Panda Food: Feeding Google's Panda What it Craves

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Q. What do you feed a Panda?

A. Quality Content... Pandas don't eat Spam

Well Google launched a new breed of algorithm in Feb 2011 to battle spam and it was called Panda. Panda really targets low quality content and over-optimization. Google is attempting to bring higher quality sites to the top of the rankings and they've introduced a number of elements as a guideline for what constitutes quality in their view.

From the research we've done on our own sites and our clients' sites we've found that many things that Google previously thought were beneficial to a site are now frowned upon. These are now considered to be Panda Traps; aspects which can get you caught by Panda. Recovering from Panda can take some time but don't fear a little hard work and digging.

Step 1: De-spam your site

Spam has an ever-changing definition. Before Google wanted specific and descriptive content in anchor text which is now considered a no-no. Remove excessive over-use of your exact match keyterms, especially in anchor text. You should begin looking at variants of a term. This can mean using plurals, synonyms and other forms of the word. For example if you want to optimize for "auto parts" then you can use other terms like "car parts" and switch the positioning like "parts for cars". Try "automobile parts", "car gear" and others.

If you look at Google Webmaster Tools you'll see a section on the left called "Google Index". Drop this down and click on "Content Keywords". You'll see the individual words that Google finds your site to be most relevant to primarily based on usage. This is a great tool to use to find words that are repeated on your website which are not your primary terms which are diluting your true relevance. You'll also see how Google finds multiple variations of the word. The word "marketing" would have variants such as "market", "marketer", "marketed", "markets", etc.

If you're using your main keyword repeatedly in your Title and Meta Description tag then you should minimize this. Use your main exact match primary term only once in each, but again, here you can use variants. Make sure that your Title tag speaks to the topic of the page. You can use the overall site keyword or your brand but make sure that the Title is primarily focused on your page's specific terms. If you're that "auto parts" website and you want to optimize the page for "break pads" then you can write a title like this: Break Pads | Joe's Auto Parts.

When rewriting your Meta Description tag you should begin to use a structured data format where possible. There is a great description of this again on Google's Webmaster Tools Help site
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Step 2: Trim the thin (huh?)

Yep, that's right... trim the thin, don't trim the fat. Google doesn't like thin pages which have little or no content. Do an audit of all of the pages of your site (you can use the site:yoursite.com operator in Google to find the pages that Google has indexed. If you're submitting a sitemap through Google Webmaster Tools then review the pages on it). Go to each page and if it's either

really thin on content either build up the content on it or add in this tag to drop it from Google's index: .

When reviewing the pages of your site also take into consideration the relevance of those pages to you website. If you are about "car parts" and you have a page on there for "horseback riding" then you might want to NOINDEX that page.

Since Google wants pages to be valuable to viewers they want them to be trustworthy as well and this means having a privacy policy and other relevant pages readily available on your site. These are usually linked to from the footer. It's also a good idea to add any links to relevant awards or association websites that you belong to, as well as links to the Better Business Bureau and other like that.

Once you've de-spammed your site you now want to start feeding Panda.

Step 3: Chow time!

Panda loves to eat and it likes quality grub. Don't write pages and pages of useless information just to get content and keywords on your site. Look at your keyword list and what you are trying to present to potential visitors. Write about the things that will benefit them.

Don't just write about your services but provide them with authoritative information. You're a pro in your field – act like it.

Create a report on something applicable to your industry such as "a comparison of break pads" or "a brief history of the break pad" for that car-parts website. Answer questions. People do tons of searches in Google with actual questions and this provides you with the perfect opportunity to generate traffic by answering those questions. Write down a list of what the most asked questions are around a particular product or service (e.g. break pads). You can do a search of top question and answer websites like About.com to find many of the top questions related to your topic. Doing a search for "top break pad questions" and low and behold we find a number of related questions which range from "how often do you have to change break pads" to "How long do brake pads last usually before being worn out and how difficult to replace them?".

Now that you're armed with a list of the top questions... answer them. Provide a Q&A section on your site or a how-to section. You can list each question on the main page of this new section and you can then link each to a page with that specific question and answer or simply use anchors to link down the same page. If you have a really good large list of questions then you may want to consider creating a page for each but if you have a short concise list then just keep them on the one page.

The wonderful thing about this is that you don't need to necessarily put any of them into your Title or Meta Description as Google will often rewrite these with content from a website to present the specific information the searcher sought.

Another great thing to do is to think "specific". If you have a website about "dog training" then don't just have a page on there called "services" or even just "dog training services" and have all of your content on that page. Google looks at the level of generality or specificity of a page. Your homepage should be somewhat general and your category or "dog training services" page should be more specifically about your services overall so that it is more specific than your homepage but more general than one of your specific dog training services. This gives you the opportunity to create pages for each individual dog training service you offer. You can write a

page for "on leash dog training" and another for "teaching your dog to stay of the furniture". On these pages you can also really take advantage of those questions and answers. In the content, slip in some questions such as "how do I get my dog to stop chewing things" and you an answer it there on the page with a line that tells them something informative – a free tip – and then describe how your services can train their dog to not chew things. You can also link over to your questions and answer page for that specific question if you have one built already instead of answering it there on that page.

Step 4: Make sure your site doesn't have errors.

Review your website for both technical errors (dead or broken links, javascript errors, etc) and also check for grammatical and spelling errors.

Using such sites as the [W3C broken link checker](#) and [Google's Page Speed Insights](#) will provide you with lots of data to help you get your site fixed up and running at top speed.

Run your site's content (even the content in your Titles, Meta tags and other such as Alt tags are important) and find any spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, etc, which can hurt you.

Other key things to review your site for are duplicate content (where more than one page has essentially the same content) and to make sure that you're not using content from other sources that published it first. If you have product information provided by a manufacturer or you grabbed and paraphrased content from another site, rewrite that content so that it is unique. You can take a questionable line of content and place it into Google in quotation marks and search for it. If other websites have it it will come up in the SERPs.

Also get out on the Social Networks and get your content talked about. These Social Signals greatly help Google to see you s an authority. Do some Press Releases, get out into the community, write reports and other valuable information. It will all help.

These are some really good methods for escaping a Panda Trap and making pals with that big fuzzy fella.

If you need help recovering from Panda or with SEO for your website [click here](#)

Questions this post answers:

What is Google Panda? How do I recover from Google Panda? What constitutes quality content? How can I optimize my site for Google Panda?

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