

The “Panda” Algorithm Change and the Future of Content - iAcquire POV

Background

This past February, Google implemented a major modification in its search ranking method. The “Panda Update” (also known as the “Farmer Update”) significantly affected a broad range of companies that depend on impactful keywords for their ecommerce revenue. According to Search Engine Land, It is estimated that 12-15% of all search results were affected during the initial launch of the algorithm tweak. Industry analysts assert that Google rolled out this adjustment to improve search quality across the board by attempting to eliminate prevailing content farms and affiliate spam sites designed to take advantage of Google’s vulnerabilities. The Panda Update would turn out to be Google’s latest weapon in its ongoing battle against low quality sites occupying extremely valuable SERP real estate. While it is clear the intentions were there to fix a lingering problem, the implementation did not come without some controversial hiccups that affected countless companies’ ecommerce initiatives.

High-quality sites both big and small began disappearing from the organic keyword ranks they had owned for years. The expected “Google Dance” (the temporary rank variance advertisers typically suffer immediately following algorithm updates) appeared to last longer than usual. On top of this, domains that users grew acclimated to for particular search terms began losing ground to competitors that had otherwise never posed threats. For many advertisers, relevancy as they once knew it seemed to be compromised, which seemingly caused fluctuations without any rhyme or reason.

The Aftermath

While some companies were able to gradually recover traffic for their core organic terms, others to this day grapple with an unfortunate and unexpected fall from grace. Since the first rollout of the Panda algorithm change, Google has indicated that future versions of the update would emerge every month or so. And as such, addendums did indeed occur this past May and June. Although it is difficult to forecast the complexity of each modification, Google has vaguely cited that the overarching Panda cornerstones would coincide with their mantra of “high-quality content created by wonderful websites around the world [being] rewarded”. What this exactly means is not easy to interpret, as recent updates have rocked the figurative SEO boat harder than ever before. One thing is for sure - the old method of trying to organically improve rank has additional variables that need to be carefully recognized. Experts in the industry have collectively settled on a few points to consider in the post-Panda SEO world:

- **Content remains king.**
 - Google crawlers will be more precise about gauging the type of content that is on-page and how it relates to the searched subject matter.
 - Having low-quality pages that stray from content will affect overall domain rank - the “weakest link” methodology.
- **Always keep the end user in mind.**

- Adam Audette of Search Engine Watch suggests the urgency of continually creating *quality, unique* content to keep the end user engaged. Always be vigilant about on-page usefulness with respect to the searched material.
- Proper website design and interface layout are more important than ever, as user engagement and time spent on-page are now determining rank factors.
- Crawlers will be gauging content from a more “human” perspective. User experience is now going to have a much larger impact than ever before.
- Content lacking “useful information” that is blatantly designed solely for SEO purposes will be more likely to be devalued.
- **Get social.**
 - Engaging media that encourages user dialogue, feedback, comments, etc. will be seen as most relevant in the eyes of Google. Bridging a site’s content with respective Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn collateral are not the “end all be all” but are necessary first steps.
 - Diversity of traffic is now a determining factor - the number of users entering a site domestically and worldwide will be gauged.
- **Remember to always check under the hood.**
 - According to Rand Fishkin of SEOMoz, optimization around usage metrics is now key - time spent on-page, bounce rates, click-through-rates from the SERP are now factors that are heavily weighed by Panda.
 - Fishkin also encourages keeping a close eye on analytics data to ensure that all ducks are properly aligned - if direct traffic, branded traffic, and search traffic do not increase, rank will be affected for targeted pages.

iAcquire’s Stance on Panda

The Panda updates do nothing but complement the Enterprise Content Marketing solutions that iAcquire has been advocating for months. These updates are focused on eliminating obtrusive spam sites - an initiative Google set in place to make Search more useful for browsers and advertisers alike. While leaps and bounds have been made to enact these improvements, there is still a long way to go as for matching rank with relevancy. Rather than having to patiently wait for these changes to fully mature, advertisers that partner with iAcquire equip themselves with the ability to get where they belong in Search.

Before Google determined that more thorough on-page content characteristics would be the key to doing so, iAcquire anticipated the value of partnering with hundreds of established unique content partners across dozens of industry channels. Our outreach team not only performed the legwork to determine which content providers were worth partnering with, but also consulted with advertisers to architect customized strategies that constantly cultivate new and fresh off-page content to mutually benefit partners and clients.

We actively work with our roster of advertisers to steer them in the right direction to not only comply with Google’s constantly changing guidelines, but to also champion them. Our principles are focused on helping advertisers achieve their maximum search potential, a principle that aligns beautifully with many of the newer gold standards that the Panda

Updates are setting. We help to channel unique content like full-page articles, infographics, embedded video, and miscellaneous tools and widgets that help harvest natural links, social interest, search engine ranks, and ultimately traffic. We then encourage advertisers to build upon these tools to preserve newfound rank improvements that can be supported by Google's rules and regulations.