that link to content." Websites don't link to content; people do. Your goal is to identify the shared characteristics of people that are most likely to link to or share your content.

Using Personas to Identify Your Audience

I wrote about *personas* in my article on [how to write content that people will read](#). These fictional characters can be helpful in link-building as well. A persona gives you a mental representative of your audience that you can focus on as you think about link-building. In the link-building arena, focus on identifying two key personas:

1. The Sharer – This is the person who is well-connected in social media (large follower lists, friends, etc., coupled with frequent updates) and who shares other people’s content regularly.
2. The Linker – This is the person with a quality site who generously links to the content of others if it is relevant to his or her audience.

You will often find that one person wears both of these hats (i.e., many people who are sharers are also linkers, and vice versa). But this is not always the case, and you shouldn’t focus on one type of person to the exclusion of the other. Both are necessary for a well-rounded link-building strategy.

Here are a few techniques I use to create personas for link-building:

Using Google Reader to Develop a Persona

1. In your Google Reader account, click on the Subscribe button. You will get a prompt that allows you to enter a search term to find feeds related to your topic.
2. Browse the first 3 to 5 pages of the search results and pick the top 5 blogs in terms of subscribers (the subscriber account will be displayed in the column to the left).
3. Visit each of these top 5 blogs and identify any similarities between them. Are their blog categories similar? Is their writing style informal or formal? Are they graphic or text based? What common interests do they share?

Using Follower Wonk to Develop a Persona

1. Browse to www.followerwonk.com. In the main screen, click on the button to search Twitter bios. Enter your search term, and click “Do It!”
2. You will get a list of Twitter users, along with some valuable metrics about them. By default, the information will be sorted by follower. Don’t change it.
3. Take a look at the Twitter bios of a handful of the most popular users. Use the same analysis as above to see if you can develop a list of characteristics about these users.

Using Tag Cloud to Broaden Search

1. Go back to your search results from www.followerwonk.com. Copy the URL from the address bar.
2. Browse to www.tagcloud.com. Under “Choose your text source,” select the “Web Page URL” option.

3. Paste the followerwonk.com URL that you copied in step 1 into the Web Page URL field and click "Visualize." This will give you a visual representation of the other topics that interest your personas.
4. Use the results to help develop your list of characteristics.

Note: After going through this process, you may find than more than one set of characteristics emerges. This often clues you in to whole groups of prospects that you haven't thought of. If that happens, divide the sets of characteristics into different personas. Repeat the process using related terms to help round out the different personas.

Characterize Your Audience

After going through this process, you should have a fuzzy mental picture of the type of person you are targeting. Now it's time to bring that picture into focus. You need to create a bullet-point list to help you identify what motivates the personas you are targeting. Think about questions like these:

- What common interests are shared among your audience?
- Do members of your audience share a common enemy?
- What has motivated them to provide links or share content in the past?
- What can you offer them that will be of sufficient value to prompt a link or a share?

Information like this will help you target your content to the audience and drastically increase your likelihood of landing the link.

Write it Down!

You should now have a clear mental picture of the type of person you are targeting. Unless you have [the memory of Ron White](#), this picture will quickly fade. Do yourself a favor and jot down a detailed description of your personas. Any time you find your campaign losing focus, take a look at your notes to get back on track.

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