

ThoughtShift presents

How to Recover from Google Panda



Google Panda Update Guide

Google's Latest Update – An Attitude Adjustment

Google are quite keen on making regular updates to their search algorithm, the authoritarian oppressors that they are. The algorithm, a mysterious mathematical formula the web boffins have come up with to determine search engine results, means that certain criteria have to be met on a website in order for Google to determine how relevant your site is in a search.

This time around, the update is all about content and the overall experience of the user. The intention is to get rid of all the nasty low quality sites from Google's index, so that users can have a more pleasant searching experience. It's all about being original, authentic and not posing as something you're not. So what does this actually mean for your website?

Quality Content Counts

There are plenty of different ways the Panda update might hit a site, but one of the major ones is that Google will penalise sites with duplicate content. Duplicate content, content taken from other areas of the web, is a big issue now. You don't want to rip-off other peoples work anyway, it's just not cool to infringe on their stuff. So, what that means is that original, and high quality, content is all the more important. Content has to be snappy, original, engaging and really serve a valuable purpose to the user.

Thin or sloppy content is another issue; Panda will recognise low quality content that doesn't actually add any value. If you want to blow smoke, and ramble on with meaningless empty sentences or hyperbole – then run for parliament, you'll do better there than you will in Google. Short undetailed content is a big indicator of sloppiness, as is bad grammar – and as the Panda update will diminish your entire domain, you need to fix it. This means that all pages really need to serve a distinct purpose, they've got to have an intent about them that makes them useful.

Not just wishy-washy content, you want to stand out as an individual. This means improving your site's overall content, but removing sloppy content is part of that.

Keyword Stuffing Gets Penalised

Over optimisation is another big issue, there should be nothing black hat at all. Keyword stuffing will incur a penalty, so avoid that. If you're writing content for a blog or web copy – just focus on small numbers of keywords. One target keyword should be enough for a blog. But overall, just maintain an emphasis on the quality of your content and user experience – and don't forget as Panda is a domain level penalty you need to completely get rid of bad content, or at the very least update it and change it to introduce some quality.

Just take a good hard look at your site, you should be able to tell quite clearly if content isn't particularly good, doesn't provide useful information or just generally lacks a certain level of engagement. Is your site posing as something it's not? Saying one thing, but doing another? The vital thing is, if you have this kind of content – it needs to be changed! Get into the mind-set of your user and really focus on quality and originality! Remember, it's not just the content pages on your site that Google will penalise – it's the whole domain.

Sharing Is A Plus

Social media is a great way to enhance user experience. Pin it buttons for Pinterest work fantastically well for people to easily share and bookmark images, Tweet buttons are excellent for information sharing so you should definitely add them to any blogs or features. Anything that liberates the user and gives them more freedom to discuss and share is a good thing. A top tip for user experience in relation to social media is adding a Google+1 button. Google will look favourably on sites that integrate with their own social media services.

Users More Important Than Ever

As we've discussed, improving user experience is an essential factor for websites in the Panda update. You've always got to think about your users, if you were a band

you'd want your fans to be happy right? This can just be relatively simple things, like broken links for example. A user who comes to a site and clicks on a broken link is going to have a reduced user experience – and Google will recognise this, and therefore reduce your search engine rankings. A good tip if you're using a WordPress site is getting Broken Link Checker.

You should also think about ads when it comes to user experience, you should have a good ad to content ratio – if you've got ads on a site, there shouldn't be too many and they shouldn't impact the overall functionality of a site to the user. This essentially means you shouldn't have too many ads above the fold – having to scroll down to see the content of your site is bad for the user.

A Shift In Approach

The Panda updates affect a wide range of sites, and there's not much point resisting. Don't make the Panda angry! You might get bitten, which means traffic and rankings drop. So, take these points into consideration and make sure your site functions smoothly in a technical sense, offers good quality content and is not overly optimised. If you need to make changes, do so. Once you've done them, you can Request Reconsideration from Google using Webmaster Tools.

Google Panda is really about the attitude a site has. If a site is spammy, poorly written link farms that offer little or nothing to the user – then Google is not going to trust it. It's about cultivating a culture geared to the user, and let's face it – websites would be nothing without their users.

About ThoughtShift

ThoughtShift is the award-winning digital marketing agency increasing eCommerce revenues for multi-channel brands including Oliver Bonas, RED5, Biscuiteers and Anna Scholz.

Specialising in the retail, furniture, fashion and travel sectors, ThoughtShift's Agile Digital Methodology™ identifies the most valuable online buyer segments to create new customer acquisition strategies integrating SEO, PPC and social media marketing.

Winners of the Chartered Institute of Marketing's Marketing Excellence Award 2015 for Marketing Performance Measurement, ThoughtShift's digital marketing campaigns increase brand visibility across Google, Facebook and Amazon to grow incremental online sales by millions of pounds each year.

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