

A Deep Dive into Backrefs Features: What Works and What Doesn't

When I first started working seriously with backlinks, I made the same mistake a lot of people make: I treated every link as if it were equal. That was about ten years ago, and I was managing SEO for a mid-sized e-commerce site. We had thousands of backlinks, but our organic traffic was flat. It took me months to realize the problem wasn't the number of links, it was that I had no way to filter out the low-quality ones. That is where understanding backrefs features became essential.

Backrefs is a tool designed specifically for analyzing backlink profiles. Unlike general SEO suites that try to do everything, Backrefs focuses on link data. It pulls information from multiple sources, including Moz, Majestic, and its own index. Over the past year, I have used it alongside Google Search Console to compare what Google sees versus what third-party indexes report. The differences are often surprising, and they matter a lot for link building strategy.

Why Backrefs Stands Out for Link Analysis

The core value of Backrefs lies in how it aggregates data. Instead of relying on a single index, it cross-references from Moz's domain authority and page authority metrics, Majestic's Trust Flow, and its own crawl data. This gives you a more rounded picture of your link profile. I have found that when Moz shows a sudden drop in domain authority for a site I track, Backrefs often catches it a day earlier because it updates its index more frequently.

Another practical advantage is the way Backrefs handles anchor text analysis. Many tools show you a list of anchor text strings, but they do not group them semantically. Backrefs groups similar anchor phrases, which makes it easier to spot over-optimization. For example, if you see that 40 percent of your links contain exact-match keywords for "best running shoes," you know it is time to diversify. That kind of insight is hard to get from Ahrefs or SEMrush without manual sorting.

Key Backrefs Features That Actually Save Time

Let me walk through the specific [backrefs features](#) that I rely on most. These are not theoretical; I have used each one in real campaigns.

1. Link Intersect Analysis

This feature compares your backlink profile against competitors. You can enter up to five competitor domains, and Backrefs shows you which sites link to them but not to you. I used

this recently for a client in the SaaS space. We found that three industry blogs were linking to our main competitor but not to us. Two of those blogs accepted guest posts, and we secured placements within a month. The third was a resource page that we could not get on, but knowing that saved us time chasing a dead end.

2. Broken Link Detection with Redirect Suggestions

Broken links are a fact of life on the web. Sites go down, pages get moved, and domains expire. Backrefs scans your link profile for broken links and then suggests which pages on your site should get the redirect. This is more useful than a generic broken link report because it pairs the broken URL with the anchor text and the linking domain. You can prioritize fixes by the authority of the linking site. I once recovered 12 percent of lost link equity just by redirecting broken inbound links to relevant live pages.

3. Link Velocity Tracking

Link velocity, the rate at which you gain or lose backlinks over time, is one of the most overlooked metrics in SEO. Backrefs tracks this on a weekly and monthly basis. When you are doing link building, you want to see a steady increase. But if you see a sudden spike of 200 links in a day, that is usually a sign of spam. I have caught two separate negative SEO attacks this way. The first was a client who woke up to 500 links from Russian casino sites. Because Backrefs flagged the velocity change, we disavowed them before Google penalized the site.

Comparing Backrefs with Ahrefs and SEMrush

I have subscriptions to both Ahrefs and SEMrush, and I still use them for keyword research and competitor analysis. But for pure link profile work, Backrefs holds its own. Ahrefs has a larger index, no question. It finds links that Backrefs misses, especially from newer sites. However, Ahrefs also includes a lot of noise, links from spam domains that inflate your total count. Backrefs applies more aggressive filters by default, so the numbers you see are closer to what Google Search Console reports.



SEMrush, on the other hand, is stronger for site audit tasks and PPC data. Its backlink tool is improving, but I find the interface cluttered. Backrefs keeps things simple: you get a dashboard with your link profile summary, and you drill down from there. There is no learning curve. That matters when you are training a junior team member or a client who just wants to see if their link building is working.

What Backrefs Does Not Do Well

No tool is perfect, and Backrefs has limitations. Its index is smaller than Ahrefs and Majestic. For very large sites with millions of backlinks, the data can lag by a few days. I have also noticed that Backrefs occasionally miscategorizes nofollow and dofollow links. It tends to mark some nofollow links as dofollow when the nofollow attribute is set via JavaScript. That is a minor issue, but if you are doing strict link profile audits, you should double-check with Google Search Console.

Another gap is that Backrefs does not include historical data as far back as Moz or Ahrefs. If you need to see what your link profile looked like three years ago, you will have to use another tool. For most campaigns, the last twelve months of data is enough, but for long-term SEO projects, this can be a problem.

Practical Workflow Using Backrefs Features

Here is the workflow I have settled on after experimenting with different combinations. It uses the backrefs features I described above, plus a couple of other tools for specific tasks.

- Start with Google Search Console to see which links Google actually counts. Export the full list.
- Import that list into Backrefs and run a link intersect analysis against your top three competitors. Look for sites that link to them but not to you.
- Use the broken link detection to find any dead links in your profile. Set up 301 redirects to relevant pages.
- Check link velocity weekly. If you see a spike, investigate the new links immediately.
- Once a month, export anchor text data from Backrefs and review it for over-optimization. Adjust your outreach strategy if needed.

This routine takes about two hours per week for a single site. For an agency managing multiple clients, you can automate the exports and review the summaries. The key is consistency. Link profiles change fast, and tools like Backrefs help you stay on top of those changes without drowning in data.

Final Thoughts on Backrefs for SEO Work

I have been using Backrefs for about two years, and it has become a regular part of my toolkit. It is not a replacement for Ahrefs or SEMrush, but it fills a specific role. If your work involves link building, competitor analysis, or recovering from link-related penalties, the backrefs features I have covered will save you time and give you better data. The link intersect and broken link tools alone are worth the price for anyone who manages backlinks regularly.

One last piece of advice: do not rely solely on any single tool. Use Backrefs for its strengths in filtering and velocity tracking, but verify critical data against Google Search Console and your own manual checks. That combination is what separates a good SEO strategy from a guess.