



CLICKCONSULT®

# LINK AUDITING, REMOVAL & RECOVERY CASE STUDIES

CLICK CONSULT LTD

WILLOW HOUSE, HOOTON ROAD,  
HOOTON, CHESHIRE, CH66 7NZ

WWW.CLICK.CO.UK  
0845 205 0292

@CLICKCONSULTLTD | FACEBOOK.COM/CLICKCONSULT



## CASE STUDY 1 - CHUMS

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**When it comes to link auditing and the removal of penalties, we have a wealth of experience and have successfully helped a large number of clients over the years. One of our most recent success stories comes from the work we did on behalf of Chums.**

Chums is a large online retailer, who specialise in clothes for men and women, footwear, homeware and mobility products. With their customer base firmly at the heart of their business strategy, they are proud of the fact that some of their first customers are still buying 30 years later.

When it came to Chums, we were originally undertaking a PPC project with them and their SEO work was under contract with another agency.

After receiving a manual linking penalty they began to see their visibility diminishing and attempted to resolve the issue. The agency they worked with had four unsuccessful attempts at removing it and so they parted company. They approached us to handle their complete workflow and we successfully removed the penalty.

Following this, Chums began to see their visibility not only return to pre-penalty levels but rise above them.



## INITIAL ANALYSIS

Here at Click Consult we aim to keep ahead of the curve and our team of experts are constantly looking to implement new techniques and utilising the latest technology. Using industry-leading search engine optimisation tools we were able to analyse the performance of the Chums website over time. From the graph below it is clear that the website had seen a steady decline over the last 2-3 years. The main aim of our team was to address this by removing bad links which would in turn improve visibility.

## Visibility

Weekly +

Time span: 11/03/2011 - 11/03/2016 GO Zoom: 1M 2M 6M 1Y 2Y 5Y



## LINK AUDIT

**We knew that the first task for us to undertake would be a link audit. We started by identifying unnatural backlinks, utilising a number of backlink identification tools, including Webmaster Tools.**

It was important to use various tools for the backlink identification stage as we knew that we may discover an unnatural link that some tools may miss. This is part of our ongoing commitment to progression. We created a document that listed the amalgamated backlinks produced by each tool and deleted any duplicates.

Following our own, industry leading research process and utilising a suite of in-house developed technologies, We identified gaps in competitor strategies, diversified targeted long tail keywords and increased customer relevance to push transactions and revenue up.



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## LINK ANALYSIS & DISAVOWING REMAINING UNNATURAL BACKLINKS

Link analysis tools use a series of metrics to determine the health of each backlink. For this account we noticed that we had quite a few links to analyse before determining a list of unnatural ones that we needed to remove.

While a link analysis can be executed manually, this is a time-consuming process. We streamlined the link analysis procedure by utilising a trusted link analysis and cleansing tool.

After analysing the unnatural links we started to remove them from the site, this was done in a number of ways and ran in parallel with the organic link building processes used by our campaigns team. We knew that by removing bad links and gaining new, good links the profile of the account would improve quickly. For links with which we had difficulty removing – Those where we had utilised all forms of communication and failed to make contact with the webmasters of certain sites, or where we couldn't locate contact details for them at all – we used Google's Disavow Links tool to disassociate from the offending links.

N.B. This was a last resort for some links and we used the tool with caution; understanding that overuse indicates to Google that you haven't made an effort to get the links removed which may harm your site's future performance.

## RECOVERY

As you can see from the graph below the last six months of the campaign have been highly successful with good growth across the board. The search visibility of the brand has increased quickly, a trend that continues to date. There is a clear correlation between the conclusion of our paid search strategy and the commencement of the increases.

### Visibility

Weekly +



## RESULTS

As a result of the work which we conducted, Chums benefited from a huge uplift in both transactions and revenue as displayed below:



As part of our ongoing partnership with the client, we are constantly analysing their metrics and the links with which their site is associated with.



## CASE STUDY 2

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**The following case study outlines how our link removal experts executed the process on one of our client's websites. To protect our client's privacy, we refer to their site as 'client's website' throughout this case study.**

On 19th May 2012, our client's website received a notice from Google within Google Webmaster Tools. The notice highlighted that the site had used unnatural links to manipulate its position in search rankings, which violated the search engine's quality guidelines. The message encouraged the webmaster to "make changes" (ie, remove the unnatural links) before submitting the site for reconsideration.



## INITIAL ANALYSIS

We utilised an industry-leading search engine optimisation tool to analyse the website's visibility within search results and gain an idea of how drastically the site's presence in search results had plummeted.

The graph above displays paid search and search engine optimisation (SEO) visibility for our client's website in search results.

The blue line indicates the organic search visibility for our client's website, which correlates with the site's visibility in search engine rankings. As represented by the sudden dip of this line on the graph, there was a significant drop in traffic when our client's website was issued with a manual penalty on 19th May 2012.





## LINK AUDIT

We utilised a number of backlink identification tools including Google's Webmaster Tools platform, to create an amalgamated list of backlinks that needed to be reviewed.

We then used a link analysis tool to determine the health of each backlink. The pie chart above indicates the percentage of unnatural links that pointed to the site. As you can see, there were a large volume of links that presented a deadly risk to the website, while the others were low risk, moderate risk, very low risk or high risk. In other words, this was not a healthy backlink profile and serious efforts needed to be made to remove the penalty and re-gain Google's trust.



	Description	
	78% (1,168) of your backlinks are Toxic links, you should remove them.	Show me these links! 
	19% (283) of your backlinks look suspicious, you should check them.	Show me these links! 
	3% (50) of your backlinks are Healthy links.	Show me these links! 

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## LINK CLEANSING

The link cleansing tool that we utilised uses an algorithm to organise backlinks into three categories: toxic, healthy and suspicious, though we always analyse each of these links manually to ensure that no mistakes are made.

Any links that have been categorised erroneously could thwart the link removal process, resulting in Google not revoking the penalty. As presented in the chart above, 78% of our client's website's backlinks were deemed as toxic, 19% suspicious and 3% were identified as being healthy. After manually analysing each of these links, we collated a definitive list of URLs that we had identified as being unnatural and required removal.



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## LINK REMOVAL

**We used social media networks, 'Contact Us' forms, domain name information databases and various other channels to locate the contact details for as many of the website owners on our list of unnatural backlinks as possible.**

We made a note of the webmasters who we could not source contact details for, which we later submitted to Google's Disavow Links tool.

Using the contact details we had managed to locate, we contacted each webmaster three times over a three week period. After the three week removal request period was over, we created a list of websites that had not honoured our link removal requests and added these URLs to the list of webmasters who were not contactable. Ultimately, a total of 300 links were removed during this process.

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## DISAVOWING REMAINING UNNATURAL BACKLINKS

**After finalising the list of the remaining 146 unnatural URLs that required removal, we uploaded it to Google's Disavow Links tool in csv format.**

In brief, this tool asks Google not to take the remaining links into consideration when the search engine's spiders next crawl our client's backlink profile.



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## RECONSIDERATION REQUEST

Next, we wrote up a reconsideration request. This contained a link to a spreadsheet, which detailed our link removal efforts and documented all actions undertaken during the link removal phase, including all links that were successfully removed and all the ones that weren't.

On the following page is a sample of the reconsideration request we submitted for our client's website.

We submitted the reconsideration request to Google via the 'Manual Actions' page under the 'Search Traffic' tab in Webmaster Tools and awaited a response from Google's Webspam team.



"Dear Google Webspam Team Member,

Thank you for reading this reconsideration request. Our website, [www.example.com] is under a partial-match manual penalty for unnatural organic links in Webmaster Tools. Upon completion of a link audit, we realised that we had been manipulative in our link building approach.

In response, we have undergone a rigorous process of removing the unnatural links that were pointing to our site. This has involved directly contacting the webmaster of each domain we found using every email address or contact form available. We also attempted to contact webmasters using information sourced from whois.com where possible. There were links we could not remove due to being ignored or webmasters requiring payment. We have uploaded a disavow file that includes the domains of these linking sites.

Please see the list of sites that we have tried to contact with no success; the owners of these sites have either ignored our request or the webmasters have asked for money in order for us to have links removed. Details regarding the link removal process and responses we have received can be viewed in the following Google spreadsheet:

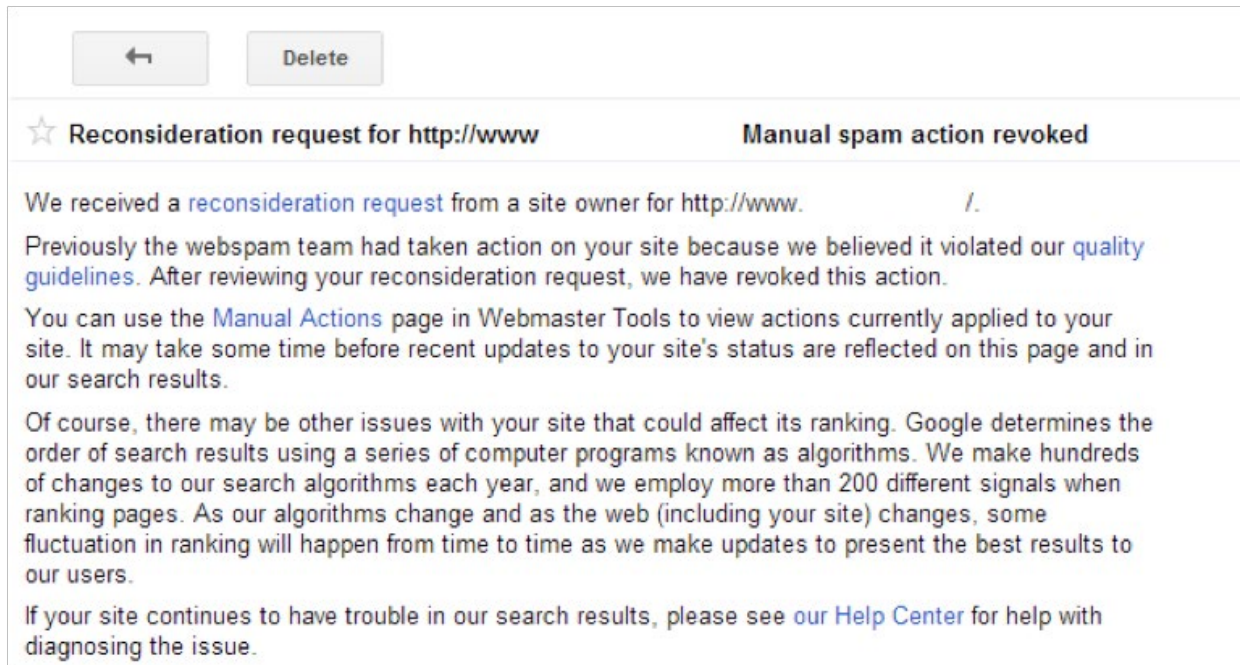
[Link to Google spreadsheet detailing all efforts undertaken during the link removal process]

We are no longer using link building practices that violate Google's quality guidelines and believe we have cleaned up the links pointing to our site as much as possible. We understand that sticking to the guidelines benefits everyone and our team is now trained to follow the guidelines. We look forward to building our business and continuing to provide the best service we can.

Kind Regards,

[insert name]"

RECONSIDERATION REQUEST SENT TO GOOGLE ON BEHALF OF  
OUR CLIENT



## RECONSIDERATION REQUEST

Within one week, our client received a message, highlighting that the partial-match penalty had been revoked (pictured above).

We could then move on to rebuilding our client's website's credibility within the SERPs.



Keywords	Before	After	Difference
excepted quantity label	101	27	+74
dangerous goods regulations	101	40	+61
dangerous goods by air training	101	68	+33
carriage of dangerous goods	101	76	+25
dangerous goods by road	101	78	+23
transport of dangerous goods	101	80	+21
protective packaging	101	86	+15
4gv	19	6	+13
500ml glass bottles	101	88	+13
dangerous goods international	101	90	+11
hazardous goods labels	46	37	+9
shipping boxes	42	37	+5
temperature controlled packaging	21	16	+5
4gv boxes	5	3	+2
battery packaging	11	9	+2
cold chain packaging	101	99	+2
un certified packaging for dangerous goods	7	5	+2
un packaging	11	9	+2
dangerous goods supplies	2	1	+1
hazardous goods packaging	6	5	+1
un approved containers	3	2	+1
un certified packaging	7	6	+1

## RECOVERY

As anticipated, once the manual penalty had been revoked by Google, the visibility of our client's website in SERPs was not as prominent as it once was.

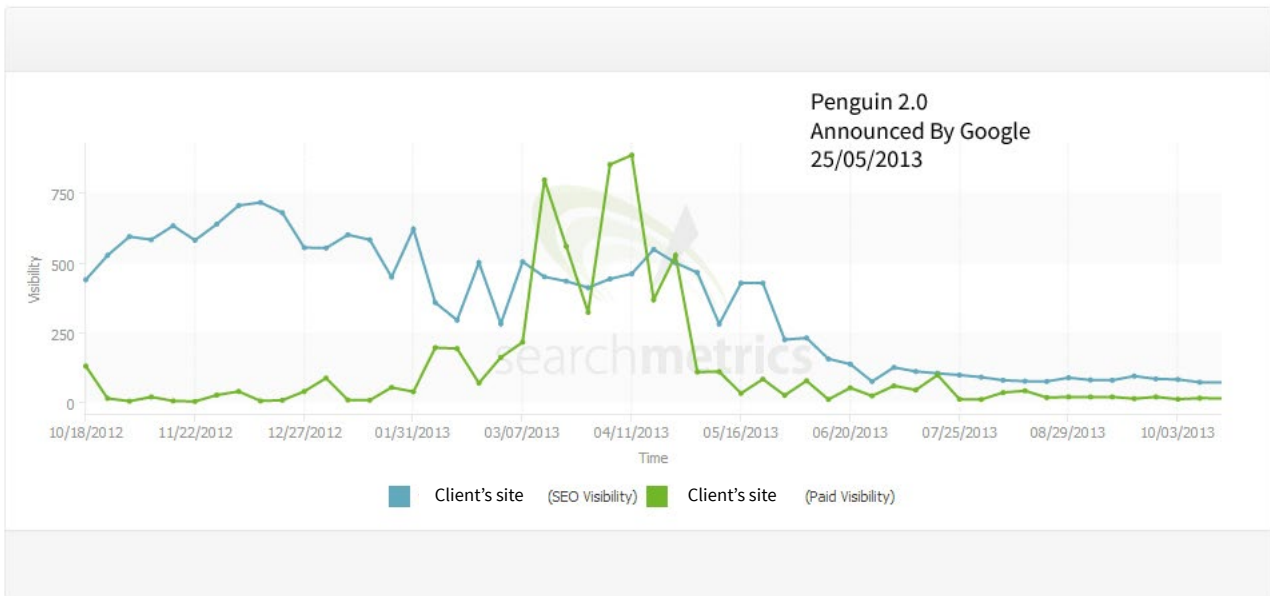
We therefore needed to create a strong, healthy backlink profile for our client's site to rebuild its credibility and help push it to a stronger position in SERPs.

We implemented an organic content marketing and outreach strategy to help re-build a healthy, Google-approved backlink profile. Further to this, we suggested that the company repeat the link audit process on a regular basis going forward.

This has enabled our client to identify and remove any unnatural backlinks as soon as possible to maintain a healthy backlink profile and decrease their chance of receiving another penalty.

We have already started to see improvements in the organic visibility of our client's website. The table above displays the improvement in rankings of a selection of keywords since the penalty was revoked and our client implemented an organic content marketing and outreach strategy.





## CASE STUDY 3

**One of our client's within the pest control solutions industry, received an unnatural links message within their Webmaster Tools account.**

This penalty distinctively looks for artificial or unnatural links pointing to a website intending to manipulate PageRank.

The graph above displays paid search and search engine optimisation (SEO) visibility for our client's website in search results and shows a significant drop in traffic when our client's website was issued with a manual penalty.

There are numerous techniques that would assist in developing an unnatural linking profile, including buying links or participating in linking schemes so it was clear from the outset that a detailed analysis of their current backlink profile would be required to help lift the penalty.



### Your Back Link Profile Risk



#### Summary

	Description
✖	15% (74) of your backlinks are Toxic links, you should remove them.
⚠	63% (307) of your backlinks look suspicious, you should check them.
✔	22% (109) of your backlinks are Healthy links.

#### INITIAL ANALYSIS & LINK AUDIT

The client's backlink profile consisted of 1731 links across 249 unique domains which was generated by using backlink auditing tools together with the client's backlink profile available within Webmaster Tools.

The next phase then consisted of a link auditing stage which allowed us to highlight potential unnatural links based on link quality metrics and then formulate a set removals list that we believe would successfully have the penalty lifted.

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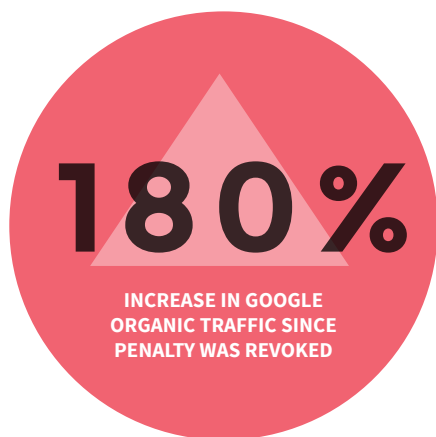
## LINK REMOVAL

After a three-week removal period a total of 170 links within 53 unique domains were removed and a list of 249 unique domains was created based on links that we couldn't remove during the removal phase.

The final stage of the process was to upload a disavow file made up of the 249 domains we couldn't remove and to submit a reconsideration request highlighting the removal process undertaken and successful removals.

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## RECOVERY



After a six-day wait, we had a positive response from Google's web spam team and we had the manual action against the website revoked as the site no longer violated Google's Webmaster guidelines.

We could then move on to the recovery phase to help rebuild the client's online reputation in a healthy way to avoid any future penalties.

Since our client's penalty was revoked and their recovery process initiated, they have seen an increase of 180% in Google organic traffic (against previous selected period).

WE LOOK FORWARD TO  
WORKING WITH YOU AND  
ENJOYING A SUCCESSFUL  
PARTNERSHIP





LET'S BEGIN

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