



Affordable Web Design
Professional Web Development

To be found in the field...
you must first plant the seed.

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Search Engine Penalties:

In the [August issue of SmallBizNews](#) I wrote an article called "Caveat Emptor - Let the Buyer Beware" that briefly discusses the two schools of SEO - White Hat vs. Black Hat and the penalties of doing business with a Black Hat firm. In this article I'd like to elaborate on the different reasons that search engine ranking can drop and offer some clarification as to what the causes may be.



Don't Pay To Be Penalized

By David Williams - August 2005

No Flag On The Play

Fact - Search Engine Ranking Fluctuates

Myth - It is always a result of Search Engine Penalties

The truth of the matter is that it is not uncommon to see your SERP ranking (Search Engine Result Pages) fluctuate to some degree or another. Don't assume that the ranking of your site has changed because it has been penalized if the site experiences a loss in search engine rankings.

What may seem like a penalty may actually be the result of other factors, changes or issues with the search engines themselves and even your hosting server.

For example, many people recently witnessed a climb in their link popularity with MSN yet a significant drop with Google and began a 'frantic research mode' phase to discern the cause only to learn that nothing was wrong with their site - it was simply an algorithm change on the part of the search engines and the value they placed on inbound referring links.

Other possible **NON-PENALTY factors** may include:

- Hosting Server is down or having problems during crawl, so pages aren't indexed
- Robots.txt could have errors in the code
- Problems with crawlers
- Lost inbound links (backlinks/referring links)
- Your local competitor just made major revisions for your key terms and outperformed you when indexed
- Algorithm changed at the search engine itself

So, before assuming your site has been penalized by the search engines' contact your developer and do a little homework of your own.



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If you noticed a drop in rank two weeks ago on Google - do a little homework to learn when the last time Google indexed your site was and see if there is a correlation.

You can do this by going to Google and typing:

cache:www.yourdomainname.com

as your search string and the resulting page will show the last time Google indexed and cached your site.

Also, spend some time discussing your concerns with your developer and share your homework with each other. It's probably been a while since you sat down with them any way and it is good to redefine goals and clarify needs periodically.

Flag On The Play

Now we've examined a few of the possible causes for non-penalized changes in your search engine ranking we should discuss some definite "No Nos" in SEO campaigns that will eventually results in a loss of ranking and may even get you banned from Google as well as the other search engines.

While it may be difficult to determine with a high degree of certainty whether or not your site has been penalized since the search engines don't generally respond directly if asked whether a site has been penalized it is possible to rule out potential causes at your end.

If you are working with a developer/SEO firm that moves within the limits of SEO and operates with integrity you will likely be able to determine the cause if it was incurred by changes made by you and/or your developer.

If you learned that your ranking dropped 3 weeks ago and you made changes to the site just prior to that there is a strong correlation - still doesn't mean there was a flag on the play - just worth investigating.

Here are some definite rules to follow when it comes to SEO practices offered by Google which gives specific recommendations in its guidelines for webmasters:

- Avoid hidden text or hidden links
- Don't employ cloaking or sneaky redirects
- Don't send automated queries to Google
- Don't load pages with irrelevant words to boost keyword ranking
- Don't create multiple pages, sub domains, or domains with duplicate content
- Avoid "doorway" pages created just for search engines or other "cookie cutter" approaches such as affiliate programs with little or no original

These simple guidelines cover the most common forms of deceptive or manipulative behavior, but Google may respond negatively to other misleading practices not listed here (e.g. tricking users by registering misspellings of well-known websites).



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This list is not all inclusive and you should not assume that just because you don't see a specific deceptive technique in this list that Google approves of it.

The bottom line is that if you and your developer/SEO firm operate with integrity and don't use deceptive practices - you will likely never see a flag on the play.

If your developer is using words like, 'we know a secret' or 'we have a special relationship with Google'
RUN LIKE THE WIND.

It is Your Site, with Your Name on it and it is Your Money - Don't Pay to Be Penalized.

Additionally, if you have incurred a penalty or have even been banned from Google call us. Once we have identified and corrected the issue you can request that Google reconsider adding your site to their database using the web form set up for this purpose at

<http://www.google.com/support/bin/request.py>

I hope you're all having a great summer and I look forward to hearing from you.

Dave Williams

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