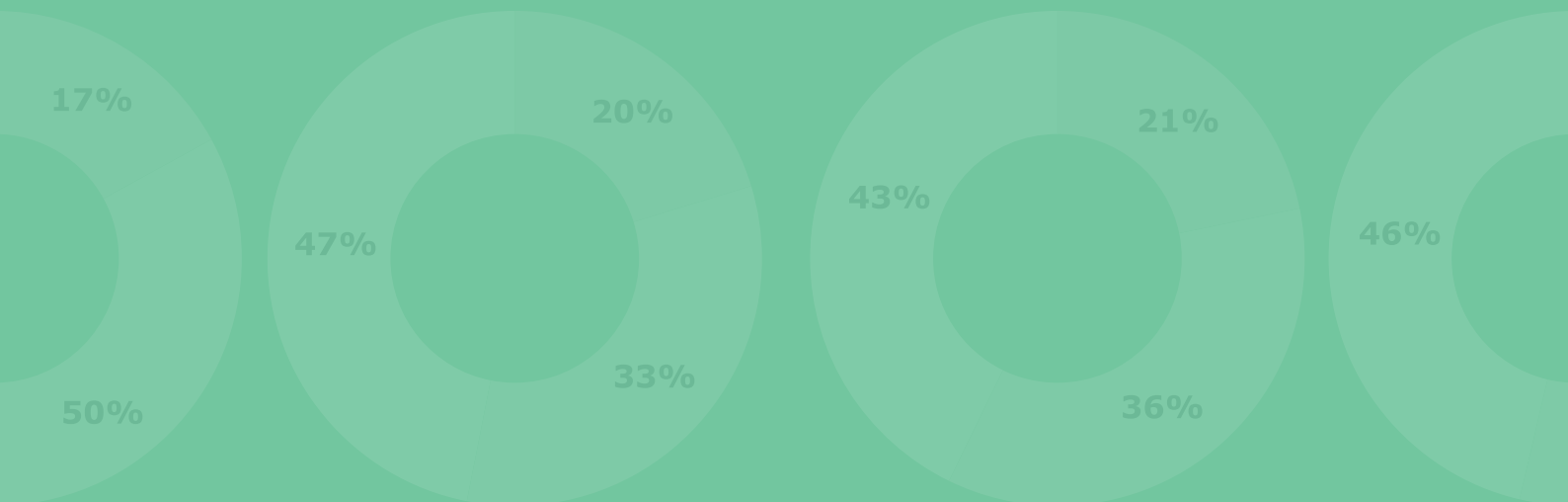




BUILD CLEAN. BUILD ORGANIC.

DOWNLOADABLE eBook

WHAT IS ORGANIC SEARCH AND
WHAT YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE
YOUR SITE'S PERFORMANCE





BUILD CLEAN. BUILD ORGANIC.

Remember the very first time you launched your website?

We bet it was an exciting time and you couldn't keep away from it!

There are fewer things in life more satisfying than getting yourself and your business on the web.

But expectations have to be realistic; you're not going to be an Amazon or an eBay overnight.

Hitting those levels takes a huge amount of careful, strategic planning. One of the most important questions you have to ask is now that your website's live, how are you going to increase its visibility?

The answer for many is with search engine optimisation.



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ALL ABOUT THE OLD STYLE OF SEO



For the vast majority of global businesses Google is key to getting noticed.

It's by far and away the world's most popular search engine. Google celebrated its 15th birthday at the end of September 2013.

Statistics from Mashable show that the search giant services 1.1 billion people on a monthly basis, all of whom make 114 billion searches each month.

Though Bing and Yahoo are also in the search game your focus really should be on Google. In short, it's where your traffic is.

With up to an estimated 75 per cent of search engine users **not bothering to venture past the first page**, getting your site as close to first position on the first page of results is essential to attracting people to your site.

One of the best ways to do that in the past was through building links, which Google took as a sign that your site was authoritative and worth a high ranking in their results pages.



HOW THE GAME CHANGED

Google is constantly releasing algorithm changes to refine its search service and return the best results possible.

But none caused as many waves as the introduction of 'Panda', 'Penguin', and most recently, 'Hummingbird'.

Hummingbird was actually announced on Google's 15th birthday and has been part of Google's algorithm since August 2013.

Hummingbird is the algorithm for the mobile future of search, but it was Google Penguin that arguably caused the most difficulties to websites who had followed traditional search engine optimisation routes.

Penguin was released in April 2012 and hit the rankings of sites that Google felt were trying to manipulate them by building bad links, amongst other things, regardless of the usefulness of the site to users.

Since then Google has continued to update the algorithm as it seeks to weed out the spam, affecting a huge amount of search results when compared to how things looked several years ago.

For a lot of webmasters and site owners, it seemed like years of work had gone down the drain as Google penalised them for what it judged to be poor links pointing back to their site. For all the web speak, think of it another way. That loss of rankings may well have led to a drop in traffic. That drop in traffic would naturally equate to lost sales and lost conversions - having a tangible negative impact on the bottom line for many businesses.

PROOFING AGAINST PENGUIN



Google's aim is to provide people with the best results possible when they search for something.

Ethical, organic link building has always been heavily underlined in [Google's Webmaster Guidelines](#). However for a number of years, Google seemed to reward any links, regardless of the sites they were from, and so webmasters and SEOs used this to build more and more link juice, which improved their rankings.

Every little helped when it came to that style of link building.

Think back to the time when you first launched your website. It may have been early days but it had something very important going for it – a clean bill of health when it came to backlinks.

That doesn't mean that no links are good links - because links are still a vital signal to Google about the relevance and importance of a website. Rather, having a clean link portfolio is more beneficial than a profile peppered with poor links.



THE GOOD NEWS!

The good news is that no matter how hopeless your link situation seems it can be saved.

You don't have to start a new site or register a new business. But you will have to put in a lot of hard work to evaluate each link pointing back to your site to evaluate its effectiveness and judge its overall benefit to your site.

Link building isn't poison. It is still an essential tactic to helping boost your site's authority and give it search prominence.

But quality has never been so important. Even a link on the smallest site can be beneficial if it's been gained ethically and organically.

GOOGLE'S ON YOUR SIDE



To drive the message of natural links home, Google has provided a number of tools to help you clean up your links and there are various third party tools which can provide even more insight:

Analyse your links

Head over to Webmaster Tools and you can download a list of links that Google has picked up that are pointing to the pages on your site.

The 'Links to Your Site' report will download a list of backlinks currently pointing to your pages – perfect for uncovering the spammy ones currently hurting your rankings.

Sort through each and every one of them and visit the sites they're hosted on. Is the site nothing more than a link farm hosting links to a number of other sites?

Maybe it's a site that's breaking a number of search rules itself. Is it filled with poor content or old-style blocks of text stuffed with keywords? Maybe Google's picked up on it and the negative effects are filtering through to your site.

Maybe the link's being affected by a total lack of relevance. Imagine you're selling shoes, perhaps, and you have an anchor-text link ('buy shoes now') on a site that sells car parts.

Have a look at all of your links in a spreadsheet and go through each and every one of them with a fine-toothed comb.

Request their removal

Once you've made a note of all the links you consider bad then you need to start the process of getting them removed.

Unfortunately, depending on the number of links you want to get rid of, this could take a while!

Google recommends getting in touch with the site owner and requesting that they remove the link from their site.

That'll involve you scouting to find email addresses and possibly phone numbers if you really want to get in touch with somebody to get that link removed. Be as polite and as transparent as possible. Ask them to remove the link and explain your reasoning.

There is a chance that webmasters will not respond to your link removal request, but it's important to keep asking (leaving an appropriate amount of time between requests) several times in order to maximise the chances of the link being removed and for Google to feel that you've made every effort to do so.

Where a problem may arise is if you've paid for a link to be placed on a site. Paid links on authoritative sites can be big business to people, but are a world away from the ethics Google is trying to push.



The problem sits with you. If the link hasn't been advertised in a sponsored post, or if the site owner hasn't made it clear that money has changed hands and given it a nofollow, then you have to decide which is more important to you.

Losing the money you paid for the link, or keeping a poor link whose value is seriously harming your web presence.

The disavow tool

If all else fails (and Google likes to know that you've made an effort in contacting people) then you can upload a list of links pointing to your site that Google will disavow.

We mention that Google likes you to make an effort because Google says the disavow tool is an advanced system that can harm your site's search standing if used improperly.

"In most cases, Google can assess which links to trust without additional guidance, so most normal or typical sites will not need to use this tool," [says the official site](#).

The message is clear. Try influencing your search position with the disavow tool as you would by trying to cheat the search engine with paid links or similar and the team will take hard action.

Once you feel that all of your links have been cleaned up then it's time to get in touch with Google to request a review of your site to try and get back on its good side.

Managing manual penalties

Got a message in Webmaster Tools telling you your site has unnatural links pointing to it? It's a manual penalty notice informing you that you'd better remove those links, without actually giving you any indication of which links need to get the chop. Very helpful!

Take heed of our tips above and get in touch with webmasters to request those links be removed or disavowed. But to remove that penalty you'll need to get in touch with Google and file a reconsideration request to show them how hard you've worked to remove those links and ask them to lift the penalty.

To increase your chances of getting the penalty lifted it's wise to show Google every step you've taken when trying to remove those links.

Sending hundreds of emails to webmasters is fine, but Google would appreciate it if you created a Google document or spreadsheet with proof. Also create a document with the links you're trying to remove, and detail your efforts in trying to remove each one. Include your disavow.txt and mention it if you've had to use it as a last resort.

Finally, contact the Google webspam team with a politely-worded email to show the hard work you've put in cleaning up your site and include those documents as proof. Most importantly show your dedication to Google's guidelines, and ensure them that you'll do everything in your power to make sure those types of negative links won't be pointing back to your site ever again!



THE HUMAN ELEMENT

It's easy when optimising your site to think that Google's just a big machine, a set of algorithms that use a number of factors to evaluate a website.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Google has a huge webspam team that evaluates sites' content and backlinks as well as the 200-odd other factors the search giant takes into consideration.

If your link looks unnatural, unethical, and sticks out like a sore thumb then don't be surprised if it gets picked up sooner rather than later.

You're not fooling a machine. You're risking your online strategy with human beings that know a lot more about how search engine's work than anyone else.

So if you've been buying links or have been purposefully going about it the wrong way then we recommend you stop right now and clean up your act.

THE INCREDIBLE POWER OF ORGANIC LINKS



Humans will also be interacting with your links if you're doing it right.

It's the most important thing to consider with search marketing, especially in a post-Hummingbird world. Organic links in the right places will not only attract the right types of traffic, but will also give your site great authority in search engines' eyes.

How to build the right organic links? That's a guide for another day, we're afraid...

But now that we've covered the impact of negative links, it's time to focus on the positives of doing it right and the benefits ethical links can bring to your brand:

Avoiding Google penalties

There's nothing more satisfying as an internet marketer than taking a look at traffic graphs from the last three years and seeing a consistent rise, especially on the days when Google

has announced algorithm updates such as Penguin. It shows that a good job is being done and that the right links are being curated. It also gives webmasters confidence that they aren't going to be the victims of any future Google changes and, as we mentioned before, livelihoods won't be at risk.

Building the right relationships

Guest blogging is one method of link building that hasn't just been hit by Penguin but by Panda as well.

Google Panda is a content algorithm that, again, focuses on quality. But because guest blogging's under the spotlight doesn't mean it's wrong.

Great guest blogging and sharing your content in the right places is one of the best ways to build organic, natural links with the right people in your industry.



But another benefit is that it helps you to focus on contacting the right people and building relationships with influencers that value your opinions and can introduce you to others. Those relationships will be crucial in the future when spreading word of your site and building links in a practical, ethical manner.

Unleash your creativity

If you're serious about being a success and ranking as high as possible for certain search terms then you owe it to your customers and potential visitors to be as creative and informative as possible.

Search engines, after all, want to give searchers the absolute best results possible to make sure people keep using their services.

It gives you a chance to show off your creative side and produce entertaining content that people can't help but share.

Creating a long-term strategy bursting with information and creativity is one of the best ways to get noticed in your field of expertise.

Including social media in that strategy can help spread that message far and wide and set you on the path to generating clean, healthy links that point back to your site.

Being creative won't just help with your search visibility, it will also help attract the right target audience to your site and show the wider world that yours is a brand in tune with people's needs.

A SEARCH SOLUTION THAT REALLY WORKS



Trust us. The feeling of getting a new, organic link is the same intense feeling you got when you launched your website for the first time.

There's nothing more exciting than seeing someone valuing your hard work and taking the time to provide a link back to your site.

That excitement can only be topped over time by all those links being considered relevant by search engines and them giving your rankings a serious boost.

But this is nothing new. This is the way link building always should have been, and how it will be long into the future.



SUMMARY

Thank you for reading our eBook on organic search (SEO).

We wanted to ensure that we produced something that not only covered many of the fundamental principles, but also explained them in an easy-to-understand manner. We hope that this eBook has been helpful and we wish you the best of luck with your organic search efforts.

You can find more content like this on our website:
www.click.co.uk.

Contact details:

Click Consult
Willow House,
Oaklands Office Park,
Hooton Road,
Hooton,
Cheshire. CH66 7NZ

0845 205 0292

hello@click.co.uk



Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic and paid search.

Our team of experts work exclusively with a portfolio of brands and SMEs who are looking to increase their online visibility and return on investment through our bespoke search marketing solutions. We've achieved impressive results for clients operating within a diverse range of competitive verticals including eCommerce, hotels & leisure, legal and pharmaceuticals.

Organic (SEO) and Paid Search (PPC) are at the core of our service proposition, but we also offer a range of search marketing services such as Content, Outreach and Social engagement, Discovery, Integrated Search Marketing, Social Media, Google Penalty Removal and Recovery, Conversion Rate Optimisation (CRO), Display Advertising, Social Media Advertising, International and Multilingual Search Marketing, Inbound Marketing and Search Marketing Consultancy.

