

Authority First SEO Strategies Resource Guide

2022 Edition



fire&spark

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The End of Technical SEO

For most websites, the technical approach to SEO is ineffective in a world where search visibility is gated by AI search engines. The answer is a more purposeful approach to SEO that resonates with your customers and search engines.

Google intends to maintain its 90% market share in search by delivering the best results for searchers' queries, regardless of the optimizations you may apply to your website.

This doesn't mean that SEO is dead. It means that your SEO resources are better spent optimizing for your customers, not Google's algorithm.

Authority First SEO ditches the technical SEO paradigm by focusing on content, authority, trust, branding and partnerships to generate the technical breadcrumbs Google is looking for and increase conversions on your website.

The technical signals SEO specialists seek to optimize for search engines occur as a natural side-effect of a strong brand with a story that is making noise in the marketplace – e.g. backlinks, engagement, mentions, topical relevance and content partnerships.

Authority First

Now that technical SEO is less effective, you should focus on becoming Google's preferred website in your product/service category. We do this by initiating our SEO efforts with authority building. Once we have defined our authority building strategy, the appropriate technical fixes, page optimizations, and content strategy are obvious.

In the early days of SEO, authority was built with link building. Today, search engines monitor other trust factors such as mentions, positive reviews, and content quality. But backlinks are still the most powerful authority builder.

To be effective, your authority building efforts must generate backlinks, content partnerships, and other trust signals that Google is monitoring.

Some examples of authority building strategies:

- Advocating for the “right to repair” by a publisher in the consumer electronics space - <https://www.ifixit.com/Right-to-Repair/Intro>
- Grants for emerging jewelers by a materials supplier in the jewelry industry - <https://grant.halsteadbead.com>

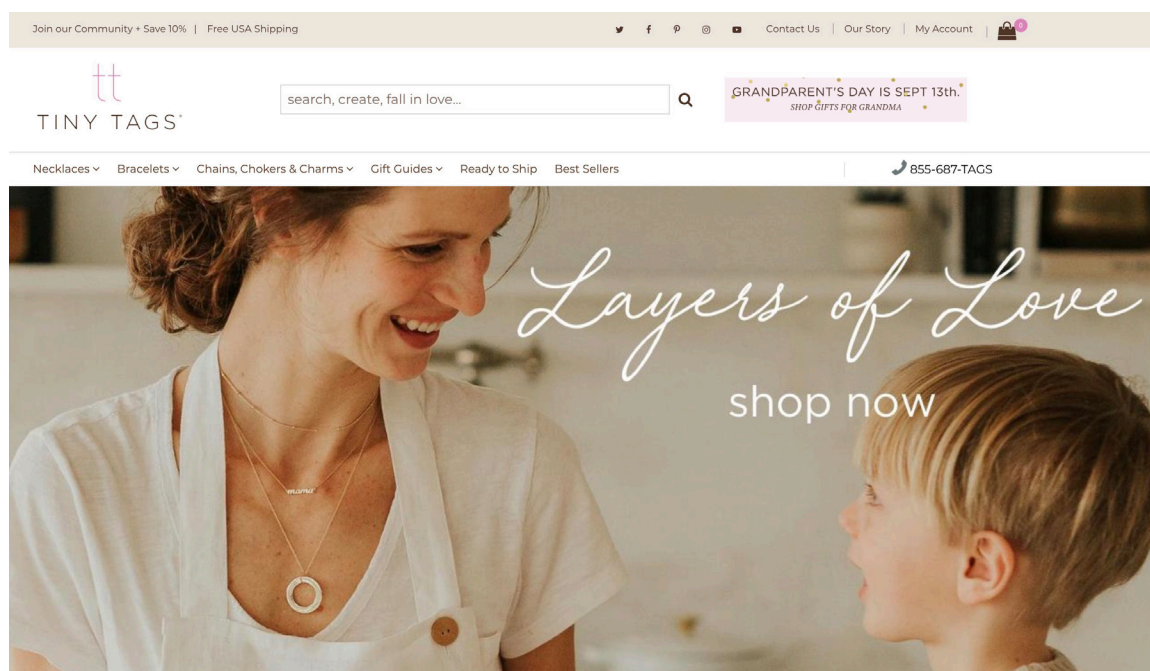
- Campaign to protect frontline workers during COVID-19 crisis by manufacturer of medical supplies - <https://zshield.com/pages/about>
- Publishing immigration stories by a financial services company in partnership with advocacy groups - <https://www.sharemoney.com/us/en/sharemoney-immigrant-stories>

The power of the Authority First approach is that you concentrate your efforts on the SEO lever with the most potential upside. You cannot play the SEO game without search engine authority.

Think of authority as your invitation to the stadium where the businesses in your market compete for organic traffic. Authority gets you on the playing field. The remaining on-page SEO and content optimization tactics that we recommend will help you win the game.

Case Study: Tiny Tags

Tiny Tags is a jewelry business founded by Melissa Clayton. Their mission is “to celebrate a mother’s most precious gift.” Tiny Tags built its brand around the joys and challenges of motherhood. Its content tackles themes from heartwarming love to grief, infertility and loss.



Instead of blogging about its jewelry products, Tiny Tags features stories about motherhood. In this [blog post](#), a woman with diabetes relays her unexpected, yet incredibly rewarding journey to motherhood.



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855-687-TAGS

Two Pieces of My Heart



I've had Type One Diabetes since I was three years old. My doctors told me having a baby was probably not in the cards for me....it would be difficult for me to get pregnant, dangerous for me to carry the baby, and unlikely to actually carry a baby full term. But all I ever wanted was to be a mother, it didn't matter to me what I did for a career, because being a mother was something that I dreamed of and hoped for every day.

When building her brand, Melissa connected with like-minded women and influencers such as Jamie, the author of this blog post. This provided her with the backlinks and organic visibility, which supported her efforts to grow revenue on social and paid media.

The Tiny Tags website doesn't need technical SEO to attract organic traffic. Their engaging content, partnerships and enthusiastic customers have built their organic visibility, introducing the brand to its target customers.

Tiny Tags exemplifies Authority First SEO. The brand's purpose is a force multiplier. Tiny Tags' engaging and shareable content generates the signals Google likes to see: low bounce rates, high time-on-site and high click-through-rate on the search results pages.

Google Understands Human Search Intent

In 2015, Google announced an addition to its algorithm called RankBrain. This innovation relies on machine learning techniques to interpret the human intent behind a search query and surface the best content.

Early versions of Google's algorithm would simply look for pages that mentioned the words the searcher typed into the search box. Back then, if you searched for "avocado oil" you might see a news article about an avocado farm or a diary entry written by an aspiring avocado farmer.

Today, Google is adept at satisfying the intent behind the search. For example, Google knows that someone searching for "avocado oil" is likely looking to purchase a product, find recipes or read nutritional information. For competitive keywords, Google will find the best pages to satisfy the queries regardless of the technical optimizations deployed to promote organic visibility.

Brands must research the intent behind keywords to develop content that matches the query and increase conversion rates. For product-related queries, Google understands when the intent is to seek information versus to purchase a product. For informational keywords, scant product details on an ecommerce product page are not enough to satisfy the query.

The best way to learn more about the intent Google assigns to a specific keyword is to type it into Google and examine the pages in the search results. Google is scary good at understanding the human intent behind queries.

Story-Driven SEO

How Stories Drive Authority

Story-Driven SEO is one of several Authority First SEO strategies. Thanks to story-driven brands like Beyond Meat and Warby Parker, we all know that brand purpose is an incredibly powerful marketing asset. But many marketers don't realize that any brand can leverage the power of purpose to boost organic visibility and sales.

We've recently had phenomenal success with a number of brands due to the connections they've built with their customers and influencers. These brands are built around a purpose that is deeply held by their founders. The purpose may be a social mission or the founder's compelling backstory or the craftsmanship behind their products.

Some examples of story-driven brands we've worked with:

- <https://www.firedeptcoffee.com>
- <https://www.prosperitycandle.com/pages/mission>
- <https://www.diffeyewear.com/pages/buy-one-give-one-program>

Not only do these brands do good in the world, but Google has taken notice and has rewarded them with rankings and organic traffic.

Getting Started with Story-Driven SEO

We've worked with several brands built around a purpose that is deeply held by their founders. For these brands, their purpose drives product development, accelerates their marketing and deepens the connection with their customers.

Google favors strong brands. Finding and expressing your brand's purpose will help you become Google's preferred brand in your category.

Some brands are driven by their passion for their products or their customers. Other brands seek to change the world. A brand's purpose may be the founder's compelling backstory, the craftsmanship behind its products, or social change.

Your purpose must be authentic to you and your brand. You can't fake it. An authentic purpose will help you to connect with like-minded influencers and, ultimately, boost your SEO.

Be clear on whether your brand has a story or a purpose. Both can be a powerful force-multiplier to your SEO efforts.

Your brand's story is the reason your brand exists. Your story becomes a purpose when you decide to make a change in your customers or your market or the world. So, your brand's purpose is the change you will make in the world.

Develop your brand's story into a purpose for maximum impact.

Some do's and don'ts of Story-Driven SEO:

Do start your SEO campaign with thorough customer research. Talk to your customers to uncover the information they need to make their buying decisions (Yes. Pick up the phone). Keyword research cannot replace a deep understanding of your customers' motivations, pain points and worldviews. Then, type these topics into Google to see what type of information Google thinks they are looking for.

Don't rely solely on keyword research tools for content topics. These tools will help you discover topics you may have overlooked but may be based on incomplete historical data. And the search volume numbers are often misleading. Google reports that 15% of all searches are keywords that it is seeing for the first time. This represents a huge opportunity to increase your organic visibility if you develop the content that addresses your customers' needs.

Do start your SEO campaign with authority building. Authority building has many benefits related to thought leadership and

provides for higher rankings derived from backlinks. Because authority building is difficult, it's usually the last phase of an SEO campaign. But if you start with authority building, you can choose a strategy that generates backlinks, keyword targeted content, engagement and the other technical signals that Google is looking for.

Don't spend too much time on an exhaustive technical SEO audit of your website. If you have an average-sized website (i.e. less than 10k pages) and your website is built on a modern CMS like Hubspot, WordPress, or Shopify without significant customizations to your theme, it is unlikely that you will uncover a technical issue that is suppressing your rankings. The opportunity for you to increase your organic visibility will be with content development and authority building.

Promote Your Story, Not Your Content

Your story will help you develop more compelling content, increase conversion rates, connect with like-minded influencers (without paying for write-ups), build search engine authority and do good in the world.

Our Story-Driven SEO campaigns outperform technical SEO campaigns because they generate the “authority” signals Google is looking for – i.e. backlinks, mentions, content partnerships, and engagement.

Google rewards websites with high levels of engagement and backlinks from authoritative websites. Reach out to like-minded individuals and organizations to develop content partnerships and generate backlinks.

The connections you build around your brand's story will generate the backlinks, reviews, content partnerships and engagement that Google is looking for. As your search engine authority improves, your organic traffic will increase.

To make these connections, the key is to promote your story, not your products.

Case study: *We worked with the founder of a manufacturing company who cared deeply about helping nurses get the personal protective equipment (PPE) they needed during the height of the COVID-19 crisis. Our goal was to identify nurses and other medical professionals who needed PPE. We reached out to nursing organizations, media outlets and healthcare facilities. Our client distributed tens of thousands of face shields to frontline healthcare workers. In addition to helping frontline workers who were at risk due to the shortage of PPE, Google noticed our efforts and rewarded our client's product website with authority and rankings.*

Story-Driven SEO Content

Story-Driven content is citable by like-minded individuals, influencers and organizations. Citable content gets mentioned, debated, linked, and reviewed.

The key is to research and reach out to link-minded individuals and give them content they can use to advance THEIR agenda. Citable content connects with influencers who will subsequently provide you with authority and backlinks.

For example, interviews are an easy way to create story-driven citable content. For one project, we interviewed immigrants in the U.S. and asked them to tell us their stories. This resulted in interview articles that were promoted by immigration advocates and law firms.

Other forms of citable content for Story-Driven SEO campaigns:

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Position/policy papers
- Opinion articles
- Data-driven articles

All of these make great citable content when you identify journalists and influencers who are interested in the topic.

Email Outreach Templates

Template #1: Reaching out to, and getting listed and linked on, veteran-owned blogs and business sites (from a veteran-owned and operated company)

Subject: Support [Company] - Veteran Owned and Operated in the USA

Dear [Contact Name or Site Name],

I hope this email finds you well and that you are safe and healthy during this time. My name is [Name] and I'm reaching out from [Company]. We are a veteran-owned and operated business right here in the USA.

Since your website promotes the importance of supporting veteran owned businesses, we wanted to reach out to you to ask for your support in spreading the word about our business and our products. As a veteran owned and operated company, we pride ourselves in creating high quality products for first responders, veterans, and our brave service men and women. We are dedicated to supporting veterans not only with our product, but also through charitable donations. Please let me know if it's possible to list [Company] on your website or if you see another way we can collaborate.

Thank you so much for your time! I'm looking forward to connecting with you!

Best,
[Name]

Template #2: Content promotion outreach (from a parenting blog)

Hey [First Name],

My name is [First Name]. I work with [Company Name], a company that is passionate about [include company purpose].

One gap we see in the [specific industry] blog landscape is information on how [specific concern]. So, to provide parents in this situation with thorough, helpful, and accurate information on the topic, we put together a [Guide Name].

From our research into [Website Name], we've seen that you and your team already have a history of providing your readers with insightful guides like the one we've written. With that in mind, would you be open to providing me with your feedback on the guide, and possibly to linking to it as a resource if you think your readers would find it useful?

Please let me know, and I can send you some more information.

Best,
[Name]

Template #3: Interview Offer Outreach (from a company that helps guide students through the college admissions process)

Hi [First Name],

I am [Full Name], Co-Founder of [Company Name], a website dedicated to providing students with the information they need to make decisions about their future.

I am in the process of finalizing our comprehensive [Guide Name], written specifically for students, and I would love to have it used by groups like yours that work with underserved student populations.

My intentions are for it to be a resource to help students from missing out on scholarship opportunities that could tremendously reduce their debt after college.

Would you be open to giving me feedback on the guide and linking to it as a resource on the [Website Name] page if you think your students would find it useful? Please let me know if you'd like me to send it over.

In a similar vein, our team is putting together "Spotlight Interviews" with outstanding people in the world of college administration. The purpose of this series is both to inform incoming college students about the financial aid process and to highlight the hard work college administrators do to make students aware of affordable

college options. If you have the time to take a look at our piece, we would be happy to interview you for our Spotlight series. Let us know if you would be interested in participating. I look forward to hearing from you!

Warm regards,
[Name]

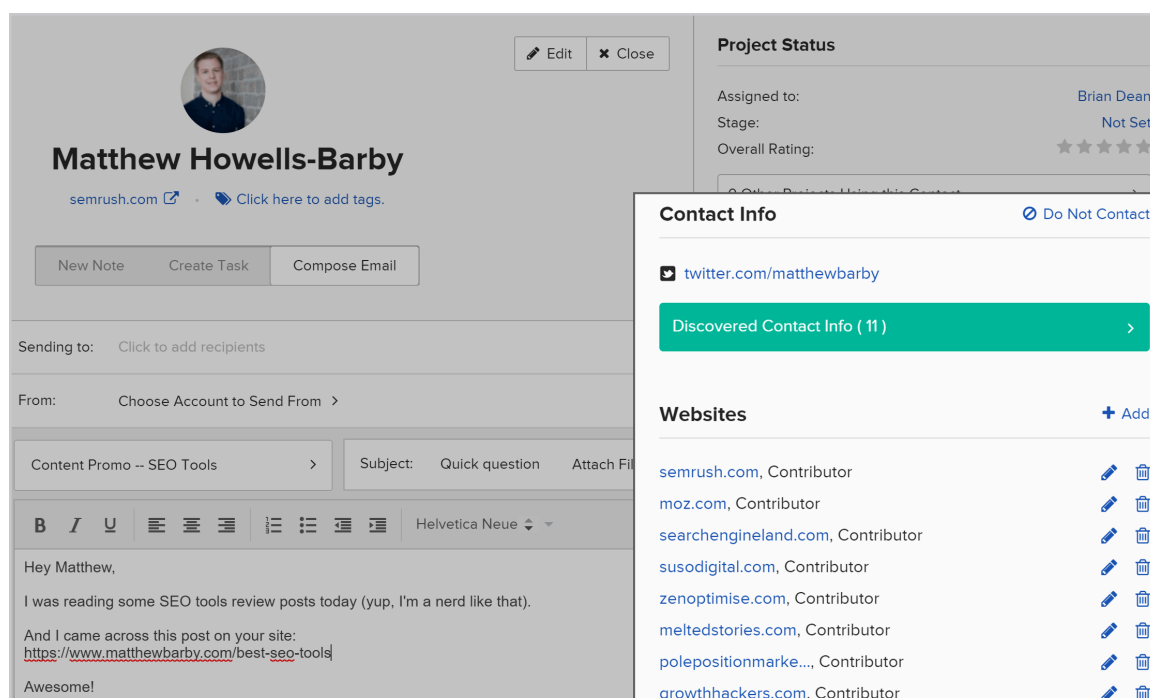
Software Tools

1



BuzzStream allows you to research influencers and organize your contacts for link building. You'll never lose track of a conversation with BuzzStream because it allows you to set an automatic follow-up to contacts. On top of this, everyone on your team can be working on outreach in the same place and it provides you with reports on your performance to analyze.

BUZZSTREAM UNIVERSITY											
WEBSITES											
Filter Add Websites View in Dashboard Outreach Store											
24 websites											
Name	Domain	Discovered Contact	RSS Feed	PageRank	Domain Authority	Inbound Links	Juice Passing Links	Relationship St...	Overall Rating	Tags	
beatappsforikids.org	beatappsforikids.org		show feed	3	42	608	1	Not Qualified	Low	ipad app, iphone app, ki...	
idownloadblog.com	idownloadblog.com		show feed	5	72	348	310	Not Started	Medium	ipad accessories, ipad ...	
ilounge.com	ilounge.com		show feed	3	80	1,832	1,776	Not Started	Medium	ipad accessories, ipad ...	
ioonoops.com	ioonoops.com			3	39	29	21	Not Yet Researched	Low		
ipad-qa.net	ipad-qa.net		show feed	3	33	2,239	388	Not Qualified	Low	ipad apps, iphone apps	
ipad.appfinders.com	ipad.appfinders.com		show feed	2	28	516	12	Not Qualified	Very Low	ipad apps	
ipad24h.com	ipad24h.com		show feed	0	23	799	1	Not Qualified	Very Low	ipad news	
ipad2blog.com	ipad2blog.com		show feed	2	28	2,205	1,586	Not Yet Researched	Low	ipad accessories	
ipad3-release.com	ipad3-release.com		show feed	3	33	3	3	Not Qualified	Low		
ipadaccessories.com	ipadaccessories.com		show feed	3	38	6	1	Not Started	Low	ipad accessories	
ipadcreative.com	ipadcreative.com		show feed	4	38	21	17	Not Started	Medium	ipad app	
ipadforums.net	ipadforums.net		show feed	4	51	67	59	Not Qualified	Very Low	ipad accessories, ipad ...	
ipadinsight.com	ipadinsight.com		show feed	5	55	6,382	1,961	Not Started	Medium	ipad accessories, ipad ...	
ipadmintcases.com	ipadmintcases.com		show feed	2	21	2	0	Not Qualified	Very Low	ipad accessories	
ipadnotebookwor...	ipadnotebookwor...		show feed	3	100	336	328	Not Started	Low	ipad accessories, ipad ...	
myipadapps.com	myipadapps.com		show feed	3	32	2	1	Not Started	Low	ipad apps	
padpadget.com	padpadget.com		show feed	5	55	58	48	Not Started	High	ipad accessories, ipad ...	
tabletcases.com	tabletcases.com		show feed	3	38	17	16	Not Qualified	Very Low		
tcgeeks.com	tcgeeks.com		show feed	4	44	27	28	Not Started	Medium	ipad accessories, ipad	

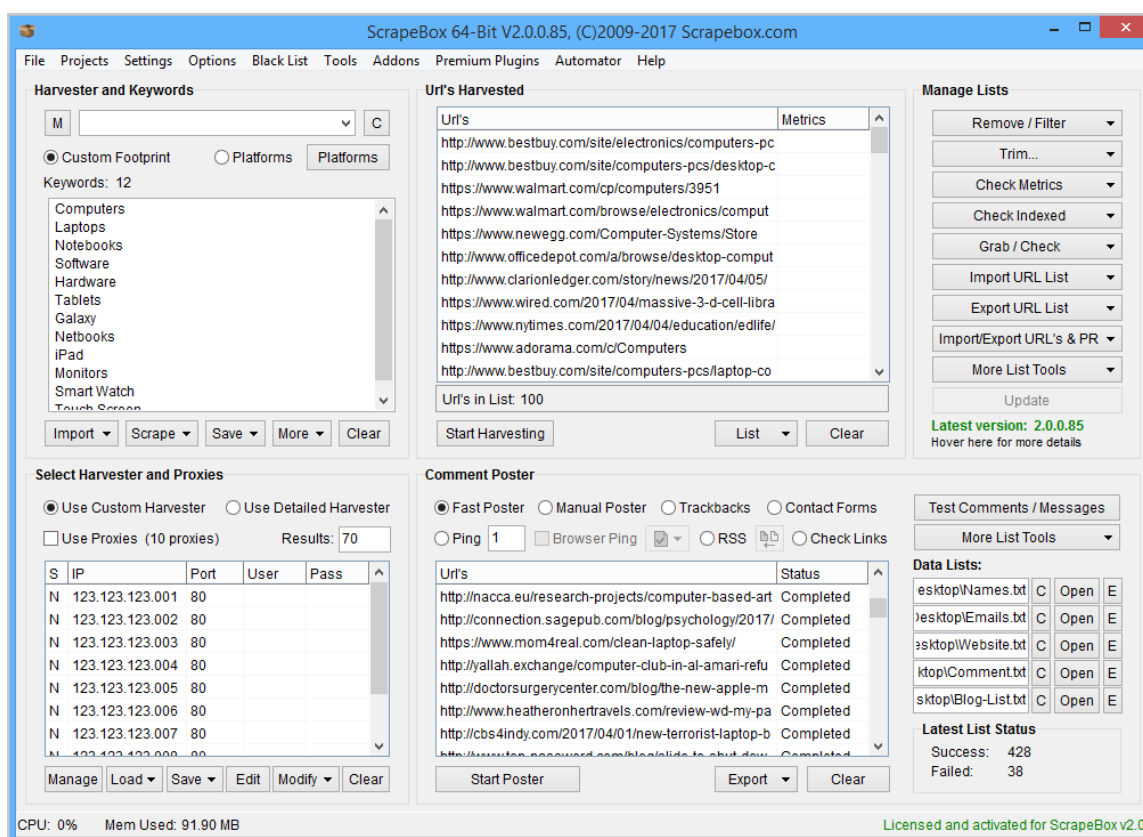


Check out www.buzzstream.com to organize your email outreach!

2



Scrape Box is a powerful tool used for generating lists of relevant URLs from Google search results. We use this tool to create lists of websites that we intend to contact for links. Specifically, we use it for finding influencers, blogs, and websites to contact for backlinks.

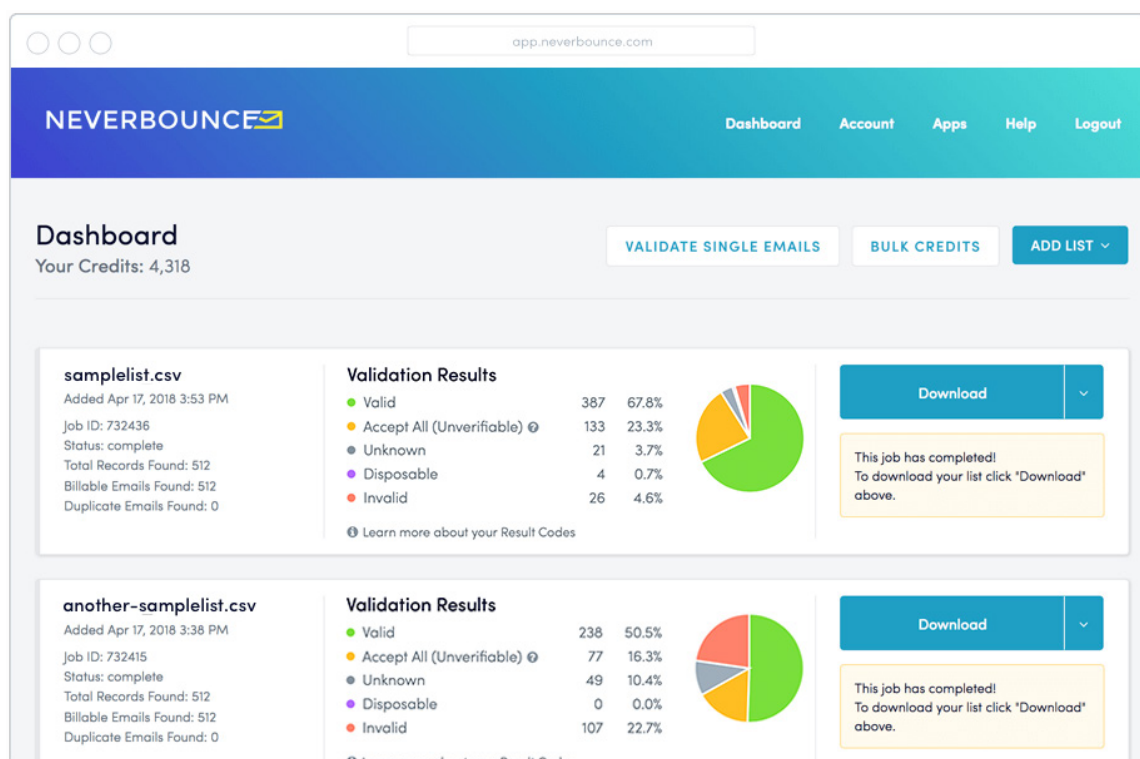


Check out www.scrapebox.com to kick off your link building campaign!

3



NeverBounce does email list verification. We use it to verify a contact's email address before we contact them for link building. NeverBounce will let you know if an email address is valid.

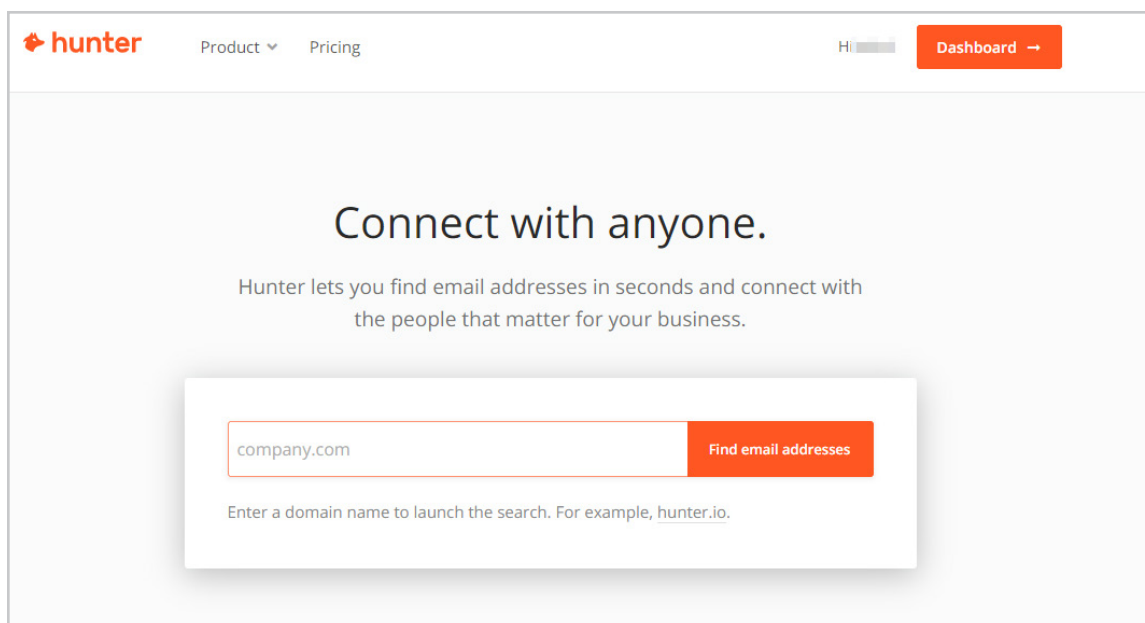


Check out <https://neverbounce.com> to verify your contacts list!

4



Hunter.io is a great tool for finding email addresses within a specific company. We use this software to scrape the company site and find/verify the email addresses associated with it.



Check out <https://hunter.io> to generate a list of contacts for link building!

5



We use Ahrefs to find websites linking to our competitors that we would like to link to our site.

We also use Ahrefs to find broken backlinks for our own sites. A broken backlink is an incoming link pointing to an “error 404” page of a website. If other websites are linking to a broken page on our site, we create a redirect for the broken URL or try to update the link on their site.

The screenshot shows the Ahrefs interface with the 'Broken Backlinks' report for the domain 'cnn.com'. The report lists 7,977,499 broken backlinks. The table below shows the top three results.

Referring page	DR	UR	Referring domains	Linked domains	Ext.	Traffic	Kw.	Anchor and backlink	DP check	RP check
United States - Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States	96	88	61,539	189	646	286,130	17,350	Merica, Dan (June 12, 2012). "Pew Survey: Doubt of God Growing Quickly among Millennials". CNN religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/12/pew-survey-doubt-of-god-growing-quickly-among-millennials/	13 May '19	9 Apr '19
New York City - Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City	96	85	21,550	266	819	181,230	11,364	"Superstorm Sandy blamed for at least 11 U.S. deaths as it slams East Coast". CNN. October 29, 2012 news.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/29/hurricane-sandy-strengthens-to-85-mp/	13 May '19	30 d
Barack Obama - Wikipedia en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barack_Obama	96	85	13,468	216	1,141	224,180	11,203	"Obama clinches Democratic nomination". CNN (blog). April 3, 2012 politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2012/04/03/breaking-obama-clinches-democratic-nomination/	4 May '19	28 May '19

Check out <https://ahrefs.com/> to investigate broken backlinks!

ABOUT US

Fire&Spark works with brands to accelerate the time to SEO impact and leverage organic visibility for PPC advertising. Our Authority First SEO process will establish your website as Google's preferred brand in your category.

Significant growth in organic traffic can only be achieved with non-technical SEO strategies that involve content marketing, backlinking, partnerships, and, as described in this guide, Story-Driven SEO. These tactics generate the technical breadcrumbs that Google notices.

To accelerate SEO results, Authority First SEO focuses on attainable keywords, low-effort content creation, and laser-focused technical optimization.

Visit our services page: <https://www.fireandspark.com/services/>

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