



Figure 3-2: A standard link-submission form at a link exchange. HTML code is provided for the reciprocal link.



Google claims to distinguish link farms from meaningful link exchanges, and generally discourages using any kind of link exchange site that contains no content besides the links to build PageRank. Choose carefully. The more editorial discretion exercised by the site, the more legitimate it probably is. Use exchanges that maintain a tight topical focus in your field. A general rule is: The more personal the link exchange, the more valuable the incoming link.

Link exchanges work on the principle that a rising tide lifts all boats. If the exchange site benefits from a high PageRank (thanks to dozens of incoming links from participating sites), its enhanced stature in Google bolsters the PageRank of each participating site. The best and most honorable link exchanges concentrate their networks in one certain field, in which case the rising tide is lifting the boats of sites that naturally are in competition. The mutual benefit is well and good, but the challenge remains to distinguish oneself from the high-floating crowd and keep ascending on the search results page. Site optimization techniques described in Chapter 4 can help with that.



When assessing link exchanges, select sites with a reasonably high PageRank — say, 4 or higher. The higher PageRank benefits your own PageRank when Google evaluates the backlink. A high PageRank also provides a kind of Google “stamp of approval,” which might not be forthcoming at a less reputable link farm. (To easily see a site’s PageRank, use the Google Toolbar. For example, in Figure 3-1, the Google Toolbar lists a PageRank of 6.)