Recent Changes to SEO That You Should Know About by Martin Goodyear

Article published on August 22nd 2012 | Seo

Technology is changing right now. As you read this, countless programmers are hammering-away at keyboards, developers are planning apps and Google's team are considering the next update to the search-engine giant. Carried by these ever-shifting tides are businesses that rely upon the internet. Among them is Search Engine Optimisation: the practice of using a mixture of on and off-page material to promote and increase the ranking of a client's website on search-engines.

This is a practice which has been in-place since the inception of the web-search, and it is a lucrative one. In a society where much of our custom is completed online, the web-market is filled with corporations vying for customers by taking-advantage of every technological innovation available. Where technology changes, potential clients go, and where potential clients go, SEO must follow.

Many such market changes can be traced to Google itself. It is constantly releasing updates; to improve user experience, and to weed-out those who would negatively impact that experience. Negative techniques employed by such groups include 'blog spam', 'link farming', 'thin content' and 'keyword stuffing', and can be collectively referred to as 'Black Hat SEO'. One of the most common forms of Black Hat SEO involves creating poor-quality pages consisting of a hundred words or so (often copied from other sources), and adding links to a client or parent site. Generally, 'Spinning' software is used to mass-produce this content, by stealing existing articles and running them through thesaurus programs. However, this process has been severely curtailed by new updates, including 'Panda' and 'Penguin' in Google regarding the way the search engine handles duplicate content and key-word stuffing. This means that Google is placing increasing value on quality, informative and relevant content.

Another necessary change to SEO is diversifying links. A large part of the practice involves creating and baiting links through various sources, which direct back to the client's web page, due to links contributing towards a page's credibility and desirability. Again, such practices can be abused through Black-Hat firms, employing bots to spam blogs and community websites with links. However, in the wake of Panda and Penguin, websites' rankings will be far more heavily affected by natural-looking links from a variety of sources. This leaves reputable, white-hat, SEO to employ linking though medums such as social media. This 'online PR' is obviously intended to take into-account website popularity through people 're-tweeting' or 'sharing' links via sites like Twitter and Facebook.

Finally, the prevalence of alternate search-engines begs the question "what, nowadays, is 'best practice'?" Bing, for example, has breached the 15% mark in terms of market share, and Google holds only 68% of the market. Is the best practice for SEO firms to stick with the safe-option in Google, or is there a lucrative opportunity in Bing, which famously claims to be a "smart" search engine. As Bing grows in popularity, many SEO firms are likely to be considering its potential for a dedicated campaign.

In short, then, Google is not so much penalising reputable, legitimate SEO firms, as it is attempting to render-obsolete the tactics used by their Black-Hat competitors. It is noteworthy that some White-Hat SEO companies employing 'grey-hat' (questionable but not usually outright banned) techniques have also claimed to have been affected by Google's moves. Thus, SEO is moving towards producing higher quality, reputable content, and encouraging community-sharing to spread backlinks, as opposed to artificially creating them. On-top of this, the possibility of other search-engines becoming a profitable market of their own is slowly dawning, and SEO will likely be affected by whatever fate lies in-store for Bing and other such competitors to Google.

Article Source:
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Article Keywords:
S.E.O.C

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