


LOOKING FOR ANSWERS?

# Private Blog Networks

*Discover the truth about PBN .*



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KNOW IN A FREE GUIDE




+ 44 (0)1242 644348  
[hello@clickintelligence.co.uk](mailto:hello@clickintelligence.co.uk)



# Private Blog Networks

## INTRODUCTION

In this eBook, we will talk you through everything you need to know about private blog networks (PBNs) and how they can impact your business as well as your backlink profile.



*For more information on the about Click Intelligence or if you would advise on building your backlink profile in a safe way please get in touch.*

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# WHAT ARE PRIVATE BLOG NETWORKS?

Private blog networks are a collection of websites created to improve SEO (and therefore increase revenue) for the owner's primary site or blog. Think of it as one main website with ten or twelve micro sites orbiting it, each of which provides backlinks to the "money site." These microsites are usually inactive or contain duplicate content, and are designed to trick Google's algorithms into thinking they are legitimate.

The PBN concept is built on the idea that it's cheaper and easier to leverage link equity across multiple sites than it is to earn backlinks organically. However, this is rarely the case. In fact, creating or belonging to a PBN could actually put your business at risk.

Whether you're a website owner, blogger or a link building consultant, chances are you've had the virtues of PBNs explained to you before, probably by someone with a vested interest.

Before you get involved in one of these networks, it's important to understand precisely what PBNs are and why they are dangerous.

***Google has long been fighting PBNs for years - Google's Penguin algorithm, which now runs in real time as part of the core ranking algorithm, can detect these kinds of schemes and devalue your website rankings as a result.***

Buying PBN links can be quite dangerous to your business and backlink profile. If you are in the habit of buying cheap links, you are more than likely in a pool of people who are also buying them from the same sources.

These companies love to sell links and place them on the same private blogging networks.

# IDENTIFY A PBN

## HOSTING

All the IP will be the same? You can use [SpyOnWeb.com](https://spyonweb.com) or similar tools to identify what sites are hosted with any other site.

## DESIGN

Do the sites all use a similar design, theme, navigation, colour scheme? This is a big red flag when it comes to PBNs.

## CONTENT

Duplicate content is another sign, Copy a paragraph into Google search to see if the content exists on other sites.

## BACKLINK

Backlink profile, check the backlink profile in Ahrefs or Majestic to see how much interlinking is occurring between sites.

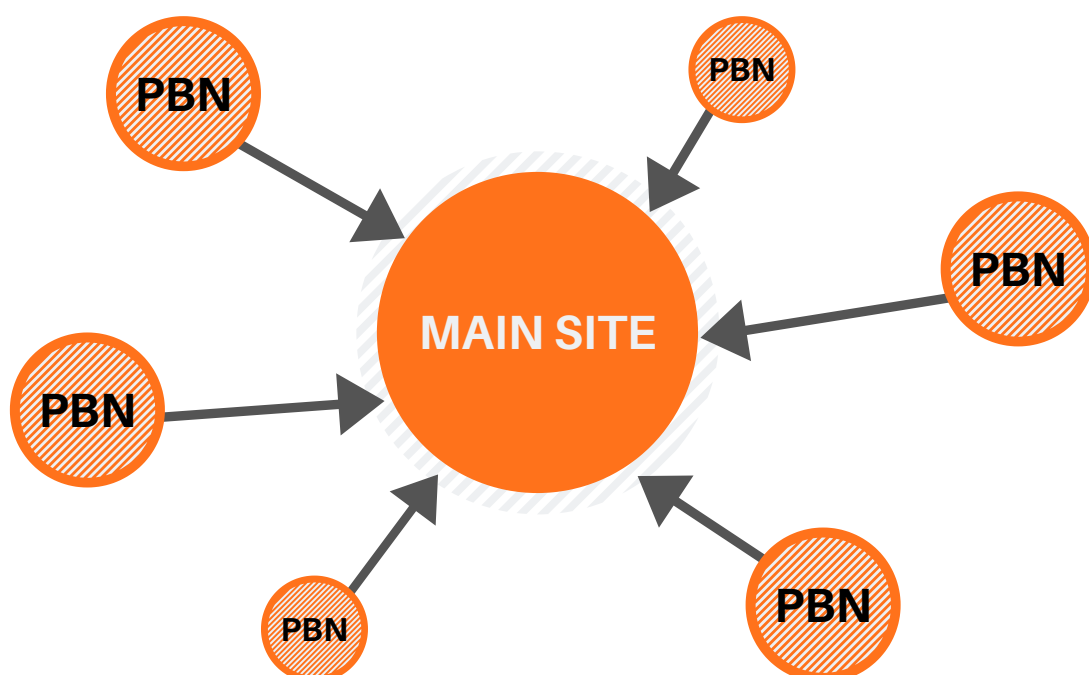
# WHAT DO PRIVATE BLOG NETWORKS DO?

You can think of a private blog network like a database of websites, all of which provide backlinks to a primary business site. To create a PBN, you would need to purchase a set of expired domain names with established authority online. You would then use these domains to develop multiple blogs in your niche with backlinks to your main site. It sounds smart in theory, but PBNs are incredibly risky in practice.

The purpose of a PBN is to manipulate search engine rankings to increase website traffic. As you can imagine, Google objects to this practice and has recently started taking action against these networks. This move to block PBNs is known as the private network purge.

As a result of the purge, many sites reported a drop of 50% or more in traffic after Google's Penguin update in 2012, as well as a substantial loss of revenue. For example, Linkamotion was a huge PBN that had all of its sites de-indexed after the update with devastating consequences for the business and its bloggers.

Unfortunately, **your site could belong to a PBN without you even realising**, which is why it's important to be aware of Google's guidelines and make sure you follow them. This is especially important if you outsource link building to a third party; just because you don't know what goes on behind the scenes, doesn't mean you won't be held accountable if someone breaks the rules.



# HOW GOOGLE DETERMINES WEBSITE AUTHORITY

Link building is the number one factor contributing to the rankings of a website. For anyone who is new to this principle, it's important to know how backlinks gained this status and why they are so effective.

A backlink is a hyperlink that leads an external page directly to your website. When these links come from reputable sources, they help boost your SEO because Google thinks, "Ah, this site is credible." These backlinks tell search engines that your website is trustworthy because an established domain has linked it.

Now we've covered backlinks, we can talk about why Google likes them so much, and why it dislikes PBNs being used as shortcuts.

Authority is a major factor in getting your website to the top of Google results when people search your keyword. This is because all search engines strive to find the best, most relevant answers to people's queries, which they achieve by pointing us to credible sites.

However, gaining authority is not always as straightforward as it sounds. Exactly how Google's algorithms work is a long-standing debate, and not even top SEO consultants have all the answers.

We do know, however, that backlinks are a major player in building SEO. According to a recent survey conducted by Moz:

*"21% of Google's ranking algorithm depends on link authority features, or the number of links to a domain and the quality of those links, and 19% depends on the page-level link features, or the number of links to a specific page."*

The attraction of joining a PBN is that they allow websites to establish authority quicker by buying lots of other credible domains and creating a link cycle. It's essentially rising to the top through shady business tactics rather than earning trust organically.

## Google uses a number of markers to assess a website's authority, including:

The number of backlinks and where they come from.

The number of shares on social media.

The quality of the content posted.

Your use of keywords and metadata.

# IMPORTANCE OF BACKLINKS

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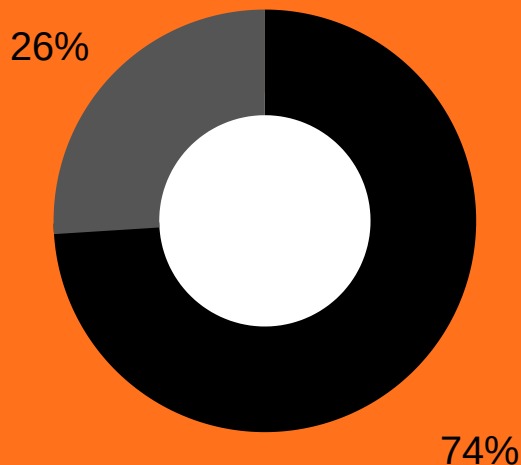
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# LINK BUILDING STATISTICS



**Lists posts on average receive 74% more links than any other content type. (Infographics recieved 62% more backlinks)**

**72%**

**of SEOs believe backlinks are a significant ranking factor**

**When asking in 2017**

***Do SMBs have enough time for link building?***

**Unsurprisingly, smaller teams have much less resources to try out different link building tactics.**

**While an average representative of a large SEO agency team would mention using ~14 link building tactics over the year, an average small business owner would mention trying only 8.**

**USA interest for “link building” has grown 43% since 2005**

**43%**





The line we are fed about private blog networks is partly true: joining a PBN can improve your search engine rankings. It can also generate passive traffic to your site and, in theory, grow your business. However, the risks of using one far outweigh the benefits, and your credibility could just as easily be destroyed.

Joining a private blog network can expose you to many dangers, so professional SEO consultants will always recommend you steer clear.

It's much better to build your links organically using white hat strategies, which we'll talk more about later.

There is a lot of misinformation about private blog networks, the primary myth being that they are safe and acceptable. In fact, you may find reputable blogging sites endorsing them as a means to improve rankings.

Make no mistake, however – the owner of the site waxing lyrical about PBNs probably already owns one. Much like the miracle weight loss pill representative endorsing the product, you should take what any blogger with an active interest in PBNs says with a pinch (better yet, a handful) of salt.

## WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF USING A PBN?

Private blog networks are often painted as a “get rich quick” scheme for bloggers and website owners. However, like most opportunities that sound too good to be true, they almost always are. Whether you own or simply belong to a PBN, the dangers include:

- Significant fall in rankings.
- Loss of credibility.
- Difficulty regaining SEO status with Google and other search engines.
- Being removed from Google's index.
- Penalties issued by Google.
- Further legal action was taken against your site.

**BUT DON'T  
PBN GIVE  
YOUR SITE  
AUTHORITY?**

**THE DARK  
SIDE OF PBN'S**

# WHAT IS A PENALTY FROM GOOGLE? WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Google wants your site to be found organically by its users, so its algorithms will ensure your content is relevant and spam-free. Therefore, if Google suspects you have flouted its guidelines, you will be issued with a penalty.

How Google penalises you will vary according to the severity of your breach, but it could have dire consequences for your website and business. Penalties typically fall into two camps: **manual penalties and algorithmic penalties**.

If someone from Google reviews your site and suspects you're using a private blog network to build links, they could issue a manual penalty. This involves being contacted via your Google Search Console account and given a warning.

You should be given a chance to amend your practices to remove the penalty, which will mean deleting all your microsites and changing your link building strategy. Either way, it will be **costly and time-consuming for your business and you will have to start from zero once it's all over**.

Algorithmic penalties are more severe and harder to undo than manual ones. These penalties are given when Google's algorithms spot a red flag. You will most likely suffer a sharp drop in your rankings, usually without warning. Individual pages can also be penalised, or entire sites can be removed from Google's index as a result.

That's not all, however. There are several other downsides to using personal blog networks.



A lot of your precious business hours will go into manipulating Google into thinking your microsites are legitimate. Once you've set up these sites, you'll need to commit to creating content for them on a regular basis. If Google suspects your sites are inactive, they could issue you a penalty.

Posting once a week is recommended, and the sweet spot is usually between 500-1000 words. If you have ten microsites providing backlinks, that's a minimum of 50,000 words per week for sites that aren't even making you money. Plus, if you're not writing those articles, you're going to have to pay for somebody else to write them, which leads us to our next point.

If you want to participate in a PBN, you're going to need a lot of money to invest in these different sites. Established domain names with good link profiles are not cheap; then you'll need to design and maintain them.

You'll also need to pay hosting fees for each site, and you will probably need to use separate hosting platforms if you want to avoid getting caught.

In essence, you are spending money to create fake websites that don't contribute to your income and could destroy your business...

It's not uncommon for private network owners to approach bloggers, website companies, and even SEO agencies to convince them to join their PBN. Some so-called Internet marketers may even recommend the tactic to help you build website authority quickly.

However, no reputable SEO consultant will recommend private blog networks for increasing traffic online. So, if anyone asks you to participate in a link exchange, you should run a mile.

Don't be tempted to buy links online, either. Sites like Fiverr tend to participate in link swapping, but this is still seen as black hat, and it could put your site in danger.

## **WASTED TIME**

## **LOSS OF MONEY**

## **YOU'VE BEEN APPROACHED TO JOIN A PBN. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?**

# ARE YOU APART OF A PBN WITHOUT YOU KNOWING?

**In a word, yes.**

**If you outsource your link building to a third party, there's a chance you could belong to a PBN without even knowing it. Therefore, it's in your interest to find out everything you can about white hat and black hat strategies and make sure you know what your SEO team is doing.**

**Remember: your SEO strategies are being carried out in your company's name, so you will be held accountable if Google's guidelines are flouted, even if you were unaware of the breach.**

**When you employ someone to enhance your web presence, you're essentially handing over the reigns of your business. Therefore, you should only hire credible SEO and Internet marketing agencies that use white hat techniques, which will be outlined below.**



# PROTECTING YOUR BUSINESS AGAINST PRIVATE BLOG NETWORKS

PBNs are dangerous. They can result in professional suicide for website and blog owners, so it's important to protect your organisation against the risks.

The easiest way to avoid the dangers of a PBN is not to join one. However, as we've already discussed, it's not always that simple. To protect yourself against PBNs, you need to understand how SEO works.

This involves learning which strategies Google considers legitimate and which are seen as link schemes.

## UNDERSTANDING WHITE HAT AND BLACK HAT SEO

When it comes to private blog networks, the link juice is never worth the squeeze. Moreover, using these networks can be dangerous and costly for your business, so they are best avoided at all costs. Luckily, there are many safer link-building alternatives to improve your SEO organically. Before we discuss these alternatives, here is a little background on how SEO works and the difference between white hat and black hat techniques.

*(A note: PBNs are not strictly black hat, but they aren't considered white hat either. However, Google doesn't see it this way. To Google, PBNs are a link manipulation tactic, which means they fall into the "black hat" category.)*

# WHITE HAT VS BLACK HAT STRATEGIES

## WHITE HAT HAT STRATEGIES

**HIGH QUALITY  
CONTENT**

**ORIGINAL  
CONTENT  
CREATION.**

**EFFECTIVE  
KEYWORD USE.**

**LINKBAITING.**

**TITLES.**

**METADATA.**

**SITE  
OPTIMISATION.**

## BLACK HAT HAT STRATEGIES

**DUPLICATED  
CONTENT.**

**KEYWORD  
STUFFING.**

**DOORWAY  
PAGES.**

**HIDDEN TEXT.**

**LINK  
MANIPULATION.**

**CLOAKING.**

**ARTICLE  
SPINNING.**