



The Ultimate Guide to Private Blog Networks



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Intro

Private Blog Networks (“PBNs”) have been used to influence search engines for as long as backlinks have been a ranking factor. And, despite a lot of evolution in the field of SEO, they will likely remain a common strategy for a long time to come.

Since PBNs violate Google's Webmaster Guidelines, they've remained a controversial practice. And yet, SEOs continue to rely on them in just about every competitive niche. We've been testing and hosting PBNs for almost a decade and have learned a lot about what it takes to create and keep a PBN healthy.

If you're new to PBNs, or even intermediate, this ultimate guide to PBNs will give you everything you need to build your own and start dominating the SERPs.

One thing we want to make clear from the start, since mainstream SEOs and agencies will want to talk from their high-horse: **PBNs are not unethical nor are they black-hat.** The phrase “black hat” is (intentionally?) misused, but the distinction between white/grey and black is very clear: when doing black hat SEO you're hacking and/or exploiting other people's websites. With PBNs, it's all your property.

Yes, they are against Google's Guidelines (so you can call them “grey hat”) but so are any other types of link-building efforts, like buying links, and even popular “white hat” options like outreach and guest posts.

Going against a corporation's guidelines is not unethical, especially when that [corporation is a monopoly and steals from its advertising partners and manipulates the search pages for their benefit](#).

If you're a small business, Google is not your friend. Google is a trillion-dollar corporation that primarily wants to sell ads, and after that, it [strongly prefers ranking large websites](#). For a small business to compete in that market, they need to use all the tools available to them.

With that in mind, let's jump in.



What is a Private Blog Network?

A PBN is a group of blogs on authority domains and hosted on different servers with different IPs. These blogs are created to simulate natural quality backlinks to the owner's money site.

As close as your blogs get to simulating quality niche websites, the harder it is for Google to find or penalize your PBN.

Here's a simple example: your client is a plumber in your city. You find a domain that years ago belonged to a different plumber. This plumber was featured as a "businessman from a community" in a few local newspapers, which brought a lot of links to his website.

He then retired and left the domain to expire. You register this domain and build a new blog on it about plumbing. Since most of the links to the domain are still live, the blog will keep a lot of the authority that the previous owner built.

Private Blog Networks come in many shapes and sizes. From small and cheap to real blogs and news sites that do actual blogging, but their primary goal is to promote other websites and products. The latter ones are mostly the domain of large companies and SEO agencies.

The ultimate goal is to have control over link-building efforts for your money sites. The alternative is to rely on other webmasters to editorially place backlinks on their sites, which are outside of your control.

PBNs are a great alternative to just about every other link-building tactic. The main drawback is the high upfront investment in time and money of building a PBN.

What can go wrong with PBNs?

If you build your PBN the right way, there is a really small chance of something going wrong. The two main concerns that most people have when thinking about PBNs are that the network is discovered and deindexed (basically making backlinks from the PBN sites worthless) or that it will result in a penalty to the money site the PBN links to.

So let's address these concerns in order:



Will PBNs get deindexed?

Very unlikely. This was mostly happening to high-profile SEO bloggers in 2016 when Google ran a large scare campaign against blog networks. And it worked like gangbusters, as everyone has been touting their propaganda since.

This guide covers in painstaking detail what needs to be done and how to avoid search engines discovering your PBN. With all the right safeguards in place, the chance of getting sites deindexed is very low. Experienced SEO professionals who use PBNs advocate treating your PBN sites as legitimate sites rather than a “facade” made-for-link networks.

Your best and most powerful PBN blogs should look and feel like genuine sites that create genuine value for visitors. If you build them like that, there's no reason to expect manual actions, even from human reviewers.

Should I buy PBN links?

Absolutely not. The P in PBNs stands for “private” and not “public” blog networks. If anyone can buy a link, those are coming from public blog networks. And buying links from those is a very bad idea. Those are way easier to find by Google and easier to penalize. Always build your own blog network, and don't sell links on it. That way, it'll be much harder for anyone to find your PBN or for search engines to give you a manual penalty.

When should you use a PBN, and why do SEOs continue to use them?

Have you noticed that Google is ranking more or less the same type of content on the first page? That's the whole premise of tools like Surfer or Page Optimizer Pro. Everyone is using them, and everyone writes very similar content, which means that, in the end, links are what's ranking you on the first page.

If you're in a very competitive industry, you can be 100% sure that your competitors are using PBNs (besides buying a ton of links). You have no chance of ranking with just “quality content” as that's become a prerequisite now – well, what Google considers quality anyway.

If you're in an industry that's not online-first, like local services, then PBNs are also very useful. It's hard to acquire backlinks to a plumber's website.



With direct control of the sites where links are coming from, you don't just control where the backlinks point, you also control other related signals, such as anchor text and the topical relevance of the link source.

Having control of this aspect is a massive advantage over just getting backlinks inserted into an unrelated blog post, as you would with other link-building methods.

Is it easy to build a PBN?

It's simple but not easy, as the cliché goes. There's a lot of tedious work in all steps of the process, but the concept itself is pretty straightforward: buy good expired domains with backlinks, host them on a good PBN host to get IP diversity, restore the original content, add your own content, wait a few weeks, then link to your website(s).

How to create a PBN

There are three major steps to building a PBN:

1. Buying expired domains that have links and domain authority. You can choose between expired domains, closeout domains (before expiry), or auction domains.
2. Hosting on a PBN host that gives you good IP diversity.
3. Restoring the content, adding new content, and sending links to your money site.

Within each of those steps is a lot of legwork, but don't let that scare you. One of the main things to understand is that PBNs aren't built overnight.

If you want to build a PBN that will last, it's going to happen over a long period of time. Think of it as a marathon, not a sprint.

We'll discuss all of these items in the next few chapters.



Finding expired domains for your PBN

A brand new domain obviously has no authority, so we need to find domains that people did not renew and still have links going to them. To get this right, you'll need two paid tools. One is [SEO Domain Finder](#), to browse through auction domains and closeouts. It scrapes all registrars and lists domains which you can then filter based on your requirements.

The other is [Ahrefs](#) (or [Majestic](#), [Semrush](#), [Serp](#)) to check the link profile of your future PBN domain. You want to make sure the links going to the website are quality links and not just spam.

We usually focus on auction and closeout domains. You can also buy expired (or dropped, free to register) domains, but some SEOs report expired domains as having less power than domains that never dropped. You can test it out for yourself. That said, nowadays it's almost impossible to find a good free domain with history.

You can spend anywhere from \$50-\$250+ per domain, depending on the name and backlink profile.

So what are the metrics you're looking for? The expired domain should have at least 10 Ahrefs Domain Rating and 10+ referring domains. Anything lower than that, and the results will be questionable. Much better metrics than that, be prepared to pay in the hundreds of dollars per domain. Always try to find domains related to your niche since topically relevant links are worth more than generic ones.

And don't expect to be able to buy tens of domains per day. There are a ton of people doing this, so you'll need to be fast and lucky. You can be happy if you get 3-5 good domains per week.

Expired Domains Checklist

Quality Metrics

Check	How To Check
<input type="checkbox"/> How strong are the domain's top backlinks and are they likely to remain?	Ahrefs, Majestic, Semrush, or Serped.
<input type="checkbox"/> Is the domain relevant to your niche? <small>Optional but recommended.</small>	Ahrefs, Majestic, Semrush, or Serped.
<input type="checkbox"/> What is the ratio between external domains and referring IPs? <small>Aim for below 10.</small>	Ahrefs, Majestic, Semrush, or Serped.

SEO Metrics

SEO Metric		Minimum	Where to Check
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ahrefs Domain Rating (DR)	10	Ahrefs, Serped
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ahrefs URL Rating (UR)	10	Ahrefs, Serped
<input type="checkbox"/>	Majestic Trust Flow (TF)	10	Majestic, Serped
<input type="checkbox"/>	Majestic Citation Flow (CF)	10	Majestic, Serped

Domain Health

Check	How To Check
<input type="checkbox"/> Is the domain indexed? Required for auction domains.	Google site:domain.com
<input type="checkbox"/> Does it have a clean backlink and anchor text profile? Nothing should be from/about pharma, adult or gambling sites.	Ahrefs, Majestic, Semrush, or Serped.
<input type="checkbox"/> Check link loss. Don't buy a domain that lost a majority of backlinks in the last few months.	Ahrefs, Majestic, Semrush, or Serped.
<input type="checkbox"/> Did the domain have relevant content?	Wayback Machine
<input type="checkbox"/> How many times has the domain dropped? Target below 3.	Domain History



Finding the right hosting for your PBN

There are countless PBN hosts, but choosing the right provider will make all the difference to your outcomes. Priorities to look out for are services such as:

- IP address diversity with varying A, B, and C-Block IP addresses and on different hosting providers.
- Nameservers given directly by the hosting providers, not nameservers unique to the PBN host.
- Management and setup tools to minimize the time and effort required to create your PBN.

You can't have your PBN websites hosted on one web host because they will have the same IP address, which clearly connects them to one owner.

Your blogs need to be hosted on different hosting providers, servers, and IPs. Since you don't want to be opening accounts on tens of different hosts and managing them separately, there are PBN hosting services that do that for you. Avoid whatever calls itself SEO hosting as it's the old way of doing things and only provides different IPs but only custom nameservers which are a big footprint (more on these later).

We are obviously biased, but we built Easy Blog Networks to be the best solution for hosting your PBN. Your blogs are hosted by multiple reputable hosting providers, including Amazon Web Services, Digital Ocean, Linode, and others. Every blog is on a unique non-sequential IP, so you get the best diversity and natural-looking backlink profile.

**Sign up for a 7-day free trial of
Easy Blog Networks »**



Creating your first PBN blog

Easy Blog Networks makes it really easy to add a new blog. Just add a domain and blog name, and everything else, like server selection and blog settings randomization, is done by the system.

Add Blog

or [transfer an existing blog](#)

Blog Domain *

Domain name where the blog will be deployed (add www. when needed).

Blog Network *

Niche Blogs

Add and manage blog networks on the [Settings](#) page.

Blog Title *

The WordPress "Site Title".

Advanced Settings (optional) +

Add Blog

You can have your first PBN blog up and running in a few minutes after signing up.

Managing your PBN blogs

Once your PBN is up and running, you'll need to maintain it. There is obviously the need for regular content but you also need to manage the technical side of blogs, like updates and backups.

EBN does a lot of these things for you. You don't need to worry about security, backups, updates, or performance. And there is also content posting automation as well, which we'll mention in the chapter about content.



Restoring the previous site structure and content

Ideally, you have bought a domain that has a few easy-to-restore pages that also have links going to them, and it does not have weird URLs. You'll want to get as much of that old content back up and indexed.

Restoring the old design

You can go for a full restore with Web Archive restoration services. This works best if you keep the site in HTML though that makes it really hard to edit. If you buy the conversion to WordPress, it usually makes a mess of posts and pages and will be hard to edit in the future.

You don't need a direct copy of the website anyway. The important bits are the URL structure and content. Specifically, content that has links going to it. So find a free WordPress theme that looks similar to the previous site and replicate the structure and restore the most important pages.

You can also find someone on Fiverr to do it. Depending on the size of the website, you're looking at \$30-50.

Redirecting old URLs

If the URLs before were not clean (like how WordPress makes them: *domain.com/topic/blog-post*), you can use the plugin Redirection to add redirects. Example: if a page was on *domain.com/subpage.html*, you'd need to add a 301 redirect from */subpage.html* to the new */subpage*.



Remove personal information

Be a good internet citizen and remove any personal information and photos of the previous owners. Remove all names, addresses, and phone numbers. You can replace the people photos with [AI-generated images](#) and use [Pixabay](#) for other (free) images.

One time at EBN, we received a takedown request from a charity because a user was impersonating them by keeping their full information and photos on the PBN blog. Don't be that guy/gal.

Publishing new content

Not long ago, this was the most expensive part of building and maintaining a PBN. With ChatGPT and similar AI writing tools, not anymore.

ChatGPT tips

If you haven't yet, buy the Plus version. I don't think there's been a tool more underpriced than this at \$20/m. It's currently also the only way to get access to GPT-4 (and Plugins).

Writing

- Give it as many details as possible. The longer and better the prompt, the better the final result.
- If you're not getting good results, try "priming" it with training content before your prompt. You can throw a page or two of relevant content and then have it generate the answer after that.
- You can also prime it with a persona prompt by telling it to act like [someone]. Get inspiration from the list on [Awesome ChatGPT Prompts](#).
- If you don't like what it wrote, give it feedback and iterate.
- Is it writing too much fluff? Tell it to "Minimize prose."





Prompts for SEOs

Here are a few prompts to try out when doing keyword research or writing.

Research prompts

Provide a list of long-tail keywords related to [keyword].

Provide a list of relevant topics related to [keyword].

Outline prompts

Write a detailed blog post outline about [keyword/phrase] with H2, H3, subheading, and bullet points.

Write a list of potential questions or points to cover in a blog post on this topic: [insert topic]

At this point, you could tell it to create an article based on the above two prompts.

Writing prompts

Write a blog post about {topic} for {target audience} in {tone of voice}. The article should be no shorter than {###} words and no longer than {###} words. It should be structured with an introduction, body, and conclusion. Use {primary keyword} and {secondary keyword} throughout the post, without overusing them.

I want to write a blog post on the topic of [long explanation of the topic] for my audience of [your audience].

First, generate five questions about the topic.

Second, generate five key things about the topic that are different from the five questions.

Third, write a blog post answering those questions and adding five key things in it.

Fourth, finish with a short summary and add a call to action to [do something].

Fifth, generate an interesting headline for the article.

The article should not be shorter than 1000 words and not longer than 1500 words.

There are, of course, a million other prompts you can try and test out. I recommend you do your own testing and compare results.

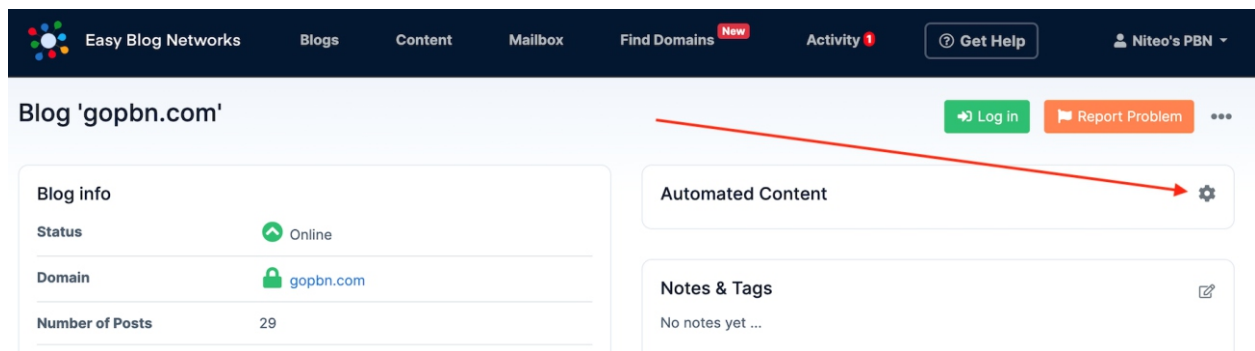


Automating posting

If you signed up for [Easy Blog Networks](#), then another benefit is that you can automate posting of articles by GPT to all your PBN blogs.

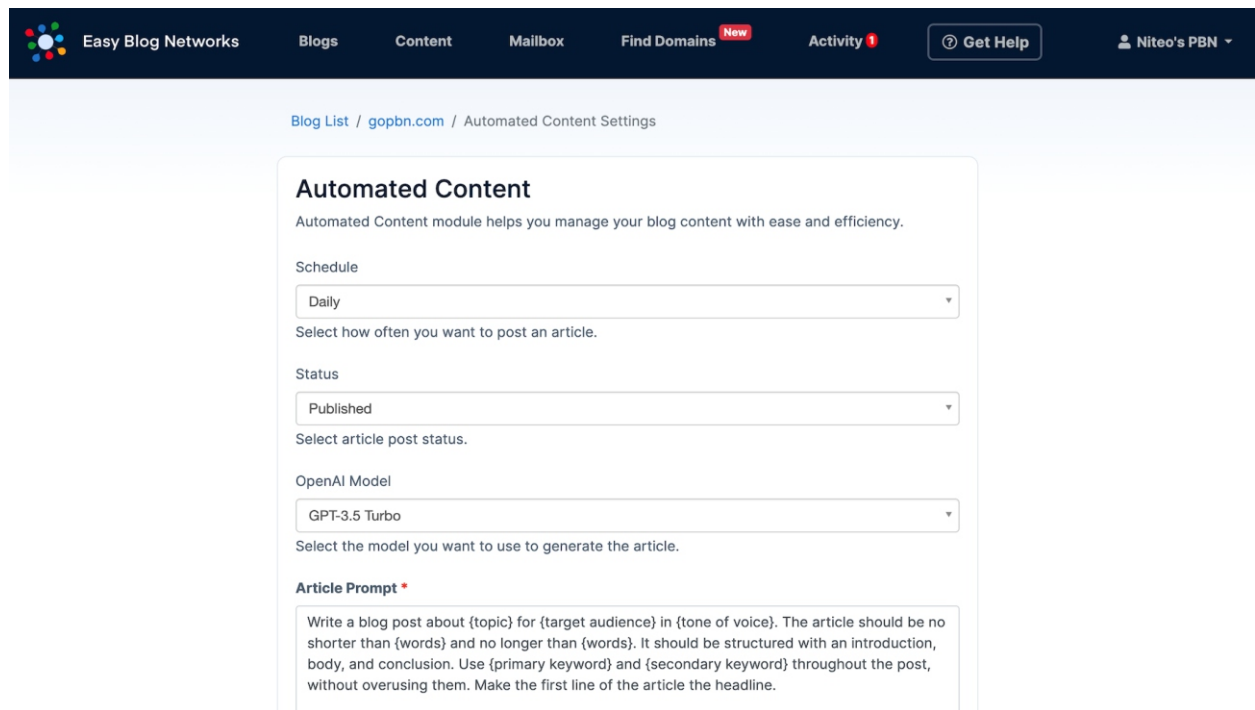
You need your own [OpenAI API key](#) and a prompt for every blog you want the automatic content.

Configuration is really straightforward. Open the blog page, and on the right, you'll see the new Automated Content section.



The screenshot shows the Easy Blog Networks dashboard for a blog named 'gopbn.com'. The dashboard includes a navigation bar with options like 'Blogs', 'Content', 'Mailbox', 'Find Domains', 'Activity', and 'Get Help'. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains 'Blog info' with details: Status (Online), Domain (gopbn.com), and Number of Posts (29). The right column contains 'Automated Content' and 'Notes & Tags'. A red arrow points from the 'Automated Content' section to a gear icon, indicating the configuration options.

Click the cog and select the posting schedule, add the prompt, and select the publish status of the blog post.



The screenshot shows the 'Automated Content Settings' page in the Easy Blog Networks dashboard. The page includes a navigation bar and a breadcrumb trail: 'Blog List / gopbn.com / Automated Content Settings'. The main content area is titled 'Automated Content' and includes a description: 'Automated Content module helps you manage your blog content with ease and efficiency.' Below this, there are four configuration sections: 'Schedule' (set to Daily), 'Status' (set to Published), 'OpenAI Model' (set to GPT-3.5 Turbo), and 'Article Prompt' (with a text area containing a sample prompt: 'Write a blog post about {topic} for {target audience} in {tone of voice}. The article should be no shorter than {words} and no longer than {words}. It should be structured with an introduction, body, and conclusion. Use {primary keyword} and {secondary keyword} throughout the post, without overusing them. Make the first line of the article the headline.').

and believe it or not, that's it! Our system will now take care of generation and posting of articles to your blogs.

Avoiding PBN footprints

There are a lot of myths going around PBNs and footprints. Some give Google god-like powers (knowing your name when registering a hosting account), while others assume it lacks basic web access.

First of all, we need to define a footprint:

A footprint is a unique identifier on all your blogs.

This could be a specific plugin, theme, outbound link pattern, and many other things. Finding most footprints is more complex than running a Google query, so we'll assume the one looking for it has the knowledge, computer- and manpower to do it.

While something can be a footprint, it is not harmful if it's used by thousands, tens of thousands, or even millions of other (legitimate) blogs. This goes for plugins, themes, WordPress itself, and anything else used on a mass scale on the Internet.

So let's classify footprints into three categories:

- harmful (unique to your blogs),
- neutral (unnatural but not harmful) and
- common (seen on thousands of blogs).

Harmful Footprints

These include the two obvious ones, most probably used in the [mass PBN de-indexation at the end of 2014](#) (yes, still relevant): **Whois information** (the same owner on all blogs) and **outbound link pattern** (links only to your websites).

The issue here is when people say, “just link out to authority websites, and you'll be alright”. No! It's really easy to find blogs that link to specific websites AND exclude the top 1000 websites. Always link to other smaller niche websites that are not in direct competition to yours.

Whois privacy is not as big of an issue as a few years ago because with GDPR most registrars have started providing free privacy. Not all though, and GoDaddy is one of those that still show some identifiable information on Whois (like organization name). Make sure you always check what records are shown on your domain Whois.

SOA Records are seen in [DNS reports](#) and include a “hostmaster” email address. If you're using cPanel it usually uses the email you signed up with. This is an enormous problem, so go and remove the email by [clicking Preferences and Update Contact Info](#).



We discussed **nameservers** in detail in our blog post [nameserver footprints](#). In short: make sure you're using the hosting provider's default nameservers, or, if using PBN/SEO hosting that they do not use unique nameservers to their service. Already solved if you're using Easy Blog Networks.

Plugins and themes can also be harmful if they're only used by you or the SEO community. However, it's really easy to hide plugins with a standard 404 error, so if the developers know what they're doing, this shouldn't be an issue.

Another obvious one would be **Search Console**, any kind of **analytics**, or **advertising codes**. These have actual unique IDs in the HTML code and are very easy to find.

Neutral Footprints

These footprints are not enough to get your PBN deindexed, however, they will not help with ranking because they look unnatural, and the links could be discounted.

Hosting on only one provider or C-Block (commonly mis-categorized as "C-Class") providers. If your links' IPs are the same or too close (as is common with SEO/C-Block hosting), they can be discounted because Google expects links coming from a diverse range of IPs.

Other things that you shouldn't do but are not really footprints: only short articles (less than 600 words), only a few blog posts, no general outbound links, no internal links, links only on the homepage, registering bulk of domains on the same day, having domains with only one registrar, etc.

Most of these footprints are easily fixed by creating many different backlinks.

Common Footprints

Plugins, themes, and anything else (like nameserver addresses) that is commonly used by thousands or tens of thousands of other websites. They will not affect your results in any way.

Note: avoid using the same plugins on all blogs since that combination, if specific enough, can be a footprint in itself (and would classify as harmful).



If you're unsure if something can hurt your blog – **think if it would be natural for a legitimate blog.**

For example, some say you can't have more than one link per hosting provider. But let's see – Amazon has 1.5 MILLION customers which probably host over 10 million websites. Does it happen that websites get multiple links from websites hosted on Amazon? Of course, probably very often.

Many similar myths are coming up on groups, but most often, they can be discounted with just a little technical knowledge and common sense.

PBN Footprints Checklist

Domains

Possible Footprint/Issue	What to do
<input type="checkbox"/> Registrars	Use popular registrars (NameCheap, Dynadot).
<input type="checkbox"/> Public auction domains	Buy domains from different marketplaces.
<input type="checkbox"/> Registration date	Don't buy all domains on the same day.

Website

Possible Footprint/Issue	What to do
<input type="checkbox"/> Cheap SEO Hosting	Host only with the reputable and popular hosting providers.
<input type="checkbox"/> 404 redirects to homepage	Rebuild strongest pages, don't use 404 redirect plugins.
<input type="checkbox"/> Short articles	Random length of articles, at least 600-800 words.
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial keywords	Don't write articles only about commercial keywords.
<input type="checkbox"/> No internal pages	Add About Us, Legal, Privacy and other internal pages.
<input type="checkbox"/> Google Search Console, Analytics, AdSense or any other analytics/ad codes	Don't use them. For analytics, find something that doesn't leave a unique code.



Linking

	Possible Footprint/Issue	What to do
<input type="checkbox"/>	Outbound link patterns	Don't link to all money sites from all blogs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No links to other sites	Add links to other small niche sites and authority sites.
<input type="checkbox"/>	All links on front page	Allow links need to drop off the front page.
<input type="checkbox"/>	No links to internal pages/posts	Do internal linking.

Testing your PBN

After you've restored the site and added an article or five of your own content, it's time to prepare for the PBN test. Wait for at least 30 days after domain registration before you do this.

With testing, you're trying to figure out if the domain is toxic or not.

How to test your PBN

Find a low-competition keyword in your PBN's niche. Go to the second or third page and find a site that hasn't changed in a while (old published date). Put the page into a rank tracker for that keyword.

Now, post a short article with an exact match anchor text (i.e., "seo hosting") to the above page. Wait 3-4 weeks and see what happens:

- Goes up a few positions and stays there – fantastic, you have a powerful PBN blog!
- Doesn't do anything – disappointing. You can wait a few more weeks and see if anything changes.
- Goes down – toxic domain, not much you can do but delete it.

When to start link building to your money site?

After your test is done, you're good to go.



Outro

If you've come to the end, congrats! You should now have all the information you need to build your first PBN. You really don't need more guides, reports, paid courses, or blog posts. It's time to put this knowledge into action.

Assuming you already have a website, and it's not in too competitive niche, then a good start is a PBN with 10 blogs. For that, you're looking at \$35/month in hosting on Easy Blog Networks, \$500-\$2500 in domain costs and some time in setting up content automation. But don't worry, these costs don't come all at once and you can easily split them over a few months. The important part is to get started and to take daily action.

Both tools we provide, [SEO Domain Finder](#) for finding domains, and [Easy Blog Networks](#) for hosting have **7-day free trials** so you can explore everything even before fully committing to the strategy.

*If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us
at support@easyblognetworks.com.*



Good luck!

