



Does Your Content Meet Google's Expectations for Quality?

Surely you have heard the trending phrase “content is king.” Now, more than ever, this is a rule to live by. It used to be that keywords were the magic keys to online marketing. However, over the past few years, much has changed. Gone are the blissful days of keyword stuffing. Now, you need unique and valuable content to pull Google’s heartstrings. Without it, you may be punished. In a given month, as many as 65,000 sites receive such warning notifications. Let’s discuss some of the more recent SEO changes and how you can re-orient your online marketing strategy to give your readers, and therefore search engines, what they crave.

Google Algorithm Changes

Since 2008, Google has put out a series of three game-changing algorithms. To better understand our practical guide on courting Google, let's walk through these changes and how they have forever influenced the way online marketing works.

1

Panda Algorithm Focuses on Plagiarizers

First, Google's Panda Algorithm was released in February 2012 to stop web holders from providing copied or low-quality content to lure readers to strategically placed advertisements. Instead, after these changes, websites could be penalized for using copied content or content with high ad-to-content ratios.

In his article *Google Panda Victim, How I Killed my Content Farm*, Forbes contributor Benoit Rafael reports that before its release, Pierre Chappaz's content farm was a virtual content database of often copied and low-quality information. However, with high-ranking keywords sprinkled throughout each article, when readers searched for any one of its thousands of keywords, they were directed to the content farm where they inadvertently viewed the advertisements that spammed the site. With high visibility on the web, advertisers paid Chappaz to include their advertisements on his pages. However, when Panda was released, Chappaz cut his losses and shut down the site, reasoning that he was not interested in paying a quality writer to research and rewrite each article in his database to provide unique and quality content. Because of Google's new content-to-ad ratio rules, the site had simply lost its investment appeal.

2

Penguin Algorithm Stops Spammers

Released in April 2012, the Penguin Algorithm tracks if readers share or reference links to determine if readers find the content share-worthy. Google created the algorithm based on the belief that if readers found content valuable, they would naturally want to pass it along or use it as a source. Thus, with this change, the more a link is shared or referenced, the higher it will rank on Google search engines. For content farms such as Chappaz's, this change meant that in order to rank well, they would have to rewrite all of their content and wait for it to be shared naturally by an interested audience. Meanwhile, advertising clients would likely go elsewhere to advertise their products on sites that had already earned a healthy Google presence.

3

Hummingbird Algorithm Catches Writing Errors

This algorithm makes it even harder for low-information, keyword-stuffing content providers to offer little value to their readers. With the Hummingbird algorithm, searchers are now better able to search using conversational wording, such as a question, instead of only by keywords. Google's algorithm seeks the question's context rather than looking for specific words used in the question. Moreover, it searches for sites that offer the most unique and valuable information on that topic. For instance, if the content has been duplicated from elsewhere on the web or resembles other content, that content will rank lower on Google's SERP (search engine results page). Consequently, stuffing content with keywords or spinning already produced articles is no longer effective to drive visitors to your website.

Manual Action

Because Google's new algorithms cannot always detect spam, Google teams have also taken to reviewing sites manually to determine if their content is "thin." Thin content does not offer unique and informative content about a given topic. Google has found that many sites that offer its readers this type of content exist for advertising purposes only. Consequently, Google labels them as spam. Google has cracked down on those sites that slip through the algorithm cracks by sending manual action warnings to such site owners and docking them on rankings if they do not comply with Google's quality expectations.

What Is Black Hat SEO, and How Does It Affect You?

Since these algorithms have taken effect, techniques that violate them have been deemed “black hat SEO.” This term includes all attempts to manipulate readers to view low-value content to earn money from advertisers or customers. Chappaz’s site is the perfect example of such tactics. Often, readers click on a link with an expectation of certain searched-for content and, once they have arrived on the site, they find that the content they seek is not there or is insufficient to meet their needs. Google wants its customers to have a good user experience. Consequently, while these types of content farms once provided a great source of revenue for webmasters, they are now punished by Google. So, what happens to webmasters who employ such unethical techniques?

- » First, they are sent a warning to comply with Google’s quality expectations.
- » If they do not comply, their site can be removed completely from Google SERPs.
- » Or the site will be “docked.”
- » Or parts of the site will be “docked,” meaning that it will rank lower on a Google SERP.

How to Avoid Google Docking or Removal

Unfortunately, though Google only seeks a positive user experience, many unsuspecting webmasters have been warned or docked due to these new changes. For example, Matt Cutts of Google explains that a Colorado DirectTV provider created a series of websites to attract customers in each of the regions it serves, changing each page only slightly. Though creating a site for each region seemed reasonable to DirectTV, Google labeled the sites duplicate content and consequently docked them. However, if you find you have been docked or received a warning message from Google regarding your site's content, first make some changes to improve your site and then resubmit your site for a Google review. To help you ensure your content enjoys a healthy Google presence, we offer some content tips:

Make Sure Your Content Is Share-Worthy

Clean, well-thought-out, well-researched, well-written, and unique content is more likely to be shared by others or referenced as a source. This is because, following the release of Penguin, to build up SEO on their pages, other sites in your niche want to use quality, informative, and authoritative sources. Therefore, they will seek sources that have this type of quality. According to quality content providers, sites with spelling errors or grammatical errors as well as sites with excess wordiness or other stylistic errors are not share-worthy. Moreover, under Hummingbird, they are more difficult for Google to find when searchers use correct spelling and grammar. In contrast, those sites with poorly written or low-quality content often share or reference similar sources. Thus, both Panda and Hummingbird, with their search for low-quality or copied material, and Penguin, with its search for high-quality links, are on the lookout for "thin" or duplicate material and those sites that backlink to them.

You might ask how other webmasters' sharing practices affect your site's ranking. Here is where Penguin most affects you. The quality of the sites that reference or use your site as a source (backlink to your site) affects your search engine ranking. If quality sites within your niche find your information valuable, Google reasons that your readers will, too.

For this reason, when freelance writer Kevin H. Danielsen was notified that his article was referenced by a Forbes contributor through a backlink, he was overjoyed. With that backlink to his content, his name and work had been endorsed by Forbes as share-worthy and, therefore, high-quality. Likewise, backlinks to your site from quality sources endorse you as an authoritative, high-quality, and unique-value site. For this reason, the higher-quality your content, the higher-quality your endorsements – and those endorsements will raise your ranking in Google. Following the release of Penguin, you must work hard for such endorsements, but your hard work will surely be honored.

Summary

So, in summary, keep these tips in mind when putting together your website's content:

1. Make sure your site is free of grammatical, spelling, or stylistic errors.
2. Provide crisp, authoritative, and well-researched material to add an air of authority to your content.
3. Remember that it is not the quantity of your content but how share-worthy it is by high-quality sources. So, aim for high-quality, not necessarily quantity.

Make Sure Your Translated Content Is of the Highest Quality, Too

The importance of high-quality content is not limited to your source language. It extends into your translated content, too. Avoid computer-generated translation. Opt for a high-quality translation provider to ensure that you make the most out of your investment in translated content.

Contact Us

To learn more about offering your high-quality translated content online as part of your global SEO strategy, contact us.

+1 866.70.SMART
www.smartling.com