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INTRODUCTION

Simply put, Google Panda is an update implemented by Google that dictates what results appear on Google under what criteria. As people continue to discover new ways to rank higher on the Google search result pages without offering content of any value whatsoever, it becomes essential for Google to stay a few paces ahead. Therefore, whenever webmasters and SEOs start catching up, Google updates its algorithm to keep in line with its primary objective: to provide the highest quality search results to its users. Google Panda is the latest addition to the Google's bandwagon of updates, about which you will learn more as this book unfolds.

If you own a business and receive a large percentage of your customers through your website, then you need your website to be well known. It is a known fact that most of us discover new websites through search engines. Remembering domains or bookmarking many websites is a pain, so it is easier to simply *Google* what we are looking for. This makes it essential for small business owners to get their website on the first few pages of Google's search results. In other words, you need to keep Google happy if you want your online ventures to succeed. Google has an impressive algorithm that determines which websites offer high-quality content to its users and which offer junk. The algorithm—updated many times since its inception—does a good job of giving accurate results relevant to the search string.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a technique employed by websites that improves a site's search-engine ranking. Since search-engine robots follow a fixed algorithm for indexing the content of a webpage, it can be determined by following the trends which techniques work and which do not. Over the years, tricks to optimize a site's ranking have been compiled by people who have extensively studied these search-engine algorithms.

There are two kinds of SEO:

1) **White Hat SEO**

White Hat SEO is considered the ideal SEO, and is achieved by filling the pages of a website with quality content, all of which is relevant to the search keywords targeted at a particular audience. The aim of White Hat SEO is to provide genuine and original content to the user while keeping filler text to a minimum and avoiding the practice of keyword stuffing. There are other factors that fall under the White Hat SEO umbrella such as link building, back linking, good site design, and controlling the quantity of ads on your website.

2) **Black Hat SEO**

The second SEO method is called Black Hat, which uses an approach aimed at flooding web pages with keywords and spun articles, creating link farms, using automated

software to make blog comments, adding hidden text, cloaked pages, and other practices designed solely to generate traffic instead of to add value to the user. Sites that primarily rely on Black Hat SEO to generate traffic to their site are often considered spam. The result of Black Hat SEO is that it tricks Google into giving a website a higher ranking than the true value dictates. Copied content from other websites is another form of Black Hat, which actually lowers your website's ranking and can lead to legal trouble related to copyright infringement. Although these tricks have proven effective in the past and can boost the rating of your website temporarily, they are merely short-term solutions prone to be attacked by future Panda-like updates.

Note: Not all things labeled *Black Hat SEO* are bad. For example, blackhatworld.com is known to have the top SEO people in the industry discussing White Hat SEO. Thus, the trick is to learn which practices are truly good and which are bad. A good rule of thumb is: *if it's too good to be true, it's too good to be true.*

It is clear that the White Hat SEO approach is the right one to take and is supported by search engines. Investing in original and high-quality content is best because it is a long-term thing. Sites relying on White Hat SEO will probably not experience a traffic decrease every time a new algorithm update is rolled out.

Black Hat SEO is what search engines aim to curb. Such websites are penalized heavily by search-engine algorithm updates. This is the right thing to do, because these sites contain nothing of value, and are usually created to attract search-engine traffic. They employ various deceptive techniques (cloaking, keyword stuffing, etc.) to gain a higher ranking on the Search Engine Results Page (SERP) and hence rob an authentic and relevant site of its place. In turn, this reduces the ability of the search engine to provide results relevant to the search query.

To combat this shortcoming, Google, the search giant, has been updating its algorithm regularly. The general focus of all these updates has been to increase the quality of search results and decrease the ranking, or exterminate spam sites. Each time a major update is rolled out, an anxious furor erupts in the web communities. Minor updates are rolled out every week, and most of them are silent and are not followed by an official announcement. It is the major updates that cause the greatest turbulence, hitting many blogs and websites. The latest update from Google, which rolled out this year, has been making news. It features one of the most intensive algorithm changes brought about by Google, and has suppressed traffic for some websites by almost 50 percent or 60 percent.

In this book, I'll tell you about Google Panda in detail. I'll tell you how it affected and penalized various websites, and what can you do to overcome it if your website got hit. I'll tell you how you

can adopt improved SEO practices into your web ventures, and how you can design your web pages from the ground up, and safeguard your business against similar threats in the future.

CHAPTER 1: What is Google Panda?

Since Google Panda rolled out in February, it has been the major topic of discussion in various online forums and SEO professionals. In the rare case you have happened to miss all the buzz surrounding this update, here we tell you in detail what exactly is Google Panda, and why is it so important.

The very first Google Panda update, dubbed as the Farmer update, was released on February 24, 2011. This update marked the biggest change Google had ever made in its search algorithm, and this update decreased the traffic of websites by as much as 80 percent. According to Matt Cutts, the Panda update was designed to affect nearly 12 percent of all searches. He further stated that around 500 of search improvements were slated for release this year. The key areas where Google has struck hardest with its new update are listed below:

Content Farms – Websites that act like content farms have been devalued by Panda. This is mainly because they stuff low quality and outdated content into their web pages for the sole purpose of gaining traffic and raising their search engine ratings. Oftentimes, they provide content of zero value, and yet are ranked higher than sites that offer genuine information.

Quality Content – Quality content is more important now than ever. Google does not like affiliate sites, and having longer articles really helps. Articles and pages on your website should contain 700 words or more. Google loves quality content and proving it to Google's spiders is going to boost you in the rankings quickly.

Spammy Links – Google has always had trouble separating pure spam from genuine links. Google Panda has hit profile links and blog comments, and they no longer pass much quality onto your site, according to Google.

The following has gained importance after the Panda update:

Social Sites – Facebook and Twitter are among the top websites now, and so Google understands the power behind these social platforms. Google now recognizes that people hold in high regard what their friends tell them; lending credence to these sites as pertains to SEO practices after the Panda update.

The algorithm update did not stop at the 1.0 version. Whereas the first Panda update was for the United States only, Panda 2.0 rolled out for all English searches worldwide on April 11, 2011. Even in non-English speaking countries, the update affected all searches made in English. The

third and fourth updates were released on May 10 and June 16 respectively. The current version is 2.2.

But before we discuss the technical aspects of the various versions of Google Panda, you should familiarize yourself with the technical aspects of the Google's search algorithm. Since Panda is essentially a ranking update, a basic knowledge of Google's ranking mechanism can come in handy.

Google's PageRank

Larry Page and Sergey Brin published two papers to describe their innovative and patented PageRank algorithm. The PageRank of a web page is essentially its importance (or rank) with respect to the other pages on the internet. The rank is a numerical value, calculated by a mathematical formula which takes into account the number of links that lead to that webpage, and the number of links that lead from that webpage. The principle is, if a lot of links lead to a single page the importance of that page automatically becomes high. Now this means that your website should be really well connected. Pages which are likely to be useful to the searcher should be made easy to be reached. Just to satisfy your curiosity, there are not a lot of pages which have a PR of 10. Apart from Google itself, Facebook.com has also reached a PR of 10. Google uses the PageRank algorithm to assign each webpage a numerical rank, and then uses that rank to determine the rating of that page on its results page.

Site Authority

Unlike PageRank, **site authority** is not a numerical value. Google decides the authority of a site in its own way. A good PageRank does not mean that a site has authority, but many of the factors that make up page rank give a site authority status. To give an idea to its users and SEOs, Google has laid out some guidelines to tell you which sites are given a high authority status. These guidelines are available on Google's blog and are quoted here word for word.

Just ask yourself these questions:

- Would you trust the information presented in this article?
- Is this article written by an expert or enthusiast who knows the topic well, or is it more shallow in nature?
- Does the site have duplicate, overlapping, or redundant articles on the same or similar topics with slightly different keyword variations?
- Would you be comfortable giving your credit card information to this site?
- Does this article have spelling, stylistic, or factual errors?
- Are the topics driven by genuine interests of readers of the site, or does the site generate content by attempting to guess what might rank well in search engines?

- Does the article provide original content or information, original reporting, original research, or original analysis?
- Does the page provide substantial value when compared to other pages in search results?
- How much quality control is done on content?
- Does the article describe both sides of a story?
- Is the site a recognized authority on its topic?
- Is the content mass-produced by or outsourced to a large number of creators, or spread across a large network of sites, so that individual pages or sites don't get as much attention or care?
- Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?
- For a health related query, would you trust information from this site?
- Would you recognize this site as an authoritative source when mentioned by name?
- Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?
- Does this article contain insightful analysis or interesting information that is beyond obvious?
- Is this the sort of page you'd want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?
- Does this article have an excessive amount of ads that distract from or interfere with the main content?
- Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopedia or book?
- Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?
- Are the pages produced with great care and attention to detail vs. less attention to detail?
- Would users complain when they see pages from this site?

Now this is how Google thinks your site should be. And if you are able to please Google by following these guidelines religiously, you shall be rewarded. One question arises here; do you need to do anything apart from following the above points? There are various tried and tested techniques which complement the Google guidelines. They are meant to give you that extra edge. The fundamentals, however, have to be first strong. Therefore, the above guidelines are to be followed by everyone.

In the due course of this text, you will come to know how your site footprint, link count, PageRank, and Speed of Indexing are all factors in defining your site authority.

CHAPTER 2: Identifying a Panda Hit

The first step to take to save your site from the Panda hit is to identify symptoms. Why? For starters, it will measure your progress in your efforts to reduce the Panda effect. You will also need to make sure that the traffic fluctuations you are noticing are indeed because of the Panda update and not because of some other random factor. This will enforce your faith in the steps you will be taking. Now a straight 40 percent traffic decrease that never returned can for sure be attributed to a Panda hit. If you didn't experience such massive phenomenon in your website's traffic, there are still quite a lot of subtle but sure hints that will tell you that your website is indeed suffering from the Panda effect. Mentioned here are the most important of those factors.

This chapter is just meant for you to identify your problem; subsequent chapters will help you in rectifying them.

Losing Long Tail Keyword Traffic

It has been established that the Panda update has caused the loss of long tail keyword traffic for many sites. Mind you, the primary keywords' ranking would stay unchanged. The question is, why only long tail keywords? The answer to this question lies in the quality of your content. If Google feels the quality of your content is not up to the mark, your long tail keywords will get devalued resulting in less traffic.

Another explanation could be that since content farms provided a lot of back links to web pages for long tail keywords, those links have been devalued because Panda has hit those content farms the hardest. Since the primary keywords normally receive the real link building, the traffic due to those remained largely unchanged after the update.

Extended Ranking Fluctuations

After every algorithm update there is a fluctuation or bouncing of rankings noticed for a while. This is mainly because Google tries to reevaluate rankings and update its index. Earlier Google Dance used to occur about once a month when Google updated its index, but since the adoption of continuous index update, Google Dance became less prominent. Even after an algorithm update, the bouncing around lasted only for a short while. However, if you notice the ranking of a few keywords keep fluctuating wildly and don't seem to settle down, then you most probably have been hit. One of the causes may be that you have done aggressive link building through content farms instead of relying on natural linkbuilding.

Traffic Increase, Then Decrease

Use a tool like Google Analytics and check your site statistics for the time around the Panda release. If you notice a spike in your website's traffic right after the Panda update rolled out

followed by an immediate decline; you most probably have been hit. The general consensus is that the rise and dip signify that Google is assessing your webpage in accordance to its new algorithm. If the dip you experience is permanent, it means Google has just reduced your site authority.

Check for Content Indexing

Use the site search feature provided by Google to verify if your content is being indexed by Google since the latest update. There are various tools provided by Google to check this. For example, check your indexed content by Google searching **site:** www.your-domain.com. This will give you a fair idea if Google has stopped indexing new content, and if it has, then you are a victim of the Panda update.

Major Decrease in Website Traffic

This is the most dreaded symptom of all, and it means that you have lost around 60 to 70 percent of your traffic in the post-Panda period. If the traffic increase right after the update was temporary and after a while, your traffic becomes consistently low, you are staring down the barrel of the gun. This occurrence definitively tells you that a major overhauling of your site is required. It is better to build your site from the ground up, following the steps given in this book, making sure you follow the white hat practices for long-term sustenance.

Later in the book, more will be discussed about building a search-engine optimized website from scratch.

Ranking Decrease for Specific Keywords

This symptom describes the event when only a few keywords saw a ranking decrease instead of your whole site being affected. If you think your site receives most of its traffic from a few specific keywords, it is likely to be hit hard after this update. Websites that paid more attention to the content quality instead of generating keyword-specific traffic did not experience much decline.

Ranking Decrease for Exact Match Domains

Google used to place EMDs or Exact Match Domains in high regard. For example, if your site is about country French rugs, the EMD will be www.countryfrenchrugs.com and it will be ranked high. EMDs are almost always based on a primary keyword that receives a lot of traffic, or in other cases, it is a slight variation of the main keyword (for example www.countryfrenchrugs1.com).

Many junk websites with poor content achieve good SERP ranking because of EMDs. With the Panda update, Google set out to fill this loophole. Surely the domain of a website is one of the important features of a website, but Google aims to downplay this factor so that there is no

room for misuse. Therefore, if you noticed about 30 percent drop in ranking in your EMD sites, it means you need to stop depending upon EMDs so much in this post-Panda era.

It is quite likely that you have experienced all or some of the above-mentioned symptoms and now can relate to them. Now that you have pinpointed your problems and are more aware, you can proceed to the next chapter where you will learn everything you need to know about bringing your website back on track.

CHAPTER 3: Conquering the Panda Effect

After going through the previous chapter, you must now be aware that you need to make radical changes to keep Google happy. Since Google controls the search market, you'll have to play by their rules. In this chapter, you will learn about various SEO techniques that will help you overcome the Panda hit. Keep in mind, the process of recovering your lost ranking can be slow, and weeks may pass before you see any major improvements.

The following techniques have been developed around Google's guidelines mentioned in Chapter 2, but there are still a lot of other tweaks that you should incorporate as well. Depending on your problem, you may need to implement some or all of the following solutions. The list is as comprehensive as possible and covers quite a few items, but is still nowhere close to the 200 different signals that Google analyzes for every website. The items covered below display the widest effect on the search ranking of your website, and hence it is not considered important to go beyond these items.

Module 1: Content Related SEO

Article Spinning

Article spinning is rewriting an article with the intent of keeping the general content intact, but changing the wording so as to offer a slightly different perspective of the topic to the reader. Spinning can be done manually or with the help of software. Spinning is performed so that you can post the same article on different sites and avoid the duplicate content penalty that search engines impose. The most popular syntax used by automatic article spinners is as follows:

{Hi|Hey} there.

The curly brackets are called delimiters. Every opening delimiter has a corresponding closing delimiter, just like brackets. The pipe character is used to separate various synonyms.

As you can see, two variations of the above sentence are possible. When you use the software on an article, it creates a text file using the syntax shown above. You can select various words and phrases, and the software puts synonyms of those words between delimiters as shown above. Using different synonyms, the spinner can produce a large number of variations of the base article.

What not to do: sub-standard article spinning

It is no secret that spun articles produced through software are not up to the mark in terms of quality. Spinning only makes your content *appear* unique to the search engines when in reality, it is not. Now that Google is becoming better at detecting duplicate content, it is even more essential to use the best methods of article spinning. If you use software for your spinning, no matter how sophisticated it is, some of the spun articles are bound to be meaningless. Manual intervention is needed in most cases, because the software can swap synonyms, but it cannot detect the context of the article and use the appropriate word in correct places, nor can software restructure sentences. Restructuring has to be done manually if you wish to produce quality content. Honestly, eliminating spinning altogether is the ideal scenario!

What to do: quality copywriting

Here are some tips to guide you through quality article spinning:

- Always use differently spun versions of your title. Since the title of an article enjoys special importance from Google, using different titles will help.
- Always spin the first sentence on your own. This means rewriting the first sentence completely by changing the structure of the sentence--not just swapping synonyms for certain words. Googlebots consider the first sentence of an article to be a summary of

what the content of the article is; therefore it is better to have as much variation as possible in this first sentence.

- Similarly rewrite the paragraphs, one by one. For starters, summarize the paragraph making it short while retaining the crux. Then use that to write different variations of those sentences. This might look tiresome right now, but after you get into the habit, you can manually spin an article with little effort.
- If you have a bullet list in your article, change the order of the bullet points within the article.
- Finally, use as much variation as possible in selecting your anchor text. You'll learn more about anchor text later in this book, but for now, remember to mix this up as well.

If the bulk of the content on your website comprises generic articles that have been spun from other websites using article spinners; the best thing is to delete those pages.

Remember, Panda updates favor websites that offer unique and original content to users.

Now, if your whole website is interspersed with copied or spun content, then you should consider rewriting all of it. You may also consider moving spun content to another domain where they are grouped together. This will increase the overall quality of your website, and only that particular domain will be affected (though it is recommended to get rid of them completely).

It has been seen that if you publish content from a plethora of authors of varying competence levels, breaking your site into subdomains can be of great assistance. Domains with better quality content will receive higher SERP ratings—as it should be. This will also prevent your entire website from getting bogged down due to the lower-quality content.

Article Length

What to do: vary article lengths

This is best explained through example. Let's say you have web pages with 1000-word articles, which would mean a greater number of keywords and long tail keywords. If it has various subsections with heading tags (H2 and H3), this would be likely to generate greater traffic, as Google assigns higher values to headings. The lengthy posts help you to build up your site authority, but the best thing to do is to have a good mix of both short and long articles. Again, quality is the most important factor here, and yes, it is quite possible to attain high authority through small posts. But if you are pressed for time and you want to see results quickly, the longer, well-written posts are your best bet.

What not to do: fix article lengths

Take care to make your posts look different from each other, so as to define a better site footprint. Forcing articles to be of a fixed length or of similar length (all short articles, or all long articles) makes articles and your website look unnatural. Variation is the key.

Website Footprint and Indexing

The number of pages you have in the Google Index is often a strong indicator of authority and you want to evaluate your site in that regard.

What to do: perform a site evaluation

Always remember to perform a site evaluation according to your niche and other competitive sites to get an accurate picture of where you stand. You can check the number of indexed pages using site: www.domain.com search in Google. From there, you can get a clear idea of how many pages you have indexed. The total number of pages is mentioned in the sitemap.xml file. Similarly, you can check out the competition in your niche using the same method. Doing this is important, as knowing your competitors well is always a plus. This will help you to select your keywords, and in the long run, will help you to ease ahead of your competitors in SERPs.

Relevant Content

Google Panda loves fresh content. It is important, therefore, to keep your site filled with content that is new and relevant to today's users.

What to do: update your site on a regular basis, make use of robots.txt files for outdated content

You need to spend serious time thinking and charting out a working plan as to how you are going to manage this. If your sitemap is massive, then you need to do this methodically and spend a lot of time. If this is too much work for you to do on your own, consider buying content from freelancers if it is too much for you to do on your own.

The robots.txt file contains information for the search engine crawler bots about which pages should be excluded from indexing. This feature has become even more important after the Panda update, because if you have old, outdated, or copied content, you should exclude those pages from getting crawled. This will save you from getting penalized because of those pages until you figure out how to go about fixing them.

What not to do: have outdated content on your website

If you have a lot of outdated and useless content and you don't update your site frequently enough, you'll see your traffic count toppling. Google search is becoming more and more dynamic, and you are probably going to lose your rating as soon as your content becomes old

and loses its relevance. Keep in mind that the days are gone when you could have created a site, forget all about it, and still be able to score that sweet AdSense money. Panda has changed it all.

Keyword Density

In layman's terms, keyword density is the number of keywords that occur in an article per 100 words.

What to do: keep your keyword density low

People have long been speculating over what an appropriate keyword density should be, ranging from 1 percent to almost 5 percent or 6 percent. But, in post-Panda times, it is advisable to be on the safe side, and keep your keyword density to a bare minimum. The best practice is to write without worrying about the keyword density, making it sound as natural as possible. But since keywords help the crawlers in identifying and indexing your article under the appropriate category, you may find it helpful to employ at least a 1 percent keyword density. This makes the discovery of your article easier when users use that keyword phrase to search.

What not to do: have keyword-stuffed content

Why? Because, Google has started considering keyword-stuffed articles spam, which, actually, is not too far from the truth. For example, if you implement a 5 percent keyword density in a 200-word article, it would mean it has ten occurrences of the keyword. This takes away the authority of the article, and converts it into a spammy text written just for the search engine crawler bots. Such text fails to provide to users the experience Google is looking for, and therefore slashes the ranking of such websites.

Module 2: On-Page SEO

This module deals with SEO techniques targeting your website's look. Believe it or not, the way your site *looks* is also a big factor in deciding the authority of your site. Content is key, but if you want that extra edge over your competitors, then you are going to have to pay a lot of attention to the intricacies of designing a web page. You have to be able to look at your site through Google's eyes and make some big decisions, move around a few things, and simply make your site better to look at. Panda loves a clear, concise, user friendly, and clutter-free web page. This will also make sure visitors keep visiting your web page for more.

To gain these benefits, there are a couple of things you can implement, the details of which are listed below.

The Power of Wordpress

Wordpress is a powerful way to create your website because of the sheer amount of plugins it has to offer. Wordpress installation is recommended on your domain because of the numerous inbuilt SEO benefits it offers. After installing Wordpress, you can make use of a variety of cool plugins such as All in One SEO, Easy Privacy Policy, XML-Sitemap, WP Super Cache, and many more. Take care to configure your permalinks to display the actual title of the on-page content in the URLs instead of numbers.

Sitemap and Site Navigation

The sitemap, as the name suggests, is a map of your website. This is basically a list of all pages on your website, which serves two vital purposes:

- 1) It helps your site visitors in navigation, and
- 2) Search engine bots find your site easier to crawl if it has a sitemap, and so your site will get indexed more effectively. Two types of sitemaps are popular: HTML and XML. It is advised to have a HTML sitemap because of its user-friendly nature.

Sitemaps help to keep your website organized, and therefore it must be kept up to date. If you are using Wordpress, there are plugins available that automatically generate and update your sitemap.

Try to make your site easier to navigate. This is simply a part of good website design, which has gained even greater importance since the advent of Google Panda. Having an organized and interlinked website will earn you many SEO points. Interlink your posts. By that I mean, if in one of your articles you refer to a topic or product about which you have written an article long ago; then include a link to that older post. People might be interested in reading more, and it's a good

practice to coerce visitors to stay on your site. Also, while you accomplish this, balance the use of anchor text on your pages; you'll learn more about this shortly.

Use interlinking not only in your text, but also in images. You can use alt text for images and produce anchor text-like results. The whole point is to make navigation of your site as easy as possible.

Image Tagging

Always give relevant alt tags to your images, as it helps search engine bots to identify what that image is about, and visually impaired (colorblindness or hypermetropia) visitors will be able to read the description of the image instead.

Utilizing Space

This technique works similar to a newspaper design. The top half of the front page of a newspaper is considered to be more eye-catching than any other portion. For this reason, it always bears the most important of headlines and the top news of the day.

This observation can be similarly applied to a webpage. When a user visits your webpage, the first thing he's going to notice is contents of the top half of the page, depending upon the browser and his resolution settings. There's a big chance the user will not scroll down to fish for relevant content if the top of your page is filled with ad banners and irrelevant text. Google has taken care to give greater preference to the content value on the top of the page while determining the authority of a website.

What to do: place quality content above the fold

Among other things, you should decrease the height of your site header, freeing up valuable space. Make sure you have lesser ads and a greater quantity of truly relevant content on the top half of the page. By taking these steps, you will realize that Google is right about this, and also it makes for a far better user experience, which is ultimately what you should strive for.

What not to do: place too many ads above the fold

Reevaluate the relevance of every item in the header and get rid of ad banners or buttons that are outdated, useless, or are just not important enough. Keep to a minimum the amount of flash animated ads and banners, as they take up a lot of screen space. Too many of these ads make your site look like a spam site and should be avoided. It's always better to gain traffic rather than to place a few more ads.

Advertisements

What to do: improve site design to better accommodate ads

It has been noticed that the content-to-ad ratio on a webpage has become an important factor after the Panda update. Placing large blocks of ads above the fold might not be a good idea anymore, as Google now penalizes websites for this practice. Many websites that had a plethora of ads around that content, taking up most of the screen real estate, have plummeted in the rankings. Such websites do not provide a good user experience, and the content is hard to locate. Come up with a good site design with pre-assigned space for ads—don't just place them randomly all over the page.

What not to do: have too many advertisements on your site

If you have many advertisements on your web pages, it is advisable to reduce the number to a respectful amount so that the content stands out through the advertisements. It is far more useful to have a good SERP ranking than it is to flood your site with ads, earning short-term cash. In the long run, flooding your site with ads will cause Google to lower your site's ranking, decreasing your traffic, which will in turn decrease your income from your advertisements.

Using different advertisement networks for your website can also be useful. Make a point to keep the ad-to-content ratio close to zero for above-the-fold space in your web pages. As mentioned before, what you place above the fold is of great importance when it comes to Google's search-ranking algorithm.

Outbound Links

Outbound links are links that take the user to another web page. This is not a major SEO factor, but it is a factor all the same.

What to do: have an optimum number of outbound links

There is a recommended optimum number of outbound links that is neither high nor low. Though it might be an uphill task to define the *optimum* number, among the best places to look are the sites of your competitors in that niche. In general, 100 outbound links on a single page is considered too many, and they tend to get their quality diluted.

Places to find these outbound links include nested menus and submenus and on a Wordpress blog -posts, categories, blog roll links and more. It is just a good practice to remove all useless links from your page. Also, take care to mark paid outbound links as *NoFollow*.

Next, include outbound links to authority sites on your website. Now you may argue that this means you are directing your traffic to other sites without any benefit. However, this will increase your own authority in Google's eyes. It is a good practice to share traffic and give credit

to sites in your niche that have more detailed content than your site. You can also include Wikipedia links, as it holds information in any niche. This indicates you are playing fair, are not trying to hoard traffic, and appears more natural. It also creates a good user experience in the sense that you are really trying to give the best possible information to the user because let's face it—no website has all the information.

If you have copied an article or a story from another site, be sure to give due credit to the original site by including a *DoFollow* link to that site. There's a good chance that the user will read the content on your site and recommend your website to his or her friends. The amount or frequency of these links have to be decided solely by you on the basis of what you have learned so far, taking into account your niche-specific competitors' sites.

What not to do: include all DoFollow outbound links

DoFollow links affect PageRank calculations, and if your site is full of such links, Google will consider you a spammer. However, do not mark all outbound links as *NoFollow*, because that will raise a red flag too. This is called PageRank hoarding. This is a small issue and doesn't have much value, but still should not be neglected.

Affiliate Site Links

Google hates sites that are made just for bearing affiliate links and AdSense. According to Google, such sites do not care about providing value content to the user and they exist just to generate ad revenue. Because of this, sites that have a bunch of affiliate links have seen a ranking drop after the Panda update.

What to do: include quality content about the subject matter

There are still a few things you can do that will help you to hold on to some of those affiliate sites. Always include quality content about the subject matter. Give up trying to use AdWords for affiliate marketing, because Google's Panda update will penalize you heavily for that.

What not to do: have too many affiliate links

As mentioned above, having too many affiliate links is unnatural. It makes your site look like it exists just to earn money through such links. With Google becoming stricter about affiliate marketing, it is better to stay on the safe side and reduce the number of affiliate site links.

Miscellaneous On-site Tips

Since this is supposed to be a comprehensive guide, I'm not leaving out things that have only a marginal impact on your ranking. Since each of these factors add up, you should pay attention to each detail, even the details that have a lesser impact when viewed alone.

- ❖ Appear as a real person to your site visitors. If your niche has such scope, share your physical address and your real phone number on the contact page of your site. This gives a strong signal to the users—and to Google—that you are not out there to spam them and are genuinely interested in providing quality content.
- ❖ However tempting it might seem to you, under no circumstances should you try to fool Google using hidden text. If you are unfamiliar with this term, hidden text is a block of text containing niche-relevant keywords that spammers hide on their site by blending them into the background and substantially decreasing the font size. Panda has increased Google's ability to spot this, and your site can be severely penalized if you're caught. This is not worth it at all.
- ❖ The loading speed of your webpage also plays a role in your site's ranking. Although this is a small and seemingly insignificant factor if looked at by itself, it should be mentioned nonetheless. You can check your page-loading time by entering your domain name on the website pagespeed.googlelabs.com. Google will give you a score out of one hundred, along with a few suggestions for improving the speed of your site. You should aim for a score of at least 70.
- ❖ Do not try to fool Google by copying text from other sites and using it as an image so that Googlebots cannot read it. This is a spamming practice and is quite predictable, from which you need to keep yourself away.
- ❖ It has been noticed that Google has found a way to detect unethical practices such as placing links and text off the page so as to fool the crawlers and users. Such links cannot be found without looking into the code of that webpage. Where these practices have worked in the past, Google's latest update penalizes such sites severely.

The bottom line is, refrain from doing anything that is illegal in Google's book. Even if you evade discovery now, Google will sooner or later find a way to penalize you. It is therefore better to follow White Hat SEO from the moment you start building your site.

Module 3: Off-Site Post-Panda SEO

This section deals with off-page factors that affect your search engine ranking. SEO-wise, this is the most important part of this book. This section will teach you how to capitalize on the Panda update by building back links, optimizing your anchor text, and saving your content from being copied elsewhere.

Back-Linking Essentials

Back linking has always been vital to the success of any SEO endeavor. And by back linking, I do not mean spamming. The Panda update has shown us that trying to trick Google is no longer the way to go about SEO. All the back links to your site should seem natural, and not as if they have been forcefully introduced to boost the rating of your site. Having only high-authority back links may also look suspicious, so the best path is the middle path.

Anchor Text

It is advantageous to get people to link to your site from another site. Take into account anchor text. Anchor text is the visible clickable text in a hyperlink.

What to do: mix up your anchor text

The best strategy is to use as many variations as possible of the main keyword.

For example, if the main keyword is *summer school*, you should use variations such as *all about summer school*, *the best summer school*, *everything about summer schools*, *learn about summer school*, etc.

It is best to evaluate your standing against your competitors in your niche and take a note of the amount of anchor text they are using. This can be easily accomplished by using various online tools such as SpyGlass.

What not to do: don't overuse keyword rich anchor text

It is a general practice to use keywords as anchor texts while doing offsite back linking. Before Panda, this was an effective technique, although it is not exactly White Hat SEO to create 100 percent of your anchor texts as keywords. Today, this practice will make Google view your site as spam. It is considered unnatural to have such a keyword-rich anchor text, instantly noticeable by Googlebots, which in turn send out alarm signals, thereby penalizing your site.

It should also be mentioned here that the overall value of anchor text has been reduced by the Panda update. Gaining leverage through massive link building using anchor texts might not be a good idea now—it can even work against you. Panda penalizes all spam practices; reducing the value of anchor text, which are a great source of spam, is part of its job.

Value of .edu and .gov Links

It is believed that Google Panda has decreased the value of back links coming from government and educational sites. The primary reason behind this can be the amount of spam that these sites accumulated because of people trying to gain back links from these sites. Although the value of back links coming from these sites is less frequent than before, I'll still advise you to get links from these sites simply because they are high authority sites. You might have to create an account and post comments in relevant threads, promoting your site. This practice almost lies on the fringe of acting like a spammer, so make only relevant and high-quality posts.

Authority Sites

It is self-explanatory why back links from high-authority sites matter so much. First, they are not easy to get, and if you did manage to attain such back links, it means you have valuable content on your site that Google will respect. Apart from the .edu and .gov sites, there are plenty other authority sites that you can use, even if the links are *NoFollow*, because all links carry some value and contribute to boosting the authority of your site.

What to do: build links from high-authority sites, including social networks

Link building on sites such as YouTube and Facebook is easy. On YouTube, you can easily create a profile and place a link back to your site. Maintain this profile by regularly adding videos and comments. This basically builds your social credibility as well as popularizes your website. The same thing is true for Facebook. Create a page for your business and keep updating it regularly. These efforts are bound to be rewarded by post-Panda Google and you will see a ranking boost soon. Additionally, you can try getting back links by creating press releases. These are bound to be picked up by a multitude of sites, which will carry a link back to your site.

The bottom line is to make your link-building efforts sustainable in the long term. Also, links that have existed for a long time carry more weight in Google's eyes because their credibility increases with time. Link building is a slow process, and it should be done regularly. Never rest on your laurels, because SEO is constantly changing. Panda was just one of the 500 algorithm updates that are slated to be released in 2011. Therefore, you have to plan your actions so that you can deal with whatever the future might throw at you.

What not to do: don't have all your links from authority sites

Be careful while doing link building, because having 100 percent incoming authority links is suspicious in Google's eyes, just because it is not natural. Mix up your links well, and perform link building on low-authority sites too, so that Google cannot detect what you are up to.

Safeguarding Your Content

This is a tricky subject. It is considered next to impossible to be able to prevent others from copying your content. Due to the anonymity the internet has to offer, a good number of people

resort to unethical practices. They can either visit your website directly and then copy and paste your content on their site, or they can subscribe to your RSS feed and pick up your articles there. Sure, you can sue them if the matter is serious enough, but in day-to-day life, it is simply impossible to fight a copyright battle over someone stealing a few articles from your website. What do you do in such a case?

What to do: disable right click, disable text selection, or contact the webmaster

First, you can disable the right click feature on your website. This will prevent them from easily swiping your content and images. I'm not saying that it will be impossible to copy after that; it's just that people will eventually stop copying from your site because of the hassle. Another thing you can do is to disable the left-click text selection on your page.

If the above tweaks do not solve your problem, then you should be practical. Find out which sites are copying your content using Google search or Copyscape premium. If they are ranking above you in Google search for that article, then you have a problem. It means they have copied your content and have managed to trick Google into believing that they originally created that content and *you* copied it. You can try contacting the webmaster of that site and ask him to take the content down on ethical grounds. If that fails, you have no choice except to remove that article from your own site and rewrite it. This is a hard choice to make, but it is better than getting penalized by Google for copying.

What not to do: deliver full content over RSS feeds

It's even easier to get your content copied through RSS feeds. One solution you can implement is to deliver only a part of your articles over RSS feeds, and then include a link back to your site. This is the last thing you should do, and only when you are suffering way too much because of content copying.

Social Networking in the Post-Panda Era

As mentioned before, Panda has increased the value of social networking sites in Google searches. Data that Google obtains from social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter is now used for leveraging search results. Google's latest addition of the +1 button on its search results pages reaffirms this belief, as now Google can collect social data directly from users.

Also, Facebook pages now rank higher in Google's search results. Therefore, it is highly advised that you promote your business through Facebook. Even though social networking outbound links are *NoFollow* links, they can still be useful in popularizing your website and your business.

Social bookmarking sites allow users to share articles and websites with their friends. A few examples of such sites with their PageRanks are given below.

| Website URLs | PR |
|---|----|
| http://www.stumbleupon.com | 8 |
| http://www.diigo.com | 7 |
| http://www.jumptags.com | 7 |
| http://blinklist.com | 7 |
| http://www.folkd.com | 6 |
| http://www.bizsugar.com | 6 |
| http://www.designfloat.com | 5 |
| http://festivalespejo.com | 5 |
| http://tagza.com | 5 |
| http://thepartizans.org | 5 |

Even though these sites, just like social networking sites, are *NoFollow*, it is still worth it to promote your sites on these platforms. These help to build up your reputation and credibility in Google's eyes. Apart from these, you can try linkbuilding on private blogs comments, forum comments, and various other websites.

Chapter 3 Summary: Keeping it Real

This might seem a little counter intuitive for the purpose of this book, but always keep a check on the amount of SEO you do for your site. For example, if all the articles on your site have a perfect length and the perfect keyword density, it would probably look like you hired an SEO firm to do the job, which isn't a good thing to do according to Google, who wants your site to be as natural as possible. For this reason, I recommend that you mix up your anchor text, keywords, and links.

Don't try to attain all back links from high-authority sites, because it looks suspicious--mix them up. The bottom line is, you have to use SEO tactics, but you have to use them in a manner that looks natural to the purpose of your website. Don't build your website for the search engines; build it for your readers.

The tips mentioned in this chapter don't have to be followed word-for-word, because then you'll end up over-optimizing, which will prove to be useless in the end.

CHAPTER 4: Post-Panda SEO

This chapter deals with building a long-term search-engine optimized site. Until now, we have been focusing mainly on how to create your site from scratch. In this chapter, you will learn some miscellaneous techniques that will help you to sustain your search ratings for a long time to come. Google understands that the web is dynamic, and will therefore not sit idle. There are still many loopholes in the Google algorithms that are exploited by Black Hat SEOs to gain quick ratings, but Google is aware of these loopholes, and sooner or later, they will be fixed. The aim of this chapter is to show you where Google sees itself in the coming years, and what to expect from the future Panda-like major algorithm updates

Before I begin, I would like to repeat the fact that you should post only unique content on your site. Sure, the Panda update has highlighted it, but looking into the future it can be safely assumed that in a few years, Google will make it absolutely impossible to attain a decent ranking through copying and spinning. Thus it cannot be stressed enough that for long-term gains, your content should be high quality, unique, and regularly updated.

The New Face of Google

There are many things that have lost their importance after the Panda update. For example, exact-match domains are not as effective today. Yesterday, you could create many small websites featuring exact keywords as their domain name and generate a significant amount of traffic, but now Google has decreased the value of such domains. It should be clear that I'm not saying EMDs have lost their value completely—they still carry a lot of weight, but you have to refrain from building your business around them. It is now better to aim for a high-authority website and use EMDs in conjunction with that website to gain added benefit. For example, if you own a business, you should create a full website for your business rather than creating multiple mini sites for each of your products. Use EMDs judiciously and be prepared for them continue to lose their value with each subsequent update. If you do decide to build your business around an EMD, treat it as any other domain and use all SEO techniques mentioned in this book to create and promote your site.

Article spinning is also losing its grip. Today, high-quality spinners are being developed only because older spinners are no longer effective. Although spun content is still important to offsite link building, the trend suggests that it will continue to lose its value with subsequent updates. Speaking of link building, as mentioned before, .edu and .gov no longer carry the same high value as before. Links coming from these sites have been downgraded to counter the unlimited amount of spam being generated on these sites.

It has also been noticed that aged domains no longer receive the same special treatment in rankings as before. Google Panda has hit them hard because such websites were simply sitting on their laurels and were enjoying good SERP ranking without updating their content—they had simply existed for a long time. Therefore, it makes good sense to decrease the value of the domain age signal and give a better chance to websites that are dynamic and have engaging and fresh content. If you are making a new entry in a particular niche, this can even prove to be a blessing in disguise. You will have a far better chance to overtake your opponents who previously had the special advantage of having an aged domain. Google Panda has pretty much leveled the playing field in this department.

Next, although there is no definite proof of this, it can be considered natural that Google will be giving greater value to relevant link building. By relevant links, I mean that incoming links from sites relevant to your niche are given a greater value. Although this is a hotly debated topic, there is reason to believe that this policy is likely to be implemented in future algorithm updates.

Finally, the design of your site is more important now than ever before. On-page SEO is gaining prominence following the Panda update. No doubt content comes first, but the way you display that content carries great importance. Many people have been seen complaining that they write fresh, original content for their websites, yet Panda has slashed their ratings and their traffic volume has diminished down to a trickle. This is likely going to happen if your site looks like a spam site to the Googlebots due to its horrible design. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, keep away from keyword stuffing, advertisement stuffing, confusing navigation, etc. Consider redesigning your site if you feel the design is old and dated. This might prove to be a great future investment for you.

Google +1

Google is becoming more social, and one of the biggest proofs of this is the addition of the +1 button on all the Google result pages. The launch of Google Plus has only strengthened this belief because the pages that you +1 appear on your profile, and are automatically shared with all of your friends. Social marketing today is a powerful tool, and Google realizes that. Although Google has denied the use of data from the Chrome extension that marked sites as spam based on users' personal choices, it cannot be denied that this might be used in the future. This is another reason that you should make your site user-friendly and socially popular. Market your services and products on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, because if you are socially popular, it makes sense that you will rank higher. This strategy is a win-win for everyone, because a strong presence on social networks will popularize your site and bring you visitors, which is ultimately your goal in any case. And of course, there is a strong indication that with further updates, such sites will receive a ranking boost. Therefore, include feeds from Facebook and Twitter on your website, and you will soon see the benefit.

Getting the Most from Webmaster Tools

Using Google's webmaster tools can be fruitful, especially if you already have AdSense and AdWords on your website. These tools can provide you with a massive amount of data that you can analyze and keep track of how your websites are doing.

Webmaster Tools allow you to see a lot of the data as Google will see it. Placing your sitemap into Webmaster Tools helps you to get your site's pages indexed. This is beneficial because it allows you see any issues you may have with your sitemap. As an example, it will state how many pages are in your sitemap that are submitted and how many are indexed. You can see crawl errors from within Webmaster Tools. If your site somehow shows a lot of 404 errors, you can look it up in your Webmaster Tools and study the data. This can help you track down the exact problem that is creating such errors.

There is a lot of keyword data available within Webmaster Tools as well. It gives data such as *for keyword x we are position #3 and we receive 3600 impressions on that keyword*. It can also tell you what your click through rate is. What is interesting about this data is that you can find out which keywords are better performers for you. For instance, I may notice that keyword x gets 6500 impressions yet only gets a 1 percent click through at position number two. But another keyword with 2000 impressions is getting a 18 percent click through at position number three. So that second keyword is actually a better performing keyword from an action perspective. The parameters to watch out for include page views per site, time on site, and bounce rate.

Another important item that you get from Webmaster Tools is back-link data—both internal and external—which is a full count. For example, if your website reports over 400,000 links, that is a grand total of all links. And while that may sound like a lot, remember one website with 1000 pages and 10 footer links pointing to various other pages on your sites can generate 10,000 links alone. It is always a good idea to have an idea of what your internal linking structure looks like.

Finally, Google +1 will be deployed via Webmaster Tools as well. This will mean that you will be able to see +1 trends, data, and analysis as well as get access to the tools that are used to generate the +1 buttons for your website.

It is recommended that you use Webmaster Tools if you can, but try not to use the same Webmaster Tools account for all of your websites. Create separate accounts for Webmaster Tools and Analytics so that all of your sites are not tied together.

Link Bait and Creative Marketing

Creative marketing is a great way to generate natural links to your websites, which can be a boon if your site has been hit by Panda. You need to think outside the box and use innovative methods to market your site. But most importantly, build your website so that it is a valuable resource for

the readers, targeted at your niche. Include case studies and reports so that your site becomes an authentic and comprehensive source of information for anyone who is interested in that niche. This will attract many regular users to your site. Create tools and widgets, which are really great ways to get people to bookmark and link to your site naturally. It is also a terrific way to build your list. Just offer a free version with no opt-in and then another version with expanded functionality that requires an opt-in to your marketing list.

Next, you can interview someone that relates to your niche. Also, you can interview your customers that are using your product in a way that your other readers may like to hear about or are having success using your product. These make great interviews and can develop interest in your product or service. Also, you can just give everyone a gift or free service. Spend some time working out the logistics of how to make this work. Spend some dedicated time each month trying to come up with a new link-bait item and roll one idea out each month—you're bound to stumble onto something good.

The Art of Social Media Marketing

Contrary to what many people think, I fully believe that social media marketing works and can produce a high return on investment (ROI), although it is not as simple as most people make it out to be. Social proof is just about getting some social links to your site to stir up a little activity and buzz around your site in the social forums and media outlets. Social media marketing is as much art as it is science, and that it is not something you can easily summarize in ten easy steps.

For starters, focus on the social media angle and automate your social media marketing with tools and plugins. Continue to educate yourself in social media marketing, but make it more of a long-term goal. Right now, there are only two social media networks to bother with: Facebook and Twitter. They have been proven to provide the highest ROI for now, therefore at least for now, focus on these two. Like I have said before, build up your profiles on Facebook and Twitter and use them to promote your own websites.

Chapter 5: A Recap

It is not an exaggeration to say that Google Panda has changed most SEO practices forever. The changes that have been introduced by this update will help push internet searching in the right direction; that is, a good user experience. The quicker you grasp this, the better. Obviously, the biggest losers were content farms and websites that feed spammy content to its users, but still you need to guard yourself against future updates of this kind.

You need to study the trends closely and plan your site's future accordingly. One of the best pieces of advice right now is to gradually move beyond affiliate marketing. The disadvantages of affiliate marketing suggest that you need to think outside the box and use a lot of creativity when you use it. Try to combine the two—your own products or services with affiliate marketing. Other than that, do a sufficient amount of research in your own niche, or write an eBook. Of course, you also need to choose your niche wisely. Select something in demand and that you enjoy doing. You should also be able to create products and provide services that appeal to that niche. All these things combined with your social media proof are really going to bolster both your credibility and popularity in your niche. This is where the future of SEO lies, and this is what you should aim for.

Make judicious use of EMDs, but do not heavily rely on them. EMDs will always carry extra weight when it comes to search-engine ranking, but an improper use might make Googlebots view your site as spam, so be careful. Focus on building a high-authority site for your niche. If you have your own products already, then focus on growing that inventory and streamlining your sales process. Add cross sells, add upsells, and add new products at different price points. You need to maximize the revenue your list can generate, which can be achieved through efficiency. There is much to do—for example, list building, better shopping cart integration, membership and continuity, more price points, and complementary product offers, etc.

If you are marketing your own product and don't already have an affiliate program, launch one. Focus on continuity and affordability. Don't overprice your products. Under price them significantly so that your customers are impressed with the value you deliver. Think of every product that you sell having at least an option for a continuity product to accompany it.

Make your site engaging and interesting. Focus on keeping readers on your site for longer. Like I said before, play close attention to time on site, pages viewed per visitor, and bounce rate; each are critical to your user experience. Make use of Google analytics to closely monitor all these parameters regularly. Keep tracking those metrics on a monthly basis and notice the effect of various changes you make on your site. This will be a great learning experience and in time, you will have a clear understanding of what is and isn't working. Finally, a good site design is

important, so hire someone competent and professional to design it for you. This will be an investment that will have pay-off in the future.

Parting words—the current version of the Panda update is not final. It is simply the biggest one-time modification Google has made to its algorithm. There are strong indications that this will be an ongoing change. So, making these changes in your website's strategy will only yield better results in the future!

We hope you enjoyed our report. Please visit <http://www.ezd.com> to give us feedback and see the suite of Internet Marketing Services that we provide.

Ciao 😊