Google updated guidelines to say spam reports are not for manual actions

Gary Illyes of Google announced on the Google webmaster blog this morning that it wanted to clarify that spam reports are only to improve Google's spam detection algorithms. Google removed any mention of manual actions in the Google webmaster guidelines and say these spam reports will not lead to a Google employee reviewing a site and manually penalizing it.

Automated spam prevention. The difference is that when you submit a spam report, this spam report will only be used by Google to figure out how to improve its search algorithms. You will not see a site you reported drop by itself in the Google search results directly because of a spam report. Google may use that information to update its algorithms but not manually penalize any specific site.

Manual actions. Manual actions are penalties Google employees can assign to individual sites or pages when the site violates Google's webmaster guidelines. When you receive a manual action, that action will be shown within Google Search Console. Again, Google spam reports will not lead to a manual action.

Before. This is what the guidelines said prior to this update:

"If you believe that another site is abusing Google's quality guidelines, please let us know by filing a spam report. Google prefers developing scalable and automated solutions to problems, so we attempt to minimize hand-to-hand spam fighting. While we may not take manual action in response to every report, spam reports are prioritized based on user impact, and in some cases may lead to complete removal of a spammy site from Google's search results. Not all manual

actions result in removal, however. Even in cases where we take action on a reported site, the effects of these actions may not be obvious."

After. This is what the guidelines say now, after this update:

"If you believe that another site is abusing Google's quality guidelines, please let us know by filing a spam report. Google prefers developing scalable and automated solutions to problems, and will use the report for further improving our spam detection systems."

More. Gary Illyes from Google wrote "spam reports play a significant role: they help us understand where our automated spam detection systems may be missing coverage. Most of the time, it's much more impactful for us to fix an underlying issue with our automated detection systems than it is to take manual action on a single URL or site."

Why we care. This is Google being clear that when you submit spam reports, you should not expect immediate action or a manual action to be associated to the site you are reporting. It will take time for Google to improve their algorithms and for those algorithms to show an impact in the Google search results.

About The Author

Barry Schwartz a Contributing Editor to Search Engine Land and a member of the programming team for SMX events. He owns

RustyBrick, a NY based web consulting firm. He also runs Search Engine Roundtable, a popular search blog on very advanced SEM topics. Barry’s personal blog is named Cartoon Barry and he can be followed on Twitter here.
http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/roKgVyLLbrs/google-updated-guidelines-to-say-spam-reports-are-not-for-manual-actions-337192