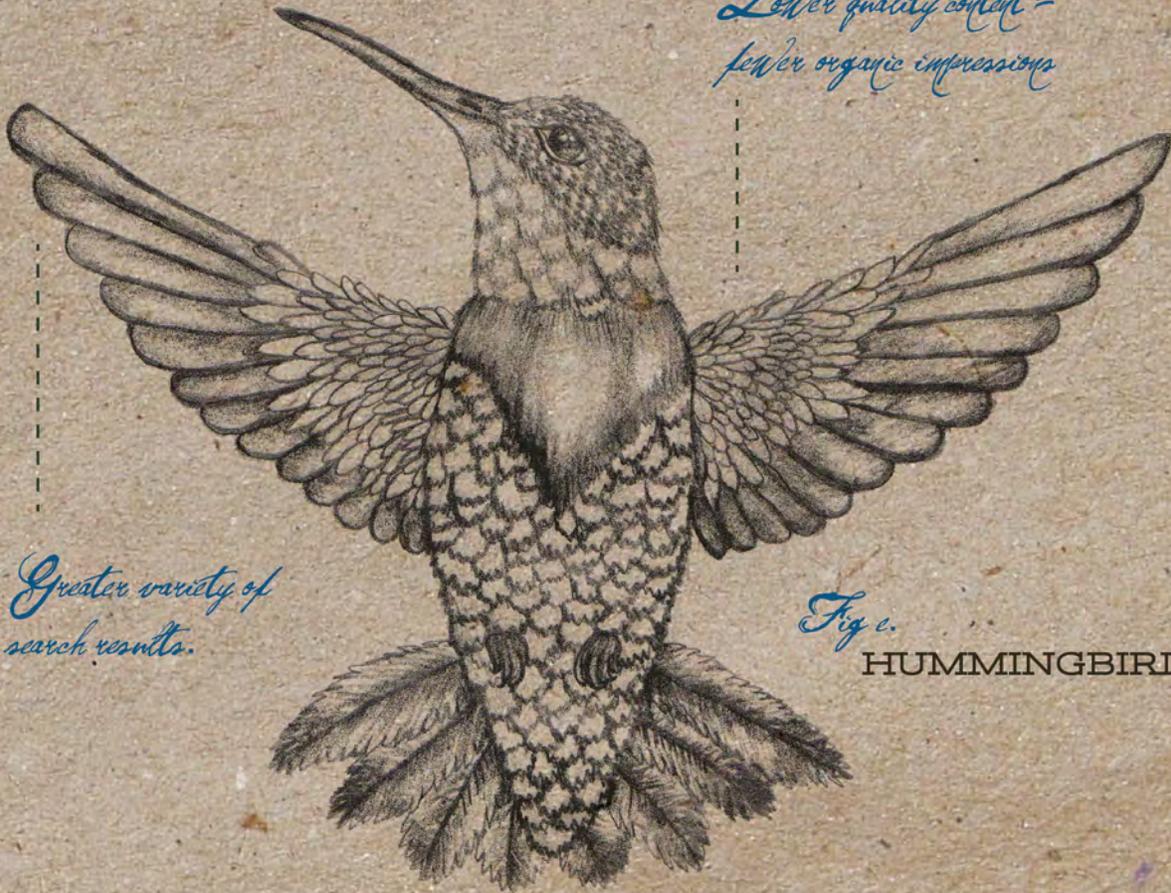


*Lower quality content =
fewer organic impressions*



*Greater variety of
search results.*

Fig. c.

HUMMINGBIRD

GOOGLE'S BIGGEST UPDATES

— AND HOW THEY'VE —

TRANSFORMED SEO **for** ECOMMERCE

 volusion®

Google's Biggest Updates & How They've Transformed SEO for Ecommerce

Table of Contents

Here's an overview of what we'll be covering:

1. Google's recent changes

- a. Penguin 2.0
- b. Updates to Google's Webmaster Guidelines & Google Developers
- c. Google Webmaster Tools reporting on webspam connected accounts
- d. 100% term (not provided)
- e. Hummingbird
- f. Penguin 2.1

2. How these updates relate

3. What this means for your SEO strategy

4. Conclusion

Introduction

Google made some big moves in 2013. From Penguin 2.0 to “100% term (not provided),” the world of SEO for ecommerce has transformed within the past year. It’s easy to lose track of the many changes Google has made—and how these changes can impact your business. Volusion, a leader in ecommerce solutions and platform for all business types, ranging from startups to large enterprises, is here to help you make sense of it all.

1

Google's Recent Changes

May 2013

a. Penguin 2.0

What changed?

This update penalized websites with unnatural looking incoming link profiles that were likely using link manipulation tactics to influence their rankings for top business terms.

Sites with a high proportion of keyword-specific anchor text, as well as link spam in general, took a big hit, especially any of which that managed to pass PageRank.

What you can do:

- Strive to perpetuate content that earns links naturally. Avoid having a lot of very low quality incoming links and associating with spammy domains and automated link building systems. This includes saying no to widget bait and site-wide links that pass PageRank.
- If you've been paying for links and for written endorsements on other websites with links that pass PageRank, you'll want to start phasing that out immediately.

Ongoing

b. Updates to Google's Webmaster Guidelines & Google Developers

What changed?

Google updates their [Webmaster Guidelines](#) somewhat infrequently, but it's important to stay abreast of these guidelines in order to understand what to do and what to avoid.

Some of the more recent changes include:

- An update to [Link schemes](#) – Post Penguin 2.0 and 2.1 Google has now clearly outlined manipulative link schemes to avoid including links with optimized anchor text in articles or press releases.
- A [checklist for mobile website improvement](#) providing a helpful framework for optimizing mobile experiences.

What you can do:

- Subscribe to Google's Webmaster Central Blog.
- Check on Google's Webmaster guidelines and Bing Webmaster guidelines after every update to get the latest best practices.
- [Google Developers](#) is also a fantastic resource to cultivate an optimized development workforce.

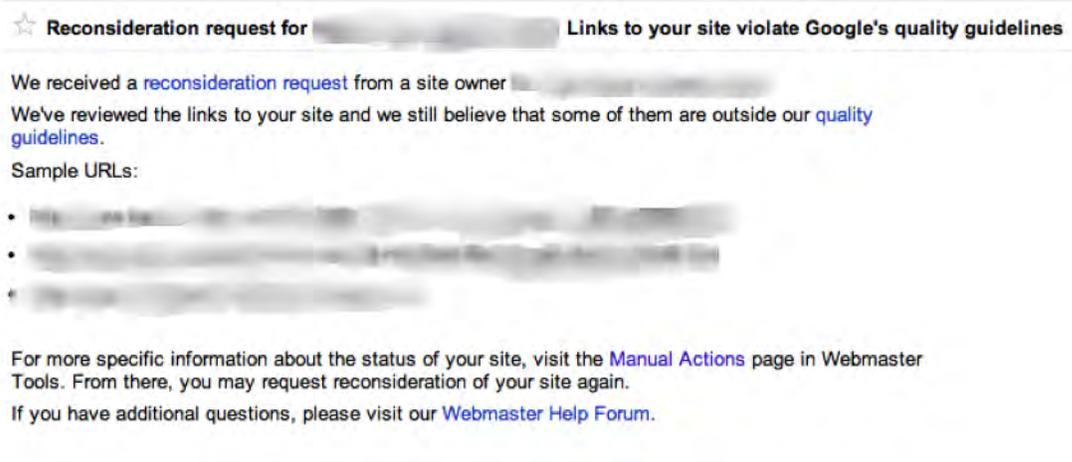
c. Google Webmaster Tools reporting on webspam connected accounts

What changed?

Google has been making efforts to give site owners notice of [manual webspam actions in GWT](#). This includes links that Google has identified as unnatural, as well as other forms of webspam, like problems with content.

What you can do:

- Log into your GWT account and navigate to Search Traffic -> Manual Actions. If you've received a manual action message, it's time to clean your content and incoming link profile of harmful, unnatural links.
- If you were dinged for a link that isn't harmful or unnatural, you have the option of submitting a request for review, aka a reconsideration request through a manual webspam message.
- If your reconsideration request provides enough detailed proof of your work to remove unnatural links, Google may be more inclined to offer sample URLs to help guide future efforts.



Example screenshot of a Google response to a reconsideration request

And remember: If you think you've been penalized but no notices have been brought forth through GWT, there is some analysis you can do within GWT to be certain.

Refer to your Search Traffic reports in GWT. Sharp declines (rather than gradual declines) in queries sending traffic to your site is a clear sign of a penalty, especially if it correlates with dates of algorithm updates.

Use your analytics tools as well and check your incoming links for over-use of specific keywords. Do you have a natural looking incoming link profile or is the keyword to brand ratio significantly different? With regards to your content, are you creating and publishing unique content? Then address any concerns with both your linking and content development strategies.

Most people heard about it on September 23, 2013

d. 100% term (not provided)

What changed?

All searches through Google are now 100% encrypted. This means that all keyword-level data for organic traffic will be reported as “100% term (not provided)” through analytic platforms like Google Analytics.

What you can do:

- Be aware of how this will affect your SEO strategy and find ways to compensate, such as:
- Utilize your Search Queries reports in GWT. These reports are limited in scope for a number of reasons, but Google has made updates lately to provide deeper levels of insight into the queries driving traffic to your site. Currently these reports remain directionally helpful, and hopefully they'll continue to evolve.
- Invest in technology that helps you understand how your content is ranking in general. Keyword rankings are one thing to track, but knowing what makes certain content rank over other content and how you can duplicate that success is even better.

September 2013

e. Hummingbird

What changed?

Hummingbird was a search engine upgrade, specifically an improvement in semantic search. The perceived impact of Hummingbird has been relatively slight depending on the industry, but it's important to understand what it means for search moving forward.

With Hummingbird in play, certain high quality content may now be able to appear for a greater variety of search results, no matter the length of the search queries. Less effective, lower quality content will get fewer organic impressions, and content created for the sole purpose of ranking for a particular search query may also receive fewer organic impressions if lacking depth and context.

What you can do:

- Begin to understand semantic search in greater depth. The first step is to understand your target market at their most intimate levels. Specifically, you need to understand what they search for online in terms of topics, products and services, and the reasons behind it.

SEO best practices are still in play, but the strategy behind your content development needs to be enriched with useful and impactful content. Content that meets a complex variety of emotional needs as opposed to being myopically focused on single keywords will rank higher. The focus on the user becomes priority one.

October 4, 2013

f. Penguin 2.1

What changed?

This was [reported by Matt Cutts](#) as a somewhat small algorithm update, but in short, some reports have suggested that certain websites penalized in May from Penguin 2.0 have seen a recovery. Others have reported increased ranking losses. As with all Penguin-related ranking changes, this one targeted link spam and other manipulative linking practices.

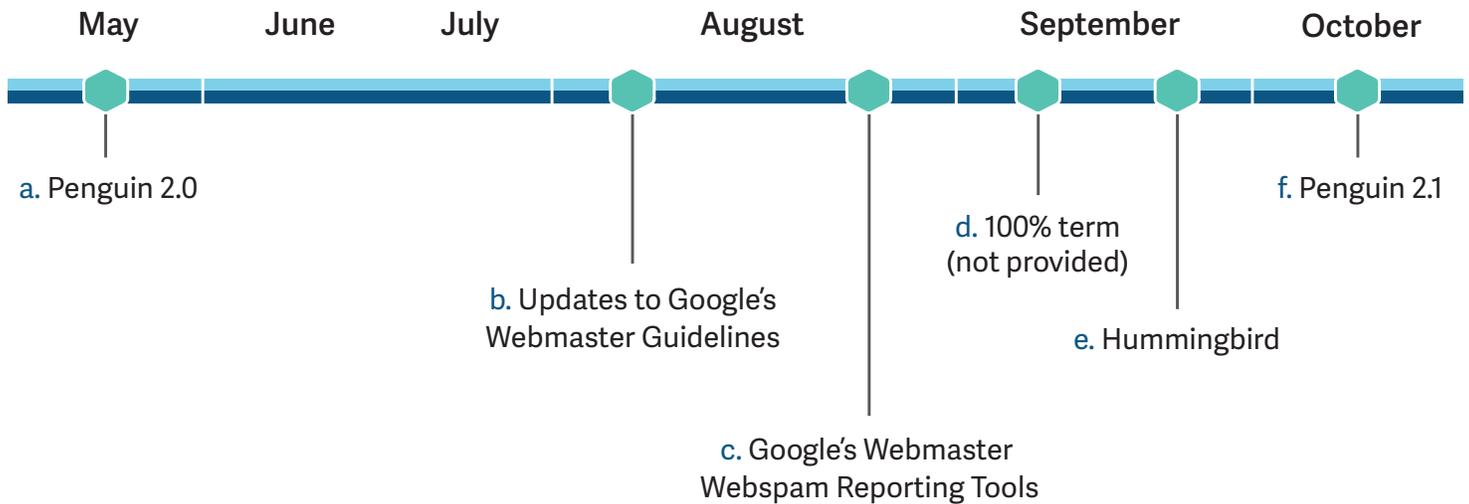
What you can do:

- Continue staying far, far away from manipulative link schemes. Google has become increasingly sophisticated in its detection and filtering technology, so trying to outsmart them is a losing battle.

2

How all of these updates relate

If you take a step back and look at the broader picture Google is painting, one thing is clear: The value of an SEO strategy set on tactics involving direct manipulation of search results is becoming increasingly less effective. And at the rate Google is churning out updates, a year from now these practices will have even less sway.



And this is exactly what Google wants. They want inbound marketers and business owners to shift their primary focus away from Google and manipulative link and content schemes and to concentrate their energy on each business's target market and to create the best products, services and content possible.

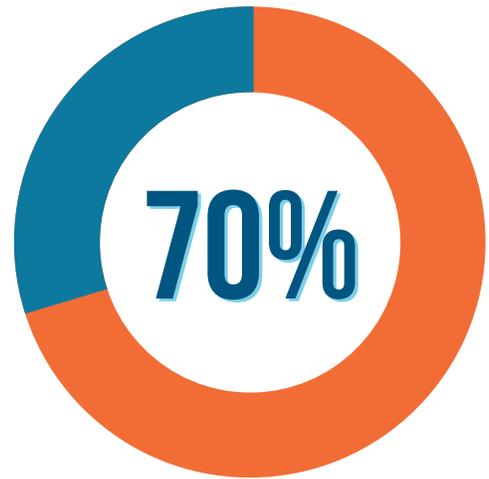
3

What this means for your SEO strategy

Google remains the first place people go to start their online searches. In fact, almost 70% of all global searches happen on Google as Google products continue to skyrocket in popularity and use.

These updates mean one thing: For your business to stay truly competitive, SEO has to become ingrained in the fabric of your organization. Everyone—not just your Marketing team—needs to optimize content, design, products and services for the best possible user experience and create a user-focused search experience from here on out.

Look at these changes as an opportunity to “humanize” your brand online. Yes, SEO is still about getting products to rank in organic search and to boost sales, but you can also expand your brand’s presence and expert knowledge by creating marketing content that your customers and prospects discover through short-tail, long-tail and informational-type searches.



Almost 70% of all global searches happen on Google™

Example: “What has better hdtv quality LCD or LED or plasma?”



What has better HDTV quality LCD or LED or plasma?



Imagine that an ecommerce business owner is selling HDTVs and he is struggling to rank in organic search for ordinary business terms such as: Samsung plasma hdtvs, Sony LED hdtvs, etc. These short-tail, head terms are a valuable source of organic traffic, but there’s also an extraordinary opportunity to gain visibility for long-tail searches. Not only will the business owner catch users at different stages in the purchase funnel, but these terms are also generally less competitive in their ranking.

Solution:

- I recommend this business owner create a content marketing strategy utilizing a CMS (e.g., an integrated blog or customer community) to support their ecommerce business. Though he may not have the resources to compete in advertising or outrank their larger competitors, he does have expertise and intimate knowledge of his audience, and can begin a conversation that will interest customers and prospects as well as build organic content and credibility with Google.

Here are a few additional recommendations to consider:

- Craft a content marketing strategy based on useful content development, with a focus on showcasing experience and highlighting expertise.
- Develop content that answers questions about HDTVs and how to buy one.
- Address all customers' questions and concerns online via blog comments and, ideally, reinforce with social media interactions.
- Use the blog platform to promote product content and industry expertise and build a customer following and sense of community.
- As the content expands, promote products and lead readers back to the online store to make a purchase.
- Encourage loyal customers to share their exceptional experiences with family and friends, create brand advocacy.

Over time, this business owner will accrue new links and grow the business organically and independent of Google algorithm changes. Also, chances are very good he'll start seeing improvements in organic visibility thanks to incorporating SEO best practices.

Conclusion

Google's goal is the same as any good brand—create the best brand and user experience possible to earn more visits and have more opportunities to make more money. They are focused on their target market first and foremost, and it is in the best interest of online business owners to do the same. Google will likely continue to reward websites and brands that have naturally earned the brand, social and link signals needed to rank well.

This report has been brought to you by  volusion®

Volusion is more than just ecommerce software; it's a platform that helps businesses own the online market. With 900+ features, 340+ ecommerce templates, SEO consulting services and 24x7 customer support, business owners have everything they need to grow their online businesses.

[Learn More with a 14-Day Free Trial](#)