LinkPanda

RESEARCH REPORT

LINK BUILDING

Link Building *Economics 2026*

The Data Report

Thirty-four data points on the cost, tactics, outreach and returns of link building - blending published research with LinkPanda's own data on available sites.

6 themes / 9 sources

Prepared by LinkPanda / linkpanda.com

Published August 2026

LinkPanda

FOREWORD

From the Founder



Link building is what we do every day. We track what is working, what is quietly becoming irrelevant, and how the playing field is shifting - across thousands of placements and dozens of niches.

The pace of change has accelerated. Google rewrites its algorithm faster than ever. Large language models are reshaping how content gets discovered. Brand mentions, linked or unlinked, are becoming real ranking signals.

This report is our attempt to cut through that noise. Every figure traces to a published source or to LinkPanda's own data - no estimates, no derived numbers we cannot show our work on. The aim is to give SEO and marketing teams something they can act on, not just quote.

Christopher Lier

Founder, LinkPanda

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

5 Findings That Matter

3.8x

more backlinks at Google's #1 result vs positions 2-10

BACKLINKO

66%

of all web pages have zero backlinks pointing to them

AHREFS

$509

average price for a quality backlink in 2026

EDITORIAL.LINK

8.5%

outreach reply rate across 12 million emails analysed

BACKLINKO & PITCHBOX

78%

of marketers report positive ROI from link building

PRESSWHIZZ

METHODOLOGY

How We Built This Report

01. SECONDARY RESEARCH

Twenty-nine statistics drawn from nine published reports - Backlinko, Ahrefs, editorial.link, BuzzStream, uSERP, DemandSage, SEO Sandwitch, PressWhizz, and the Backlinko/Pitchbox joint study.

Each figure was verified against its source URL. Stats that could not be located in the cited study were cut. Where two sources reported similar figures, we used the most recent.

02. PRIMARY RESEARCH

Seven statistics drawn from LinkPanda's own data on 388 available sites with placement opportunities.

Includes link insertions, guest posts, citations, listicles and brand mentions. Industry mix, product types, DR distribution, follow-type, price spread and per-product industry comparisons.

WHAT WE EXCLUDED

Any figure whose underlying inputs could not be traced - industry baselines, assumed conversion rates, or markup percentages we could not cite. If a derived stat relied on plausibility rather than a source, it did not ship.

REPORT UPDATED AUGUST 2026

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34 statistics, 6 themes

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LINKPANDA INSIGHTS

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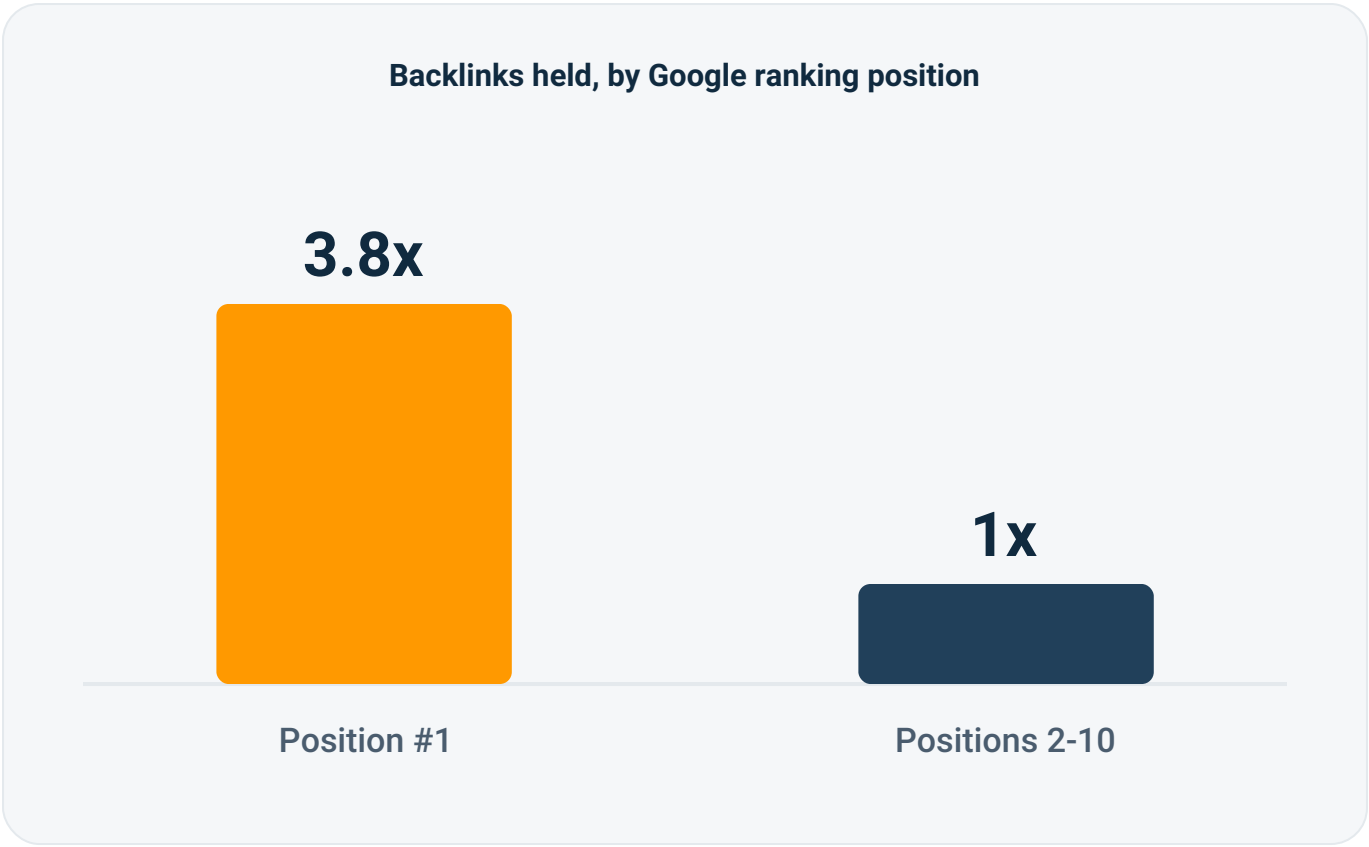
BACKLINKS & RANKINGS

01

The #1 Google result has 3.8x more backlinks than positions 2-10



From Backlinko's study of 11.8 million search results, still the largest public dataset on ranking factors.

ACTION

To rank top-3 in a competitive niche, plan for a backlink count roughly 4x what positions 2-10 already have.

Backlinko

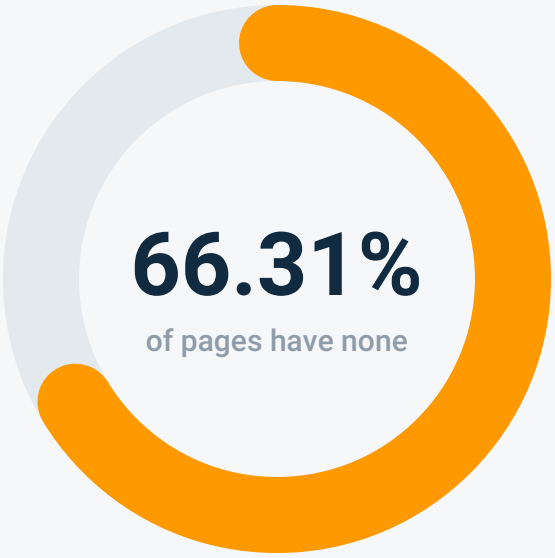
View source ↗

02

BACKLINKS & RANKINGS

66.31% of all web pages have zero backlinks

Share of all web pages that have no backlinks



Ahrefs analysed over 1 billion pages with Content Explorer. Two-thirds had no external links pointing to them at all.

INSIGHT

Most of the web is starved of links. A modest, consistent link budget puts you ahead of the long tail before you've done anything clever.

Ahrefs

View source ↗

BACKLINKS & RANKINGS

03

Long-form content earns 77.2% more backlinks



Backlinko's content study found posts of 3,000+ words attract significantly more links than short-form articles, likely because they work better as reference material.

ACTION

Write your link-bait posts to 3,000+ words. Short articles need a different distribution play since they will not pull links organically.

Backlinko

View source ↗

04

COSTS & BUDGETS

The average quality backlink costs $508.95

Average price of one quality backlink

$508.95

average cost per quality backlink

From editorial.link's survey of 518 SEO professionals, one of the largest link building surveys published.

NOTE

Use $508.95 as your benchmark. If a vendor quotes under $200 per link, ask what corner they are cutting on quality, relevance or velocity.

editorial.link

View source ↗

COSTS & BUDGETS

05

A niche edit averages $361.44

Average price of one niche edit (link insertion)

$361.44

average cost per niche edit

Niche edits, also called link insertions, remain cheaper than guest posts, but the gap is narrowing.

LEARNING

Niche edits are cheaper because someone else built the page. The trade-off is less control over surrounding context and topical relevance.

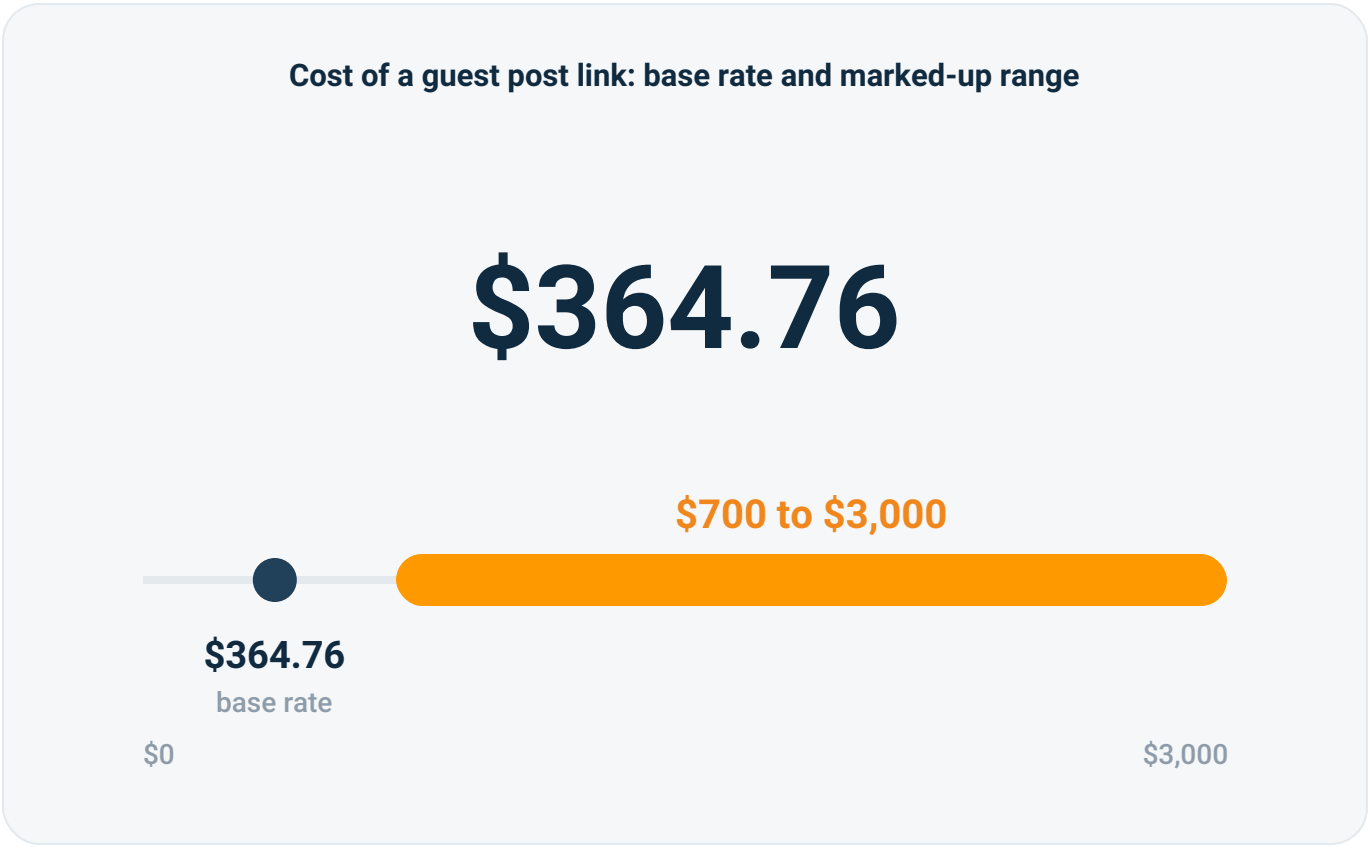
PressWhizz

View source ↗

COSTS & BUDGETS

06

A guest post link averages $364.76 before markup



With agency or vendor markup the effective price typically pushes to between $700 and $3,000, depending on the site authority.

INSIGHT

Base rates look similar to niche edits, but markup and editorial effort push real cost above $700. Budget for the full range, not the base.

BuzzStream

View source ↗

COSTS & BUDGETS

07

Digital PR costs about $750 per link

Average cost per link acquired through digital PR

$750

average digital PR cost per link

The upfront cost is higher, but campaigns typically earn multiple links per asset, making the effective cost per link competitive with manual outreach.

ACTION

Plan PR as multi-link assets. A $4k campaign earning six links lands closer to $670 per link than the $750 average.

BuzzStream

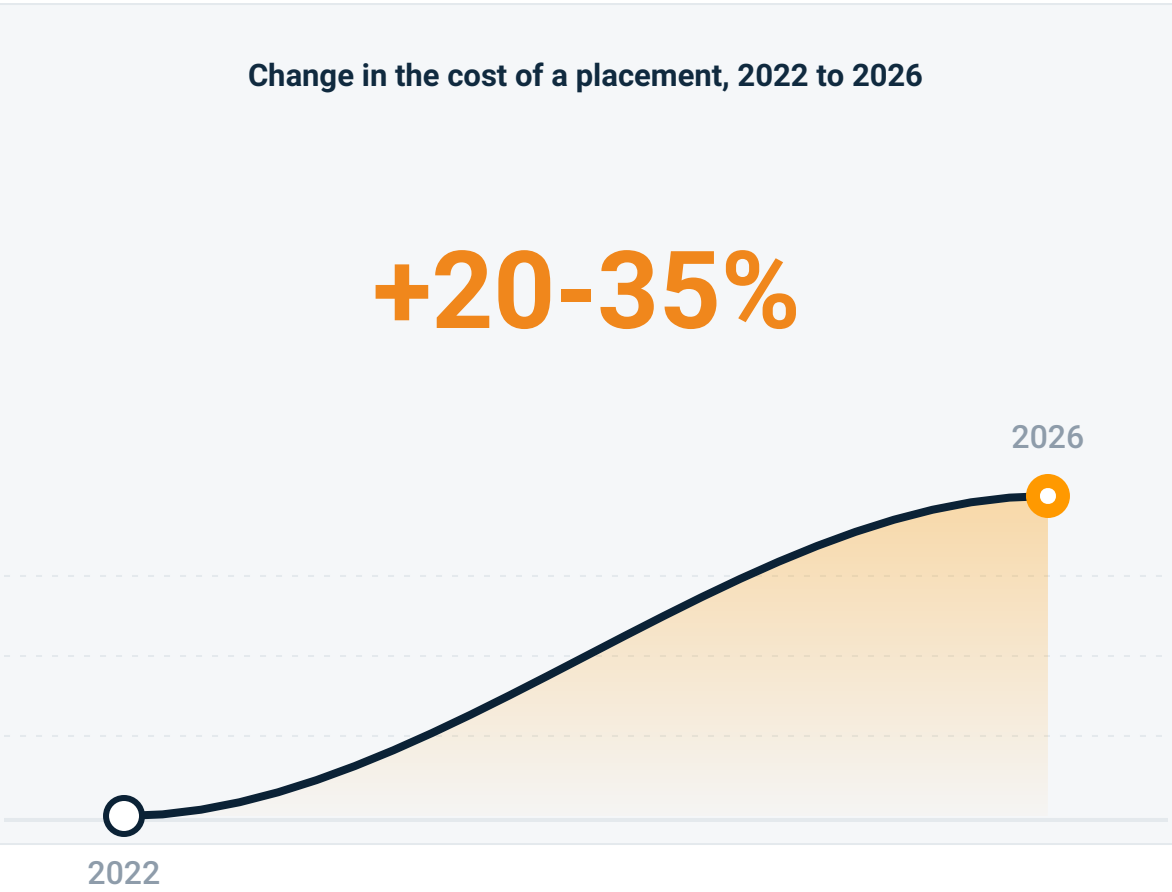
View source ↗

COSTS & BUDGETS

08

Link building costs have risen 20-35% since 2022

Change in the cost of a placement, 2022 to 2026



AI-generated content has made editors pickier. Sites that accept guest contributions now apply heavier editorial filters, which means more work per placement.

NOTE

If you are budgeting from a 2023 price list, you are already underfunded. Reset assumptions before reviewing this year's plan.

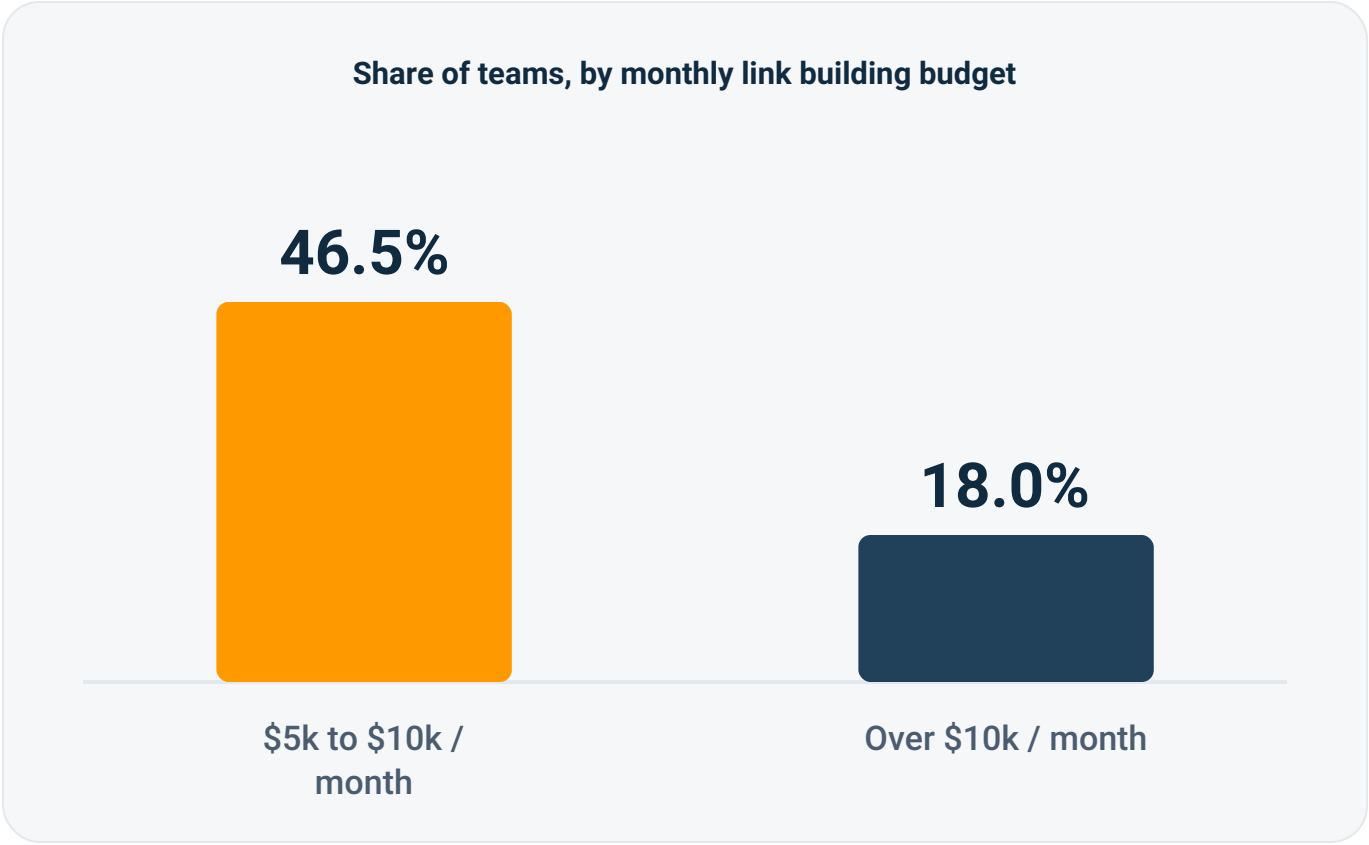
PressWhizz

View source ↗

09

COSTS & BUDGETS

Nearly half of teams spend $5k-$10k a month



The largest budget band in uSERP's State of Link Building report. A further 18% of teams spend over $10,000 a month.

INSIGHT

$5k-$10k is the industry's centre of gravity. Below $5k it is hard to maintain steady velocity in a competitive niche.

uSERP

View source ↗

10

COSTS & BUDGETS

Competitive niches need $8,406 a month minimum

Minimum monthly budget to compete in hard niches

$8,406

minimum monthly budget, competitive niches

In finance, SaaS or legal, expect to spend more than the average to compete for placements.

ACTION

In finance, SaaS or legal, under $8k forces a choice between volume and quality. Budget closer to $12k to keep both.

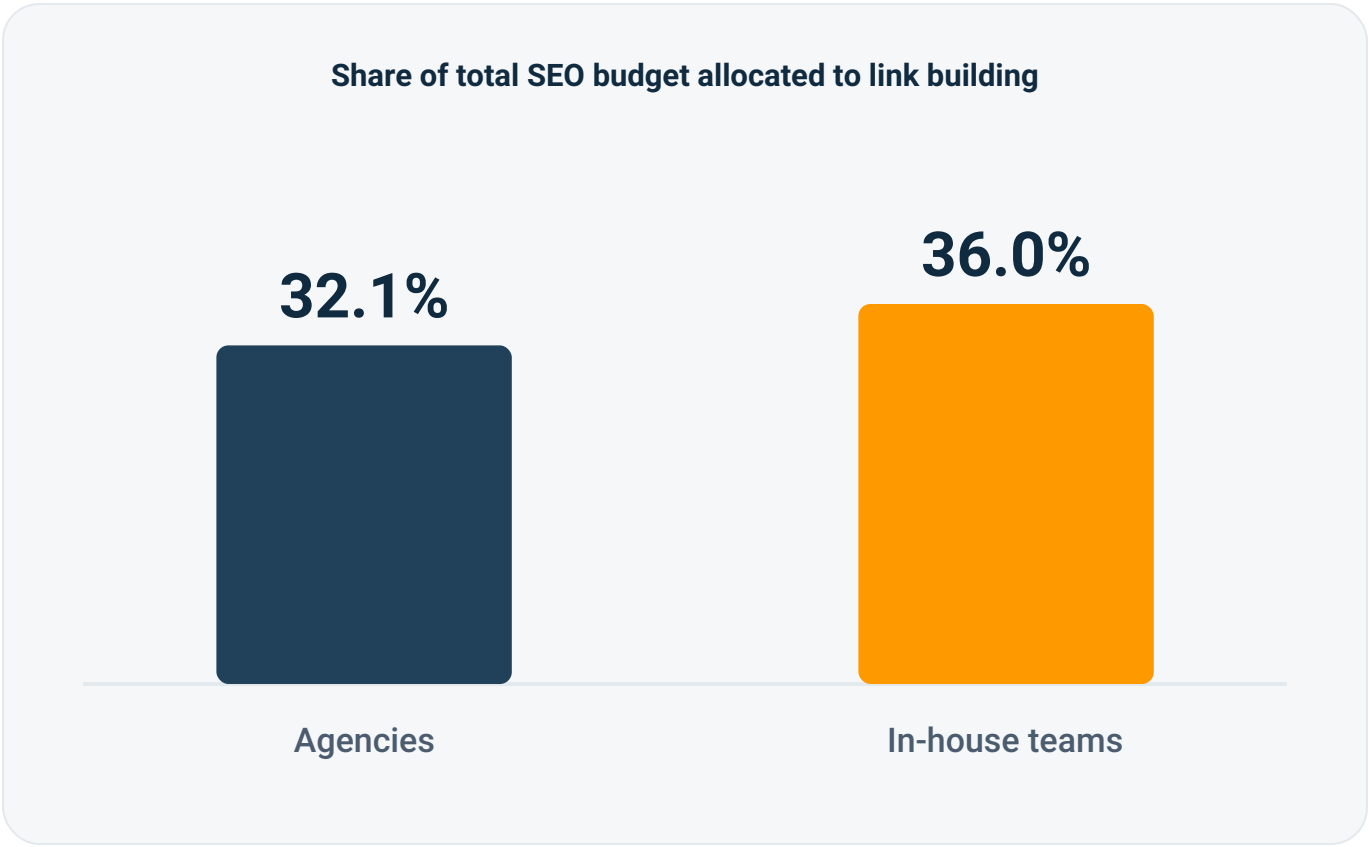
editorial.link

View source ↗

COSTS & BUDGETS

11

Link building is the biggest line item in SEO budgets



Agencies allocate 32.1% of their SEO budget to link building; in-house teams allocate 36.03%. Either way it is the single largest line item.

INSIGHT

If your SEO spend allocates less than a third to links, you are likely under-indexed against competitors and leaving rankings on the table.

editorial.link

View source ↗

12

TACTICS THAT WORK

Digital PR is voted the most effective tactic



editorial.link's 518-expert survey placed digital PR well ahead of guest posting and linkable assets.

LEARNING

The pros do not vote on what is cheapest, they vote on what works. Treat digital PR as a default channel, not a discretionary spend.

editorial.link

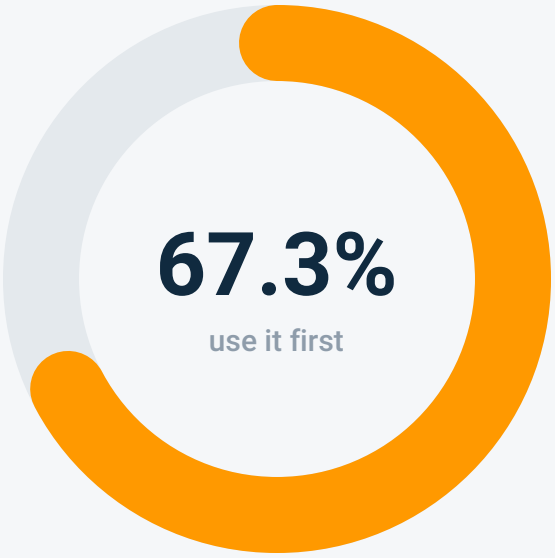
View source ↗

13

TACTICS THAT WORK

67.3% use digital PR as their primary method

Share of marketers using digital PR as their main tactic



The gap between digital PR and guest posting is narrowing. Three years ago, guest posting dominated by a wider margin.

NOTE

Guest posting is no longer the default starting point. If your team still leads with it, audit whether you are running a 2020 playbook.

DemandSage

View source ↗

14

TACTICS THAT WORK

85.3% of guest posting sites are low quality



Most sites that freely accept guest posts sit below DR 40 with under 10,000 monthly visits, which is why vetting matters.

ACTION

Treat any easy-to-find 'accept guest posts' list as a do-not-pitch list. Real placements need bespoke prospecting, not directories.

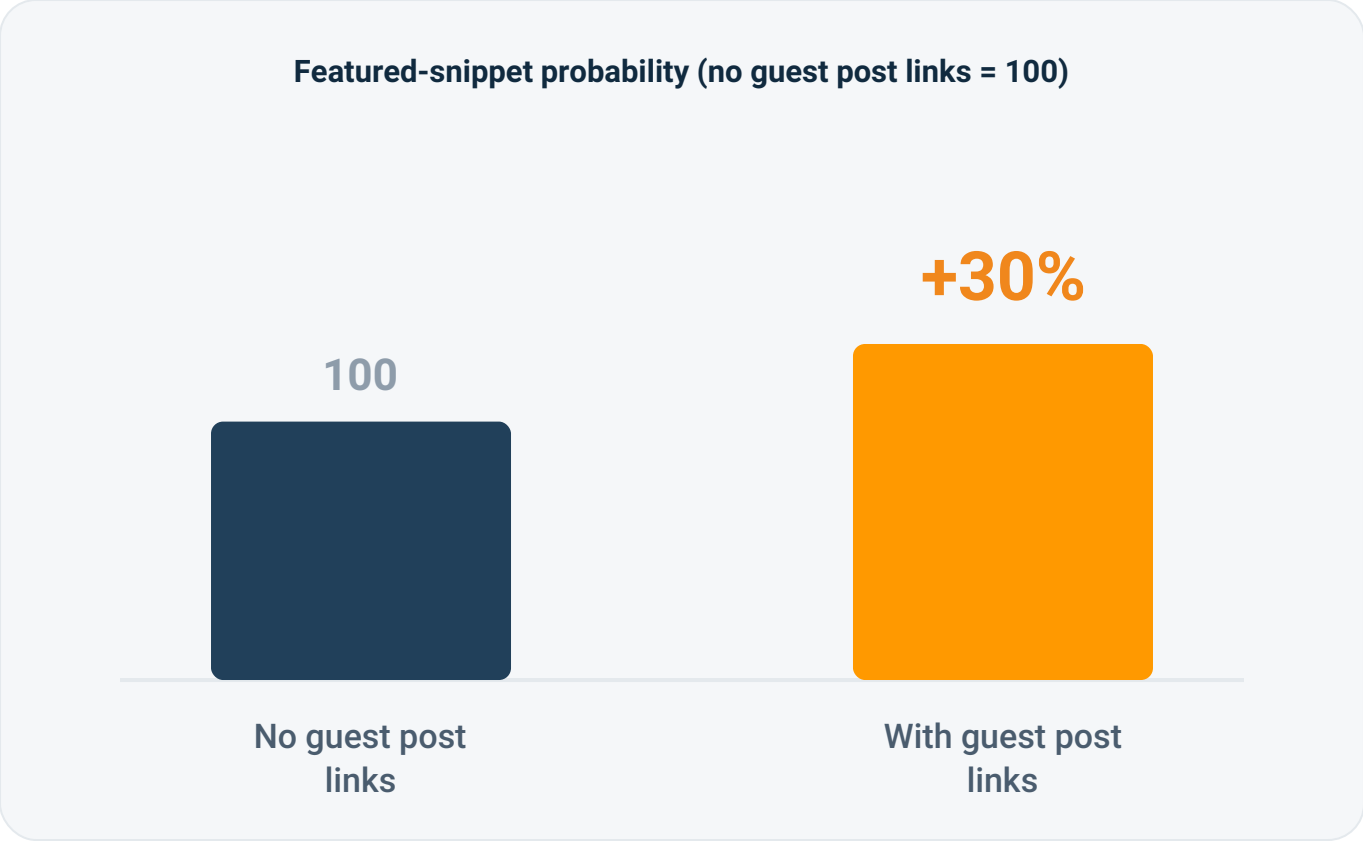
BuzzStream

View source ↗

15

TACTICS THAT WORK

Guest post backlinks lift featured-snippet odds by 30%



Guest posts do more than pass authority. They help establish the topical relevance that Google systems pick up on.

INSIGHT

Guest posts pass relevance signals, not just link equity. Pick host sites that already rank for adjacent terms to compound the effect.

SEO Sandwitch

View source ↗

16

TACTICS THAT WORK

12% of experts rate linkable assets as most effective

Share of experts rating linkable assets the top tactic



Tools, calculators, original research and data visualisations attract links passively, but they need a higher upfront investment.

NOTE

Linkable assets earn links passively, but they need a calculator, dataset or tool that doesn't yet exist. Bigger upfront effort, longer tail.

editorial.link

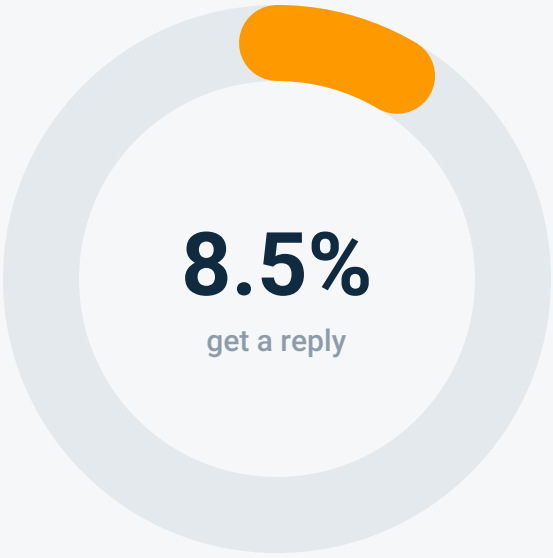
View source ↗

17

OUTREACH

Only 8.5% of outreach emails get a reply

Share of outreach emails that receive any reply



Backlinko and Pitchbox analysed 12 million outreach emails. Roughly 1 in 12 emails generates any response at all.

LEARNING

Even great outreach gets ignored eleven times in twelve. To earn 10 placements, plan for around 250 outreach contacts.

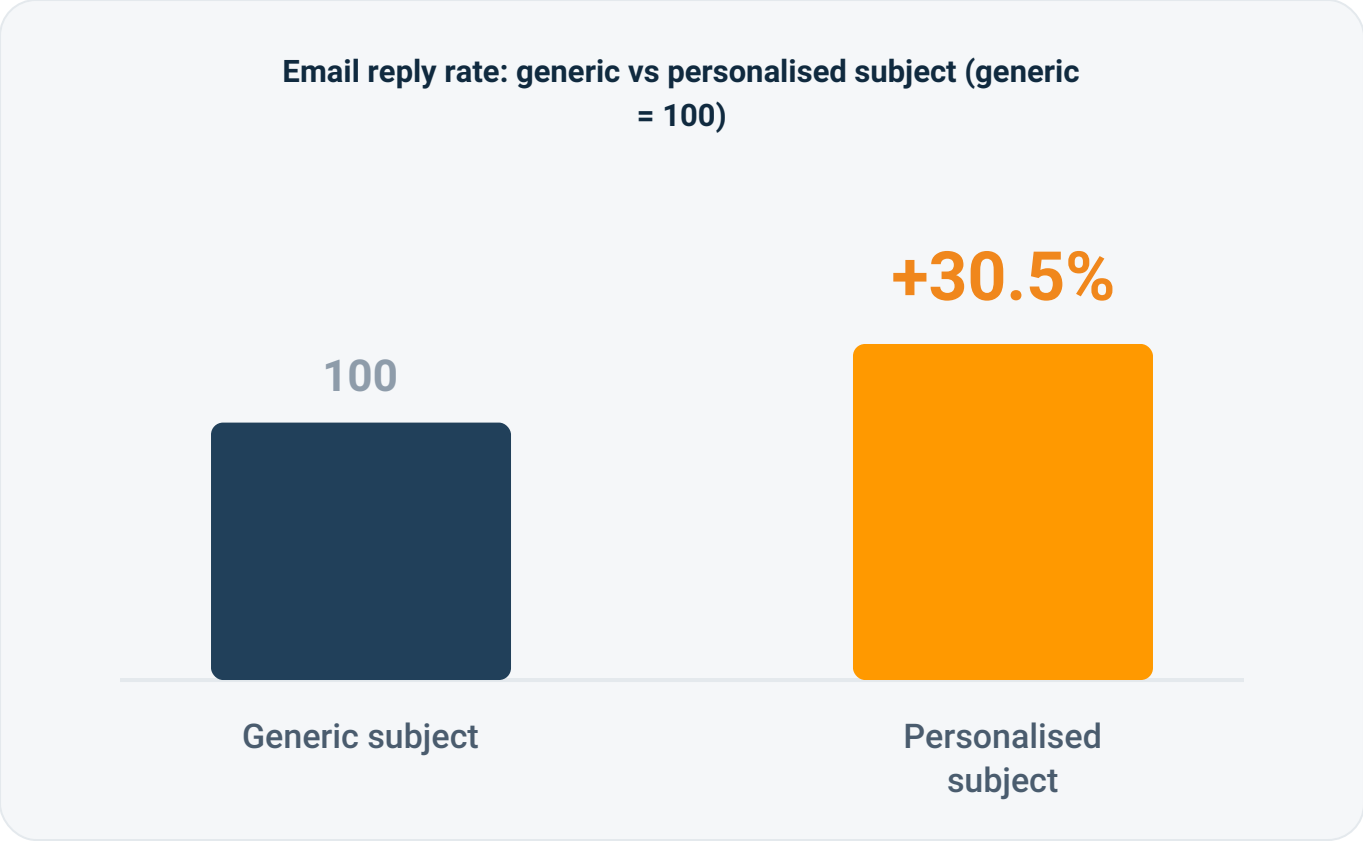
Backlinko View source 1 ↗

Pitchbox View source 2 ↗

18

OUTREACH

Personalised subject lines lift replies by 30.5%



Using the recipient name, site name, or a reference to recent content makes a measurable difference.

ACTION

Mention the recipient's name, their site or recent content in the subject line. Generic subjects cost you a third of your replies.

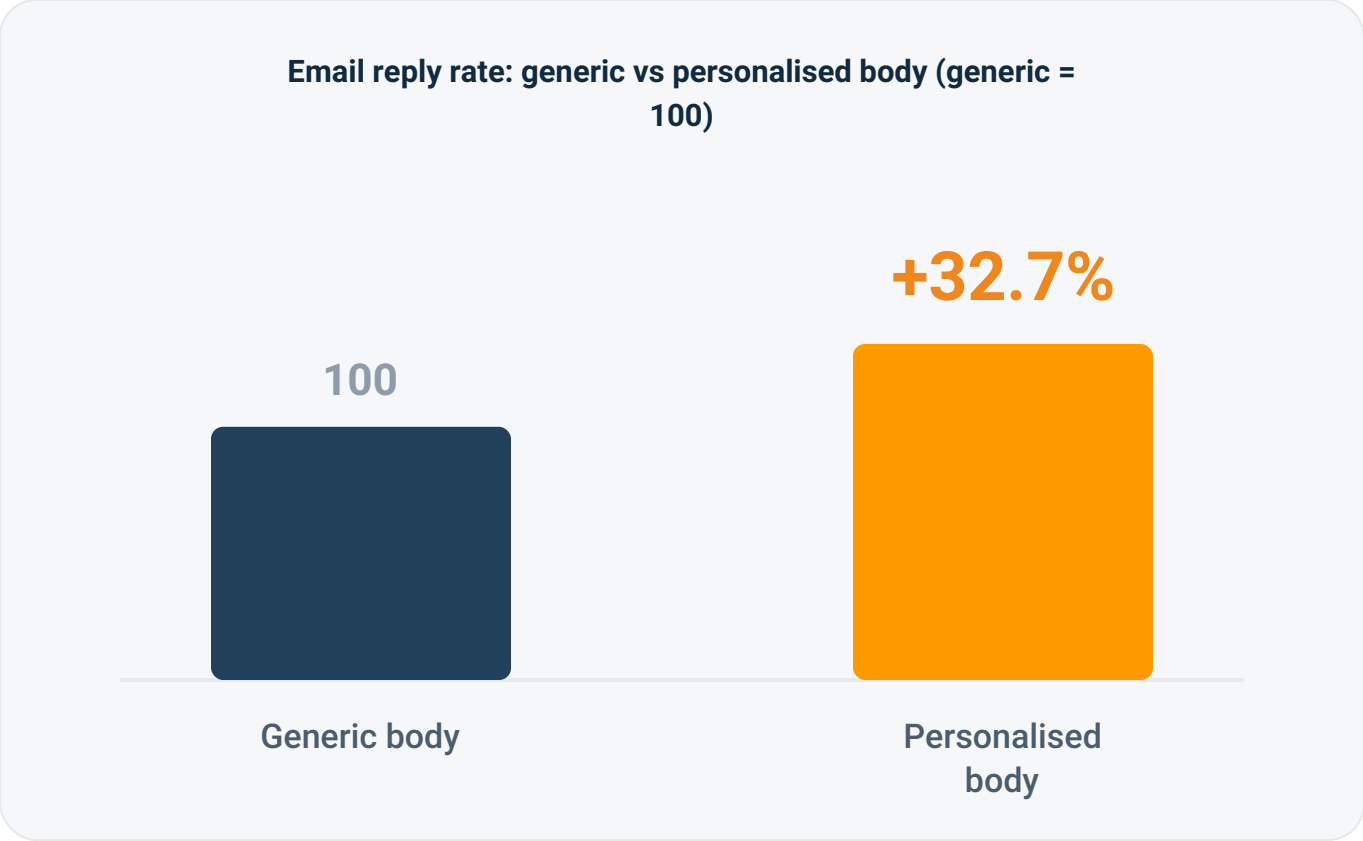
Backlinko View source 1 ↗

Pitchbox View source 2 ↗

19

OUTREACH

A personalised email body lifts replies by 32.7%



Generic templates get ignored. Tailored pitches that reference specific articles or topics perform significantly better.

ACTION

Reference a specific post or topic on their site in the first two lines. Templated openings get filed as automated.

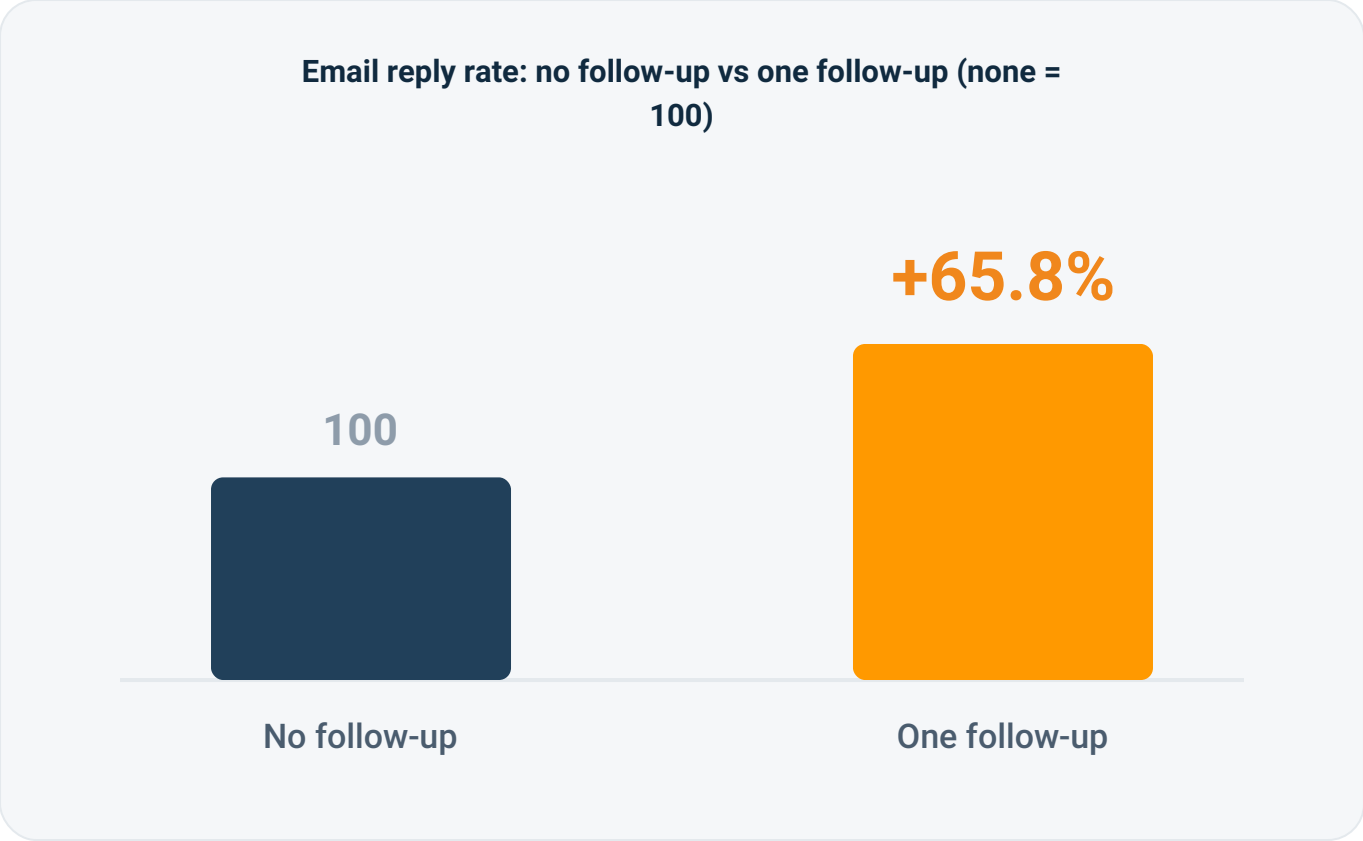
Backlinko View source 1 ↗

Pitchbox View source 2 ↗

OUTREACH

20

One follow-up email boosts replies by 65.8%



Most senders give up after the first email. A single, well-timed follow-up dramatically improves the odds.

INSIGHT

The single highest-leverage move in outreach. Stopping after one email leaves two-thirds of your potential replies on the table.

Backlinko View source 1 ↗

Pitchbox View source 2 ↗

OUTREACH

21

Emailing several contacts lifts replies by 93%



Reaching only one person at a site leaves results on the table.

ACTION

Map two or three contacts per target site. Pitching only one person per domain almost halves your reply odds against the alternative.

Backlinko View source 1 ↗

Pitchbox View source 2 ↗

22

OUTREACH

Pitch to published guest post takes about 3 weeks

Average time from pitch to a published guest post

3 weeks

average time from pitch to publication

Between editorial review, revisions and scheduling, even accepted pitches take time to go live.

NOTE

Treat link building as a quarterly plan, not a monthly one. Pitches sent today land in next quarter's report, not this one.

SEO Sandwitch

View source ↗

ROI & OUTLOOK

23

78% of SEO professionals report positive ROI

Share of SEO professionals reporting positive ROI



Nearly four in five practitioners say link building pays for itself.

INSIGHT

Nearly four in five SEOs see it working. If you are not, the issue is more likely execution (quality, relevance, velocity) than the channel.

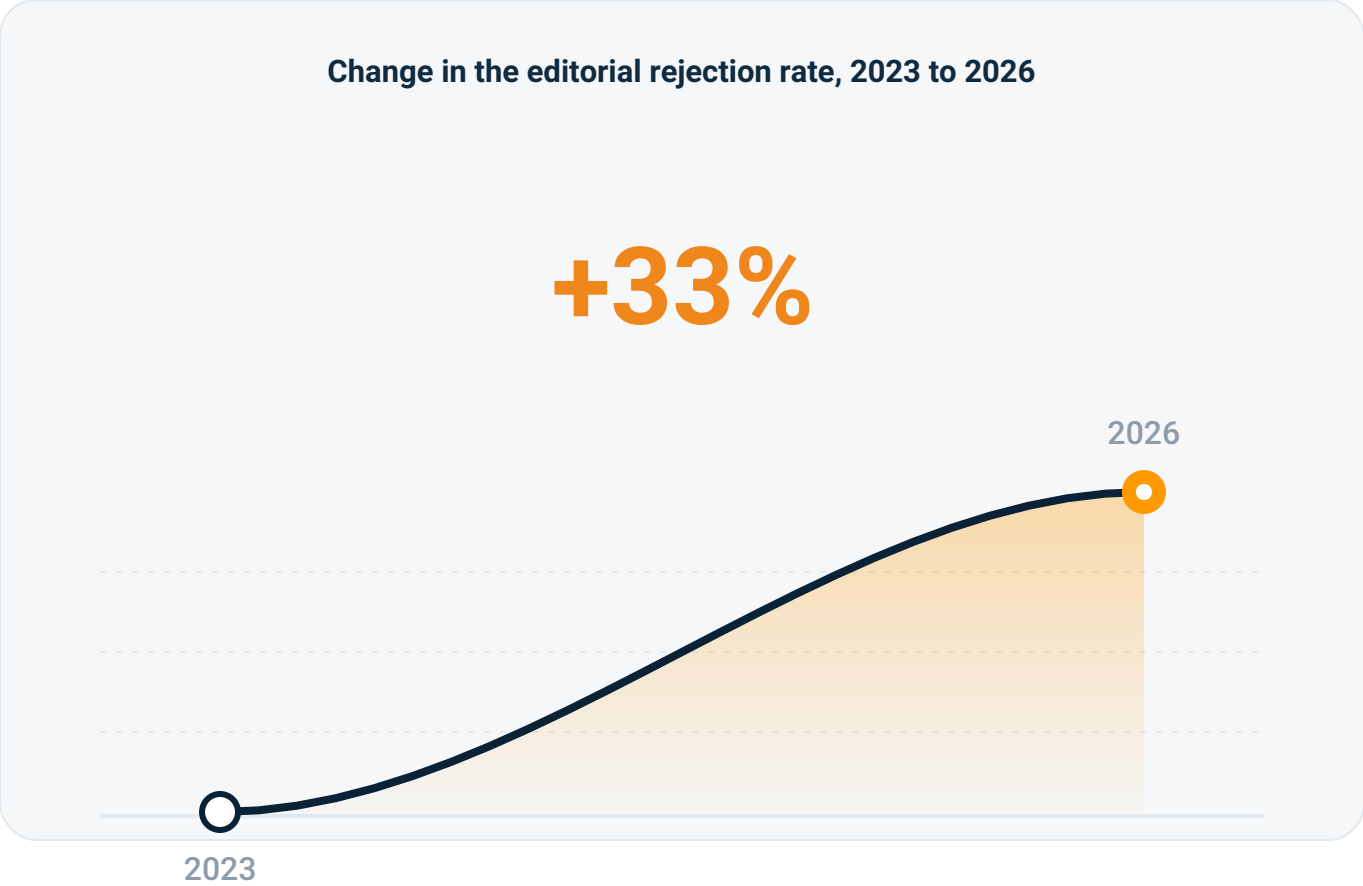
PressWhizz

View source ↗

ROI & OUTLOOK

24

Editorial rejection rates have risen 33% since 2023



Editors are more sceptical because they receive more AI-generated submissions. That raises the bar for everyone, including original writers.

LEARNING

Editors are pickier because AI-generated submissions flooded their inboxes. Pitches that pass need original angle, data and clear value.

PressWhizz

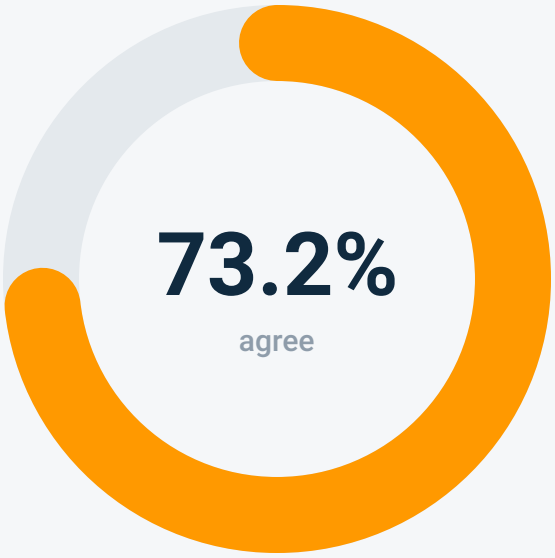
View source ↗

ROI & OUTLOOK

25

73.2% believe backlinks influence AI search visibility

Share who say backlinks influence AI search results



As AI-powered search grows, practitioners believe backlink authority affects which sources get cited in AI answers.

INSIGHT

AI overviews increasingly cite authoritative sources. Backlinks now influence visibility in AI answers, not just classic ranking.

editorial.link

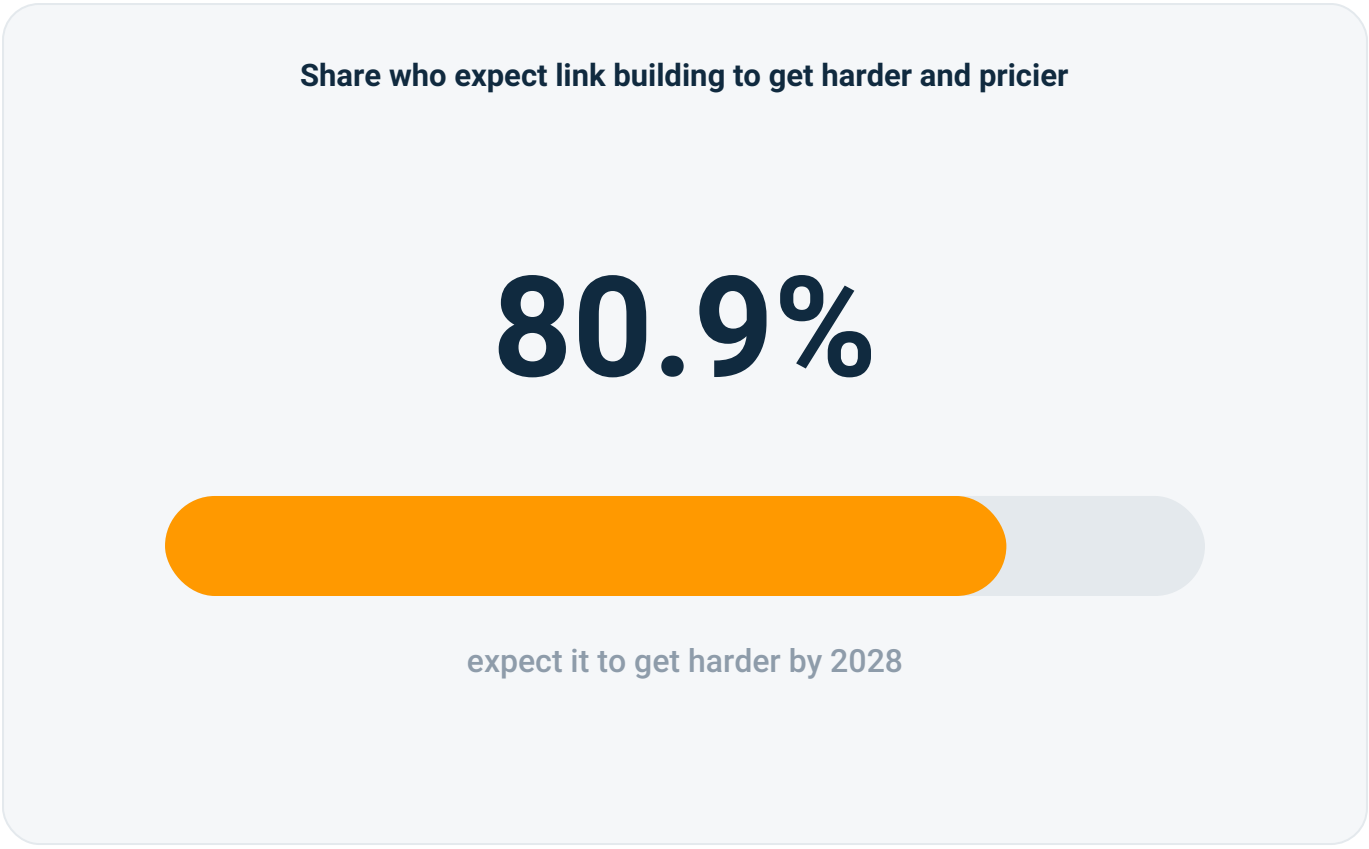
View source ↗

ROI & OUTLOOK

26

80.9% expect link building to get harder

Share who expect link building to get harder and pricier



Rising costs, stricter editorial standards and Google's evolving algorithm are all cited as factors for the next 2-3 years.

ACTION

Lock in placements while costs are at current levels. The next 24 months are expected to be the cheapest of the next five years.

editorial.link

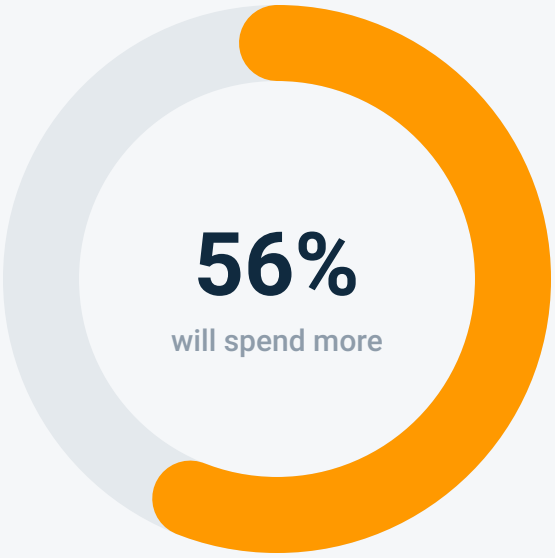
View source ↗

27

ROI & OUTLOOK

56% plan to increase link building investment

Share of marketers planning to spend more next year



Despite rising costs, more than half the industry is doubling down over the next 12 months, a signal that returns justify the spend.

NOTE

Doing the same as last year means falling behind. The industry is raising spend, so flat budgets erode in real terms.

BuzzStream

View source ↗

28

ROI & OUTLOOK

80.9% say unlinked brand mentions influence rankings

Share who say unlinked brand mentions affect rankings



This is driving interest in brand monitoring and mention reclamation as a link building tactic.

LEARNING

Unlinked brand mentions are now a valid SEO signal. Mention-reclamation belongs in your monthly link-building cadence.

editorial.link

View source ↗

29

ROI & OUTLOOK

Nearly 80% say nofollow links still affect rankings

Share who say nofollow links still affect rankings



The old binary of dofollow equals value and nofollow equals nothing is gone. Most practitioners now treat nofollow links as contributing signals.

INSIGHT

Stop discounting nofollow to zero. Nofollow placements on high-authority sites still pass brand and relevance signals worth pursuing.

editorial.link

View source ↗

LinkPanda

PART TWO

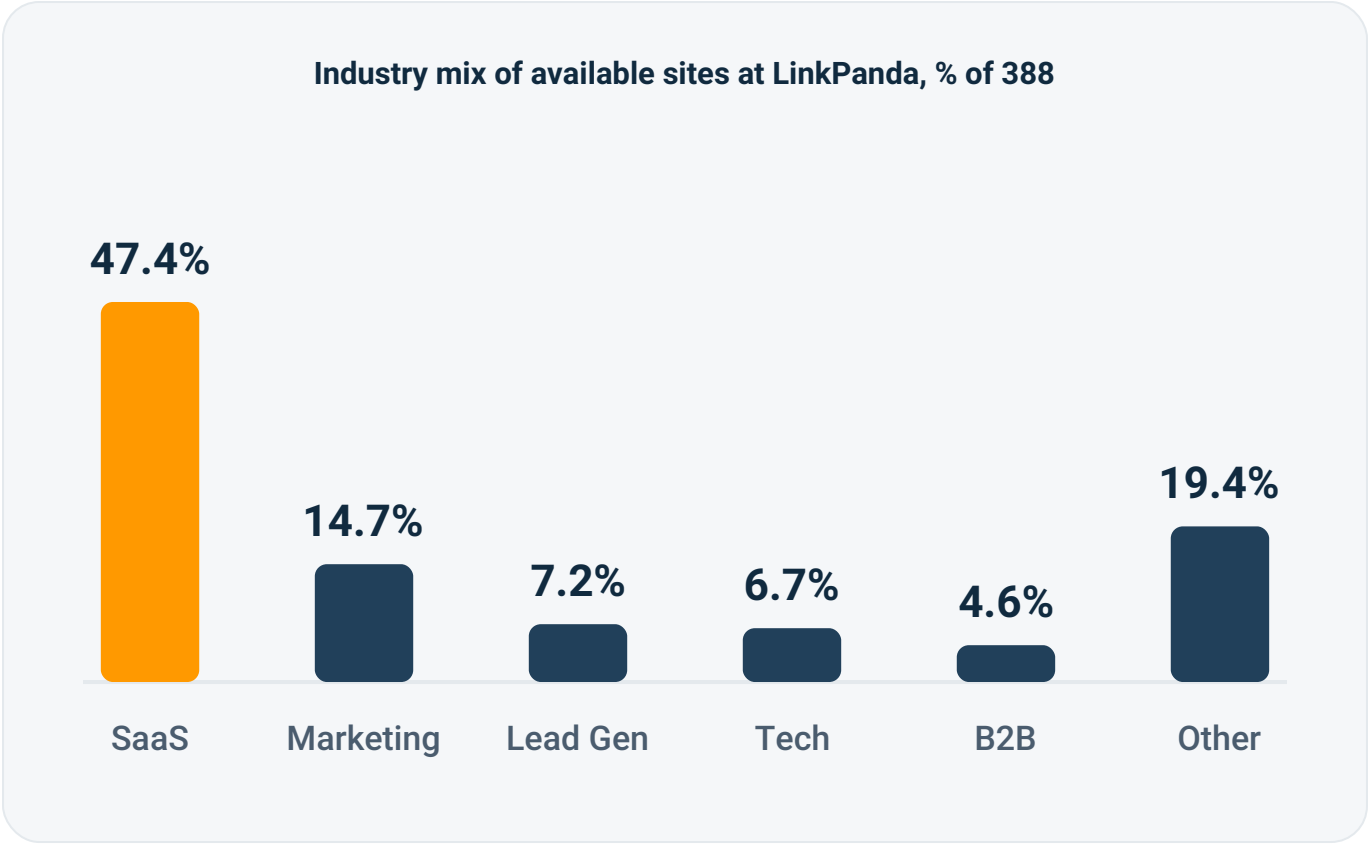
LinkPanda Insights

Charts drawn from LinkPanda's own data on 388 available sites: industry mix, product types, DR distribution, price deviation, follow-type breakdown, and link-insertion + guest-post pricing versus the published industry averages.

LINKPANDA INSIGHTS

30

SaaS domains make up 47% of available sites at LinkPanda



SaaS dominates with 47.4% of available sites at LinkPanda. Marketing follows at 14.7%, then Lead Generation (7.2%), Technology (6.7%) and B2B (4.6%). Other industries account for the remaining 19.4%.

INSIGHT

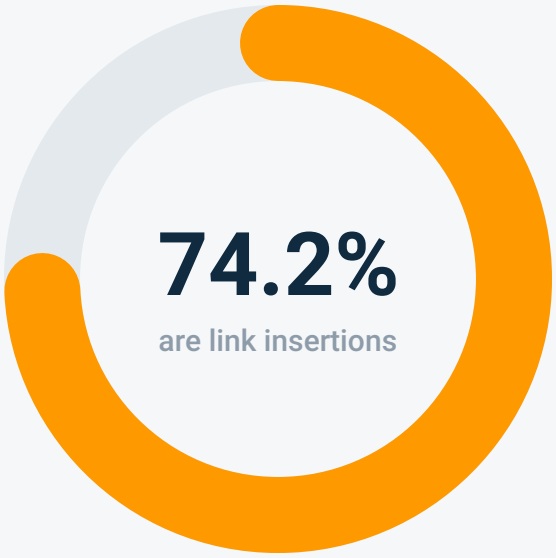
SaaS publications dominate LinkPanda's available sites with placement opportunities. If your audience reads software-focused sites, the available sites naturally weight toward you.

31

LINKPANDA INSIGHTS

Link insertions make up 74% of available sites at LinkPanda

Product type distribution, % of 388 sites at LinkPanda



Link insertions are the dominant product at 74.2% of available sites at LinkPanda. Guest posts add 17.5%, citations 5.9%, listicles 1.3% and brand mentions 0.8%.

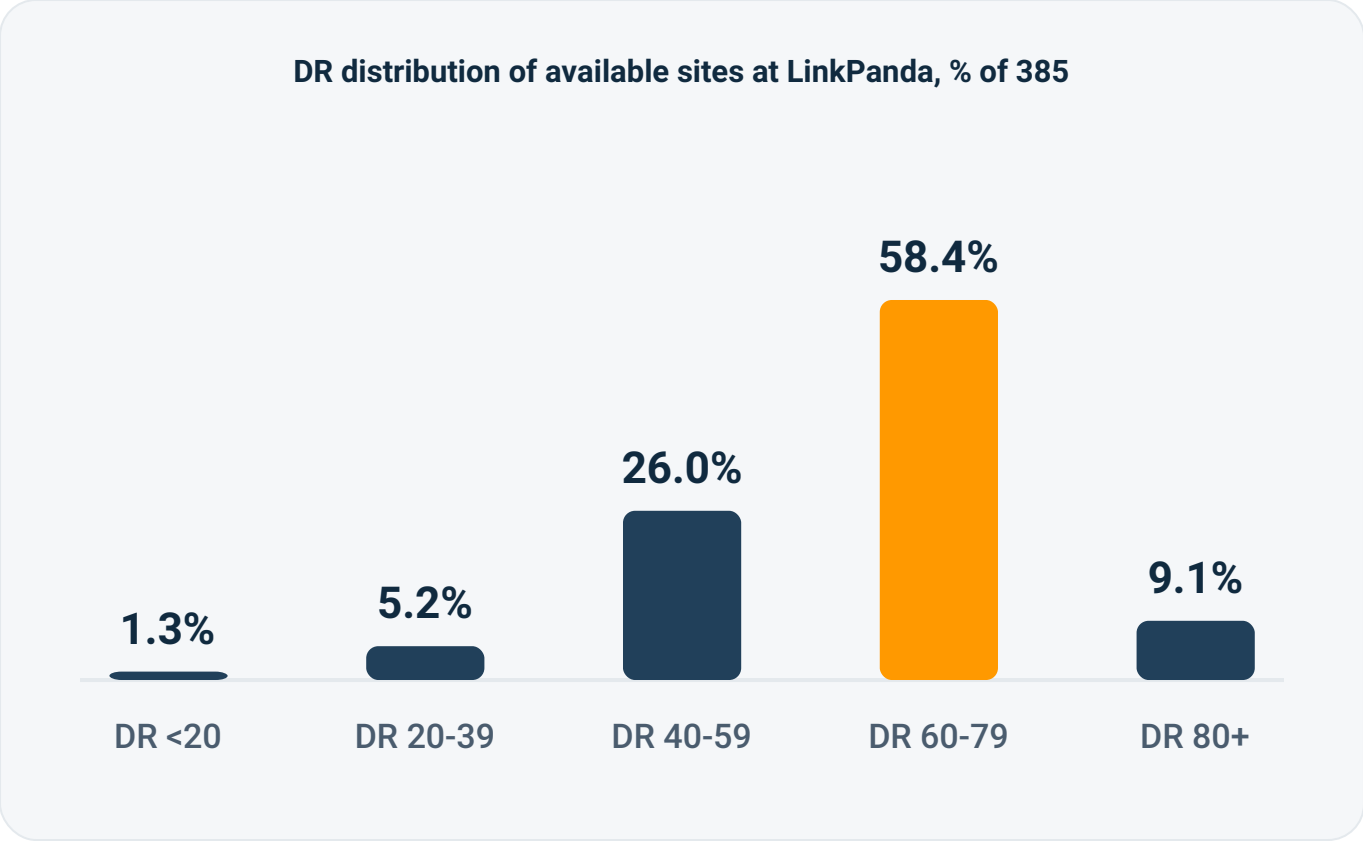
NOTE

Link insertions place your link inside content that is already indexed and ranking, which is why they make up nearly three-quarters of our available sites.

LINKPANDA INSIGHTS

32

58% of placements sit in the DR 60-79 band



The majority of LinkPanda's available sites (58.4%) fall in the DR 60-79 range, with another 9.1% at DR 80 or higher. Below DR 40 accounts for only 6.5%.

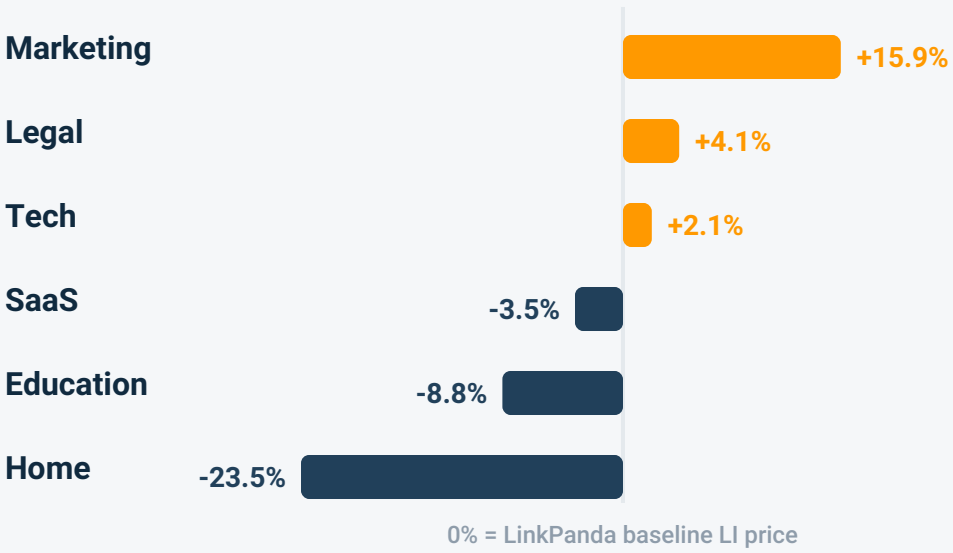
INSIGHT

Two-thirds of LinkPanda's placements sit at DR 60 or higher. Available sites are built for buyers who want authority, not volume from low-tier sites.

LINKPANDA INSIGHTS

33

Link insertion price varies by industry: -24% to +16% from baseline



Within the Link Insertion product type, Marketing and Legal sites trend above the baseline price, while Home, HR and Education trend below. The spread reflects supplier and editorial differences by vertical.

LEARNING

Industry choice meaningfully shifts placement cost. Within the same product type, vertical-specific supply dynamics create a 39-point spread top to bottom.

LINKPANDA INSIGHTS

34

99.2% of available sites at LinkPanda are dofollow

Share of available sites at LinkPanda that are dofollow



Of 388 available sites at LinkPanda, 385 are dofollow and only 3 are no-follow. Dofollow is the default by a wide margin.

NOTE

If you have heard 'most paid placements end up nofollow', that is not true of LinkPanda's available sites. Dofollow is the default by a wide margin.

LinkPanda

PART THREE

Pricing & Packages

Three programme tiers built for different stages of authority growth. Custom programmes available on request.

PRICING

Programmes & Packages

Most accounts begin on Core, move to Momentum within two to three months, and graduate to Impact when link velocity steps up.

TIER 01

Core

$4,400 /month

- 10 High Authority Links (DR50+)
- Do-Follow Links for SEO and AI SEO
- 24/7 LinkCard Tracker Access
- Detailed Monthly Link/SEO Report

TIER 02

Momentum

$6,600 /month

- 15 High Authority Links (DR50+)
- Do-Follow Links for SEO and AI SEO
- 24/7 LinkCard Tracker Access
- Detailed Monthly Link/SEO Report
- Rolling Monthly Agreement
- Monthly Strategy Call

TIER 03

Impact

$8,360 /month

- 20 High Authority Links (DR50+)
- Do-Follow Links for SEO and AI SEO
- 24/7 LinkCard Tracker Access
- Detailed Monthly Link/SEO Report
- 6 and 12 Month Contracts
- Monthly Strategy Call

Bulk Packages

25 High DR Links	30 High DR Links	35 High DR Links
5% Savings	5% Savings	10% Savings
$10,450 /mo	**$11,880** /mo	**$13,860** /mo

Share Your Requirements →

PROOF IN NUMBERS

Link Building Case Studies

Selected outcomes from B2B and SaaS programmes. Full breakdowns on the LinkPanda site.

ZeroGPT

AI SAAS TOOL

258% traffic growth

to 8.5M monthly visits through strategic link building targeting AI detection authority.

Read case study →

Zeely

AI MARKETING TECH

463% traffic surge

through feature-led link building, positioning Zeely.ai as a fast-growing AI marketing tool.

Read case study →

CompanyData

INFORMATION SERVICES

Authority from zero

launching a brand-new data platform with sustained organic growth from scratch.

Read case study →

Toggl Track

PRODUCTIVITY & WORKFORCE

2,300+ referring domains

added through a strategic B2B push reinforcing Toggl's enterprise authority.

Read case study →

Latam Nearshoring

IT SERVICES & CONSULTING

48% domain rating surge

in 6 months, establishing authority in the IT outsourcing space.

Read case study →

GoAnywhere

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

24% growth in referring domains

strengthening GoAnywhere's enterprise security authority in managed file transfer.

Read case study →

More case studies at linkpanda.com/case-studies/link-building

IN THEIR WORDS

Client Testimonials

A selection of what brands and agencies say after working with LinkPanda.

★★★★★

"Impressed by their professionalism, responsiveness, and most of all the results they drive. Their team cares about my businesses winning in SEO and it shows."



Kris Hutchinson
HUTCH AGENCY

★★★★★

"We've introduced LinkPanda to several of our clients for link building and SEO support. The team is responsive, professional, and consistently delivers high-quality, relevant links."



Afriyaz Maqbool
APEXURE

★★★★★

"I couldn't be happier. The quality of the websites they work with is top-notch, and I've already seen measurable improvements in traffic and search rankings."



Danish Abad
NESTORS GLOBAL

★★★★★

"The results speak for themselves. If you're looking for relevant, high-quality links and a team that understands the bigger picture, LinkPanda is the real deal."



Shafik Walakaka
PETCOACH SINGAPORE

★★★★★

"Chris was professional, patient and took time to understand our audience and what we wanted to achieve. We now have confidence that our website is optimised and set up correctly."



Gaurav Gupta
MABEL INSIGHTS

★★★★★

"A reliable, professional SEO partner that truly understands the value of quality over quantity in backlinks. Their ethical, high-quality linking strategies make them stand out."



Omer Qureshi
ALFARDAN CORPORATION

GLOSSARY

Terms used in this report

DR (Domain Rating)

Ahrefs' 0-100 score of a domain's backlink profile strength.

URL Rating (UR)

The same kind of score applied to a single page rather than the whole domain.

Niche Edit / Link Insertion

A backlink added inside an existing, already-published article on another site.

Guest Post

A new article published on another site that includes your backlink.

Citation

A mention of your brand in a listing or directory, often without a link.

Brand Mention

A reference to your brand in another site's content, linked or unlinked.

Digital PR

Outreach to journalists or publishers to earn coverage and backlinks, usually via a story or data asset.

Dofollow / Nofollow

HTML attributes signalling whether a link should pass ranking authority to the destination.

Anchor Text

The clickable text of a hyperlink, used by search engines as a relevance signal.

Linkable Asset

A piece of content - calculator, dataset, tool, original research - built to attract links passively.

TAT (Turnaround Time)

Days from order to live placement.

LinkPanda

BUILD REAL AUTHORITY

Real links.
Real editorial.
Real results.

Every campaign starts with a brief and ends with a list of placements you can hand to your team or your CFO without a translation step. If a campaign does not earn its place by month one, you walk away.

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