

LINK BUILDING STRATEGIES

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The Dirty Little Secrets of Search



Photo illustration by The New York Times

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J C Penney story

- Aggressive link-building delivered top rankings for lots of very high profile keywords during the Christmas period
- NY Times investigated & reported to Google
- Google gave site a penalty
- NY Times published story
- SEO agency of 7 years was fired
- <http://nyti.ms/gHITQa>



The result

- At 7 p.m. Eastern time on Wednesday, J. C. Penney was still the No. 1 result for “Samsonite carry on luggage.”
- Two hours later, it was at No. 71.
- At 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Penney was No. 1 in searches for “living room furniture.”
- By 9 p.m., it had sunk to No. 68.
- In other words, one moment Penney was the most visible online destination for living room furniture in the country.
- The next it was essentially buried.

Links are the most important ranking factor

- Links are what Google uses to differentiate between similar websites

Top 5 Ranking Factors

1. Keyword Focused Anchor Text from External Links

73% very high importance



2. External Link Popularity (quantity/quality of external links)

71% very high importance



3. Diversity of Link Sources (links from many unique root domains)

67% very high importance



4. Keyword Use Anywhere in the Title Tag

66% very high importance



5. Trustworthiness of the Domain Based on Link Distance from Trusted Domains (e.g. TrustRank, Domain mozTrust, etc.)

66% very high importance



Links and PageRank

- This isn't new.....
- Since 1998 links have formed the basis of the Google algorithm

$$PR(A) = 1 - d + d \left(\frac{PR(B)}{L(B)} + \frac{PR(C)}{L(C)} + \frac{PR(D)}{L(D)} + \dots \right)$$

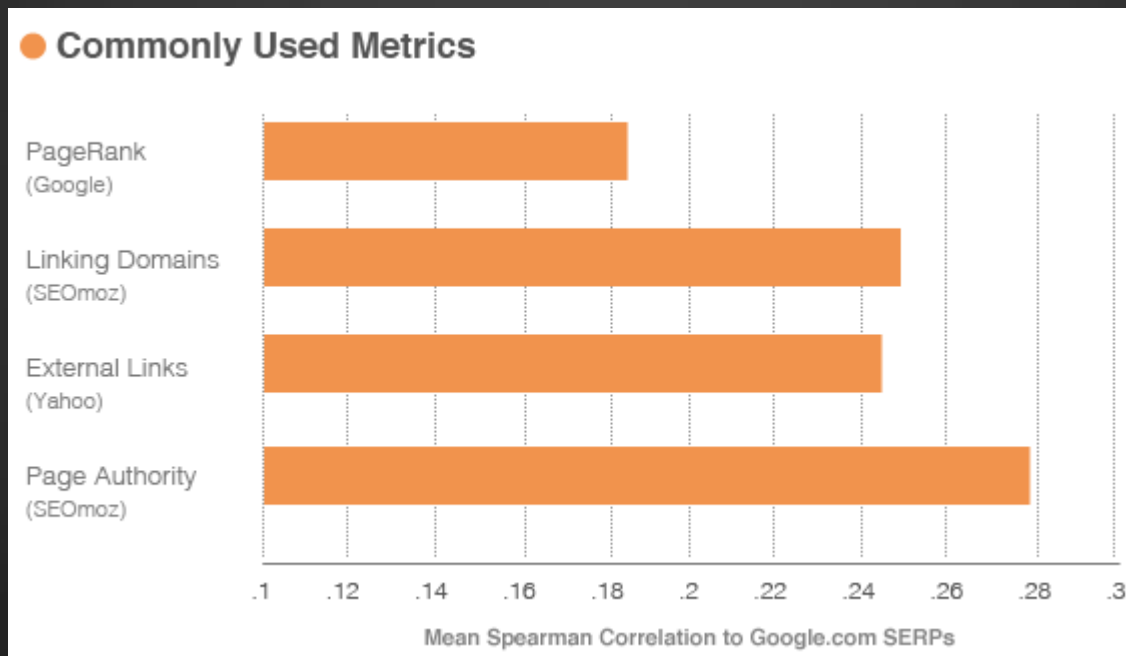
or (N = the number of documents in collection)

$$PR(A) = \frac{1 - d}{N} + d \left(\frac{PR(B)}{L(B)} + \frac{PR(C)}{L(C)} + \frac{PR(D)}{L(D)} + \dots \right).$$

- PageRank is a probability distribution used to represent the likelihood that a person randomly clicking on links will arrive at any particular page.
- The pages that have the most incoming links are deemed more important.

PageRank \neq rankings

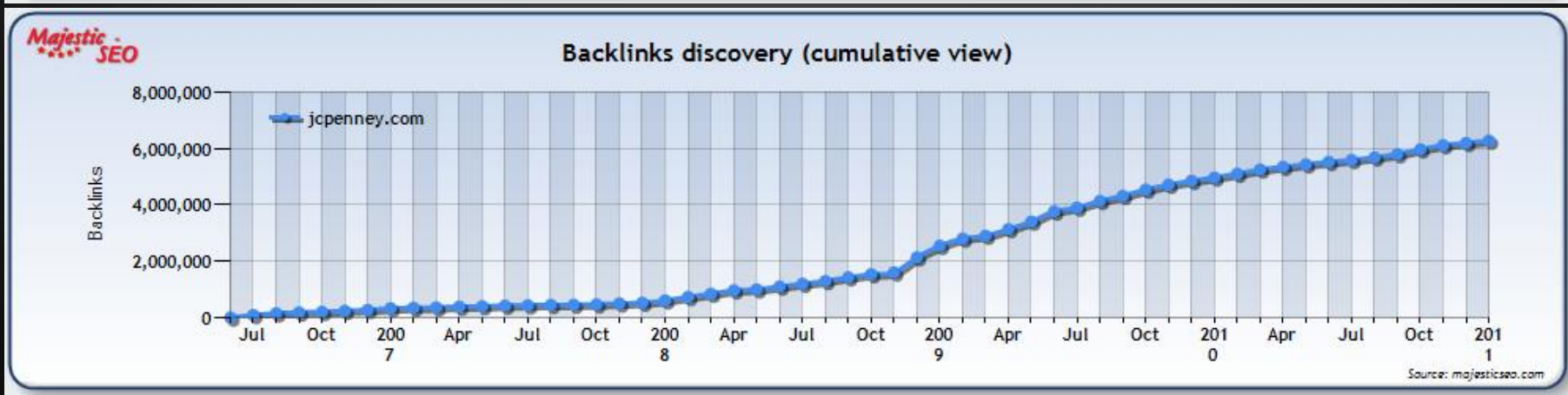
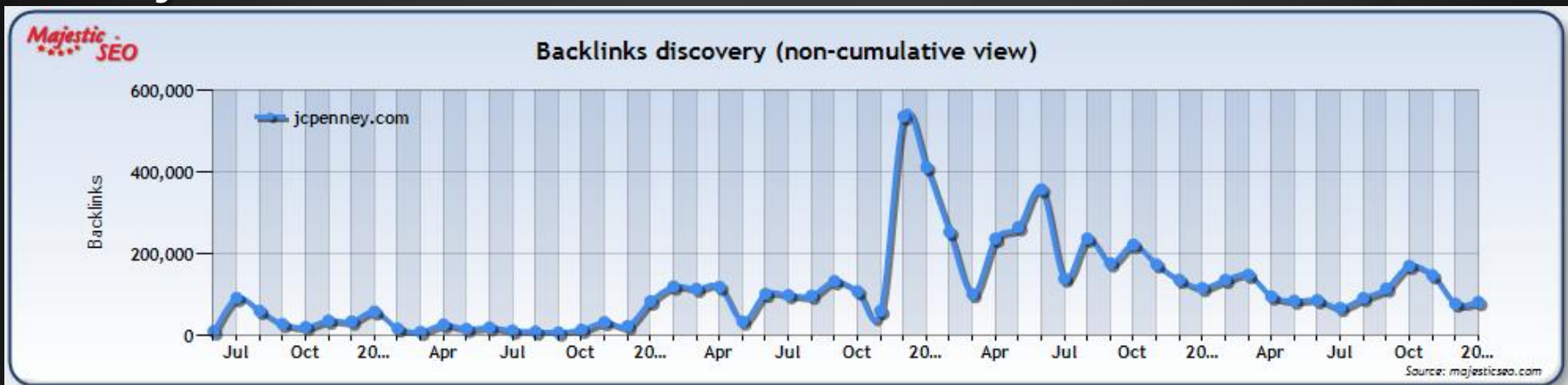
- PageRank is quite inaccurate – a higher PR does not necessarily mean higher rankings



Research & Analysis Toolset


- Yahoo Site Explorer for quick checks
- OpenSiteExplorer.org & SEOmoz
- MajesticSEO.com
- Microsoft Excel
- Wordle.net
- Raven
- Buzzstream
- Linkdex
- We use heavily customised version of Microsoft TFS

Majestic SEO



Competitor analysis

- Identify 20 target keywords
- Record domains ranking in top 20 search results for each keyword
- Remove duplicate sites



OPEN SITE EXPLORER
Link Popularity Checker + Backlink Analysis Tool

Enter any URL below to see up to 10,000 links + metrics

http://

[+ Add a URL to Compare](#)

Get Link Data

Competitor analysis

- Export all links to Excel

The screenshot displays the Open Site Explorer (OSE) interface. At the top, the URL <http://www.blogstorm.co.uk> is entered in the search bar, with a 'Get Link Data' button to its right. Below the search bar, four key metrics are presented in a grid:

Page Authority	Domain Authority	Linking Root Domains	Total Links
70/100	64/100	756	34,063

Below the metrics, there are tabs for 'Linking Pages', 'Top Pages', 'Linking Domains', 'Anchor Text Distribution', and 'Full List of Link Metrics'. The 'Linking Pages' tab is active. At the bottom, there are filters for 'Show Followed + 301 links from External Pages Only to All Pages on the Root Domain'. A red box highlights the 'Export to CSV (limit 10,000 links)' button. The bottom right corner shows 'Prev 1 Next »'.

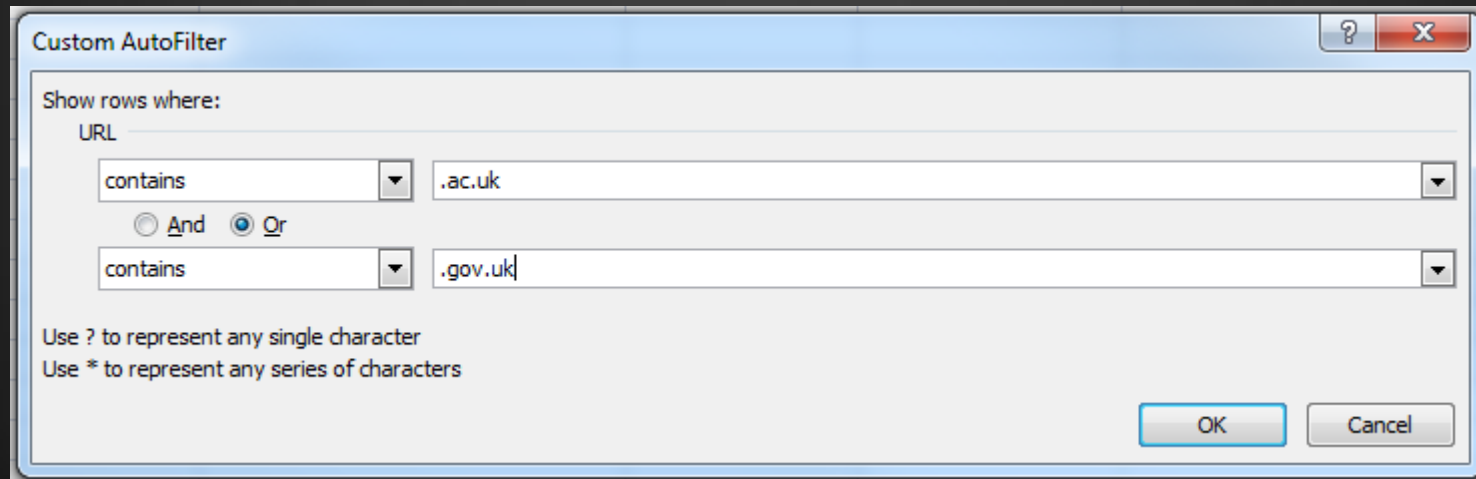
Competitor analysis

- Repeat for all competitors to create one giant Excel document
- Remove duplicate linking domains
- Sort by Domain Authority or Page Authority

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	URL	Title	Anchor Text	Page Authority	Domain Authority	Number of Linking	Target URL
3	http://www.music.hyper-info.com/	Music Tips : Free, Legal Music Onli Discount Furniture		72	73	1640	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
4	http://www.auto-care.hyper-info.com/	Auto care Tips : 18 Simple Ways To Pillowcases		71	73	1489	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
5	http://www.kitchen.hyper-info.com/	Kitchen Tips : 5 Ways To Decorate \ Crib		71	73	1583	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
6	http://www.kitchen.hyper-info.com/	Kitchen Tips : 5 Ways To Decorate \ Bedspreads		71	73	1583	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
7	http://www.kitchen.hyper-info.com/	Kitchen Tips : 5 Ways To Decorate \ Bedspreads		71	73	1583	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
8	http://www.kitchen.hyper-info.com/	Kitchen Tips : 5 Ways To Decorate \ Crib		71	73	1583	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
9	http://www.jewelry.hyper-info.com/	Jewelry Tips : 6 Handy Tips on Buyi Bed In A Bag		71	73	1496	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
10	http://www.jewelry.hyper-info.com/	Jewelry Tips : 6 Handy Tips on Buyi Bed In A Bag		71	73	1496	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
11	http://hoteldeals.biz/	Hotel Deals	Womens Swimwear	70	64	1348	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
12	http://hoteldeals.biz/	Hotel Deals	Gifts For Babies	70	64	1348	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
14	http://marketing-bussines.ru/	KIA Opirus KIA Optima KIA Rio	Fashion Jewelry	69	63	1330	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
15	http://reklam-profi.ru/	Ferrari 360 GT Ferrari 575 GTC anc Charm Bracelet		69	63	1330	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
16	http://reklam-profi.ru/	Ferrari 360 GT Ferrari 575 GTC anc Name Necklace		69	63	1330	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
17	http://reklam-profi.ru/	Ferrari 360 GT Ferrari 575 GTC anc Name Necklace		69	63	1330	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
18	http://reklam-profi.ru/	Ferrari 360 GT Ferrari 575 GTC anc Charm Bracelet		69	63	1330	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
19	http://www.broadband-internet.hyper-info.co	Broadband internet Tips: Broadbar Furniture Outlet		69	73	1318	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
21	http://about-stroika.ru/	Volkswagen models Volkswagen Mens Watches		69	62	1305	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
22	http://bently-continental.ru/	Bently Bently Cars Car Video i Console Table		69	62	1330	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
23	http://bently-continental.ru/	Bently Bently Cars Car Video i Console Table		69	62	1330	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
24	http://www.home-organization.hyper-info.co	Home organization Tips: 7 Baskets Kitchen Table		68	73	1416	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
25	http://www.home-organization.hyper-info.co	Home organization Tips: 7 Baskets Console Table		68	73	1416	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
26	http://www.home-organization.hyper-info.co	Home organization Tips: 7 Baskets Console Table		68	73	1416	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
27	http://boingboing.net/2002_10_01_archive.htm	Boing Boing: A Directory of Wonde Link		68	93	60	http://www3.jcpenney.com/jcp/prod
29	http://www.autoresponder.hyper-info.com/	Autoresponder Tips: 11 Creative W Discount Furniture		68	73	1310	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
30	http://www.car-insurance.hyper-info.com/	Car insurance Tips: Car Insurance E Bar Stools		67	73	1415	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
31	http://www.diabetics.hyper-info.com/	Diabetics Tips: Exercise Can Reduc Window Treatments		67	73	1416	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,
32	http://www.jcpenney-coupons.com/	JCPenney Coupons & JCPenni Click To Redeem Your Disco		67	60	1120	http://www.jcpenney.com/jcp/jmetc
33	http://www.jcpenney-coupons.com/	JCPenney Coupons & JCPenni Wedding Registry		67	60	1120	http://www.jcpenney.com/products,

Competitor analysis

- Use filters to find valuable links
 - URL contains .ac.uk , .edu , .gov , .nhs
 - Anchor text contains target keyword



The screenshot shows a 'Custom AutoFilter' dialog box with a title bar containing a help icon and a close button. The main area is titled 'Show rows where:' and has a 'URL' label. It contains two filter rows. The first row has a dropdown menu set to 'contains' and a text input field with '.ac.uk'. The second row has a dropdown menu set to 'contains' and a text input field with '.gov.uk'. Between the two rows are radio buttons for 'And' and 'Or', with 'Or' being selected. At the bottom, there are two lines of text: 'Use ? to represent any single character' and 'Use * to represent any series of characters'. In the bottom right corner, there are 'OK' and 'Cancel' buttons.

Custom AutoFilter

Show rows where:

URL

contains .ac.uk

☐ And ☒ Or

contains .gov.uk

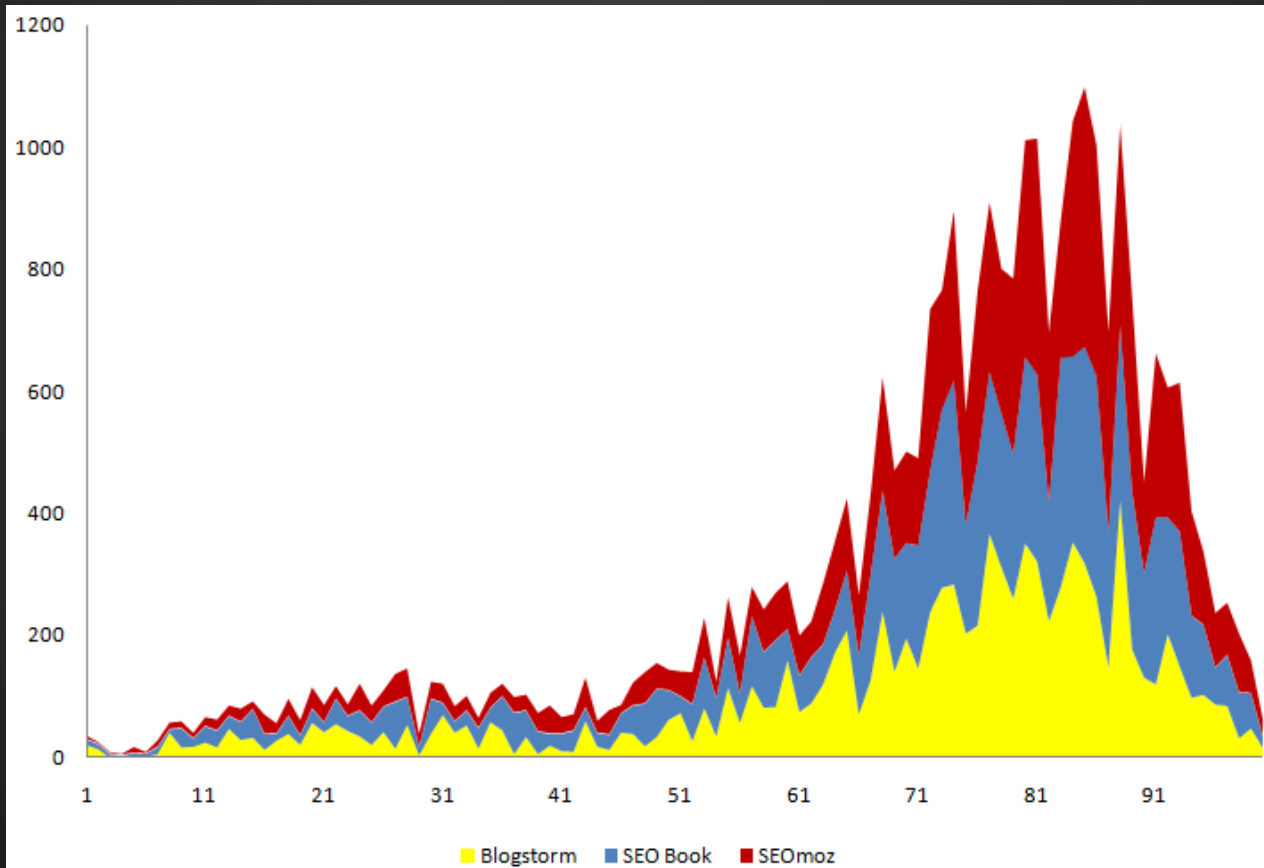
Use ? to represent any single character
Use * to represent any series of characters

OK Cancel

Anchor text



Visualising your link profile



Case study – “mobile phones”

- Competitive keyword
- Good mixture of brands & affiliate sites
- Sites have lots of links

[Mobile Phones | Contract Phones | Cheap Mobile Phone Deals & SIMs](#) ☆

Cheap Contract **mobile phone** deals & Broadband deals. & Large range of laptops. Compare **mobile phones** on any **mobile phone** network at Carphone Warehouse.

[Pay as you go](#) - [Pay monthly](#) - [Phones](#) - [Store Finder](#)

www.carphonewarehouse.com/ - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[Mobile Phones - Best Mobile Phone Deals on Orange, O2, T-Mobile, 3 ...](#) ☆

Free **mobile phone** deals from Orange, O2, T-Mobile, 3 and Vodafone. Samsung, LG, Nokia and Sony Ericsson cheap **mobile phones**. Part of Carphone Warehouse.

[Cashback Claims](#) - [HTC Desire](#) - [Contact Us](#) - [Pay as you go](#)

www.mobiles.co.uk/ - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

[O2 | Mobile Phones, Broadband & Sims From The UK's Leading Provider](#) ☆

O2 is the UK's leading provider of **mobile phones** and broadband, offering the best **mobile phone**, sim only, and broadband deals. Save money by buying direct!

www.o2.co.uk/ - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

branded
3—

mobilejazz.co.uk



branded
3—

T Mobile

T-Mobile Mobile

Communication Phones Broadband
Internet T-mobile Text Anchor UK
<http://www.t-mobile.co.uk>
www.t-mobile.co.uk

branded
3—

Bestcontractmobilephone.co.uk

Mobile Phone Deals Offers phones Phones
phone deals UK mobile Latest Best Contract Shop

branded
3—

Phones 4U



branded
3—

Onestopphoneshop.co.uk



branded
3—

Dial-a-Phone



02



branded
3—

Mobiles.co.uk



branded
3—

Carphone Warehouse

A word cloud visualization of search engine data for Carphone Warehouse. The most prominent words are 'Warehouse' and 'Carphone', which are displayed in large, bold, black font. Above 'Warehouse' is the URL 'www.carphonewarehouse.com' in a slightly smaller bold font. Other visible words include 'Anchor', 'Free', 'Text', 'tempHTML', 'Mobile', and 'CPW'. The background of the word cloud is white, and the words are arranged in a way that suggests a search engine results page or a collection of search terms related to the brand.

www.carphonewarehouse.com

Anchor

Free

Text

tempHTML

Mobile

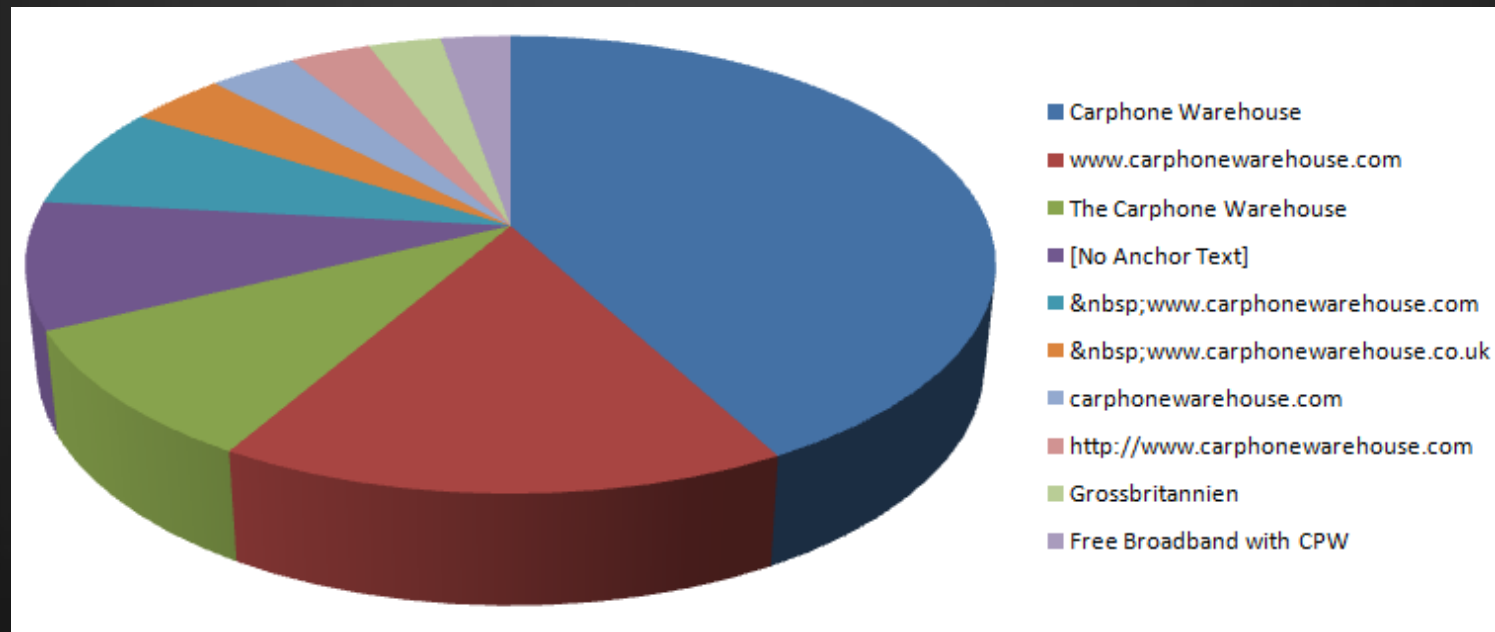
CPW

Warehouse

Carphone

Carphone Warehouse

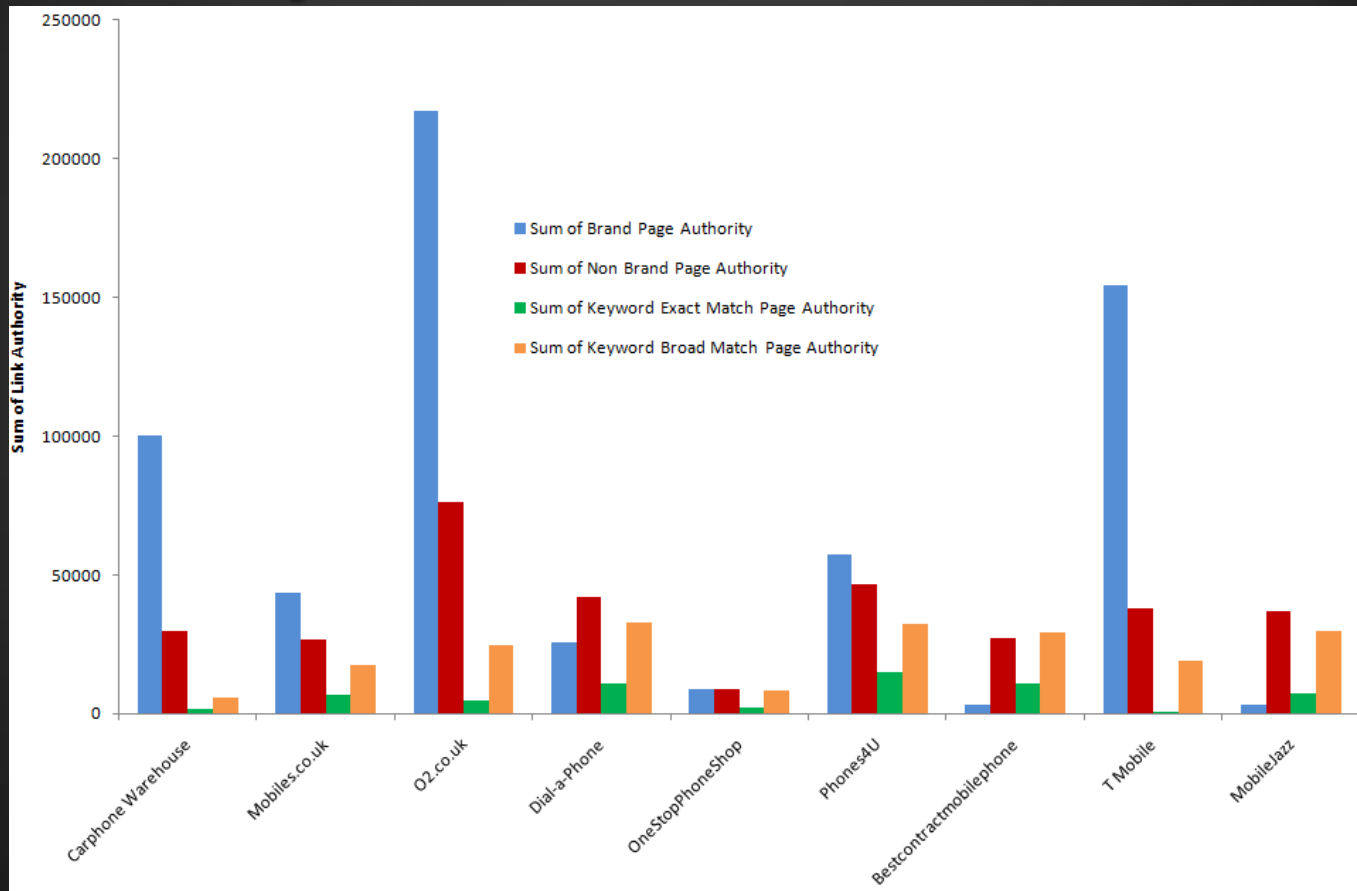
- Pivot table
- Find top 10 anchor texts by count



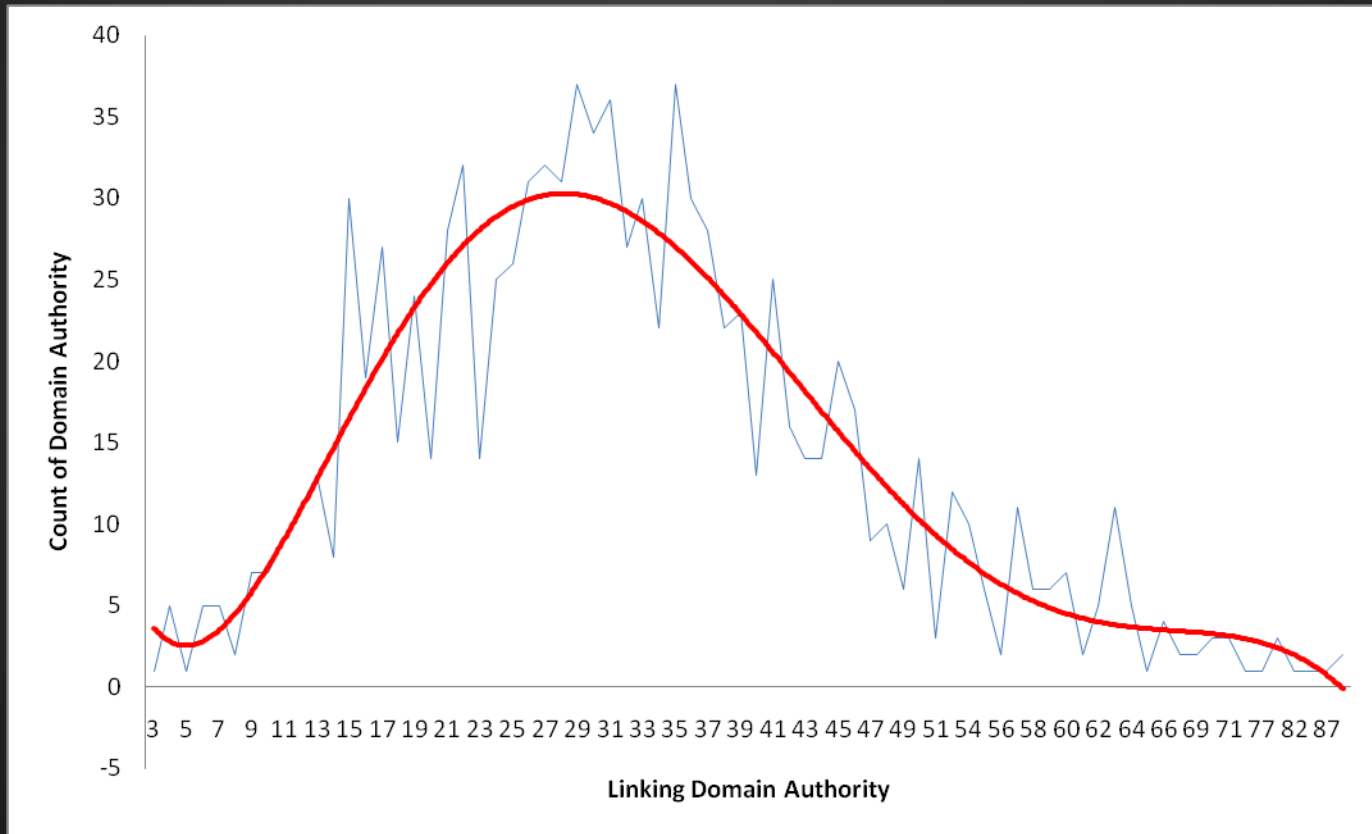
Brand link authority

Site	% Brand Authority
Carphone Warehouse	77.77%
Mobiles.co.uk	49.89%
O2.co.uk	76.56%
Dial-a-Phone	38.71%
OneStopPhoneShop	52.50%
Phones4U	57.12%
Bestcontractmobilep	10.62%
T Mobile	80.24%
MobileJazz	7.87%

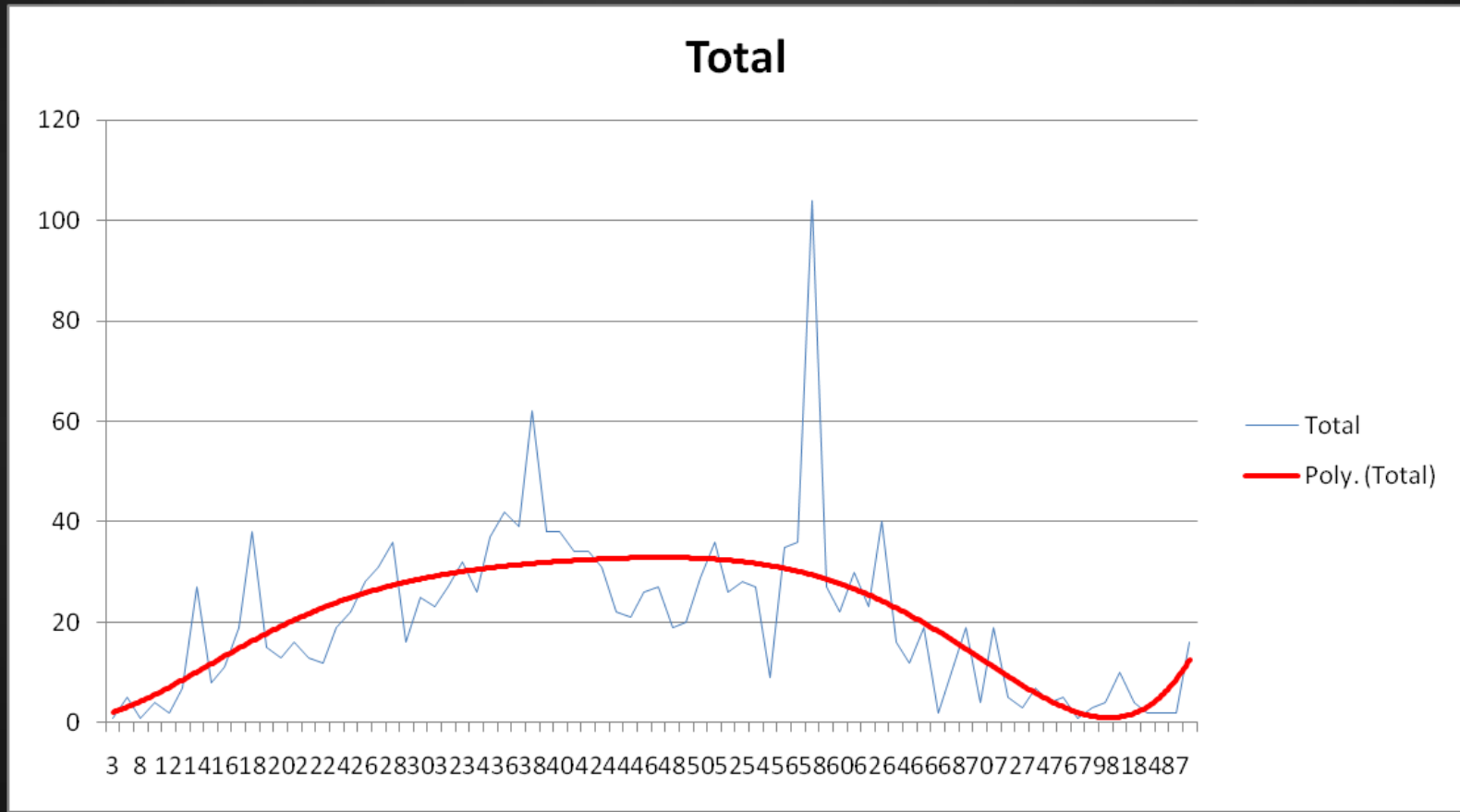
Link authority



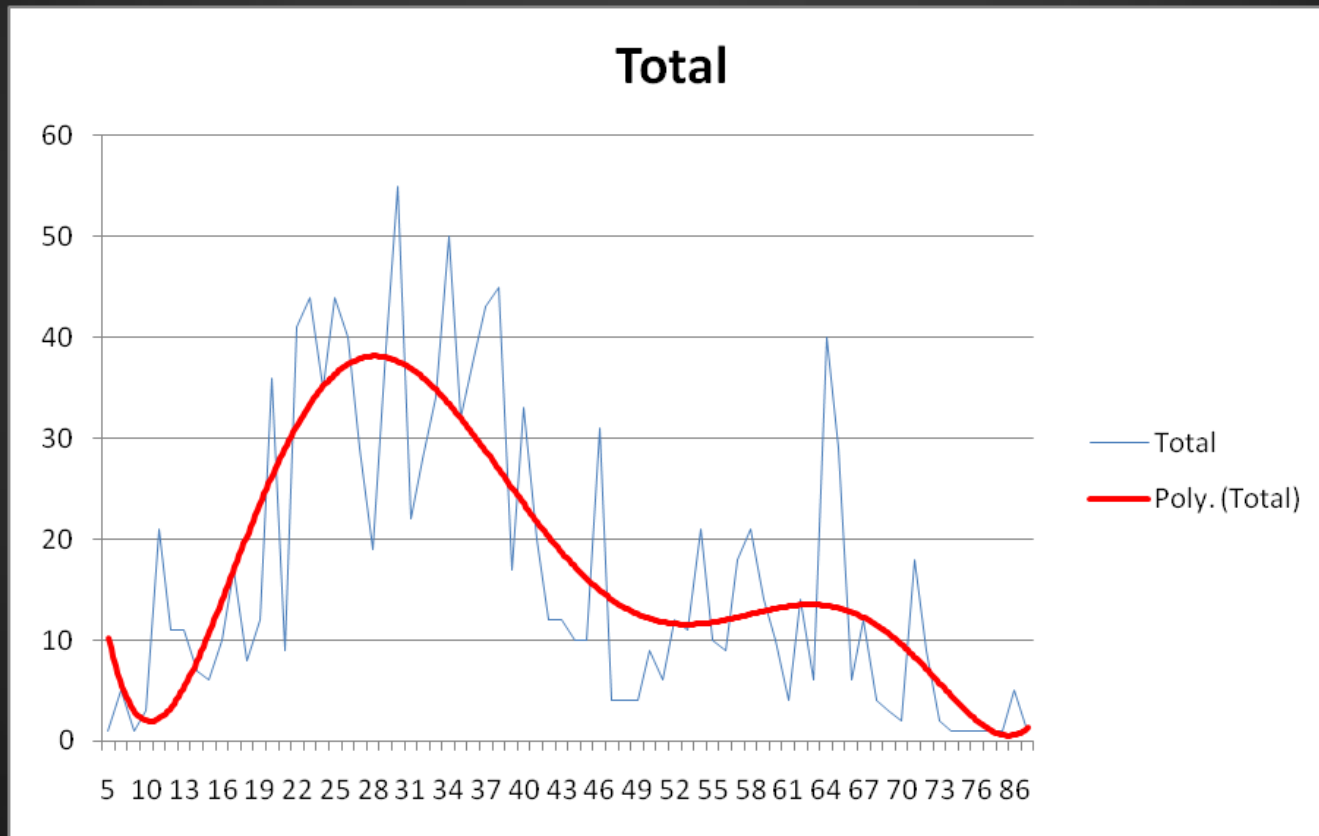
Carphone Warehouse Link Profile



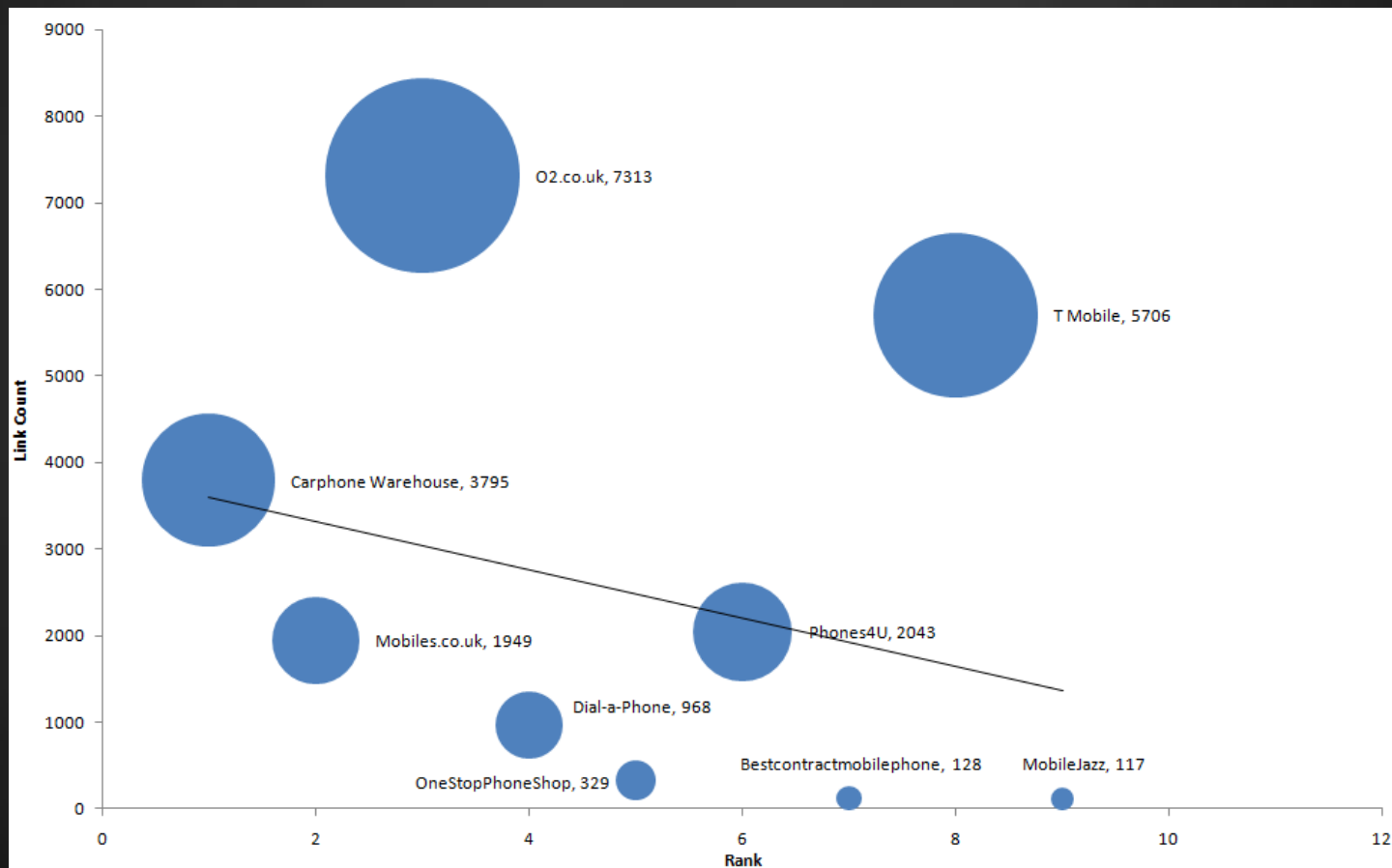
Unnatural Link Profile



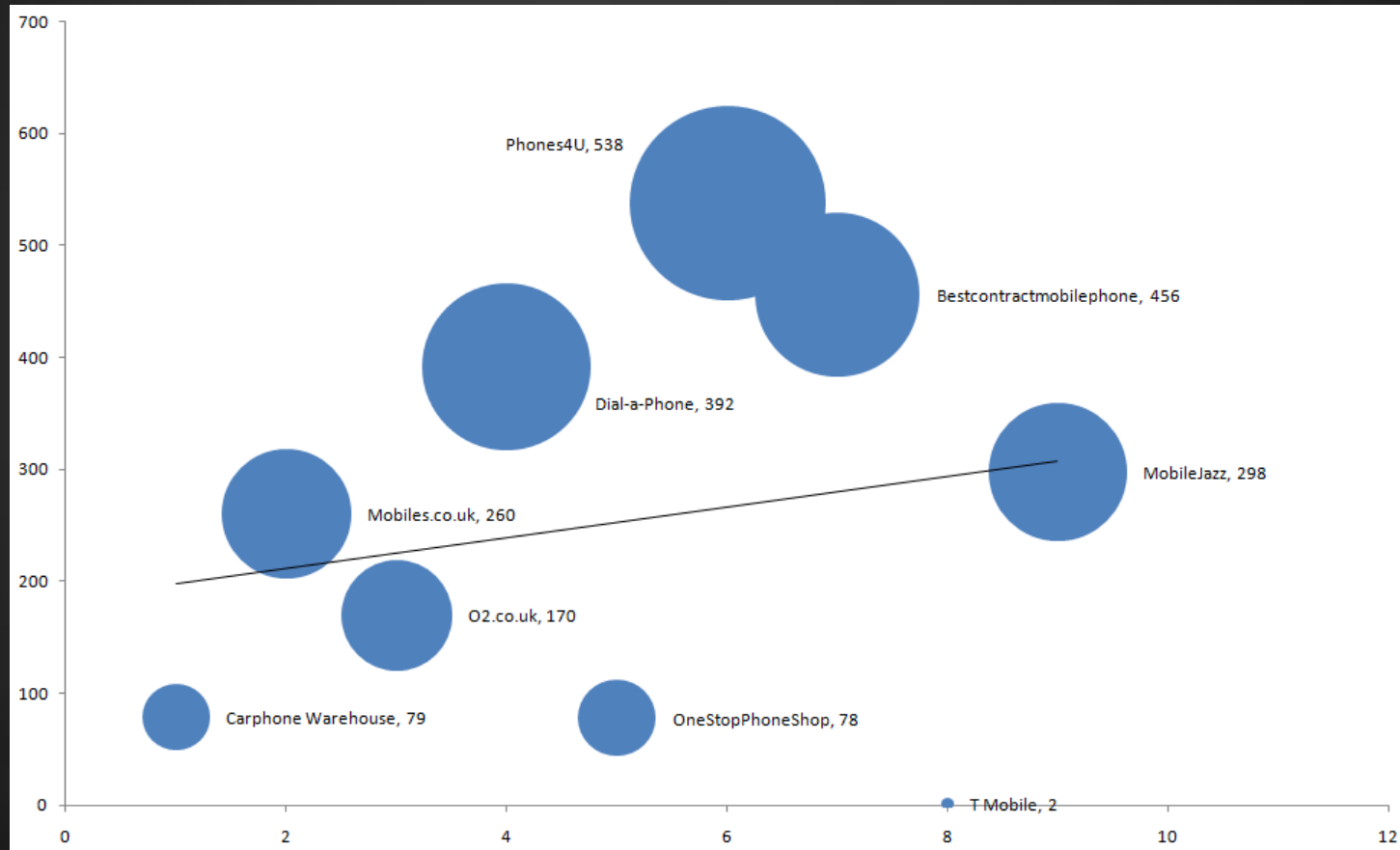
Unnatural Link Profile



Brand Links



Keyword links



The importance of brand links

- We tested 30 highly commercial UK keywords
- Every single keyword followed the same pattern: sites with large brand link authority rank higher
- Non-brands are using branded anchor text links to make Google believe they are brands

What about anchor text & paid links?

- Most people think that paid or unnatural links are devalued based on the site that they are placed on
- For example if the site is openly selling links and putting groups of paid links in sidebars or footers...

Naturalness

- What we found is that Google appears to be doing the opposite
- They are devaluing links based on the “naturalness” of a sites link profile
- Sites with very natural link profiles can use obvious spammy or paid links with immediate positive results
- The same links pointed to a site with lesser brand authority are devalued and have no effect
- JC Penney went too far!

Implications

- To succeed in Google a site needs to have a high amount of “natural” links with more brand authority than competitors
- If you don’t have this authority already you need to create it
- Once you have brand authority you only need a very small number of anchor text links to rank

Good news

- It's a lot easier to get brand anchor text than keyword anchor text in links
- Very few people know about this so you can get a head start on your competitors

Easy 4 step strategy

- Analyse industry & find out how much brand authority the leading sites have
- Find out how much keyword anchor text link authority they have
- Analyse your link profile and build up your brand authority so it's higher than your competitors
- Then build your keyword authority until you hit the top

Content syndication

When looking for brand anchor text this is highly effective

- MarketWire
- PRweb
- PR News Wire
- Article syndication systems
- Blog networks that syndicate content
- Guest posts

Replicating competitor links

- Think about why each link was given
- Is it a paid link?
- Did the company attend a trade show or event?
- Is it from one of their business partners?
- What are your chances of getting the link?

Some final points

- Link-building is a very difficult task
- Results can take a long time to deliver
- Analyse the industry and your link profile to understand what type of links you need
- Don't rely on natural link-building in the hope that you will get to the top eventually - you won't
- Don't assume that your big brand competitors who are using paid links will be penalised – they probably won't

Learning more

- Read Blogstorm.co.uk - UK's largest blog about SEO with over 10,000 daily readers
- Email patrick@branded3.com for free SEO advice
- Visit our website at Branded3.com

