



GOOGLE'S MAJOR ALGORITHM UPDATES AND HOW THEY AFFECT WEBSITE'S SEARCH PRIORITY

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As a company that revolutionizes internet search mechanism by introducing the most sophisticated way of searching with its PageRank system, Google regards its search engine as its most essential asset. Updates to its search result ranking algorithm are periodically introduced, implemented and revised to make sure that its search engine ranks websites fair and square.

Most of these updates are minor, but there are some major updates that significantly change the search engine's behavior. The first major update is called **Panda**, which Google first introduced in 2011. About a year later, Google introduced **Penguin**, which further enhanced the search engine's ingenuity in rewarding quality websites and punishing spammy websites with manipulative link profiles. The next major updates that follows, including **Hummingbird**, **Pigeon** and **RankBrain**, make Google even more context-friendly and more capable to provide users with more relevant search results. Google also released a special update called **Mobilegeddon**, which allows its search engine to give priority to mobile-friendly websites when users use their mobile devices for searching.

For website owners, knowing the features introduced by new updates and their impact to their websites is crucial. Here you will learn about what you need to know about each of those major updates so that you and your websites can get prepared to deal with them.

Panda

- Introduced on: Feb 24, 2011.
- Revision: Monthly.
- Purpose: Lower the rank of websites with poor content quality.

Google Panda is intended to crush the keyword stuffing habit that is pervasive in the web, a trendy scheme to boost search ranking that is already popular even since before Google era. For years, Google has been attempting to change this tradition and to encourage websites to deliver high-quality content that is not too stuffed with keywords; and Panda is its biggest weapon to accomplish the task. Before being implemented as Google's core algorithm starting from January 2016, Panda was simply a filter that punished spammy websites by de-ranking them.

As the first large update for Google's algorithm, Panda is deemed so aggressive that it receives a lot of complaints from website owners. Google, however, asserts that Panda is going to be updated regularly, that penalized websites may regain their rank if they improve their content, and that websites that previously escaped the penalty may get caught.

Google never clearly specifies the criteria for a website to pass Panda's sensor, but in general, websites with poor content, including those with plagiarized, thin (lots of words with very few specific facts), duplicate, and spammy content as well as websites with low-quality and keyword-stuffed content are mostly prone to Panda's penalty. Sudden drop of PageRank can be a clear symptom that a website is being penalized by Panda.

Penguin

- Introduced on: April 24, 2012.
- Revision: May 25, 2012; Oct 5, 2012; May 22, 2013; Oct 4, 2013; Oct 17, 2014.
- Purpose: Lower the rank of websites with poor link profiles.

Google Penguin is intended to curb the years-long abuse of Google's policy that ranks websites based on the number of backlinks that they have. This abuse results in websites owners striving only to multiply backlinks without paying attention to the quality of their backlink sources. Websites with poor backlink profiles, i.e. those that manipulate the way their backlinks are generated, are prone to Penguin's punishment. This link-building scheme has actually been so severe that there are actually a lot of SEO programs whose main function is only to fraudulently build links on some spammy and poor-quality websites. The PageRank boost achieved using those programs is mostly temporary and once Penguin steps in, the boost will be annulled and the culpable websites will be punished.

There are several types of backlink that are deemed poor-quality and spammy, including those coming from spammy and poor-quality websites, websites with irrelevant topic, websites that are made only for link-building, websites that offer paid links, and websites with exaggeratedly optimized anchor text.

Hummingbird

- Introduced on: August 22, 2013.
- Revision: Unknown.
- Purpose: Enhance the ranking mechanism by understanding the meaning behind search queries so that websites with more relevant content get better rank.

Hummingbird is a major algorithm update that makes the search engine more context-friendly than text-friendly. Google will still regard keyword as an important element when providing search results, but it will also try to discover the context of the keyword by exploring the synonyms of short keyword and interpreting the contextual meanings of long and conversational searches. The search result pages now display websites with more theme-related content even if their content doesn't necessarily contain the keywords in the search queries. Among websites that will likely be demoted in rank after this algorithm is implemented are those with poor content, poor user experience and keyword-stuffed content as well as websites that target specifically exact-match keywords.

Pigeon

- Introduced on: July 24, 2014 (US); December 22, 2014 (UK, Canada and Australia).
- Revision: Unknown.

- Purpose: Enhance the ranking mechanism by giving priority to relevant local searches.

Pigeon further enhances the accuracy of Google's search result by taking users' location into account. Search queries are thematically assessed by heavily incorporating local elements. The correspondence between Google Search and Google Map will be stronger and more intensive than it used to be so that local factors, such as location and distance, can be effectively exploited in search engine optimization. Pigeon is currently available only for searches in English.

This update will undoubtedly affect the PageRank of websites. Local directory websites will receive significant boost whereas websites that fail to have relevant citation in local directories, websites with inconsistent NAP and websites with improper Google My Business setup will almost certainly be demoted in rank. Websites with poor content and link profiles will be crushed even more severely by Pigeon.

Mobilegeddon

- Introduced on: April 21, 2015.
- Revision: Unknown.
- Purpose: Boost the search priority of mobile-friendly websites on mobile search result pages.

Mobilegeddon or Mobile Friendly Update is a special update that Google releases to allow mobile-friendly websites to gain precedence on mobile search result pages. When users search using mobile devices, mobile-friendly websites will occupy the top positions on the search result pages. Desktop search, so far, is not affected by this update. The same search query may thus yield different result on desktop search and mobile search.

Mobile-friendly websites, including those that use reflexive and mobile-friendly design, will receive significant boost of search priority on mobile search engine. Websites with poor mobile optimization, poor viewport configuration, and illegible content on mobile devices, on the other hand, will have to occupy more inferior positions on mobile search result pages. Their PageRank and search priority on desktop search, however, are mostly unaffected.

RankBrain

- Introduced on: October 26, 2015.
- Revision: Unknown.
- Purpose: Gives the search engine a capability to learn and to provide search result based on high level of relevance.

RankBrain is a major breakthrough made by Google for its search engine as it literally gives the engine the power to learn, to analyze, and to smartly and accurately provide search results based on

high degree of relevance. It gives the search engine a capability to better interpret the meaning behind queries and to provide search results accordingly. RankBrain is designed to continuously evolve. As a result, it will become smarter in dealing with search relevance with time.

RankBrain is an update that makes the search engine as close as possible to a human. It allows the search engine to summarize the content of websites and to evaluate how relevant it is to search queries. It will take into account all SEO factors, including traditional factors, such as on-page optimization and link quality, and query-specific factors that draw better user experience and interaction. Websites with poor query-specific relevance and poor user experience will undoubtedly adversely affected by this update.