Google: How to Handle Expired Content on a Site

Sometimes there is content that expires… such as job postings or non-repeating events that doesn't make sense to keep indexed, especially if it leads to a poor user experience to leave it up. But for best practices purposes, what is the best way to handle this content?

The question came up in the last Google Webmaster Office Hours with John Mueller, and here is his advice on different ways a site can handle this, depending on the type of expiring content.

> *So first of all, you kind of say unavoidable expired content as if that's a bad thing. I think that's perfectly natural on the web that some content exists for a short period of time and afterwards, it's not relevant anymore and so you remove it. That's kind of how classifieds sites work, any kind of listings that are temporarily available, that is completely normal and that's something I wouldn't say you should see as something bad.*
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> *Kind of like with the first question here, removing content when it's no longer relevant is kind of the right approach here.*
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> *So obviously if you have something that you are replacing, like you have an old listing you are replacing with a new listing, and it's really the same thing, then 301 redirecting is the right approach here, as you are replacing one thing with something that is essentially the same.*
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> *If you don't have a real replacement for that, then doing something along the line of a 404 or a noindex is probably the right approach here.*

> *I've seen some sites kind of experiment with this in the sense that they try and find the right balance to make it possible for users to find some expired content, but not keep that forever. So one approach might be to say after this listing is expired, I will keep it online as a 200, a normal HTML page, together with the text that this listing is no longer valid. And after maybe a month, take that page down with a noindex or a 404 so it's completely removed.*
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> *That way, kind of during that short time where people might be interested in that expired listing, and might want a little information on what they just missed, they'd be able to find that in search, and in the long run you are still kind of cleaning things up rather than building and building and building more URLs to your website that aren't really relevant to anything.*
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> *So lots of variations there, I'd say there's no absolute answer to this, it really depends on your site, the kind of content you have on your site, how relevant it is when it's expired or just shortly expired, and what you want to do with it in the long run.*
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> *So those are kinds of the things you want to look at in the long run there.*

So for some expired listings, there could be value in keeping the content online longer. Perhaps you are a business and want to keep old job postings online to help job seekers interested in working for your company. Or maybe some types of classifieds make sense to keep on a site longer after they expired. But you need to balance user experience as well – if someone keeps clicking through to results on your site only to find "listing expired" pages without any helpful links to find current listings, this is a horrible user experience.

It would be a case where you probably want to look at traffic to expired listings when they are recently expired. If they

are getting referrals from search or other websites, spending the time to create a 301 to a similar listing, or change the page to a “listing expired, but check out these similar listings” page instead, to encourage additional page views while remaining helpful to the person who lands on the page. But ensure your “similar listings” tool or plugin is only pulling valid or current listings, and doesn’t send that traffic to more expired listings.

It also makes sense to investigate and see how your site’s competitors are handling expired listings as well, and check SEO tools to see from a ranking and linking point of view as well.

But bottom line, don’t just think of Google – you want to ensure your visitors are having a good user experience so that they return and/or share your site with others.

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