

Google on True Recovery Time for Link Penalty by @martinibuster

In a Webmaster Hangout, Google's John Mueller answered a question about link related manual actions. His answer discussed two link related penalties. He noted they are handled differently which affects the time it takes to recover.

How Long to Recover from a Link Penalty

This is the question asked:

"After links manual action, how long does Google treat the domain once the reconsideration request is accepted but not regained their potential rankings and traffic."

John Mueller immediately stated this is a two part answer:

"I think there are two aspects here. On the one hand, if the manual action is resolved then pretty much directly that site will be visible in search without that manual action."

This response may cover a situation where a manual action was triggered by something like buying links

So there's one exception here where if a site is removed for pure spam reasons, then it'll simply be removed from our index completely."

What is Pure Spam?

Google's Matt Cutts, offering a definition of pure spam and offering advice on how to recover from a pure spam penalty.

Google's Matt Cutts created a YouTube video that definitively answers, "What is Pure Spam?"

Matt Cutts explained what Pure Spam is:

"Pure spam is the label that we typically use for something that any sufficiently tech savvy person would recognize as

spam.

So for example, what you would traditionally call “black hat,” you know, auto generated gibberish, cloaking, scraping, throwaway sites or domains where somebody’s more or less doing churn and burn.

...these are the sort of things where we feel pretty confident that a regular person looking at the sort of stuff that we’re taking action on would say, “Yeah, this is complete junk.”

Matt Cutts goes on to say that when they take action on pure spam that it affects the entire site because it’s usually not something that affects just a part of the site.

He then noted that most publishers hit with a pure spam penalty do not try to recover because the penalty is expected because that’s the business model of spamming, to spam until it gets caught then move on.

Matt advised that a reconsideration request for pure spam should focus on communicating why Google should trust that site in order to let it back in. Matt says that the pure spam penalty is hard to come back from so your reconsideration request must be well documented.

He then discusses the scenario of having purchased the domain without knowing that someone else had used it for spam as a reason why Google might remove the pure spam penalty.

Recover from a Pure Spam Penalty

John Mueller described an additional aspect of a pure spam penalty. He noted that once a pure spam penalty is removed, the site is essentially starting from nowhere since it had been removed from the index. It’s kind of like the site is brand new.

Here is how John Mueller explains it:

“So it’s not that we can just turn it back on and show it again. It will require that we actually re-crawl and reprocess that site and sometimes that takes a few weeks.”

Link Penalty Recovery

John Mueller returned to the normal link penalty recovery and noted that Google didn’t treat the site with extra caution. This is interesting because the SEO community has speculated on time to recovery and if Google is treating the reinstated website differently.

John Mueller said:

“But for all other manual actions... where once that manual action is resolved and things are back in the previous state, it’s not like Google holds a grudge and says, “well, there was a manual action here so I need to be extra careful. If it’s really resolved it’s resolved.”

Ranking Where You’re Supposed to Rank

Many years ago (around 2012) I coined the phrase, “ranking where you’re supposed to rank” to describe when someone mistakenly believes their poor rankings are due to a penalty. Sometimes a site is not suffering a penalty but is only ranking where it’s supposed to rank. There are many reasons why a site ranks where it’s supposed to rank.

John Mueller refers to a similar phenomenon peculiar to sites that have recovered from a link penalty. A site that was ranking because of link manipulation that then successfully submits a reconsideration request will begin to rank where they are supposed to rank.

Here is what John Mueller stated:

“With regards to links of course, if your site was artificially ranking in the search results due to unnatural links and you got a manual action and you fix that by removing these unnatural links, then of course, your site won’t be artificially higher because of the unnatural links because those unnatural links are gone now.

So that’s something where it would be completely normal to see a change in visibility after resolving something like that.

Similarly, if a site were unnaturally visible due to other things on your website and you resolve that by removing those other things then obviously your site will be visible naturally again. But it won’t be unnaturally visible due to those things that you removed. So that’s something kind of to keep in mind.”

How to Recover from a Penalty Recovery

There is an expectation for a reinstated website to begin ranking again. Sometimes, the site is starting as a weaker competitor because it no longer has the links to help push it to the top of the search results.

This means that the publisher must have a plan in place for moving forward in a way that cultivates links without crossing violating Google’s guidelines. It’s the odd situation of having to recover from a penalty recovery.

Watch the Webmaster Hangout here

Screenshots by Author, Modified by Author

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