

Internet Marketing

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SECRETS



Special SEO Edition

Google's Top Secret
- Code Name Panda -
Algo Change!
How to Put the Bear
Back in its Cage!

Including 19 Things
You Must Do to
Protect Your Search
Engine Rankings!





Pandas are usually docile creatures, but they will attack humans when sufficiently provoked or aggravated. That's exactly what happened with Google's Panda algo change. **We've got one seriously angry bear on our hands.**

I read everything I could on the changes. Most of what I read was rehashes and mashups of what other people wrote, in other words, aggregates of aggregates.

Few caught the original interviews, that are essential to understanding what happened. The result is that, almost everything written to date, missed the core of the algo change.

That's about all I can say without "giving away the farm." LOL... (Pun intended, because the Panda update was also dubbed Farmer by the SEO crowd.) So you'll have to read this entire paper to get the details.

Yes, the content farms were hard hit. So were article directories. Yet some questionable sites remain. How did they do it? What triggers the algo?

I've been doing SEO since 1996. I decided to get to the bottom of it. It turns out that we need to go back over a decade to reveal the key concepts.

Now I have the answers. I'm putting the bear back in its cage. LOL...

Just kidding Google! I really do like you. ;-)

What you get in this report, is actionable advice. 19 steps that you can do right now, to improve your rankings.

Plus I reveal one thing that you do out of habit, that's actually causing your rankings to fall. I tell you how to fix it, so you can get found ahead and instead of the competition.

Introduction

First some brief history for those who need it. I want to give you a little background on how we aggravated the bear. If you've already read all the news coverage and the Wired interview, you may want to skip to the actionable advice. But for those of you just getting up to speed...

Google's Caffeine update in late 2009 added "near real time" feeds from Twitter, Facebook and social media sites. Their index grew very quickly. Their search results accidentally got filled with the dirt from content farms, scrapers and low value pages.

Updates throughout 2010, managed to filter out most the gibberish pages and most of the scraped content. Most of the "auto posting" software was also detected, thanks to the huge footprints they leave.

Then early 2011, we received word from the Official Google Blog, that the Big Panda was about to be released from its cage.

Their aim? *"To find more high quality sites in their search engine."*

Overall it impacts 11.8% of their queries. With Google serving over a billion searches per day, 11.8% is a big number. Nearly 12 million pages per day are affected.

To get an idea of how serious the changes are, a post on SearchMetrics.com shows the damage. Some of the article directory's keyword rankings went down over 90%.

The article directories got hit, because they are a load of crap... in my opinion. If you've ever read some of their articles, they are verbose, light weight fluff, like a grade 5 book report. You'll find better and more accurate info within a few minutes of search.

They got hit for the same reason as content farms and article mills. Thin, low-quality, spun content, that - for the most part - was NOT written by experts.

Everyone I asked about the article directories feel the same way. They'd bounce back to Google for more search results after reading one paragraph. I know I did.

Its nice to see Google agree with my opinion. The article mills and content farms, don't deserve top spots in the search engine.

Many of the low quality press release sites were hammered as well. That's because of all the abuse from cheesy, fake press releases that were dumped in them.

Also hard hit, were sites with excessive advertising. You know the ones.

They have a 3 to 1 advertising to content ratio above the fold. Many with blinking banners and animated GIFs that don't adhere to the IAB's advertising standard of 15 seconds max for animation.

One example, an article site that lost nearly all rankings, had three large AdSense blocks, a blinking banner, and two large ad blocks from three separate ad networks.

Most of the content is user generated, in tiny impossible to read 8 point type, except the comments like, "Great Post." Which are obvious plants. Sheesh!

Well, I hope the spammers are happy now. They've been dumping their toxic waste in the last oases of links for years, and now the water's no good. Article marketing is dead. Press releases are dead. Content mills are dead. MFA sites (made for AdSense) are dead...

But do not despair, for in the words of Albert Einstein, *"In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity."*



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Google's Modus Operandi

Here's what Google likes to do...

Hire a bunch of human students. Record the behavior patterns of the humans. Program the machine to mimic the human behavior. Then get rid of the humans.

This method has worked well for Google in the past. Most major updates, like the infamous Florida update, have been done this way. So it should come as no surprise that Google's using human reviewers again.

The "raters" as Google call them, visit a list of sites and vote on them with a custom Chrome browser extension. Their behavior gets fed into a database. Then the engineers program the algo to mimic what the humans did.

In the Wired.com Q&A with Amit Singhal and Matt Cutts, the Google reps revealed that they told their "outside testers" or raters to ask themselves questions like this:

Would you be comfortable giving this site your credit card?

Would you be comfortable giving medicine prescribed by this site to your kids?

Do you consider this site to be authoritative?

Would it be okay if this was in a magazine?

Does this site have excessive ads?

Then Amit Singhal stated, "...based on that, we basically formed some definition of what could be considered low quality."

In addition, Google rolled out the Site Blocker to everyone with the Chrome browser. Anyone could download it and block sites they don't like. Thousands of Chrome customers did just that.

It's interesting to note, that they didn't use the data collected from the public in the

Panda update, but looked at it, and now use it to justify their algo change to the public.

As Amit Singhal said in the Wired.com interview, "...we compared and it was 84 percent overlap, between sites downgraded by the Chrome blocker and downgraded by the update. So that said that we were in the right direction."

It's also interesting to note that Google's blog states, "...while we're not currently using the domains people block as a signal in ranking, we'll look at the data and see whether it would be useful, as we continue to evaluate and improve our search results in the future."

Note the words "*not currently using the domains*" which implies they could add this in the future. It would be easy to game such data by hiring an army of people in a developing country and voting down your competition... but I'm sure they're aware of that.

Or maybe they're not, because a few sentences later in the interview Matt Cutts states, "*Our most recent algorithm does contain signals that can be gamed.*" Sheesh, no kidding. I'll talk about those more later.

Continuing the Wired.com interview about using outside human raters, Matt Cutts stated, "*I think you look for signals that recreate that same intuition, that same experience that you have as an engineer and that users have. Whenever we look at the most blocked sites, it did match our intuition and experience.*"

Very interesting... So the algo was programmed to mimic human intuition. Think about your own behavior for a moment...

The average person can tell if they like a song in less than three seconds. A TV show in less than one second. A website in less than 10 seconds. Just think how fast you are with those radio buttons in the car, or the TV remote.

So what do humans do when they don't like a website? They click off in less than 30 seconds. The faster they leave a website the poorer the quality.

Temporal Distortion

Some of you might remember a search engine called "Direct Hit" circa 1998 - 2000. It powered several search engines until Ask.com bought the technology over a decade ago.

Your ranking was determined by temporal duration. (Not to be confused with Tempura duration, which is how long it takes to eat fried Japanese food.) ;-)



Temporal duration means, how long someone stays on your site before bouncing back to the engine for more search results. This is the major component of the Panda algo.

And yes, for the purists, there are over 200 factors that affect your rankings. All the usual on-page and off-page factors, along with social reach still apply.

Social reach? It's the number of followers you have. The number of retweets, or shares that you get. What you say about others. Discussion about you and your company. They all contribute.

(If your SEO source thinks social reach is new in this algo change, they're only two years behind the curve. You better hire a new SEO company.)

But what we're talking about here, in addition to all that, is the NEW stuff in the recent algo CHANGE.

Go back and read the questions that Google told their human raters to consider. Then think about what Matt Cutts said about mimicking human behavior. It's all about time spent on site. It's a very easy and effective way to enhance their existing algo.

Even my friends with doctorate degrees, who majored in computer science, say it's easy, because they have so many ways to track it...

To start, Google sets cookies. Not a couple of cookies like 2006. Now they set many cookies over time. Last I checked there were over a dozen Google cookies on my computer.

Go ahead and clear your cookies and type in Google.com. Now go check your cookies and you'll see Google has set new ones, that may be tracking your search behavior.

Go check back after a couple of hours and you'll see several Google cookies. I had seven fresh Google cookies after just an hour of surfing around.

Do you have any browser plugins that show PageRank? Do you have the Google toolbar installed? Guess what, you're online activity is being recorded and tracked.

Got Google analytics on your site? Well, they're using that data too. They're tracking the visitor behavior while they interact with your site.

Between the cookies, browser plugins, toolbars and stats, they track everything you do. Every click. Every site you visit. Every page. And most importantly, how long you stay on each page.

So its not just about content anymore. Content may be king, but the king must be dressed in royal attire and live in a palace, where you go to hang out with him for extended periods of time.

Or in other words... The user experience, how aesthetically pleasing, or attractive the page is, and how engaging the content is, are major factors. That's the human intuition factor that Matt Cutts was talking about.

Yet to the computer, to Google, it's just math. It's an algorithm. Meaning that you can clean up, add or remove bits of content and change design elements to gain your rankings back. In other words, you can improve your math.

And to improve your math, here's the single most important thing you can do. Prevent someone from clicking the back button and returning to Google for more search results. You must provide sticky content in terms of your design, layout, copy, graphics, media and navigation.

Accidentally Killing Your Rankings

Almost everyone I've talked to has this habit. They go to Google and type in their keywords to see where they rank. Fair enough. Except you're sending one of two messages...

If you search, but don't click on any listings, you're telling Google that you didn't find anything clickworthy. This happens either manually, or with an automated rank checking tool (which is against Google's TOS BTW).

You're telling Google that none of the top 10 are suitable. So if you were in a top 10 spot and didn't click, you're telling Google to reevaluate this keyword phrase, because the current search results suck... thereby hurting your ranking.

If you do click on the listing - and almost everyone is guilty of this - you click your listing and get some sense of satisfaction when it leads to your site. Happy and glowing you go back to Google and search for another keyword phrase you want to check.

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And therein lies the problem. You clicked on your listing and went back to Google all in a matter of seconds. The message you're sending Panda is that the page content sucks. You clicked, landed and returned, all in a few seconds, which is the primary indicator of a low quality site...

So don't do that anymore. M'Kay?

It's ok to check your rankings in Google. Go ahead and click on your listing. But don't go back to Google within the next 10 minutes. This tells Google that the listing for the keyword was perfect.

And yes, this can be gamed as Matt Cutts stated. You could have many people with different IP addresses clicking your listing once per day and not going back for more results. But I know you won't do that, because they'll certainly be tracking all the clicks and IP addresses, just like they do with the AdSense fraud protection.

So rather than participate in behavior that could get you banned, I suggest that you take the high road of morals and leave your scruples behind. Focus on creating high quality pages that engage the reader, so they don't need another page, or more search results for your keyword phrase.

19 Steps to Prevent Low Quality Pages

Google's Michael Wyszomierski stated that, *"...low quality content on part of a site can impact a site's ranking as a whole. You should evaluate all the content on your site and do your best to improve the overall quality of the pages on your domain. Removing low quality pages, or moving them to a different domain, could help your rankings for the higher quality content."*

- 1) Check your stats for pages with high bounce rates. Then improve them, or remove them, or you'll lose them in the rankings. Keep in mind that low quality pages can drag down your entire domain.
- 2) Let me repeat... The single most important thing you can do, is to prevent someone from clicking the back button, returning to Google for more search results. You must provide sticky content in terms of your design, layout, copy, graphics, media and navigation.
- 3) Try and avoid overly huge navigation. Remove graphical elements like big amateurish buttons and clip art. Use real photographs of people like the ones you can purchase from iStockPhoto.
- 4) If a picture doesn't help tell the story, or enhance it, leave it out. Don't add artwork to a page for the sake of color. There's nothing wrong with white space. In fact, it provides a necessary relief.
- 5) If you duplicate content from another site, you might think its curation, or syndication. But if you do so excessively without adding value, its considered low quality. So you'll want to minimize posting low value content, where all you do is summarize what others have said.
- 6) Don't be afraid to speak up. Tell us what you know. Share what you've experienced. Be original. Add your thoughts. Interject your opinion. Don't just aggregate... create!

7) Avoid pages with too many (30+) links out. You might think a page of links would make it sticky, so the viewer doesn't go back for more search results. But unless you provide a paragraph detailing each link, its likely to have the opposite effect.

8) Be sure to put the confidence builders like the credit card logos, secure shopping logos, verified site logo, a toll free 800 number, Better Business Bureau and your other professional trade association logos on your pages. Doing so builds instant trust in the mind of the consumer.

9) Put up all the required legal pages, or lump everything on one "About Us" page. That means having terms of use, privacy policy, spam policy, external links policy, earnings disclaimer, compensation disclosure, DMCA notice, refund policy, etc.



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10) If you have AdSense on your pages, you must have wording explaining Google's DoubleClick DART cookies. How they follow you around the internet, tracking your personal viewing habits, so they can determine what kinds of ads might be interested in.

11) When it comes to ads on your site, low quality doesn't necessarily ad heavy. There's plenty of ad-heavy sites still in the index. It's when the ads interfere with the content, or make the content hard to read, requiring additional effort on behalf of the reader, to find where the story starts, continues or stops.

12) Another low quality tactic is where a site gives a top 10 list, but the list isn't on one page. The list is actually 10 paragraphs spread over 10 pages, forcing you to look at dozens of ads with slow load times.

13) Speaking of which, slow loading pages are almost always low quality. They rely heavily on ad servers and they often hang for 10 seconds or more, while waiting for all the ads to load.

14) Fix your spelling and grammatical errors. If you fail to spell check, its a red flag that your page is low quality.

15) Add some video or sticky content. That's how many video sharing sites emerged unscathed by the Panda, because of the video. They don't experience the traditional bounce back ratios of text based sites. If the user doesn't like the video, they tend to search for others on the same topic before moving onto another site.

16) Videos, audio and photos all engage the audience. At least for a few minutes. As my research shows in the whitepaper, the [Ultimate Heatmap, photos of attractive people hold attention longer](#). So do some types of ads. You can read the paper to find out more.

17) Pick a color harmony and test your colors. For example, in my research I found that people looking for life insurance quotes hate purple, but love aqua. I tripled

conversions, simply by changing the background color. It affects your bounce rates too.

18) Avoid Arial and Helvetica fonts for your body copy. They were designed for signage in bus and train stations. Use a font that was designed for reading on the computer screen, such as Georgia, Trebuchet or Verdana. The easier it is on the reader, the longer they'll stay.

19) The most important single element of all that everyone can fix... readability. Avoid putting light text on a dark or black background, as it tends to sparkle and tire the eye. Keep column widths narrow (60 characters max) and the font size at least 12 point, with plenty of line spacing (aka leading) for maximum comfort, legibility and readability.

Conclusion

The average time spent on a website is 57 seconds. Are you trying to be average, or are you striving for more? One way boosts your search engine rankings. The other has an angry bear.

Which path will you choose?

Michael Campbell, CEO

[Dynamic Media Corporation](#)



Links Related to this Publication...

The original Google announcement regarding the Panda update:

<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/02/finding-more-high-quality-sites-in.html>

The - MUST READ - Wired.com Q&A with Amit Singhal and Matt Cutts:

<http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2011/03/the-panda-that-hates-farms/2/>

The SearchMetrics.com research showing the damage caused by the angry bear.

<http://blog.searchmetrics.com/us/2011/03/03/google-farmer-update-whos-really-affected/>

Google post about blocking sites from your search results:

<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2011/03/hide-sites-to-find-more-of-what-you.html>

Download the personal block list extension for Chrome:

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/nolijnfcfnkgaikbjbdaogikpmpbdcdf>

Squealer page to report AdSense violations:

https://www.google.com/adsense/support/bin/request.py?contact=violation_report&sourceid=twitterEN&medium=tweet&subid=tweet2011-03-16

Unrelated story about J.C. Penny penalized for link farming

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/business/13search.html>

IMPORTANT Draft Language for Google Dart Cookies

<http://mikeyounglaw.com/internet-lawyer/google-privacy-policy-change-and-interest-based-advertising/>

Postscript...

Google denies having "global" whitelists but they do have "exception lists" for individual sites that were unjustly affected by a certain algo change. They also deny having a whitelist for the Panda update at this time, but they can certainly add one later. If you think you've been affected by the recent algorithm change, Google is listening. You can join the discussion here.

<http://www.google.com/support/forum/p/Webmasters/thread?tid=76830633df82fd8e&hl=en>

They have stated that it is an "algorithmic change" and they will not manually adjust the results. Your comments will help the engineers "tweak" the algo, so more good sites get their rankings back.

And finally, don't forget that you must diversify your traffic sources. Be sure to include the likes of paid advertising, permission email, [social media marketing](#), social bookmarking, participating in conversations, blogging, podcasting and video, in addition to providing quality "linkworthy" content to help with your SEO.

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