



## ***Got Slapped?***

### How To Deal With A Google Slap

*Online Blog Version -*

<http://smarterseo.com/tutorials/got-slapped-heres-how-to-deal-with-a-google-slap/>

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***The battle's lost... but the war's not over.*** Before you go on your all out rampage, you'll need to be patient and understand what happened exactly so you can plan for the rest of the war. This can be very hard, but *who said life was easy?*

**This report will primarily discuss the Penguin Algorithm Updates and how you can fix your site if it has been hit by the Penguin Algorithm.**

*By cleaning up your backlink profile and site, you will be “restoring the ability of your site to rank”.*

A thoroughly cleaned up site will be able to start ranking well again, but will not automatically recover to previous rankings immediately. That may happen over time as you start building more healthy links gradually in a natural manner that Google considers healthy.

The most important first step you can take if your website has been hit is to stay calm and composed. This is difficult - but a requirement if you want to recover. So, get a grip of yourself and get ready to face the challenge that lies ahead.

The Penguin update is predominantly targeting off-site webspam (unlike Panda which predominantly targeted on-site content related issues).

By this we mean that with Penguin, Google is trying to map out the profile of the backlinks coming into your site, and if there are some factors that don't meet a particular threshold or limit, they will -

- enforce a manual penalty (or a ban) on your site and send you the now infamous “Unnatural Links” notice via your Webmaster Tools message system

*or...*

- impose an algorithmic penalty on some or all of your websites pages - thereby giving you massive SERP drops for some or all of your keywords. If this happens, you will not get any notice from them.

Each of the above penalties are related to the Penguin Algorithmic update and you need to take slightly different measures to lift the penalty for each of them.

Unfortunately, the current rate of sites that have managed to get themselves out of the penalty after trying is only around 10% (via a survey done online on SENews).

If you want to give this your best shot and be amongst this 10%, you need to make sure you understand exactly what is going on or hire a professional who can get your site out of the penalty.

### **First, Get to Know Which Update Hit Your Site**

The very first thing you need to determine while trying to understand exactly what went wrong – is to find out the date on which your organic traffic got effected or the date on which your Google rankings started to drop. This is essential as it will tell you exactly which Algorithm update hit your site and which version of the Update effected your site.

Before you go any further you need to make sure that the drop in traffic was not a result of your site being hacked. Check to see if you got an alert in Google Webmaster Tools warning you of “malware” or other suspicious activity. You may also scan your site using any of the free site scanners available. Next, do check to see if the drop in traffic was only temporary – perhaps being caused by server downtime issues.

Once you eliminate the above issues, you can move ahead in examining things further.

You need to get to know the date the traffic drops started to occur on, you can then compare it with the list of algorithm updates listed on SEOMoz page

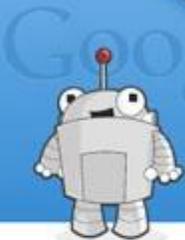
- <http://moz.com/google-algorithm-change>

## Google Algorithm Change History

Each year, Google changes its search algorithm up to 500 – 600 times. While most of these changes are minor, every few months Google rolls out a “major” algorithmic update that affect search results in significant ways.

For search marketers, knowing the dates of these Google updates can help explain changes in rankings and organic website traffic. Below, we’ve listed the major algorithmic changes that made the biggest impacts on search. Understanding these updates can help with search engine optimization.

 Tweet 3,458  Like 2.2k  +1 1.9k  Share



◀ 2012 2011 2010 2009 2008 2007 2006 ▶

### 2012 Updates

**Page Layout #2 — October 9, 2012**

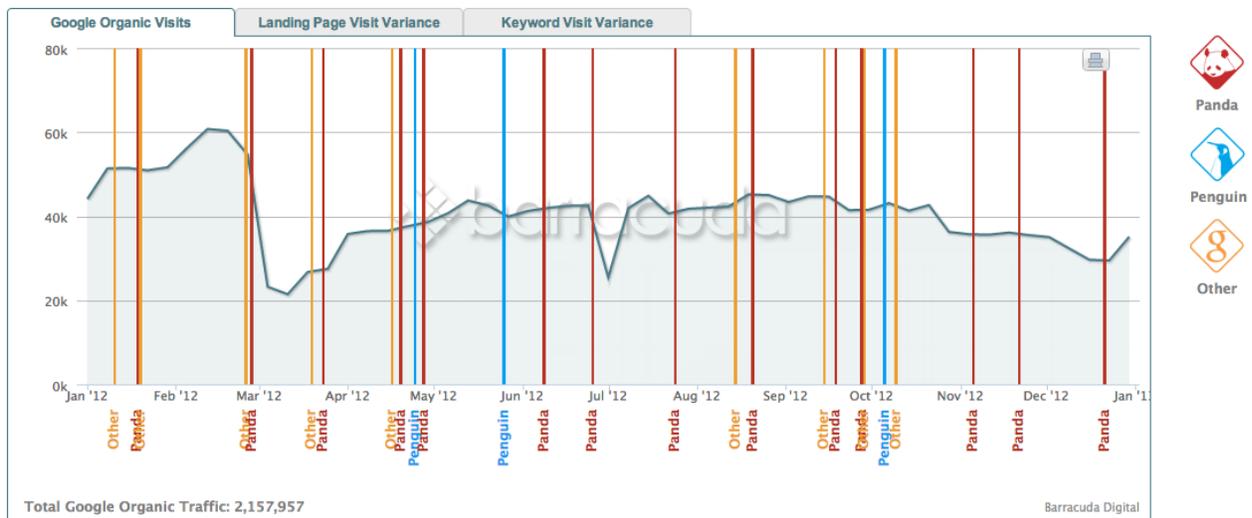
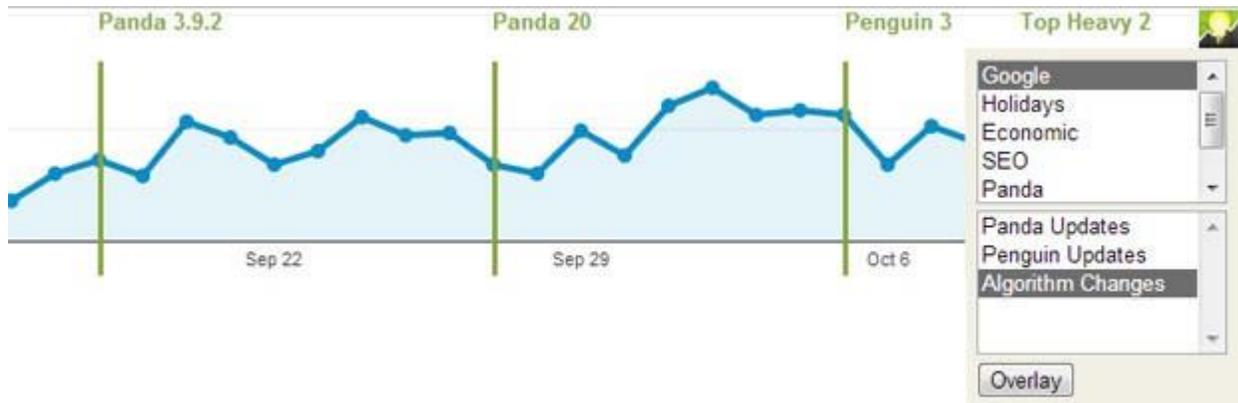
Google announced an update to its original page layout algorithm change back in January, which targeted pages with too many ads above the fold. It's unclear whether this was an algorithm change or a Panda-style data refresh.

[It's "Top Heavy 2" As Google Rolls Out Update To Its Page Layout Algorithm](#) (SEL)

[Google Page Layout Algorithm Officially Updated](#) (SER)

However, if you recently got hit and do not see any update mentioned on the page above, then you need to take a look at the daily updated [MozCast.com](http://MozCast.com) - which specifies the turbulence in Google’s Top ranking sites. This will allow you to examine if there was turbulence across the entire net and then you can look out for an official announcement by Google pinpointing an algorithm update.

If you want to do a quick side-by-side comparison of your Analytics data or Quantcast data with Google Algorithm update markers - you can do this via two great tools, namely - [Chartelligence](#) and [The Penguin Tool](#) (I have discussed these in more detail in the “Tools” document).



Once you understand that Penguin or Panda hit your site - you move towards fixing and rectifying things. If it was Panda you will need to examine various on-site factors and do a thorough on-site audit. If it was Penguin – you will need to mostly do an audit and “clean up” of your backlinks profile.



## **A Ban vs A Penalty**

A **ban** results in *total removal of your entire domain from the Google index.*

A **penalty** results in *a drop in rankings of your page(s)*

To check if your site has been banned simply search Google using the colon operator...

site:domain.com

This will show you how many pages of your site are still indexed by Google and/or if you have received a blanket ban for your site and de-indexation of all pages.

## **What Are The Main Factors That The Penguin Looks At?**

The two major issues that the Penguin Algorithm looks at while profiling a site for a Penguin related penalty are -

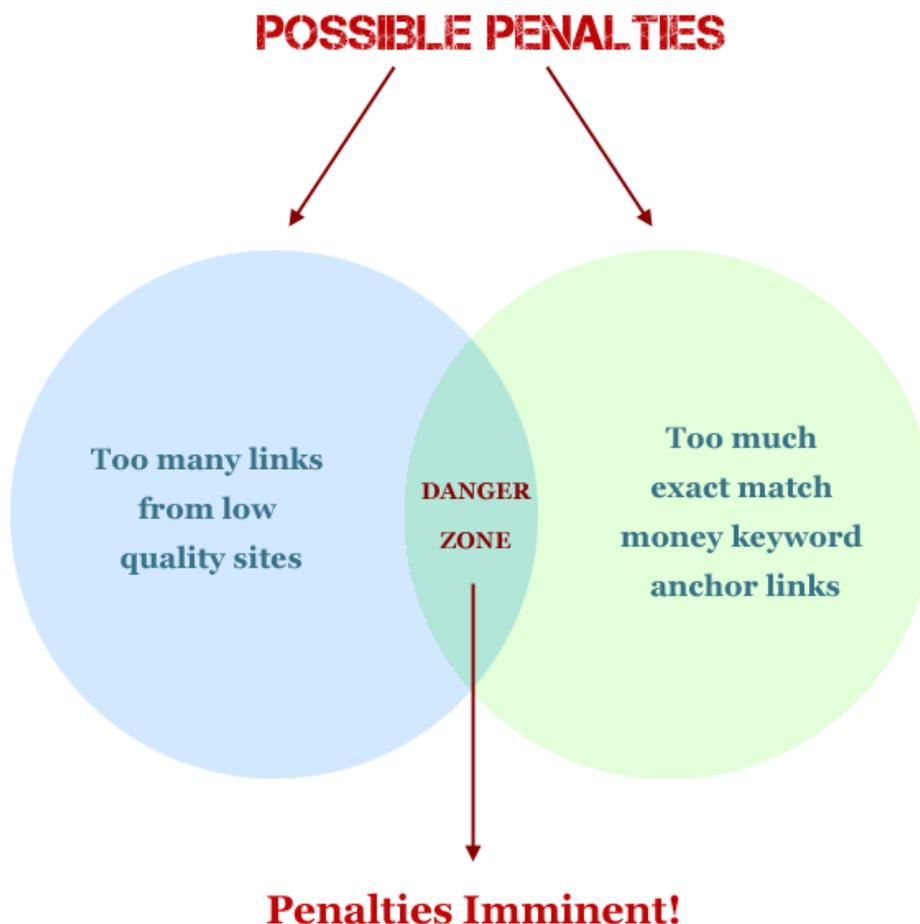
- Anchor links distribution across the entire backlink profile. For example – if you use excessive money keywords in your backlinks as compared to other natural looking anchor backlinks – you are indulging in over-optimization of your money keywords. They basically realized that a natural backlink profile will have a very low ratio of money keywords in them and mostly have more natural looking links (which we will discuss shortly).

AND/OR

- Your overall backlink profile has a very large fraction of low quality (unnatural) links as compared to your high quality backlinks. For example – if your site has too many forum profile links and very few contextual or editorial links coming from sites in the same niche.

There are several other smaller factors of your backlink profile that the Penguin Algorithm also looks at and we will discuss them later – but for now, the above are the big two. Also, the levels of “tolerance” for each of the major and other variables that Google looks at changes across different niches – depending on how competitive they are. In some niches, they may be more tolerant for certain factors while in others lesser tolerant for the same.

The best way to understand how the Penguin Algorithm dials are set for your niche, is to study the backlink profile of the current top 3 to 5 ranking sites that are still holding ranks. Study their anchor profile and backlink profiles using tools like Moz / OSE, MajesticSEO, Ahrefs etc.





So, in order to understand a Penguin related penalty and fix it, you basically need to examine your off-site backlinks.

You need to closely examine your overall anchor link portfolio to see if you have a “natural” looking anchor text distribution.

A natural looking anchor link distribution has minimal money keywords as anchor links, and more brand links, raw URL links and generic keywords. We can get this data from tools like MajesticSEO, OpenSiteExplorer or Ahrefs.

On examination, if you notice that there are a relatively high number of money keywords being used - anything more than around 20% to 25% is high, but to see what is natural its best to study your top 3 competitors in your niche - then you have to either delete those backlinks, edit them or dilute the ratio by adding a ton of the other non-money keyword and highly diversified and random looking anchor keywords (more on this later).

You also need to examine each backlink in our portfolio and define if it is a “low” quality link. Depending on what kind of link it is you will need to attempt to delete it, or fix it, or consequently submit it to Google for deindexing via the Disavow Tool.

In order to decide which backlinks are unhealthy / unnatural or healthy - you will have to manually inspect each link.

You can use some of the tools out there to aid in your inspection and link removal process. I have discussed these Tools in a separate document.

### **Getting Backlinks Data From Webmaster Tools**

The first step is to download a list of all the backlinks of your website and a spreadsheet which gives you all “Linking Domains” numbers (how many multiple backlinks are coming from the same domain).

Once you have all the backlinks - you will need to inspect each one physically or contract out a company that can do this for you.

With the other “Linking Domains” document should have a dataset from WMT, that allows you to quickly see how many multiple links come from the same domains. With this, you will be able to just inspect a few links from each domain which has multiple links pointing to your site, and if they are unhealthy – you can simply do a domain disavow command to exclude all the links coming from that domain (without needing to inspect each of them).

It is absolutely critical to document all your link pruning attempts via an online spreadsheet (preferably Google Docs) - so you have ample evidence and proof for Google that we have made substantial effort to do our “link clean up” by various means.

Note that - Google has indicated that they want you to first make this attempt and document the efforts being made so they know you “made the effort first” and are just not submitting mass links to be deindexed via the Disavow Tool without any much other effort.

### **Do you need to clean up DoFollow AND NoFollow links, or just DoFollows?**

It is very important to remember that in an Algorithmic penalty you only have to clean up your DoFollow links (you can ignore all NoFollow links). Whereas, in a Manual Penguin Penalty you may have to clean up both DoFollow and NoFollow links as much as you can, specially if you have high levels of low quality NoFollow spam links.

This is however, my opinion and some other professional SEO experts may not agree. My thinking behind this is that in a Manual Penguin Penalty, someone is seeing ALL of your links, but in an Algorithmic Penguin Penalty the algorithm is only factoring in your DoFollow links as that’s how it is designed to pass link juice and rank pages.



This point is a little tricky to understand but you can follow what is comfortable for you - based on your specific situation.

## **How Google Used The Power of the Crowd To Fight Webspam**

Google was almost cornered by blackhat SEO folks who were easily gaming their ranking algorithm to push any site to the top by spamming the web with low quality pages and backlinks - created by automated tools.

However, with the birth of Penguin and then the Disavow Tool, Google is essentially crowdsourcing the identification of toxic and unhealthy pages... a massive task which they could never possibly get done in-house - no matter how big their resources.

Talk about innovation and applying Web2.0 social models! This is the biggest trump card they have played. Absolutely fantastic!

First they ban and penalize a large number of websites... approximately 3% of all searches - for having link profiles that look unnatural and artificial.

A few months later, they throw these desperate site owners a lifeline in the form of a Disavow Tool – asking them to manually examine and report all backlinks that are toxic to Google.

So, obviously, site owners who have a real business and not just spam sites, have no choice but to go through with this process. They start manually identifying unhealthy backlinks and trying to remove their links on these toxic pages - with probably around 20% to 30% success rate.

All the unhealthy links that they could not successfully remove are reported to Google, and this is exactly Google what Google wants. A manual review of pages and links that are toxic. They know your success rate to remove these links will be low. But, they still want you to try this yourself or by contracting a provider. They're crowdsourcing it.

Getting other people to do the dirty work. Not because the links are being cleaned up. They're getting an audited list of unhealthy backlinks from you (the other 80% or so that you could not remove successfully).

So, if a specific URL is identified as toxic by multiple people doing a manual inspection like you - then Google immediately knows that this URL is "bad" and needs to be "deindexed".

*Rephrasing and repeating what I just said for clarity...*

By telling site owners that were hit - to first try and remove unnatural links and low quality links, and then submit spammy link URLs for exclusion - they have basically crowdsourced the removal of link webspam.

By giving everyone access to the disavow tool they are essentially getting you to report pages that are link farms, toxic, thin pages etc. If many people report the same page or a domain.. and it consistently shows up in the disavow tool reports people submit - then Google can easily and automatically identify these are bad neighborhoods and deindex them... thereby cutting off any link juice these pages pass to other pages.

*... and that's how Google is crowdsourcing its fight against Webspam!*

They're penalizing you and then using you to fix things if you want to get back into the game!

There are 2 ways in which your site can get a penalty. Both are Penguin related.

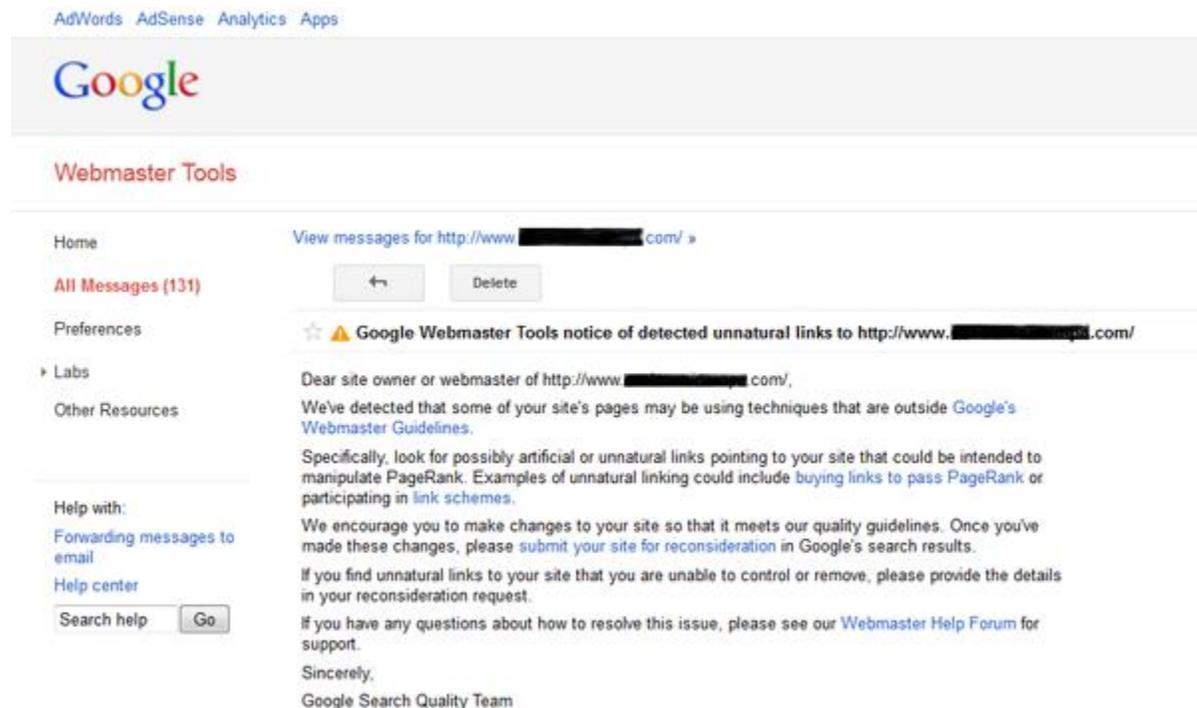
Essentially your site gets penalized for having an unnatural or unhealthy backlink profile... that is, too high a level of spammy inbound links. (Note that Panda targeted mostly on-page content issues).

**Two Kinds of Penalties...**

### *(A) An Unnatural Links Notice*

This is a manual penalty and not an algorithmic penalty. It is Penguin related and probably the algorithm caught your overall backlink profile and someone took a quick look at your backlink profile and site – and decided to have the system send you a notice. With this penalty, someone at Google manually inspected your backlink profile and your site (after being alerted by a software algorithm) - and decided that it violated their guidelines. They then sent you an “Unnatural Links” notice in your Webmaster Tools Area, basically saying that Google has detected unnatural links to your site and therefore penalized your rankings partially or wholly.

*Your site has received a penalty or a complete ban - as a result of which Google has either de-indexed your site or drastically dropped most of its SEPRs.*



The screenshot shows the Google Webmaster Tools interface. At the top, there are navigation links for AdWords, AdSense, Analytics, and Apps. The Google logo is prominently displayed. Below it, the 'Webmaster Tools' section is visible. On the left sidebar, there are links for Home, All Messages (131), Preferences, Labs, and Other Resources. The main content area shows a message titled 'Google Webmaster Tools notice of detected unnatural links to http://www. [redacted].com/'. The message text reads: 'Dear site owner or webmaster of http://www. [redacted].com/, We've detected that some of your site's pages may be using techniques that are outside Google's Webmaster Guidelines. Specifically, look for possibly artificial or unnatural links pointing to your site that could be intended to manipulate PageRank. Examples of unnatural linking could include buying links to pass PageRank or participating in link schemes. We encourage you to make changes to your site so that it meets our quality guidelines. Once you've made these changes, please submit your site for reconsideration in Google's search results. If you find unnatural links to your site that you are unable to control or remove, please provide the details in your reconsideration request. If you have any questions about how to resolve this issue, please see our Webmaster Help Forum for support. Sincerely, Google Search Quality Team'.

To fix things, you will need to remove as many of these unnatural links and then contact Google by filing a “Request for Reconsideration (re-inclusion)” – clearly stating the efforts etc that you have made. (more on the specifics of what goes into this document later). It is my opinion that it is easier and faster to get out of a manual penalty - as someone at Google just needs to review your reconsideration request and see that you have made substantial efforts to fix things and then they just flip the switch back on for your site. *(In an algorithmic penalty you need to fix your link profile and then wait for a data refresh to happen – which can take a while)*

### *(B) An Algorithmic “Penguin” Penalty*

You do not get any message in webmaster tools, but you notice that your rankings have automatically dropped for one or more keywords targeting one or more URLs of your site. This has affected your organic traffic for your site. This is an algorithmic penalty, and is Penguin related if the drop in traffic and rankings occurs on specific dates when Penguin 1.0 or 2.0 was rolled out.

There is not much you can do but to try and clean up your backlinks profile and then hope that your site starts ranking back up again once a “data-refresh” occurs.

*With an algorithmic penalty - you need to do the same steps of trying to fix things, but you need to wait out for a data refresh to check if your efforts are sufficient for the algorithm to start ranking you again.*

### **The Disavow Tool**

Google realized that only a small fraction of unhealthy backlinks you try and remove will get successfully removed. Therefore that introduced the Disavow Tool - to help you report the links you could not remove. By using the Disavow Tool you can submit unhealthy URLs and domains on which you could not get your backlink removed. Once



you submit the file and they accept and process the links in it – all the toxic link juice to your site from the URLs and domains you submitted will get devalued and neutralized.

### **Is The Date of the Penalty Significant?**

If you suddenly notice a drop or change in rankings and organic traffic the first thing you need to do is check if there was a big update rolled out by Google on the same date that you are noticing this change in SERPs. You can do this by visiting this [Google Algorithm Change Calendar](#).

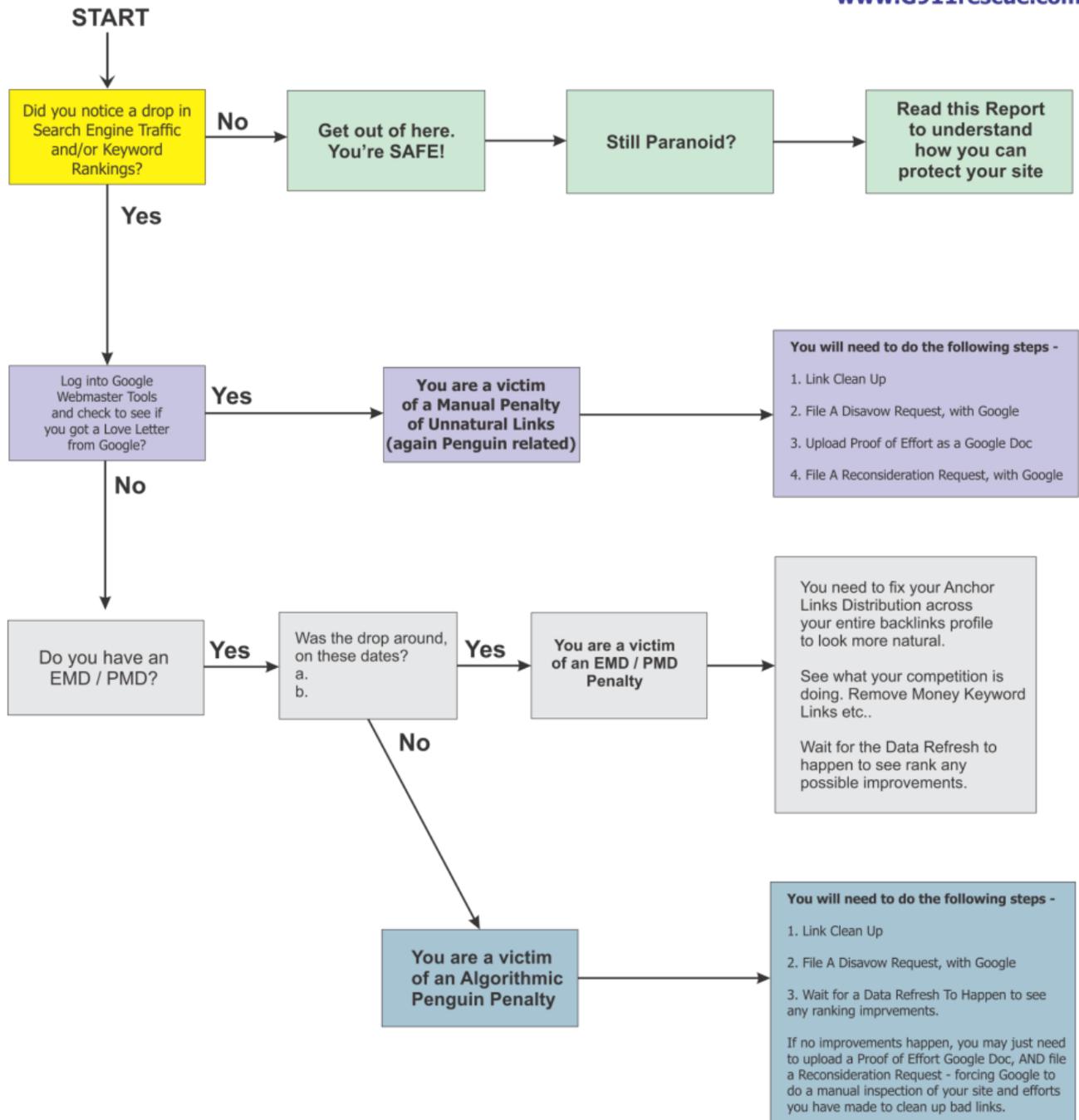
If your site was hit in the past, then you may want to check retrospectively and match any traffic changes that you see in Google Analytics or StatCounter or any other Web stats tool – and compare it to the Google Algorithm Calendar.

Its very important that you check this first because it will help you plan your road to recovery.

The top players in SEO will look for signals and patterns to combat any latest big updates when they roll out. So, being in the loop is very important if you want to play the SEO game in the long run.

## Google Penalty Handling, Overview

[www.G911rescue.com](http://www.G911rescue.com)



### Taking Charge of the Penguin



Here's a simple step by step overview of what you need to do to get in control of the Penguin penalty and start working towards getting it lifted.

**Step 1** - Try to first manually remove/delete the bad unnatural links

**Step 2** - Make a list of bad links you want to have removed but could not remove even after contacting webmasters manually. Make this in text file in format supported required by Google for the disavow link tool.

**Step 3** - Access Disavow tool and upload all links you want removed

**Step 4** - If you received a manual penalty to your site via the Manual notice from Google within your Webmaster Tools area, you need to follow the Disavow Tools submission after say 24 hours by submitting a Request for Reconsideration, and referencing your Disavow Tool submission AND a Google Doc which shows the effort you have made in trying to remove unhealthy links. *I will get to the format of the Reconsideration Request document later.*

If your rankings were hit by the algorithmic update and not a manual penalty notice, you should submit the Disavow Tool and then wait a couple of weeks, to hear back from Google if they have applied your URL exclusions as per the list of URLs in the disavow document.

If you do not hear back from Google for a couple of weeks after submitting the Disavow Tool document (in an algorithmic penalty), then you may optionally consider submitting a Reconsideration Request.

Note - submitting a Reconsideration Request is not required if you did not get a Manual notice from Google, but I am recommending it here because Google has not responded to your Disavow Tool submission. You may choose not to follow this step, but I am recommending it as you have no other option here. Note that your site has to be a solid



legit site (not a spam site etc.) if you attempt to do this as this will trigger a manual visit and review of your site.

If after submitting your Disavow Tool request, your URLs are approved for exclusion – then all the link juice from your backlinks within the list of URLs and domains you submitted will be devalued. Thus you may see a jump in your rankings.

In an Algorithmic Penguin Penalty - even if the Disavow File is uploaded and processed successfully, you will still need to wait for a “data refresh” to be pushed through in the future, for the full devalue-ing of all the URLs and domains in that file to be reflected. Optionally, you could speed up the process by doing a manual reconsideration review request - which can trigger your site to be re-indexed much faster.

However, as said before – I suggest waiting out a bit if you got an Algorithmic Penalty, before you decide to go in for Reconsideration Request (which is required only in a Manual Penalty).

It is important to note that - Google has said that before you go about submitting the list of unhealthy links where your backlink is located to Google via the Disavow Tool, Google wants to see that you have made an effort to remove them first – even if you did not get much success.

They want to see a document which you maintain (it can be Google Docs) that documents your efforts in contacting the various webmasters asking them to remove your unhealthy links.

So, if you received the Unnatural Links notice from Google within the Webmaster Tools (A Manual Penalty) – you can include the list of URLs you managed to delete as a Google Doc file along with your Reconsideration Request.

**Reconsideration Request, Done Right ( ie. The Way Google Wants You To)**



Filing a reconsideration request is basically asking Google to do a manual overview of your site and its backlink profile and lift a manual or algorithmic penalty that your site may have received.

While a reconsideration request only needs to be done if your site received an unnatural links notice within Webmaster Tools, you may want to do a Reconsideration Request even if you did not get a notice IF Google does not respond favorably to your Disavow Tools submission. By doing this, you will force Google to do a manual review of your site and the effort you made to remove all the unhealthy and unnatural links.

In both cases (whether you got a notice or not) you will need to make sure that you do the Reconsideration Request AFTER you have made substantial effort to delete unnatural and unhealthy links from your backlink profile and AFTER you submit your Disavow Tool file.

This is because Google wants you to make an “effort” to fix things, before you ask for any reconsideration AND examining what your backlinks profile will look like after devaluing the URLs in the Disavow Tools file.

It is very important to note that before you submit the Reconsideration Request - you have to make substantial EFFORT in trying to clean up your link profile as much as you can – AND you need to document everything you do to this effect, so that you can submit and show it as proof to Google.

*They want you to make the effort... and whether or not a large fraction of the links are actually deleted is not important.*

While making the effort to delete your unnatural links you need to contact the webmasters of each domain via email (at least 3 times if they do not respond initially, I would say) - you need to track all your efforts and activity via a Google Doc.



Again, note that Google is not concerned with how many links you could successfully clean up, but want to see that you make a substantial effort to contact maximum webmasters where your unhealthy links are located in an attempt to delete them.

### **How Do You Submit The Actual Reconsideration Request To Google?**

The reconsideration request is basically a web-form (URL shared at the end of this document in the Resources section), in which you need to cut and paste your message to Google.

While filing your reconsideration request you will need to submit a link to your Google Docs file, so that their manual Reconsideration Request team can directly access and see your cleanup effort.

You cannot upload any attachments or special text - just simple text like from a notepad file. This is why you will need to create a separate online Google spreadsheet that details your link removal efforts, and then link to it from within your Reconsideration request form submission.

*Here are the basic steps in creating a publically shareable Google Doc...*

<http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Google-Doc-Public>

Just make sure in the last step to choose to share it only with “Anyone with the link” – and then simply take the link of the Google Doc and insert it into your Reconsideration Request in the right area where you reference this document.

### **What Needs to be Covered in your Reconsideration Request**

- In the reconsideration request, Google also wants you to openly admit AND list out the link schemes and other blackhat processes that you may have indulged in, or that you may have contracted an SEO company for.

They want you to send them a note confirming that you realize this kind of link building is a violation of Google's Guidelines and that you realize that it was a mistake (intentional or not) and that it will not occur again.

*Admittance of guilt is the key here (talk about using muscle power)*

You need to list out the specific violations of Google's quality and link building guidelines that you or your contractor may have engaged in while doing the SEO. If you do not know these, please ask your agency or look for someone who can evaluate this.

- They require you to let them know that you will not indulge in these type of activities again. In fact, they want you to even send them the name of the SEO company or agency that built the spammy links for you in the first place! \*ouch\*

If you are not up front with Google and hide things, your request can get rejected. Make sure you also include some examples. Things like paid links, cloaking, scraping, doorway pages, link schemes etc are all blackhat and you need to report specifics to Google if you have done these. Just be honest.

- You need to tell them what you have done to fix the situation. Specifically what links you have taken down etc. Be specific in stating the process you have followed. Create a separate Google Doc which includes all details of your communication with Webmasters of the sites. I have included a template for you in the report.
- Tell them the measures you have taken to ensure this does not repeat – including things like training in-house people, cancelling any paid link subscriptions, breaking ties with the SEO company that you contracted and that indulged in these methods.

- You should also let Google know that you submitted a list of links to be disavowed via the Disavow Tools file. Let them know the specific date on which you uploaded the Disavow Tools file. They will take all this into consideration, so they can look at your case as a bigger picture with all factors.
- Include a link to the Google Docs file which details your entire effort to clean up all your links and comply with their Guidelines. I have included a template for you that you may use. This spreadsheet must have site name, URL, webmaster email address, date on which you sent initial email requesting link removal and subsequent follow ups, the response you received if any, and status of the link. On the top of this document or at the end you may want to include a summary of all numbers – like total links removed, total not removed, total links gone dead etc.
- You need to describe your future plans for SEO for the site – and make it clear that you will focus on making a better user experience and not indulge in any artificial link building activity. With this they will understand if you realize what white hat SEO is about.
- Finally, close the request by asking Google to actually remove the penalty!
- Make sure you save a copy of the request locally for your records as this is a web form.

*I have included a separate document which has sample templates and brief notes on the proper manner in which to file a Reconsideration Request to Google.*

**Do you need to submit a Reconsideration Request if you did not get a manual notice from Google within your Webmaster Tools?**



Unfortunately, Google is not very clear and has been cryptic in how it gives manual penalties vs algorithmic penalties. Google has always been tight-lipped and has provided the public very bare minimum information on how sites are to recover from a penalty.

The answer to this question is really based on different preferences of SEO professionals. While it is not necessary to submit a reconsideration request if you did not get a manual notice from them within the Webmaster Tools area, however – some people would rather still submit one.

The final choice is yours. I sometimes feel it is not required, but in some cases you may want to do so - specifically if your site is legit, 100% clean, has top notch content bringing tons of value... and does not use any shady techniques etc. - and therefore, has nothing to hide.

If you got an algorithmic penalty, you are not required to submit a reconsideration request – but can simply submit the disavow and wait for the data refresh to happen and your rankings to get back up. But, you can still submit a reconsideration request – and this will force Google to look at your case faster than if you do not submit one.

So, it does have its advantages.

If your site has been hit very hard by an algorithmic penalty (i.e. many of your rankings have dropped) - and you are in a very desperate situation and require Google to analyze things faster than wait for a data refresh to happen which could take weeks – then I suggest you go ahead and submit the reconsideration request. However, if your site has only been affected mildly by an algorithmic penalty, and if you can wait it out - then you can simply do only the disavow tool submission and play the wait and watch game.

In the event that your site has shady content and is not up to the mark – you may want to stay clear of any manual review by Google and thus getting slapped with a manual penalty (Panda related in this case). If you fear this – then it may just be better to

submit the list via the Disavow Tool and hope that Google processes your submission and de-indexes your unhealthy links – thereby tripping the algorithm to automatically rank your site back higher up again.

### **Should you Disavow NoFollow Links?**

Since NoFollow links do not pass any Link Juice (positive or negative) as per Google's guidelines you should not Disavow NoFollow links, even if they look unnatural and are of low quality. These links are ignored by the googlebot and you do not need to do anything with them. You do not even need to analyze them. Just work on DoFollow links only!

### **Reconsideration Request Checklist**

- Identify the Problem;
  - Give details of problem/s
    - Affiliate Links (Google calls them Feeder links)
    - Excessive Use of primary keyword hyperlinks in links
    - Excessive Use of Keywords in content on website
  - Admit Fault
  - How Problem/s developed
- Did previous SEO company cause problem? If so, give name and address.
- Did someone internally cause the problem? If so, what training done and what steps taken to ensure it won't happen again
- Give Detail steps for what we did to correct each problem; If a problem cannot be fixed, explain the circumstances of the problem and why it cannot be fixed. Please upload a separate document in Google Drive (docs) and link to it from within your reconsideration request (how to do this is explained later in this report).

- Upgraded and change the architecture and design of the site, including:
  - development and addition of CMS;
  - creating totally new urls, content, descriptions more helpful to visitors;
  - created canonical tags;
  - and upgraded our entire product line with new stationery cards.
- How does your site add value to its: products; visitors; information; user experience;
- Differentiate your site from the spammy websites
- If Google Analytics shows low bounce rate, then include that. A low bounce rate will indicate to Google that visitors find value and are benefiting from information the website provides
- Give assurances that the problem will not happen again
- Editing the robots.txt files on site
- Ask Google to Re-Crawl the website BEFORE acting on this Request
- If attachments / links use, put them in Google Docs
- Include brief bio about yourself, (the seo guy / company submitting the Request)
- Include data and date of Disavow Tool submission, if any

### **Healthy Link or Unhealthy Link? 8 Questions to Ask Yourself.**

Evaluating if a specific page has an unhealthy / unnatural link to your website can be a tricky process and requires some insight and experience. If you mistakenly identify a healthy link as unhealthy – you could end up disavowing a perfectly good backlink that passes good link juice to your site. On the other hand, if you miss out on classifying a



link as unhealthy or a whole set of links as unhealthy – Google can reject your submission.

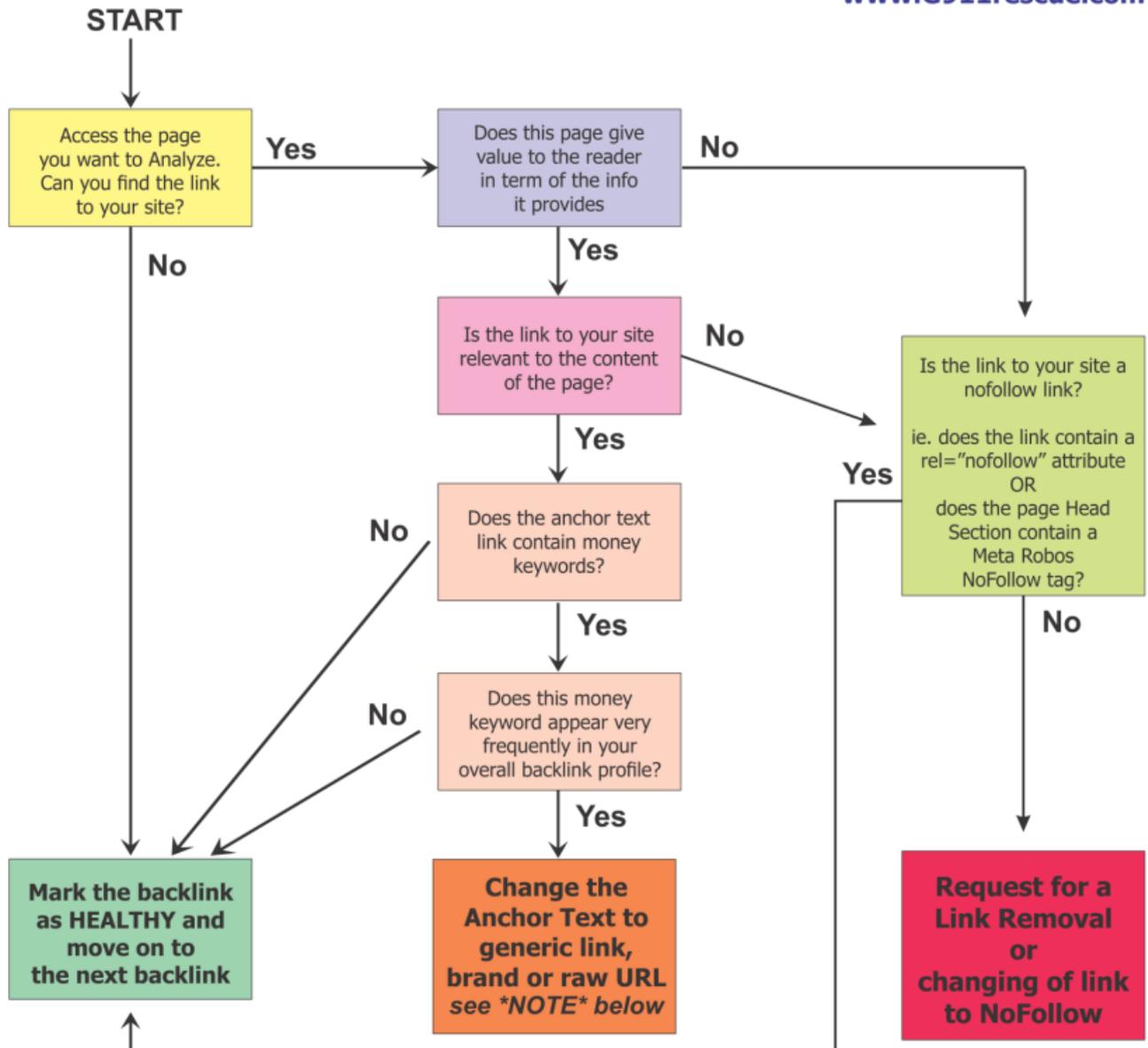
So, here are some basic questions to ask yourself while evaluating a backlink...

- Is the content around the link relevant to the page being linked to.
- Does the page provide good value to the visitor, or does it exist for the purpose of the link?
- Does the link exist on a page with “thin” content?
- Does the page exist on a domain that looks like a spam domain?
- Does the rest of the site have outbound links that are mostly money keyword anchors?
- Is this a blog comment link that is not-related to the site being linked to?
- Is the link appearing in a Sponsored Links unit that is DoFollow?
- Does the link look like it is a paid link?

*Below is a simple and a detailed flowchart of the entire link clean up process.*

## A Brief Look At The Link Inspection Process

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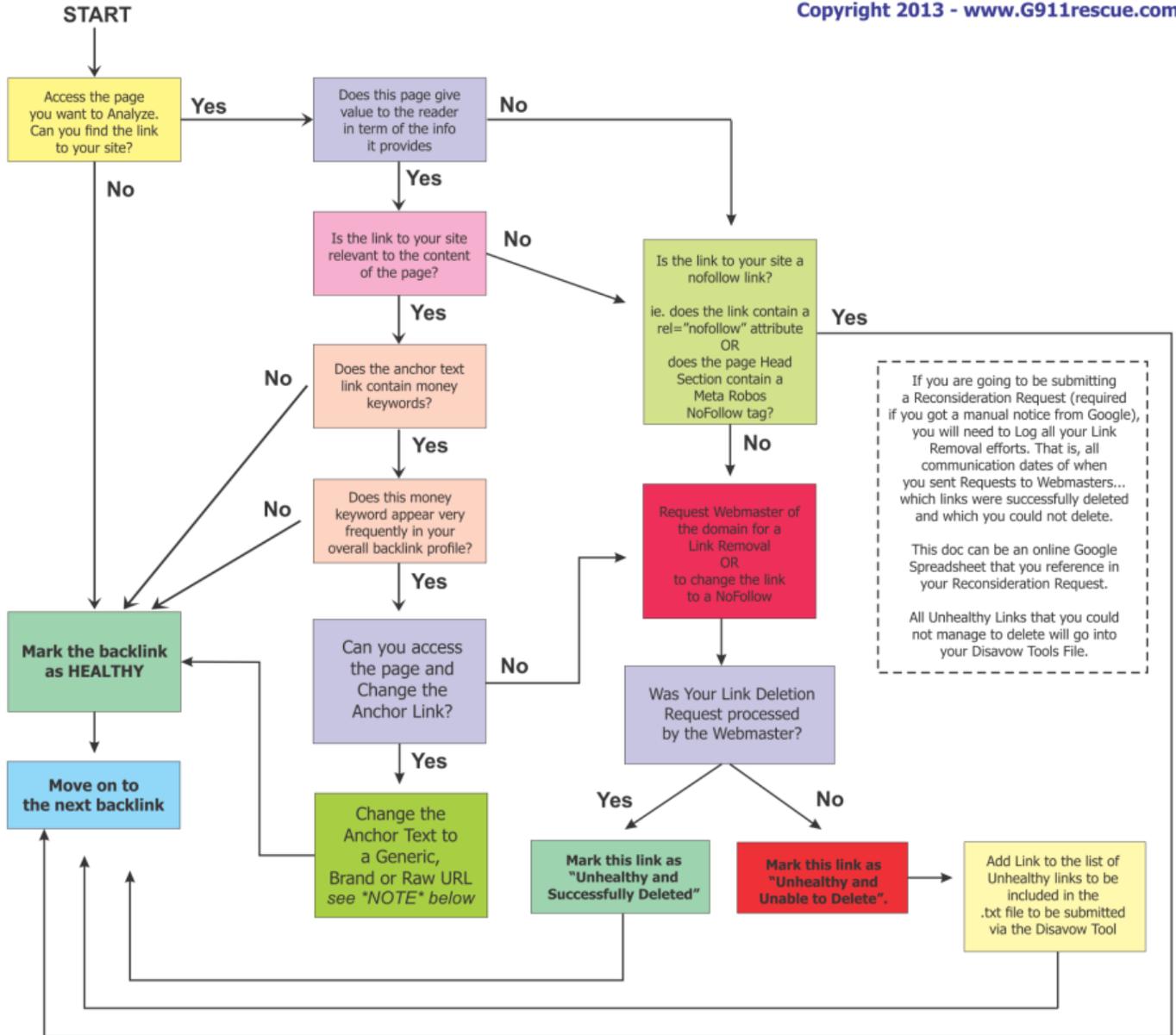


**\* NOTE \*** If you cannot change your Anchor Text on a page that has relevant content into a generic link, brand link or raw URL link, then you have to either...  
**(a)** create 3 or more new similar type of backlink pages without the presence of money keyword anchors for each such page that you have, or  
**(b)** you have to mark this link as unhealthy and have it removed or disavowed.

Both these steps will ensure that the money keyword anchor will get diluted. However, if you have the resources option (a) of is more desirable, because the your link is already on a page with relevant content and can magnify your link juice if you are able to dilute your anchor keywords profile with more generic, raw and brand URLs. However, this strategy will cost you more than option (b). For example, if you have to make 3 new contextual Web2.0 pages or make 3 new guest posts on related niche blogs. The number of new pages you have to create to dilute your money keyword anchors will depend on what your existing ratio of your anchor link profile looks like.

## A Detailed Look at The Link Inspection and Classification Process

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If you are going to be submitting a Reconsideration Request (required if you got a manual notice from Google), you will need to Log all your Link Removal efforts. That is, all communication dates of when you sent Requests to Webmasters... which links were successfully deleted and which you could not delete.

This doc can be an online Google Spreadsheet that you reference in your Reconsideration Request.

All Unhealthy Links that you could not manage to delete will go into your Disavow Tools File.

**\* NOTE \*** If you cannot change your Anchor Text on a page that has relevant content into a generic link, brand link or raw URL link, then you have to either...

**(a)** create 3 or more new similar type of backlink pages without the presence of money keyword anchors for each such page that you have, or

**(b)** you have to mark this link as unhealthy and have it removed or disavowed.

Both these steps will ensure that the money keyword anchor will get diluted. However, if you have the resources option (a) is more desirable, because the your link is already on a page with relevant content and can magnify your link juice if you are able to dilute your anchor keywords profile with more generic, raw and brand URLs. However, this strategy will cost you more than option (b). For example, if you have to make 3 new contextual Web2.0 pages or make 3 new guest posts on related niche blogs. The number of new pages you have to create to dilute your money keyword anchors will depend on what your existing ratio of your anchor link profile looks like.

## Disavow Tool Submission - Syntax and Submission Process

- Make sure your syntax and format is proper and the file you upload is a .txt file with text-wrapping turned off. Do NOT submit a word document or an excel spreadsheet! This is a mistake many people make and your submission will be ignored if you do this.
- To emphasize - Google uses automated parsers to read all uploaded files via the Disavow Tool. They have configured their system to only process your file successfully if you use a .txt file that is encoded UTF-8 or 7-bit ASCII. If your file is not submitted properly they will NOT tell you so. They do not currently have a mechanism in place to alert you that your file was improper.
- Make sure that the content inside your Disavow text file is in proper format, that is...
- list single URLs you want to exclude, as –

`http://www.sitename.com/whatever`

- domain exclusions when you want to exclude all backlinks from an entire domain should be listed, as –

`domain:whateverdomain.com`

Do not include `www` or `http://` in front of “domain:”

- If you have an IP address only then you may include the IP, as -

`domain:11.33.5.123`

- The domain disavow command is also very useful when you find you have backlinks on multiple pages of a forum or directory site that is low PR or the

posts are junk posts. You don't need to find each page URL where your backlink is, but you can just disavow the entire domain. Be careful not to do a domain disavow for Web2.0 sites for example – tumblr.com , blogspot.com , weebly.com – or you will lose all the healthy backlinks that may be on this social media Web2.0 sites now and in the future. Be very careful with this!

Most people do not catch all their unhealthy links properly throughout a suspected spammy domain. They only catch one or a couple of unhealthy links and forget to check any other pages within the domain that may be unhealthy... such as, from a directory or a spam blog. If you or your team is auditing a specific domain for unhealthy links and you suspect there might be multiple unhealthy links on other pages of the site – you need to disavow the entire domain. Make sure you do this if you have a doubt about any domain!

- The # tag for inserting comments should not be over-used / abused excessively. Use comments briefly and to the point and do not use them excessively. You can simply insert your notes as lines of comment within the txt file, as below for example -

```
# We could not remove the following links and hence submitting to the disavow tool
```

```
http://
```

```
http://
```

```
...
```

```
# Owner of spam domain xyz.com removed most links, but missed these
```

```
http://
```

```
http://
```

...

However, if you are absolutely certain that you will not be submitting a Reconsideration Request then, you can submit each disavow link and also a list of the links you managed to successfully remove, in the following manner below (as opposed to the one above).

```
# We contacted webmaster of domain xyz.com, 3 times, between 7/1/2012 and  
15/1/2012
```

```
# but they did not respond and delete the following links on their domain
```

```
http://xyz.com/link1.html
```

```
http://xyz.com/link2.html
```

```
# We managed to successfully remove our backlinks on the following URLs or delete the  
pages
```

```
# http://xyz.com/link1.html
```

```
# http://abc.com/link2.html
```

```
# http://anothersite.info/link1.html
```

```
# http://andonemore.net/link2.html
```

Note how we are putting a # in the beginning of each line even for the URLs in the second unit of links above - as these are links we managed to remove and so is just a line of comments we want Google to see, and not process these links as they are removed already!

The thinking behind doing things in this manner, is to let Google know that you have made an effort to remove the unhealthy links - because there is no other way of letting them know this! (as you will not be submitting a Reconsideration Request)

However, Matt Cutts has said in a video that comments may not be necessary at all, and just submit your URLs that need to be disavowed.

*But then, Mr Matt Cutts - how will you show Google proof of your link removal efforts?*

*How are we to demonstrate to Google that we did indeed make sufficient effort to first delete the links?*

Yes, Google wants to see some effort being made on your part - but how do you show this if you are not going to be submitting a separate Reconsideration Request document where they allow us to specify all the steps we have taken?

The logic therefore is, by including the list of links you managed to successfully delete, this is “proof” that you have worked hard on deleting your unnatural / unhealthy links.

Some might argue that this document is not “seen” by a human and basically just goes through an automated link parser software.

However, because you are not violating any syntax format – you don’t really lose anything by including this information, just in case a real human does look at the file before deciding if it should go through the parser for processing.

So, all that said, the disavow tool is not a substitute for manual effort from your end to remove the spammy, unnatural, low-quality and unhealthy links. Google wants to see that real effort has been made to remove the links before you just hit submit and upload the links to be deleted – and you can choose communicate this to them via the



Reconsideration Request document or within the Disavow Tool as a # tag commented list of URLs.

If you got a manual penalty you should submit the Disavow Tool document first and then follow up with your manual Reconsideration Request which mentions your Disavow Tool submission and references a Google Doc that outlines the effort you have made in your link deletion process.

- *The Disavow Tool is DIFFERENT than the Reconsideration Request. They are not the same! Do NOT cut and paste your Reconsideration Request into the Disavow Tool. The Disavow Tool is not the file in which Google wants to see the entire story of your link removal efforts. That needs to be documented and explained in the Reconsideration Request Document that you will submit later (if you got a Manual notice or if you prefer to submit a Reconsideration Request anyway). If you submit this information inside your Disavow file, it can lead to trust issues causing Google to reject your submission.*
- **Can I submit multiple txt files with the exclusion list via the Disavow Tool?**

You cannot submit multiple broken up lists via the DisavowTool for the same domain. If you submit a partial list of unhealthy sites, and you find more sites after a week - then the tool will automatically overwrite the existing file. It is very important that if you find new sites - you make an incremental list. That is, you **add and merge the new list to the previous one** and then submit the txt file as it will overwrite your current file.

- **Some webmasters are asking me for money to have the link deleted? Should I pay?**

Never pay a webmaster to remove links unless you are really desperate in getting as many links removed as possible – following single or multiple rejections of your

reconsideration requests to Google. So, the rule of thumb is to just include a note in the “Webmaster Communications Spreadsheet” saying that the webmaster is asking for money to delete the link. That will be sufficient. However, if your initial or repeat reconsideration requests are being rejected by Google because they are not seeing substantial unnatural links being removed, then you may just have to resort to this method and pay the demands of webmasters. Usually they charge \$10 to \$25 for deleting each link. The logic they use is that you should not have spammed their site with your links in the first place.

In any event – never ever tell Google that you paid the webmasters to remove the links. Several people have said that Google does not like this and it is against their recommendation.

- **My reconsideration Request got rejected. What do I do?**

It is, indeed, very common for reconsideration requests to be rejected. In most cases I have seen, Google is not convinced that you took great pains to do your link clean up properly, or even at times that your Disavow submissions are not catching multiple (sitewide) inner pages from a domain – and they will recommend that you do a domain level disavow in such cases.

**Reconsideration request for http://www. [REDACTED] : Site violates Google's quality guidelines**

---

Dear site owner or webmaster of http://www. [REDACTED],

We received a request from a site owner to reconsider http://www. [REDACTED] / for compliance with Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

We've reviewed your site and we still see links to your site that violate our [quality guidelines](#).

Specifically, look for possibly artificial or unnatural links pointing to your site that could be intended to manipulate PageRank. Examples of unnatural linking could include [buying links to pass PageRank](#) or participating in [link schemes](#).

We encourage you to make changes to comply with our quality guidelines. Once you've made these changes, please [submit your site for reconsideration](#) in Google's search results.

If you find unnatural links to your site that you are unable to control or remove, please provide the details in your reconsideration request.

If you have additional questions about how to resolve this issue, please see our [Webmaster Help Forum](#) for support.

Sincerely,

Google Search Quality Team

If you get a rejection email, like the one shown above, from Google - do not worry. You need to read what they have said you need to do to get the penalty revoked. Read their email carefully and do what they are asking you to do and resubmit a new request only AFTER you do it thoroughly. We are aware of countless cases that have recovered after 3 to 4 tries!

Mostly, they will tell you that your link cleanup effort is not sufficient and you need to clean up or disavow many more links or entire domains. If this is the case – then you will need to once again examine the links you have marked as healthy, checking them all once again to ensure that they are indeed healthy backlinks. This time be a little more stringent in your classification. If the domain or page is even slightly shady looking and does not pass much value – mark it off as unhealthy, so it can be added to your new Disavow submission AFTER you make an attempt to contact the webmaster of the site for link removal and you document the communication in your “efforts document”. This time you should be more aggressive and submit even more links in the Disavow Tools

submission and also make sure you document properly every effort you make for link removals and provide a link to the “efforts document” from within your reconsideration request submission.

*Tip: Make sure you keep a track record of all the submissions / form data you send to Google via the webforms.*

- **Is it better to send the email to Webmasters from Gmail or a company domain website account?**

In the event that you cannot gain access to a company domain email address, you will have no option but to use a Gmail account for communication – and this is fine in most cases - only a very small number of webmasters will want you to prove your authenticity via a direct website domain email. If they do, you can ask your client or access your domain control panel to create the email address so you can follow up from it.

Note that it is always better to send the email from a domain website account – as it looks more genuine, but this is not a requirement as most webmasters are ok with getting link removal requests from Gmail accounts. If you have a POP account on the website domain, you can very easily have the pop account forward to your Gmail account so multiple people can manage the single account and do follow ups etc.

In addition working from within Gmail will also allow you to use plugins like Boomerang for Gmail to automatically do follow ups, and also install plugins like Rapportive to possibly reveal hard to find contact email addresses for you.

- **I see some sites have many sitewide links, sometimes in large excessive numbers like 50 to even 100 and in some cases in the 1000s. Do In need to examine all these links?**



We recommend that for private sites (that are not publically open web2.0 property sites that anyone can post content to) – you examine up to around 5 backlinks if they exist on the same top level domain. If all of them look unhealthy to you and you have more links on this domain, you don't really need to examine of of the links. Just do a domain exclusion in the disavow Tool That way all your links on this domain get devalued. You must mention this to Google in the Webmaster Communication Spreadsheet in the form of a summary.

- Make sure you insert a summary of your entire projects efforts in the Webmaster Communication Spreadsheet. I have included a template for this, but here is what the top of the sheet should look like as an example.

<b>Initial Backlink Profiling Summary</b>	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>QTY</b>
Total Backlinks in Portfolio (including all sitewides)	15433
Total Links after excluding more than 5 sitewides per domain*	3194
Links after removing No-Follow links	1538
Total Unique Domains	<b>817</b>
<b>HEALTHY</b>	
Total Links	324
Unique Domain Links	188
<b>SUSPICIOUS</b>	
Total Links	987
Unique Domain Links	527
<b>TOXIC</b>	
Toxic Total Links	227
Toxic Unique Domain Links	113
<b>ERROR</b>	
Total Links	89
Unique Domain Links	58
<b>UNHEALTHY LINKS</b>	
UNHEALTHY LINKS AFTER ANALYZING	<b>719</b>
Unique Domains	<b>355</b>
<b>Domain CONTACTED</b>	
Domains Contacted	355

\* For private domains (sites that do not allow public User Generated Content) that have more than 5 sitewide links, we only examined up to 5 links - and if they were all unhealthy we have done a domain level disavow.

Project Output Results - Summary	
Number of domains to be contacted	355
Number of domains with no contact details or forms	24
Number of backlinks successfully removed from these	25
Domains requesting money to removing backlinks	16
Number of forums that we paid to have our links removed **	32
** this is not recommended but you could try later if required	

- **What can I do if my healthy links that remain even after my link pruning efforts - still have a high concentration of money keywords - as compared to the Top 3 sites in the niche?**

*This is a very important last step, if after you try and prune all the unhealthy links.*

*Many forget to do this.*

After you attempt to delete all unhealthy links, you should see what your new backlink profile looks like. If there is still an excessive number of money keywords being used in your overall anchor profile, then you need to change this somehow.

*You can do the following...*

1. Contact webmasters of healthy links asking them to edit it and change it to brand links or generic links. If you have access to login and make the edit – then you will need to change the link to a brand or generic link.
2. If the above is not successful then you will have to Disavow the link (add it to your Disavow submission). I know that in some cases the page itself is healthy –

but you need to bring down your ratio of Money keywords... and this is one method.

Obviously, it is more desirable to attempt to remove/edit a page that is say a Social Bookmark with the money keyword as compared to a healthier page which is a contextual page.

You basically need to bring down the ratios to a level that matches the top 3 to 5 sites in the niche.

- **What happens when my Disavow Tool submission is processed?**

Once your Disavow Tool submission is accepted by Google an invisible “NoFollow” tag is added to all the pages that contain your backlink that you submitted via the Disavow Tool.

### **Which penalty (Manual or Algorithmic) takes longer to recover from?**

There is speculation and proof from some people that a Unnatural Links Warning (manual Penguin related penalty or ban) is easier to recover from than an algorithmic penalty (automated Penguin penalty). Note - how I refer to Penguin while referencing both these types of penalties. This is because they are both spammy backlink profile related.

**In a manual penalty**, you get to submit a Disavow Tool file, create sufficient proof in a Google Doc of your efforts and make a plea to Google via a well written message in your Reconsideration Request. Someone at Google sees all this and then decides to flick the switch back “on” or “off” for your website – thereby approving or rejecting it. This gets done fairly quickly (around a week to 2 weeks, sometimes faster). If things are decided in your favor, the penalty or ban gets lifted and your site starts ranking back again – hopefully where it was before, but possibly a bit lower for some of the SERPs.

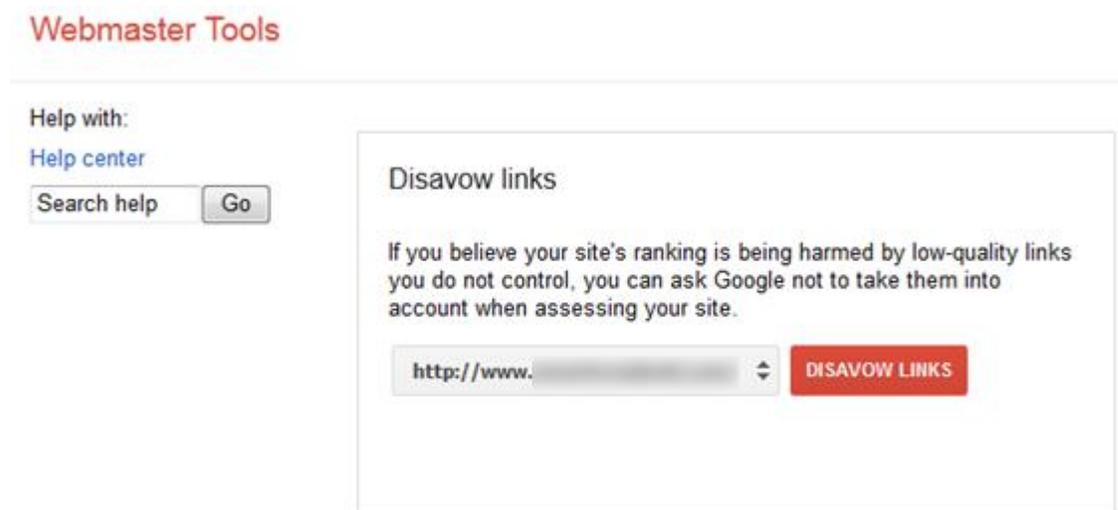
**In an algorithmic penalty**, you only get to submit a Disavow Tool file. You then wait a couple of weeks to see if your file has been accepted and processed. Once that happens and you get notified – you still have to wait for the next “data refresh” to happen in the Google index. Once that happens, the URLs within your Disavow Tools file get devalued to stop passing down negative penalty that resulted in your threshold level of unhealthy links to trip the algorithm and catch your site, in the first place.

In addition, in a data refresh - all the unhealthy links you managed to take down, also vanish from the index and stop contributing to any negative penalty.

Once this happens and all your unhealthy links vanish from the index - your site gets booted back up to where it was mostly. Sometimes a lower and, sometimes higher specially if you create more high quality links as opposed to those who replaced your SERPs earlier in the penalty.

## Screenshots of the Disavow Tool

(A)



The screenshot shows the Google Webmaster Tools interface for the Disavow Links tool. At the top, it says "Webmaster Tools" in red. Below that, there is a "Help with:" section with a link to the "Help center" and a search bar with "Search help" and "Go" buttons. The main content area is titled "Disavow links" and contains the text: "If you believe your site's ranking is being harmed by low-quality links you do not control, you can ask Google not to take them into account when assessing your site." Below this text is a text input field containing "http://www." and a red button labeled "DISAVOW LINKS".

(B)

---

## Disavow Links

This is an advanced feature and should only be used with caution. If used incorrectly, this feature can potentially harm your site's performance in Google's search results. We recommend that you only disavow backlinks if you believe you have a considerable number of spammy, artificial, or low-quality links pointing to your site, and if you are confident that the links are causing issues for you.

Disavow Links

(C)

Upload a file containing **only** the links you want to disavow.

Choose File

Submit

Done



## **Good Business. Bad Karma.**

Unfortunately, a company that has grown so big has shareholders whom it has to please and “ethics” really take a backseat and “profits” are of prime importance.

The truth is that Google has screwed over many small mom and pop online and offline businesses by hitting out on a large number of small businesses and affiliates doing SEO and replacing their rankings with the big guns like Amazon etc.

Since the Penguin update was released Adwords revenue have gone up by 50% !  
Adwords now generates more than 90% of the company’s revenues and it’s no surprise that Google stock price and shareholder value has skyrocketed since the attack of the Penguin.

That’s all for now.

Peace and Love

Vishal Lamba - SmarterSEO.com



## **RESOURCE LINKS**

**I have attached the following sample templates below.**

- [\*Sample file format for Disavow Tool document to be submitted if you are going to follow through with a Reconsideration Request.\*](#)
- [\*Sample file format for Disavow Tool document to be submitted if you are NOT going to follow through with a Reconsideration Request.\*](#)
- [\*Reconsideration Request to Google - Sample\*](#)
- [\*Sample email templates to send to webmasters requesting link removal/deletion.\*](#)

## **Related Online Resources**

- Google Algorithm Change History / Updates

<http://moz.com/google-algorithm-change>

- Webmaster Tools Access to the Disavow Links Submission Tool

<http://google.com/webmasters/tools/disavow-links-main>

- Reconsideration Request Submission Form

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/reconsideration>

- Youtube video matt cuts introduces disavow tool -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=393nmCYFRtA>



- Here is a must see video of Matt Cutts talking about the common mistakes people make while submitting files via the Google Disavow Tool.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX5K741AlWg&feature=youtu.be>

- Matt Cutts speaks... What should be included in a proper Reconsideration Request. A high level view...

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=8MfPe1NbsoA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=8MfPe1NbsoA)

- Your Ultimate Guide To Disavow Tool

<http://www.garyviray.com/your-ultimate-reference-google-disavow-tool.html>

- Reporting a site or a page that is Webspam

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/spamreport?hl=en>

- Interview of an Ex-Google Employee

<http://jamesnorquay.com/an-interview-ex-member-matt-cutts-search-quality-team/>

- Google Guidelines - Link Schemes

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/66356?hl=en>