5 SEO Tips for Affiliates
Visiting the Google Zoo
Practical advice for surviving Hummingbird, Panda and Penguin algorithm updates

Courtesy of your Web Coach
Helping you navigate the web

Geek-Speak
Level 4
Playing Nicely with Hummingbird, Panda, Penguin and Other Google Beasts

Each year, Google releases over 500 algorithm updates that determine where your website falls in its search rankings. Many in the affiliate community have seen their rankings affected by recent Hummingbird, Panda and Penguin “Zoo” updates including:

- Penguin 2.1 (#5): October 4, 2013
- Hummingbird: August 20, 2013
- Panda Recovery: July 18, 2013
- Panda Dance: June 11, 2013
- Panda #25: March 14, 2013
- Panda #24: January 22, 2013
- Penguin #3: October 5, 2012

You may have noticed organic traffic changes after these updates, and tools designed to reveal how your site was impacted are now available. This eBook will provide tips to help affiliates maintain and improve search rankings as Google continues to update its algorithms.
Tip 1: Distribute Content Across Domains to Maximize Main Index Penetration

Google dropped the Supplemental Results label from its search results back in 2007, but this purgatory of “less important” webpages still exists.

The Panda updates have been a primary culprit in banishing web content to the Supplemental Index. Intelligently distributing your content across main domains and subdomains can increase the presence of your most valuable web pages in Google’s Main Index.

Try this:

Main Domain Tips:
- Reserve your main domain for your most frequently updated, hardest working pages. These may be the pages that you use to sell products or services and convert prospects to customers.
- Make sure the content on these pages is fresh and frequently updated, and focus your link-building efforts here.
- Keep your main domain’s information architecture simple and straightforward, requiring minimal clicks to get to key content.

Subdomain Tips:
- Move highly nested pages and other pages with complex URL structures to subdomains, such as forums.yoursite.com.
- Reduce nesting by splitting large areas of your site across multiple subdomains, such as customerforums.yoursite.com, partnerforums.yoursite.com, etc.
- Move pages that are updated less frequently, such as support content and archived product documentation, to subdomains.
Tip 1 Continued ...

Try this:

Measure your site’s Main Index Penetration (MIP)

First, use these search queries to evaluate your site’s presence in Google’s indexes:

a. Main domain pages appearing in all Google indexes: site:www.yoursite.com
b. Main domain pages appearing in Google’s Main Index: site:www.yoursite.com/
c. All pages (main domain + subdomains) appearing in all Google indexes: site:yoursite.com
d. All pages appearing in Google’s Main Index: site:yoursite.com/

Then, calculate your Main Index Penetration ratios using counts from the above searches:

1. Main Index Penetration of Main Domain = b./a.
   This is the percentage of pages from your main domain in Google’s Main Index.
2. Main Index Penetration of All Domains = d./c.
   This is the percentage of pages from all domains in Google’s Main Index.

Track your MIP on a monthly or quarterly basis, and make adjustments as necessary. For larger websites, aim for a 20-30% MIP of the main domain for large sites, 40-50% for medium sites, and 80-90% for smaller sites.

Remember:

Your main domain should only contain useful and relevant information. It’s better to have 50 pages with 100% in the Main Index than it is to have 2,000 pages with only 2% in the Main Index.
Tip 2: Optimize Your Backlink Profile to Demonstrate Site Reputability

While you probably don’t consider yourself a webspammer, your site’s link profile may be sending Google the wrong signal.

One way Google’s Penguin updates targeted webspammers was by analyzing link profiles for link schemes, keyword stuffing, and other black hat link techniques. Below are a few link profile best practices revealed by our analysis of large, brand-name companies that enjoy strong Google rankings.*

Try this:

- Google knows that most high-quality links point to detailed, relevant content on internal pages – not to your home page. About 80% of external backlinks should therefore point to your site’s internal pages, such as blog posts, news announcements, and other topic-specific content.

*A strong link profile is likely one of many factors contributing to strong SEO in these cases.
Tip 2 Continued ...

Try this:

- Your site’s backlink profile should also consist of a variety of link types, including keyword links, image links, sitewide links, and no-follow links (see chart).

- Avoid intensive link-building initiatives that create sharp increases in external link mass. Be patient and maintain a natural, steady link-building rate over time. A mass of backlinks built over the span of a year or two may be seen as more legitimate than one built within a couple of months.

- Direct links are more valuable than redirects, so keep external site owners updated when you move content or make other URL changes to your site.

Remember:

Keep tabs on who is linking to your site, what they’re linking to, and how they’re linking to it. There are several tools available for analyzing your site’s backlinks.
Tip 3: Increase Content Value and Relevance for Higher Rankings

Focus on providing rich content that keeps visitors engaged and encourages further interaction with your site.

Google’s Panda updates came down hard on sites it deemed as low quality, such as those that copy content from other sites without adding any value.

Try this:

- A small site with fresh, relevant content will rank higher than a large site loaded with thin content copied from other sources. If you use content from other sources, be sure to supplement it with tips, reviews, editorial content and other value-adds that site visitors can’t find elsewhere.

- Create informative, relevant videos to further enhance content and increase average page visit times. For instance, Zappos produces its own straightforward videos that enable users to take a closer look at the products it sells.

- Be smart about your web copy by naturally incorporating relevant keywords into your text. Also, be sure to use terms “normal” people would use to find your site; the Google Adwords Keyword Tool can point you in the right direction.

- Have a clear site design strategy that meets the needs of customers and other target personas. If a searcher lands on an interior page, can they easily figure out where they are and navigate to where they want to be?

Remember:

Engaging original content, high-value supplemental content, and a simple design are essential ingredients in “sticky,” highly ranked sites. See Metric #2 in this Moz blog post for more information on how average time on page factors into search engine rankings.
Tip 4: Generate Clean Code for Customer, and Googlebot, Friendliness

The Penguin and Panda updates further bolster Google’s policy of rewarding sites that offer high-quality content and code.

In fact, Googlebot and other search engine spiders can be easily thrown off by code problems, preventing them from indexing your site. It’s therefore critical to inspect and validate your code before going live.

Try this:

- Assess the markup validity of HTML, XHTML and other code with the [W3C Markup Validation Service](https://validator.w3.org).
- Check CSS validity with the [W3C CSS Validation Service](https://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator).
- Clean and simplify CSS with the [CSS Formatter and Optimiser](http://cleancss.com) at CleanCSS.com.
- Use [Fetch as Google](https://developers.google.com/webmasters/tools/fetch) in Webmaster Tools to assess your site’s crawlability and get suggestions for improving your HTML.
- Use [cross-browser testing tools](http://www.google.com) to test how your site will appear to different users. The [Browser and OS Report](https://www.google.com/analytics) in Google Analytics can provide insight into how users are accessing your site.

Remember:

Not all coding errors are immediately obvious. While your site might look great to site visitors, clunky or bloated code could mean the difference between a high ranking and absence from search results altogether.
Tip 5: Speed Page Load Times to Encourage Repeat Visits

Google cites page load time as a key determinant of user experience and site quality – and therefore factors site speed into its page rankings. Fortunately, there are several steps you can take to track and optimize your site’s response time.

Try this:

- Compress JavaScript for faster download times, reduced bandwidth consumption, and other performance benefits. There are several free compression tools available online.
- If possible, combine JS scripts and place them at the bottom of HTML code – or combine them into an external file. This reduces requests to external files, thereby speeding page load times.
- Use asynchronous code for plugins, applications, counters, and other third-party page elements (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, analytics). Asynchronous code increases speed by simultaneously loading these elements with the rest of the page content.
- Use Google PageSpeed Tools and other performance tools to analyze and improve your site’s performance. Try PageSpeed Insights for a quick, straightforward performance assessment and suggestions from Google.

Remember:

Google’s own internal studies reveal that speed matters to site visitors. The faster your site, the more likely users are to return – so be sure to assess and tweak your site’s performance on a regular basis.