Does Google owe us more than just an apology over de-indexing?

There is an ecosystem in the world of the Internet. You have the content producers, you have advertisers and you have people searching for content. In this world, Google is the primary destination people go to search for content. Google can provide this service because they make money by letting advertisers show ads in their search results. At the same time, without the content producers creating content for Google to index and rank in their search results, Google would not have any place to show ads and make money. So when Google does things that upset the content producers, they are in a sense upsetting part of the overall Internet's ecosystem.

Google's recent de-indexing bug that lingered on for six-days or so and is now impacting some of their Search Console reports and tools is one example of where Google harmed the content producers and the overall ecosystem.

Based on some estimates, about 4% of the Google index was removed, causing many content producers to lose traffic, conversions and revenue.

Also, recently Google upset content producers when it forgot to inform us that it stopped supporting rel=prev/next. Content producers spent tons of resources and time adding this markup to their site, only to find out that Google has not been respecting the directives that Google itself set. Again, content producers were upset with a Google mistake – a communication issue.

Let's not forget the controversy around Google "stealing" traffic from publishers with the position zero or featured snippets position.

The list goes on and on.

‘We’re sorry’

Google apologized in the rel=prev/next issue. Google also apologized for the indexing bug from last week. Google didn’t want a portion of their index to vanish, they worked hard to fix it and technical bugs do happen. Google didn’t intentionally hide the rel=prev/next news, it was a mistake. Mistakes do happen both in terms of communication and engineering. So Google said they are sorry.

But is an apology enough? Do we, content producers, SEOs, webmasters, developers, etc. deserve more than just an apology from Google? Yes, we understand that Google is a free service, Google sends us traffic in exchange for letting Google index our sites. But when Google stops sending us traffic, either by mistake or on purpose, should we expect more from Google?

Transparency, now?

We at least should we expect more transparency from Google on these issues. For example, with the indexing bug, Google did apologize and kept us up to date on the status of the bug throughout the weekend and the rest of the week. But Google did not tell us about how big of an impact this was overall (i.e did this impact 4% of the Google index) or how much of an impact this was to our specific and individual sites. In fact, Google Search Console’s reporting tools are currently having issues on reporting the impact this indexing bug had on specific and individual sites.

Google’s John Mueller said in this video that Google has yet to do a postmortem that he said will include “what went wrong, the steps that lead to that, where we got lucky, where we got unlucky, where things ended up going even worse, and what the overall impact was,” he said.

“From my point of view, I first need to wait to see what they come up with and then it is a matter of is this something where we won’t be able to talk about the numbers or we would be able to talk about the numbers. What kind of numbers would be reasonable to mention. Those are kind of open questions there.”

Mueller said big people at Google are aware of the issue and discussing it. But what will happen? How will they “make it right” for content producers who are a critical part of the Google ecosystem? That is yet to be determined.

When I asked John Mueller if Google will apologize, he said, “I have no idea. I know there are lots of people involved.” But he added that “technical issues happen, they happen to all websites.” He said it is “kind of awkward for all sides.”

The questions I asked John start around the 4-minute mark into this video, which we have embedded below:

[embedded content]

About The Author

Barry Schwartz is Search Engine Land’s News Editor and owns RustyBrick, a NY based web consulting firm. He also runs Search Engine Roundtable, a popular search blog on SEM topics.
http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/PSl8aeUoyRI/does-google-owe-us-more-than-just-an-apology-over-de-indexing-315468