



No Need to Panic. Changes to Search Algorithms are Constant.

Recent changes to Google's guidelines coupled with statements from Matt Cutts, the head of Google's Webspam team, that disparage the usefulness of press releases have made many firms nervous about their rankings and the future of their search marketing efforts. Just as everyone is adapting to summertime Penguin updates, additional modifications are forcing marketers to once again reconsider what the best strategies are for their clients.

Rule number one when facing any unknown is: don't panic. Making reactionary, emotion-based changes to your website or marketing will likely do more harm than good. Take a step back and see how much new guidelines will actually affect your site and go from there. If you have been engaging in ethical and honest practices, chances are you will not have to make too many adjustments at all. Here are some areas about which your firm may have particular concern.

Press Releases. Google has been saying for years that links on press release websites do not offer any benefit and that press releases are not a good SEO strategy. But empirical data has shown otherwise. Now, Google has updated their guidelines to include hyperlinked keyphrases in press releases within their "Link Scheme" section. Does this mean the death of the press release? No. In reality, it means that you can spend more time on quality press release content without the need to include superfluous keyword-filled copy. Press releases will still get picked up, distributed and drive traffic to your site. They will still offer context that Google can pick up on, like your practice areas and firm name. And they still offer the opportunity to link your firm's url. So do not give up on your press releases; take the opportunity to write about newsworthy topics that truly interest you and enjoy the freedom that not having to link keyphrases provides.

Social Networks. Social network activity can seem extraneous, since social media sites produce admittedly few actual leads. If you have been listening to marketers who tell you you need to be engaged in social media but are wondering if there is really any point, be assured that you made the right choice. Facebook might not produce a lot of leads, but your involvement in social networks does have SEO benefit. The Moz blog's Ranking Factors 2013 study found a very high correlation between social media activity, particularly on Facebook and Google+, and rankings. Google is paying attention to social cues, so if your firm is participating in social media marketing, stay the course.

Content Marketing. Content marketing is currently all the rage, but the concept is far from new. Google has always valued content, frequently updated pages and an active blog. The only difference is what the focus of your writing should be (forget keyphrases) and how it should be distributed. Article distribution sites have been obsolete since Panda started targeting duplicate content. If you already add fresh content to your site and post to your blog regularly, keep it up.





Link Profiles. Chances are, your firm's website has been over-optimized at some point in its existence. At one time, having a lot of hyperlinked keyphrases worked. Hopefully, you have been taking steps to address this problem by unlinking keyphrases and focusing on building a more organic link profile. It may seem to go against everything you have been told about SEO over the years, but too many keywords are bad news. The theory is that no one naturally links things like, "San Francisco Personal Injury Attorney." Rather, other sites tend to link your firm's name, or a phrase like, "learn more." Therefore, it is now important that you have a wide variety of text linking to different pages on your site.

Even if you are currently in the position of having an over-optimized site, don't panic. There are several linking plugins available that can help you update your pages quickly. Your marketing company should already be ahead of the game, de-optimizing pages and producing new content that is in line with new guidelines.

All of Google's changes have at their core the goal of making the Internet a friendlier place for people who are looking for real information. Even though it is causing some understandable headaches, it is a good thing. New policies are forcing firms to pay attention to quality and penalizing those who have tried to get ahead through questionable means. Ultimately, the web will be a better place for it.

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