

WHAT IS GOOGLE PENGUIN?

THE ULTIMATE CHEAT SHEET

The Penguin update was launched by Google in April 2012 and is now part of Google's core algorithm that crawls and indexes websites.

Its aim is to penalise sites that are considered to have unethical backlink profiles.

Penalisation basically means that your website will see a decline in Google's search ranking.



WHAT ARE BACKLINKS?

Backlinks refer to incoming links to your website from other domains; they indicate to search engines that your site is valued by users. Indeed, each time you receive a backlink, Google perceives this as a 'vote' for your site as it suggests that a user has found your content valuable enough to share with others.

Google's ranking algorithm will analyse the quality of your recently acquired backlink the next time its search engine robots, also known as 'spiders', crawl your page.

To detect the quality and relevance of a backlink, Google's spiders analyse a number of factors, such as:

- **The authority of the linking site.**
- **Whether or not the link looks natural.**
- **The relevance of the link's anchor text.**
- **The subject matter that appears on the linking page.**



The theory behind this element of the search engine's ranking algorithm is that the more high quality backlinks a website possesses, the more valuable that site is deemed to be.

In turn, valuable websites are likely to be positioned higher up on search engine results pages (SERPs), where they tend to draw in more traffic than those appearing lower down on SERPs.

Google is on an uncompromising mission to provide users with accurate, well-written and relevant answers to their search queries.

Websites that have a healthy backlink profile are likely to be valued by users and it's probable that they will ultimately be favoured in SERPs by Google, too.

While a healthy backlink profile is a vital ingredient in conveying to Google how authoritative your site is, it is worth noting that Google's algorithms consider a multitude of other factors when determining your site's position in SERPs, such as the quality of the content on its pages and how easily your site can be navigated.



WHAT IS DEEMED A POOR QUALITY LINK PROFILE?

Google Penguin cracks down on link schemes - or 'spamdexing' - and seeks to penalise sites that breach Google's Webmaster Guidelines by using manipulative link building techniques to achieve rankings and grow traffic.

Any site that was deemed to be engaging in 'black hat' linking techniques, be that via directories, link farming, paid or rented links etc, can receive a penalty that affects their ranking on search engine results pages SERPs.

The objective is not to make your links appear natural; the objective is that your links are natural.



HOW CAN I GET A LINK-RELATED PENALTY?

Bad neighbourhoods

A bad neighbourhood refers to a collection of interlinked websites or link directories that have been penalised in the past. Sharing your server with a large neighbourhood of websites that have a penalty history could put your site in jeopardy of being demoted, no matter how ethical your links are.

Similarly, backlinks that point to your website from a bad neighbourhood can harm your site's authority.

Bought links

Buying links to manipulate your site's position in SERPs includes exchanging goods or services for links and trading money for links. Such actions are classed as a defilement of Google's Guidelines, which is likely to result in a penalty.

Link networks

The phrase 'link networks' refers to multiple websites that operate with the sole intention of increasing the ranking of websites in SERPs. The content found on link networks is rarely high quality as, by their very nature, most link networks are built purposely to dupe Google.

Over-optimised anchor text

Google Penguin has underscored how imperative it is to avoid over-optimising anchor text, ie, by using too many, or irrelevant, keywords ('keyword stuffing'). This indicates to Google that you are attempting to manipulate your place in search rankings.

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I'VE BEEN HIT BY A LINK-RELATED PENALTY?



If your link profile is deemed by Google to be negative, your site will be penalised and you'll see your search engine ranking fall.

Therefore, if your site's analytics report displays a sudden and severe drop in traffic and SERPs rankings, it's likely that you've been issued with an algorithmic penalty.

The severity of the decrease depends upon the form of penalty that has affected your site, as well as the variation of digital marketing tactics you have in place.

For example, if you rely solely on organic search to drive traffic to your website, the dip in visitors is likely to be more intense after a penalty compared to sites that utilise other forms of advertising, such as pay per click (PPC) initiatives and television advertisements.

Regardless of the form of penalty your website has received though, even a small dip in traffic is bad news for companies operating within the competitive online sphere.

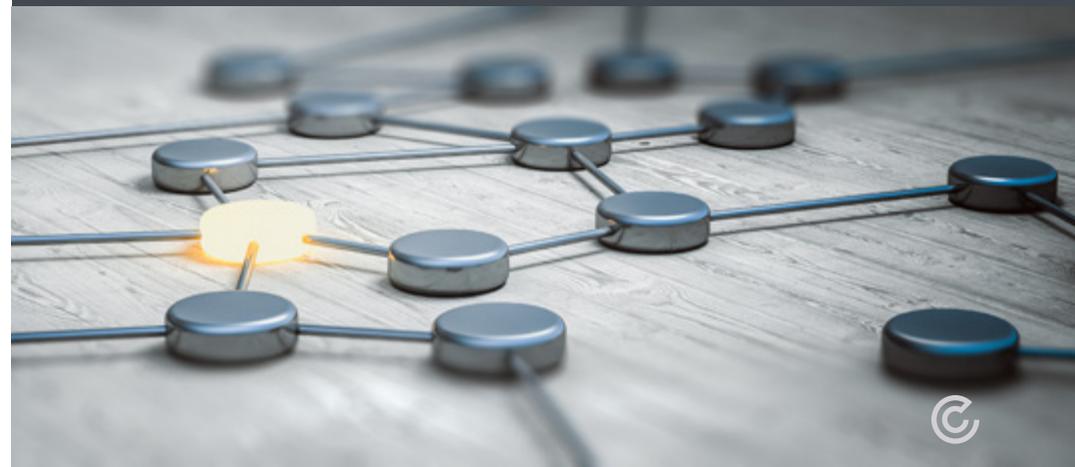
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ALGORITHMIC PENALTY AND A MANUAL PENALTY?

An algorithmic penalty occurs naturally when Google's spiders crawl a website and discover recent unnatural linking strategies.

As suggested in the name, a manual penalty is issued manually by Google; it places restrictions upon individual websites that violate Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

If you've been issued with this form of penalty, you may notice that one of your website's pages – or, in the worst case scenario, your whole website – have stopped appearing in SERPs.

The severity of a manual penalty depends upon how badly your website was breaking the guidelines.



CAN WEBSITES ACTUALLY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF GOOGLE PENGUIN?

Penguin is part of Google's core algorithm, sites that maintain a strong link profile are in a great position to see key metrics improve, including rankings, sessions and leads.

This is great news for businesses who have fallen under historic algorithmic penalties, as they'll see the benefit of any hard work put into cleaning up their link profile, which should be picked up on each time Google spiders 'crawl' their site, and reviews their link profile.

We've seen these performance improvements both for our clients and outside of our portfolio, throughout the web, and across multiple industries.



CAN I REMOVE A GOOGLE-IMPOSED PENALTY?

It's possible to remove a link-related penalty: a complete link audit, clean up (removal of poor quality links) and link acquisition campaign should see the harmful impact removed.

However, the link auditing and removal process is rarely easy and, if it's conducted incorrectly, it's likely that Google won't revoke the penalty.

Conduct a link audit

If you suspect that your website has been hit with a manual or algorithmic penalty as a result of unnatural links, you should conduct a link audit. This will allow you to identify unnatural backlinks that point to your site from websites that break the rules set out in Google's Guidelines.

Link removal

The backlink removal process involves contacting the owner of each site on your finalised list of URLs that need to be removed and asking for the links to be deleted.

This can take a few weeks as you'll probably need to contact each website owner several times numerous times to optimise the possibility of getting the links removed.

WHAT A SITE OWNER REFUSES TO REMOVE AN OFFENDING LINK?

If you utilise all forms of communication and fail to make contact with the webmasters of certain sites or you can't locate contact details for them at all, you can use Google's Disavow Links tool to disassociate your site from the offending links.

This tool should be used with caution; using it too often indicates to Google that you haven't made an effort to get the links removed and this may harm your site's future performance.

If you've been issued with a manual penalty, you'll need to submit a reconsideration request to Google; this involves detailing your link removal efforts and pledging to Google that you will not purposely build backlinks that break the Webmaster Guidelines in the future.

It's therefore vital that you document your link removal efforts so you can prove to Google that you put a reasonable amount of work into cleaning your backlink profile.

Simply disavowing your links without attempting to get them removed will probably result in your reconsideration request being rejected.

HOW DO I RECOVER FROM A LINK-RELATED PENALTY AND MAINTAIN A HEALTHY BACKLINK PROFILE?

Once you've been successful in getting a manual penalty revoked and/or removed any offending links that may have led to your site being penalised, it's important to rebuild your site's authority and regain the trust of Google by building ethical backlinks.

The following techniques are key:

- **Content marketing**
- **High quality on-page content**
- **Campaigns**
- **Digital PR**
- **Blogger outreach**
- **Social outreach**
- **PR & editorial outreach**



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ABOUT US?

Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC), with over 70 professionals employed and with a portfolio of over 60 clients from across the UK, Europe, Americas and Australia.

Click was named Search Agency of the Year 2018, adding to its long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within both RAR's and Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'

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Sometimes what you need is a quick point of reference about complex subjects. Thanks to its team of highly talented designers, Click Consult is also able to distil its vast experience into easy to understand visual content.

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OUR TECHNOLOGIES

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