

Workshop notes: Advanced SEO

Recommended reading

SEOMoz's Google Algorithm Change History keeps track of changes at Google:

<http://www.seomoz.org/google-algorithm-change>

Google's "panda" update

Google launched the "panda" update (formerly referred to as the "farmer" update) on 23rd February 2011. This update attempted to assess the quality of sites. It was developed by training a learning algorithm using the results of real human assessment, which means it penalises sites for using techniques that real people don't like, such as excessive advertising or template content.

Google's "penguin" update

Google launched the "penguin" update on 24th April 2012. This update targeted common spam techniques, including:

- exact match domains (e.g. a-long-list-of-keywords.com)
- overuse of exact match links (a high percentage of incoming links using the same link text)
- low quality articles
- keyword stuffing, especially in internal links

It has been described as an "over-optimisation" penalty, but it's really targeting outright spam.

Myth: likes, tweets, and +1s affecting rankings

Social media is important for marketing in general, but does not directly affect search engine rankings. Google doesn't have access to Facebook's and Twitter's data on likes and tweets (Google formerly had access to Twitter's "fire house", but that deal expired on 3rd July 2011). +1s only affect rankings in a specific situation: when you're logged into your Google+ account and people in your circles have +1'd pages that are relevant to the query (Google calls this "Search, plus Your World").

Myth: on-site behaviour affecting rankings

There's a persistent myth that on-site behaviour – for example, the number of pages viewed, or the time spent viewing each page – affects rankings. Google would only have access to this data if the site uses Google Analytics, and even then their terms prevent them from using this data for any purpose other than providing statistical reports (you even have to opt-in to allow Google to compile industry-wide averages). The only information that the search engine has available is the length of time that passed between you clicking on a result and returning to the search engine. If this is very short it's reasonable to assume that the result was not what you wanted (and you 'bounced' back), but if several minutes passed search engines have no way of telling whether you went off to do something else and promptly 'bounced' on your return, browsed around the site and found useful information before returning to consider other results, or followed a link onto a completely different site before returning to the search engine.