

Google's

Greatest Hits

What, when and why?

2011 - Panda

With its first iteration appearing in 2011, the Panda algorithm update initially targeted thin content, high ad-to-content ratios and other content quality issues. On release, Google reported that it had affected 12% of searches. It was followed quickly by Panda 2.0 and 3.1 in the same year and has undergone regular updates since. Iterations 4.0 and 4.1 occurred in 2014, while a Google announcement in late 2015 suggests that 4.2 is imminent.

2012 - Penguin

Introduced in 2012, the 'Penguin' update targeted a host of different 'spam' factors and, on release, impacted an estimated 3.1% of all English language queries. Penguin targets practices such as the purchase of links, link networks, keyword stuffing and other over-optimisation techniques. Its last update, a switch to continuous updating (Penguin Everflux) occurred in late 2014. In October 2016, Penguin was incorporated into the main Google algorithm, meaning that penalties and recoveries will occur whenever web-pages are crawled.

2013 - Hummingbird

Imbuing Google's algorithm with a much improved lexicon, Hummingbird changed the way Google deals with latent semantic indexing, decreasing the importance of keyword density for SEO and shifting toward natural, speech oriented search - a move seen as representing Google's belief in mobile as the future of search. As mobile search and conversational search increase in prevalence, this is likely to be the subject of update or refresh in the coming year.

2014 - Pigeon

The 'Pigeon' update caused quite a stir in SEO as it seemed to sharply alter the manner in which Google dealt with local search - as well as improving its distance and location ranking parameters, traditional ranking factors became much more significant to local search. Local search is likely to become more important as mobile becomes the home of the internet, and with mobile gaining larger and larger shares of search volume year on year, local results accessible and pertinent to users on the go are increasingly paramount.

2015 - Mobilegeddon

Mobilegeddon was a rare update, insofar as it was announced in advance, sending the SEO industry into paroxysms as they planned for an update that didn't really end up impacting as much as feared. Essentially Mobilegeddon represents Google acknowledging once again the importance of new platforms and devices, rewarding those who catered well to customers using them.

2015 - RankBrain

Google's 'RankBrain' was announced with much hyperbole in the press, however, the still impressive reality is that this piece of programming vastly improves Google's ability in latent semantic indexing and its ability to return pertinent results for never before entered queries.

2017 - Phantom

Probably better described as fluctuations rather than full scale updates - the name Phantom has been primary given to two rankings shifts - one in 2013, and another in 2015. At these points several prominent sites noted significant, unexplained traffic losses. Google has mentioned 'quality signal' updates around these times, but there have been no confirmed sightings of these particular phantoms, or at least none acknowledged by Google themselves.

2017 - Snippet Length

After testing longer search snippets for over two years, Google increased them across a large number of results. This led us to adopt a new Meta Description limit - up to 300 characters from the previous 155 (almost doubling). Google confirmed an update to how snippets are handled, but didn't provide details.

2017 - Mobile Interstitial Penalty

Announced in August 2016, Google began penalising the mobile rankings of sites whose interstitial advertisements were deemed to hide 'a significant amount' of page content on transition from the search result page.

2018 - Broad Core Algorithm

In March 2018 Google confirmed that they ran an unnamed "broad core algorithm update" that impacted the appearance and rankings of some websites in the search results.

Google posted that they do these types of updates "several times per year" and there is nothing a site can do specifically to "fix" their ranking after the core update runs. "Some sites may note drops or gains,"

2018 - Mobile-First Indexing

Google began basing its index on mobile, rather than desktop, versions of websites. Google introduced 'Mobile-First indexing', demonstrating the importance of mobile search by basing their index on mobile, rather than desktop, versions of websites. Before they crawled and indexed the web as a desktop browser would see the web page. Now, while still taking desktop into account, Google crawls and indexes the web as a mobile browser would see the web page.

2018 - Speed Update

Page speed becomes a ranking factor for mobile searches. This affects pages that deliver the slowest experience to users and applies the same standard to all pages, regardless of the technology used to build the page.

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