

Interview with John Doherty



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John Doherty

The Interview :

Hi John, first of all thank you for answering these few questions! Here's an easy one to begin: can you introduce yourself?

My pleasure, and for sure! My name is John Doherty. I'm currently the head of Distilled New York City and a senior consultant. I work with clients of all sizes, from venture backed startups to large international corporations. I also lead a team of analysts and consultants in the New York office. In my spare time I try to blog, write and create. I also run [HireGun](#) on the side to generate leads for reputable marketers and deserving businesses. I also have a social life and enjoy all sorts of active sports, especially rock climbing, skiing, and cycling.

I remember a Whiteboard Friday on Moz where you talked about internal linking. I think it's something underestimated, at least here in France, how can you show how important it is?

If you're in even a remotely competitive space, you can easily pull site metrics of a site and its competitors and I would bet that a combination of the quantity of internal links as well as the anchor text will correlate pretty well to rankings. I usually pitch a test to show that increasing internal linking will work to increase rankings so that I can then get more buy-in from higher management for resources.

Surprisingly, I believe it's much easier to deal with internal linking on a big website than on a small one. Are we limited only by the main menu with small websites? How would you act for, let's say, a 20-pages website?

You're definitely not limited to a main menu on a small website. You can link via the sidebar as well and within content. What's important, I'd say, is the context of the page to the page you are linking

to. For example, before I start linking I think "does this link make sense to live on this page? Do I expect people to click it?" If the answer is no, then the link shouldn't go there!

So, what I'm saying is you should always categorize the pages on your site. Are they product pages? Blog pages? Then categorize them by topic. Are they shoes pages? Shirts pages? And then think about what makes sense to link together, and what people might want to order at the same time.

Let's talk about external linking now, every day a new blog post comes out about link building but it seems that most of them look the same (I am to blame too). Do we already know everything? Is there anything new to learn?

There's always more to learn! I think that a lot of people out there know how to do good link building, but are too lazy to do it. Honestly, sometimes we just need to go back to the basics and get those right - links from high quality, authoritative, and relevant sites. We need to quit looking for loopholes and start just doing good work.

That said, there is always a new tactic you haven't tried on your site. Have you done broken link building? Have you produced visualizations of data? There is always something new to try.

When you say visualization of data, I guess you talk about a specific way to create link baiting. How do you evaluate if it is worth the effort of thinking about it? I mean it takes resources: time spent to collect data, time spent on creating content, time spent on contacting people when it's online (or just before), etc. It is often difficult to allocate that much resources when there are many doubts concerning the results.

I actually think this is the wrong way of thinking about content marketing or linkbait/creation of content to get links. If you're just creating content to get links, you're missing out on a much bigger picture - branding, inbound traffic, lead generation, etc. If you just focus on the links and put a quota on it, then anyone can go and get you a lot of crappy links that won't help you.

Instead, start off by asking "What do we need?" and then building a marketing plan around that. If it's more qualified traffic to the site, then a combination of content and other channels like social can help in the short term while building organic traffic.

The point is, the question is not "Should we create content and how can we justify the expense?" but rather "What are our goals and what will get us there?" Once you've done this, then you can put in place the numbers you need to hit (aka \$100k more in sales), the cost per acquisition based on content or other means (ie paid or social), your conversion rate, and then model out a timeline for how long it will take and the investment it will take. How long until you see a return on the investment potentially? This is the question you need to answer.

Outreach seems to be the big question. As we all know more or less the arguments to convince a professional of the web to link to us, how would you convince someone who is not really into it to

link back to our website? For example a tourism office or an institutional website, as they mostly depend on an agency and have lots of "editorial rules" to follow?

In the past I would've said "If they turn you down then let it be. There are bigger fish to fry than trying to convince someone to link to you." I still think this is somewhat true, but it also depends on the site. I saw someone (I forget who) recently say that they have a response for when someone says no. Normally it's along the lines of "I'm sorry to hear that. Can I ask why you said this? I'd love to learn so that I can do better in the future." Often this will open up a conversation with the person and potentially a relationship, and then a link.

I like the idea of creating relationships; I try to do this as much as I can. But at the end of the week it's hard to tell my manager "OK I spent N time creating true relationships with 15 bloggers, 7 journalists and 10 people that are on the same activity as ours but not competitors" "Great! How many links did you get?" "8". How would you persuade him it's the right way to work, even if it takes time and if it can last a long time before getting results? (It seems that everything is about convincing somebody!)

That's a great question and I think it gets down into the psychology of how people work. Does your boss value relationships? If not, why are you going to tell him that you spent time building relationships? What he cares about is links, so tell him the links and what the strength of them is. But, also show him other links that have been built by your brand advocates or social traffic driven by them. Links is a terrible metric for relationships. Often you can point back to amplification over social channels (ie how many people did their tweets reach), traffic driven via social, and links that they built as well.

How do you see link building in the next few years?

Google will crack down on manipulative guest posting, more link networks will be deindexed and new ones will spring up, paid links will still work pretty well until you're caught or push it too far, and quality content that earns links will win in the long term (though you have to supplement it with other types of marketing in the short term).

When I started to write on Noviseo, it was dedicated to beginners, so if you had only one advice to give to someone who wants to become a SEO, what would it be?

Launch your own website with your own domain name and paid hosting, learn how to connect with people online, write some content and promote it, and learn how to build some links. Then keep doing that, and as you build sites you'll learn more about large site issues and how to solve them.