Google Bans Back Button Hijacking, Agentic Search Grows – SEO Pulse via @sejournal, @MattGSouthern

Welcome to the week's Pulse: updates affect what Google considers spam, what happens when you report it, and what agentic search looks like in practice.

Here's what matters for you and your work.

Google's New Spam Policy Targets Back Button Hijacking

Google added back button hijacking to its spam policies, with enforcement beginning June 15. The behavior is now an explicit violation under the malicious practices category.

Key facts: Back button hijacking occurs when a site interferes with browser navigation and prevents users from returning to the previous page. Pages engaging in the behavior face manual spam actions or automated demotions.

Why This Matters

Google called out that some back button hijacking originates from included libraries or advertising platforms, which means the liability sits with the publisher even when the behavior comes from a vendor.

You have two months to audit every script running on your site, including ad libraries and recommendation widgets you

didn’t write yourself.

Sites that receive a manual action after June 15 can submit a reconsideration request through Search Console once the offending code is removed.

What SEO Professionals Are Saying

Daniel Foley Carter, SEO Consultant, summed up the community reaction on LinkedIn:

> *“So basically, that spammy thing you do to try and stop users leaving? Yeah, don’t do it.”*

Manish Chauhan, SEO Head at Groww, added on LinkedIn that he was:

> *“glad this is being addressed. It always felt like a short-term hack for pageviews at the cost of user trust.”*

Read our full coverage: New Google Spam Policy Targets Back Button Hijacking

Spam Reports May Now Trigger Manual Actions

Google updated its report-a-spam documentation on April 14 to say user submissions may now trigger manual actions against sites found violating spam policies. The previous guidance said spam reports were used to improve spam detection systems rather than to take direct action.

Key facts: Google may use spam reports to take manual action against violations. If Google issues a manual action, the report text is sent verbatim to the reported website through Search Console.

Why This Matters

Google now states that spam reports can be used to initiate manual actions, making reports explicitly part of its enforcement process in official documentation.

This also raises concerns about potential abuse, as grudge reports and competitor sabotage may become more appealing when reports have a tangible impact. Therefore, the true test will be the quality of reports that Google actually considers.

What SEO Professionals Are Saying

Gagan Ghotra, SEO Consultant, wrote on LinkedIn about why the change may lead to better reports:

> *"Now spam reports have direct relation to Google issuing manual actions against domains. Google announced if there is a spam report from a user and based upon that report Google decide to issue manual action against a domain then Google will just send the user submitted content in report to the site owner (Search Console – Manual Action report) and will ask them to fix those things. Seems like Google was getting too many generic spam reports and now as the incentive to report are aligned. That's why I guess people are going to submit reports which have a lot of relevant information detailing why/how a specific site is violating Google's spam policies."*

Read Roger Montti's full coverage: Google Just Made It Easy For SEOs To Kick Out Spammy Sites

Agentic Restaurant Booking Expands In AI Mode

Google expanded agentic restaurant booking in AI Mode to additional markets on April 10, including the UK and India.

Robby Stein, VP of Product for Google Search, announced the rollout on X.

Key facts: Searchers can describe group size, time, and preferences to AI Mode, which scans booking platforms simultaneously for real-time availability. The booking itself is completed through Google partners rather than directly on restaurant websites.

Why This Matters

Restaurant booking shows how task completion within search works. For local SEOs and marketers, traffic patterns shift: users now often stay within Google during discovery, with bookings routed through partners.

This depends on Google booking partners, which may limit visibility for restaurants outside those platforms, making presence on Google-supported booking sites more important than the restaurant's own website. This model may or may not extend to other experiences.

What SEO Professionals Are Saying

Glenn Gabe, SEO and AI Search Consultant at G-Squared Interactive, flagged the rollout on X:

> *I feel like this is flying under the radar -> Google rolls out worldwide agentic restaurant booking via AI Mode. TBH, not sure how many people would use this in AI Mode versus directly in Google Maps or Search (where you can already make a reservation), but it does show how Google is moving quickly to scale agentic actions.*

Aleyda Solís, SEO Consultant and Founder at Orainti, noted a key limitation in a LinkedIn post:

> *"Google expands agentic restaurant booking in AI Mode*

> *globally: You still need to complete the booking via Google partners though.”*

Read Roger Montti’s full coverage: Google’s Task-Based Agentic Search Is Disrupting SEO Today, Not Tomorrow

Theme Of The Week: Google Gets Specific

What counts as spam, what happens when spam gets reported, and what agentic search looks like all got clearer definitions this week.

Back button hijacking becomes a named violation with an enforcement date. Google’s documentation now says spam reports may be used for manual actions, not just fed into detection systems. Agentic search becomes a live product for restaurant reservations in specific markets rather than a talking point about the future.

Now, the compliance work, reporting mechanics, and agentic experience are all clearly understood enough to be tracked directly, instead of just forecasted.

Top Stories Of The Week:

More Resources:

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