Google Defends Parasite SEO Crackdown As EU Opens Investigation via @sejournal, @MattGSouthern

Google has defended its enforcement of site reputation abuse policies after the European Commission announced an investigation into whether the company unfairly demotes news publishers in search results.

The company published a blog post stating the investigation "is misguided and risks harming millions of European users" and that it "risks rewarding bad actors and degrading the quality of search results."

Google's Chief Scientist for Search, Pandu Nayak, wrote the response.

Background

The European Commission announced an investigation under the Digital Markets Act examining whether Google's anti-spam policies unfairly penalize legitimate publisher revenue models.

Publishers complained that Google demotes news sites running sponsored content and third-party promotional material. EU antitrust chief Teresa Ribera said:

> *"We are concerned that Google's policies do not allow news publishers to be treated in a fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory manner in its search results."*

Google updated its site reputation abuse policy last year to combat parasite SEO. The practice involves spammers paying publishers to host content on established domains to manipulate search rankings.

The policy targets content like payday loan reviews on educational sites, casino content on medical sites, or third-party coupon pages on news publishers. Google provided specific examples in its announcement including weight-loss pill spam and payday loan promotions.

Manual enforcement began shortly after. Google issued penalties to major publishers including Forbes, The Wall Street Journal, Time and CNN in November 2024.

Google later updated the policy to clarify that first-party oversight doesn't exempt content primarily designed to exploit ranking signals.

Google's Defense

Google's response emphasized three points.

First, Google stated that a German court dismissed a similar claim, ruling the anti-spam policy was "valid, reasonable, and applied consistently."

Second, Google says its policy protects users from scams and low-quality content. Allowing pay-to-play ranking manipulation would "enable bad actors to displace sites that don't use those spammy tactics."

Third, Google says smaller creators support the crackdown. The company claims its policy "helps level the playing field" so legitimate sites competing on content quality aren't outranked by sites using deceptive tactics.

Nayak argues the Digital Markets Act is already making Search 'less helpful for European businesses and users,' and says the

new probe risks rewarding bad actors.

The company has relied exclusively on manual enforcement so far. Google confirmed in May 2024 that it hadn't launched algorithmic actions for site reputation abuse, only manual reviews by human evaluators.

Google added site reputation abuse to its Search Quality Rater Guidelines in January 2025, defining it as content published on host sites "mainly because of that host site's already-established ranking signals."

Why This Matters

The investigation creates a conflict between spam enforcement and publisher business models.

Google maintains parasite SEO degrades search results regardless of who profits. Publishers argue sponsored content with editorial oversight provides legitimate value and revenue during challenging times for media.

The distinction matters. If Google's policy captures legitimate publisher-advertiser partnerships, it restricts how news organizations monetize content. If the policy only targets manipulative tactics, it protects search quality.

The EU's position suggests regulators view Google's enforcement as potentially discriminatory. The Digital Markets Act prohibits gatekeepers from unfairly penalizing others, with fines up to 10% of global revenue for violations.

Google addressed concerns about the policy in December 2024, confirming that affiliate content properly marked isn't affected and that publishers must submit reconsideration requests through Search Console to remove penalties.

The updated policy documentation clarified that simply having third-party content isn't a violation unless explicitly

published to exploit a site’s rankings.

The policy has sparked debate in the SEO community about whether Google should penalize sites based on business arrangements rather than content quality.

Looking Ahead

The European Commission has opened the investigation under the Digital Markets Act and will now gather evidence and define the specific DMA provisions under examination.

Google will receive formal statements of objections outlining alleged violations. The company can respond with arguments defending its policies.

DMA investigations move faster than traditional antitrust cases. Publishers may submit formal complaints providing evidence of traffic losses and revenue impacts.

The outcome could force changes to how Google enforces spam policies in Europe or validate its current approach to protecting search quality.

Featured Image: daily_creativity/Shutterstock

https://www.searchenginejournal.com/google-defends-parasite-seo-crackdown-as-eu-opens-investigation/560822/