Google has released two major updates to the way it ranks web pages in its search index. In early 2011 the Google Panda update was released, first during February in America and then in April across all other English speaking markets. This update affected many websites and was designed to improve the quality of the websites in the search index. This is a brief guide to the Panda and Penguin updates from the perspective of a webmaster who has dealt with both.

This Penguin update was released around a year after Panda, in April 2012. While Panda tackled low quality content on a website, Penguin was designed to remove or demote websites that had used Web Spam to get higher rankings in Google.

.

[**Google Penguin and Google Panda Penalty - What's That?**](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2012/05/google-penguin-and-google-panda-penalty.html)

#### So why are these updates needed?

If this is about any one thing, it's about  (SEO). The concept of SEO has evolved ever since search engines like Google have come along. SEO is good. It allows you to take your website ranking to a higher level. But that's precisely where the problem lies. You see, it provides a shortcut where you can skip writing quality content, and still be able to take the low quality content to a high ranking. In late 90s and early 2000s, when Google was still newborn, some webmasters started doing just that. They would spare themselves the trouble of writing good quality content, and would learn seo tricks instead, which brought their poor quality content to the top.

Through he years, search engine optimizers kept at it. Google has been constantly improving its search module, but these people learned to duck and dodge everything Google had to throw at them. Fundamentally, this practice defeats the basic goal of Google, which is to provide good quality content to readers, instead of bogus websites that spam the web and gain the high ground in SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages). Hence, the need for an advanced screening mechanism which would let quality through but not spam content.

Although Google has been implementing such a filter throughout the past few years, it only rolls out major algorithm updates once a year. Google Panda was just such an update last year. And may I say, it was the deadliest update yet. The major update for this year is the Google Penguin update, and it looks relatively less harmful than Panda, although it still has effected a lot of websites. So basically, these updates are aimed at promoting quality and filtering out spam.

#### Google Panda

Google unleashed the Panda on Feb 24 2011. And immediately, it made its mark and hit so many blogs and websites that the entire ranking structure was shaken, with new websites coming at the top while some old established websites dipping down. According to Google, it was aimed at filtering "thin or low quality content". Since its launch, Google have made changes to it 13 times as of 20th April 2012. And a total of 12% websites have been effected by this update.

Google Penguin is another installment in Google's arsenal of weapons to be unloaded onto the online world. This was introduced on 24th April 2012. Again, it aimed at discouraging / punishing spam websites. By far, it has effected about 3% of the websites. Prior to its release, Google said;

In the next few days, we’re launching an important algorithm change targeted at web spam. The change will decrease rankings for sites that we believe are violating Google’s existing quality guide line. We’ve always targeted web spam in our rankings, and this algorithm represents another improvement in our efforts to reduce webspam and promote high quality content. While we can’t divulge specific signals because we don’t want to give people a way to game our search results and worsen the experience for users, our advice for webmasters is to focus on createing high quality link that create a good user experience and employ white hat SEO methods instead of engaging in aggressive webspam tactics



#### Panda and Penguin penalty

Once again, these updates are aimed at punishing spam websites, although there could be a lot more reasons for the updates to hit your site. Sites that are hit have seen a demotion in their Google PageRank, and their traffic has dipped, while sites that have benefited from this update have seen a soar in their traffic. The saying "One man's gain is another man's loss" never seemed more appropriate.

#### Why have you been effected?

There can be many reasons why you got hit. But the exact factors are known only to Google insiders. Google doesn't disclose this information, because if they do, search engine optimizers would grab on to those points and cheat Google once again. So Google does not give out the precise details, thank you very much. Here are, however, some probable causes as to why you took a hit.

* **Over optimization** - This is very important. People who don't have quality content over optimize their websites. So you should do what is necessary, and no more!
* **High keyword density** - This is like calling out loud to search engines; "check me! check me! I have the most keywords!". And they don't like it when you call them. Using excessive keywords is also a form of spamming, since you are seeking for search engines' attention. In the past, pages were ranked according to the number of keywords they had. Not anymore though. Always keep that in mind.
* **Virus and malware** - People simply hate it when they land on a website infected with a virus. And so does Google. Having a virus on your site, or even having too many spam or bot scripts can trigger the alarm bells for Google. Please review your website regularly from now on.
* **Lack of user experience** - Now this is very crucial, and Google has been stressing on this a lot lately. Pleasing the search engine is one thing. Pleasing the visitors is another. Even with adequate SEO, a website that lacks a good user experience might have been hit by Google.
* **Duplicate / copied content** - Yeah you think you are making things easier for yourself when copying content, but actually, you aren't. In fact, quite the contrary, you are axing your own feet. Google hates it when it finds duplicate content on your website. Never copy from another source, and never use redundant content.
* **High Bounce Rate** - Make sure to reduce the number of banners and other heavy graphics as much as possible to make sure your site loads faster. Slow loading blogs are hated by visitors and so by Google. Do not reduce the size of the page so much that it may begin looking dull and grey. Be creative yet smart!

#### What sort of websites were hit?

Before I dive into my tips, let me tell you a few things first. Google's basic aim behind this update, apart from promoting quality, was to discourage spam. Basically, it hit the following kind of websites;



* **Low quality** - This much is pretty obvious by now. Websites with low-quality or "thin" content got effected. You might think your content was good quality, but the fact is, quality doesn't mean just good English. It also includes adequate quantity, inter-linking, etc.
* **Content farms** - Google also discourages content farms. Sites with just quantity, but no quality content and inadequate SEO were effected by this update pretty badly.
* **Duplicate content** - Redundant and duplicate content is hated by everyone, including Google.
* Slow **site load time**
* **Excessive use of advertisements** - I have seen many such sites where there's an ad left, right, top, bottom, and within the content as well. As a blogger, I know the guy's feelings, as he wants to earn money. But as a web-surfer, I hate it! It comes under lack of user experience, which is not good in Google's big eyes.
* **Over optimization** - According to Google, it penalized websites that used black-hat SEO tricks to get their low quality content to the top results. One good example is something.com. No seriously, this is a website! If you go there, you will see just one word on the entire site, and that word is "something"! What a joke huh? Well get this. The content was negligible, but prior to Panda's release, this site came on top of Google's SERPs when you searched for the keyword "something". Freakishly weird, yes? Needless to say, black-hat SEO tricks were used a lot those days.



There's one important thing you need to know about Google Panda. Earlier, search result showed webpages based on their individual quality. After Panda though, things changed. Panda was a domain-level update, which means one bad quality page could impact the whole website's rankings. So this became the bane for most blogs, who had had poor quality content from the time they were newly launched, and their owners didn't know much SEO or quality content.

#### Tips for recovering from Panda

Okay. I know I have said this a lot. So I won't repeat it (after this one more time, I swear :P). So you know you have to create good quality. But how? Well first of all, improve your grammar. Use spelling and grammar checks available in good editors like Microsoft Word etc. Secondly, write a good intro paragraph for your posts. Keep your posts above 400-500 words. Use Images and videos whenever possible, and most of all, inter-link your pages. For more about quality content,.

#### 2. Remove poor quality content

This should be your first step. Hurry and go into your archives, and review the content from long ago, when your blog was still new. Chances are, you didn't write much quality posts back then. Either update those pages, or remove them. Google penalizes websites on a domain-level. So any one bad post can be the weak link Google has been looking for.

#### 3. Get rid of ads

Once you are done trashing your old, low quality posts, it's time for dumping your ads. Look at your website from a critical eye, and look for any obtrusive ads. Generally, one banner at the top, one ad at the side, and one in the content is fine. But don't push those boundaries. Never ever use more than one ads within the content.

#### 4. Become active on social media

Ever since Google introduced the +1 button, it has been expecting people to use it. The more +1s you get on your content, the more Google likes you. And this isn't just about Google+. You have to be active on other social media too. Google likes it when people from various social media come to your site and share or like your content.

#### 5. Get rid of duplicate content

You might very well know that plagiarism is a very bad thing, and Google hates it. What you might not know is, you might get into trouble if someone else copies your content. Thus far, Google can't tell the difference between original and copied content. Thus, you need to manually complain against such content copiers.

#### 6. Get good, but not cheap backlinks

People might say otherwise, but backlinks are a force to be reckoned with. They can really help out your blog with the traffic and rankings. But those backlinks should be genuine, and good quality. Work on building backlinks by writing guest post, articles, etc. Never buy backlinks. Such backlinks are bot generated, and are considered as spam. Not only that, they are low quality backlinks which do more harm than good for your blog. Google frowns on these backlinks. You should too.

#### 7. Learn basic SEO

SEO is very important. I said earlier that people got penalized for over-optimization. You don't need to do that. But you do have t learn basic SEO. This includes meta descriptions, keywords in [titles](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2011/01/how-to-write-search-engine-friendly.html)and paragraphs, [image optimization](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2011/12/how-to-optimize-images-before-uploading.html), etc. Look at my [20 Hot SEO tactics for more info](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2012/04/20-hot-seo-tactics-every-blogger-must.html).

#### 8. Un-index poor quality pages

If you don't want Google to index a low quality page, you can simply [noindex](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2012/04/20-hot-seo-tactics-every-blogger-must.html) that page. This simply excludes that page from Google search. This is a good way to hide your "About Us" or "Contact" pages, which are there just for the user and have little quality associated with them.

#### 9. Avoid keyword stuffing

Keyword stuffing means using excessive keywords. It is considered as a black-hat SEO technique. Using too many keywords is like calling for doom to come. A lot of keywords cry out to Google to check the page out. But once Google sees a high density, it knows you are spamming it, and it does not like that one single bit. So avoid this practice if you love your rankings :)

#### 10.your links

You might want to interlink maximum of your older posts into new ones. Not only does this breath new life into them, it also helps out crawlers. And Google likes this practice. We already talked about backlinks, or inbound links. Now, let's talk about out going links. Keep an eye on the number of dofollow links you give away. You're in serious trouble if you have more outgoing links than incoming links. Google considers this as spamming, since anyone can get a website running and add links to it to supplement their main website.

**How-to-recover-from-google-penguin**

#### How's Penguin different from Panda?

Google Penguin and Google Panda basically work on the same concept. The idea is to bring up quality content on SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) rather than content that has good SEO. So Penguin can be considered as the update over Panda.

But if we really dive deep into it, we can see a slight difference. While the Panda focuses on the uniqueness of the content and eliminates low quality or copied content, Penguin is working on removing webspam, and removing sites that use 'black hat' SEO techniques, such as cloaking, keyword stuffing, hidden texts, etc. Unethical tricks, in other words.

One thing I'd like to say is, if you got hit by Panda, it's not that big a deal, since many and more websites were effected by it as well. I mean, sure the update hit your traffic and your earnings. But at least you know where you went wrong. You can repair the damage done by by applying [these simple Google Panda tips](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2012/05/top-10-seo-strategies-to-protect-your.html).

If you got hit by Penguin, then you are in more of a trouble. It means Google doesn't like your site! And it's that serious. You seriously need to think over some things, because chances are, you are spamming or tricking users in some way even you might not realize. Don't worry though. It is still reparable. It will take some careful analysis, and lots of hard work though.

If you got hit by both Panda and Penguin, then you might want to pay special attention here. Now's your chance to learn your lessons. First, read our tips on recovering from Panda, and then come back to this post. Of course, some of the tips are going to be same. But hopefully, after applying them, you will be prepared for whatever beast Google has in store for us next.

#### How to recover from Google Penguin

Google Penguin was officially launched on 24th April 2012. So if your traffic has dropped after that date, then you are hit by Penguin. Otherwise, it could be a Panda refresh. Either way, the following tips will help you get through the mess and also prepare yourself for the next updates.

#### Start using Google Webmaster Tools

If you aren't already doing so, then get going! [Google Webmaster Tool](http://www.google.com/webmasters/) is great. It gives you all sorts of guidance related to your website. It has tools that help you do proper SEO for your website. It can help [remove sitemap errors](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2011/09/remove-blogger-sitemap-errors-in-google.html). You also get messages from Google informing you about any mistake you have made. They will tell you when you're spamming, And you'll get to know if there's some negative SEO associated with your website, for example when someone points spam and cheap backlinks to your website just to harm you. This could be a real problem, so go and get yourself signed up!

#### Make your content user-friendly

Now this is Google's main point of focus. It's all about quality now, and the user experience. There are quite a few things I want to say here. Some people asked me to look at their websites and see why they got hit. And in them, I noticed quite a few things.

Firstly, the site navigation wasn't clear. Buttons weren't clearly visible, layout was unusual, and it was all confusing. Obviously, these things don't fare well with the readers.

Secondly, and most importantly, there were simply too many ads! I understand people are eager to make money off their blogs. But that doesn't mean you have to clutter your content with ads. In fact, this is something Google dislikes in particular. Too high an ad to content ratio, and you're staring trouble in the face!

Then, there was the post layout. It is always recommended that you use a nice long intro paragraph, with just one intro image for each post. And use a read more page-break after the intro paragraph so that maximum number of posts can be displayed on your home page.

Needless to say, you need to look at your website from a critical reader's point of view, and you'll automatically see things that could be the cause of a high bounce rate. Google doesn't like a high bounce rate.

#### Keyword stuffing

Look at your content again, and if you are doing this, whether consciously or sub-consciously, stop immediately! A high keyword density, or too many keywords in a paragraph or post, is a call to search engines saying "Check me out! I have the most content available". And when Google sees that you obviously spammed it, it won't be happy. Keyword stuffing is a black hat SEO tactic, and you should avoid it at any cost. Change your older posts if you have to.

#### Get rid of spam backlinks

There are a couple of things worth mentioning here. Firstly, never ever buy backlinks. These are cheap and automated links that do more harm than good. Stay away from SEO and links optimization. Don't use any automated SEO or links software. It is never good.

Secondly, guest posting is good, but irrelevant posting is a hazard. If you are accepting guest posts irrelevant to your niche, or even writing about irrelevant stuff, then that's not good. And if you are guest posting on other blogs not related to your niche, then you might have a bigger problem. See, Google ranks backlinks according to their relevancy as well. So if you are getting irrelevant backlinks, then they aren't much better than those cheap backlinks money can buy.

#### Use social media

First of all, get yourselves social media pages for your website, especially on Google+. [Add sharing buttons](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2011/06/add-social-media-share-widget-to.html) on your posts, and encourage people to share your posts. If you socialize, then Google will give you more credit for your website.

*When will the next Google Penguin Update Take Place?*

#### A brief update history



Google was launched in March 1998. In internet terms, that's pretty long ago, considering that the world wide web was invented just 8 or 9 years before Google was born. I can't imagine how internet users survived before Google! We sure as hell can't live without it now :P. Anyways, at that time, Google was just a simple keyword based search engine, and it returned pages that had the most number of user query keywords in them.

The very first update from Google was the Google Toolbar for browsers, and the Toolbar PageRank (TBPR) in 2000. This was when Google started ranking pages intelligently, and the concept of PageRank came into being.

in 2002, Google launched its first official update, code-named the 'Boston' update. Google started monthly indexing of webpages, the so-called Google Dance.

2003 was a pretty busy year for Google. The Boston algorithm was updated, and a new algo was introduced, called the Florida update. This was much like the recent Panda update, and left many websites devastated. The Fritz update ended the monthly Google Dance and now, pages were being indexed on a daily basis.

The Austin update was the major algo in 2004, and it continued Google's crackdown on low quality, black hat SEO websites. Apart from that, Google began investing, and raised its market share.

By the start of 2005, Google emerged as a major search engine, and its share prices doubled. This is when it continued its efforts for fighting against spam by bringing many updates, such as the Bourbon, Allegra, Jagger, and Big Daddy updates. The "[nofollow](http://www.mybloggertricks.com/2011/08/when-should-you-tag-external-links-as.html)" attribute was introduced around this time as well, and Google started XML Sitemap submission. Google continued working on these updates in 2006 by Supplemental updates. This went on in 2007 as well, although Google started Video, News, and other searches.

2008 wasn't much constructive either, with no algorithm update from Google. However, Google introduced the Caffeine update, which was a major algorithm and infrastructure update. This update was perfected in 2010, and a new update was introduced in May, infamously known as the 'May Day' update. It impacted a lot of webmasters around the globe.

In 2011, most of you will remember, Google unleashed the Panda update, which was a major algorithmic update and impacted lots of websites. Google also introduced the +1 button around that time. Google continued to update the Panda in 2012, and more than a dozen Panda updates have been rolled out to this day. The most recent update from Google was the Penguin update, which was again a major algorithm update.

#### How frequently does Google bring updates?

Well, judging from Google's update history, Google now brings a major algorithm update each year. But it introduces hundreds of smaller minor updates. Take the Penguin, for example. It has only been here for like two weeks, But in that time, Google has introduced more than 50 minor changes and updates. The total count for last year was around 500-600. So, yeah. Google is busy as a bee these days.

Google also updates its previous algorithms now. The Panda 3.6 was released just after Penguin was rolled out. Google also updates the PR of websites every 3-4 months. The latest PR update was in the start of may 2012, so we can expect the next update to take place in August 2012. So fasten your seat belts, and start working on recovering from the panda or penguim updates.

#### What are these updates all about?

Like I have talked earlier, Google introduces these updates to fight against web-spam. The idea is to bump up quntent  on search results, and push down the ruthless and black-hat SEO websites that use spam and unethical SEO tactics as a shortcut to gain the best rankings. So the priority is given to quality and original content, and duplicate and spam content is being pushed down. Of course, Search Engine Optimizers know how to duck and dodge these updates, which is why Google is constantly updating to stop them from finding their comfort zone.

There can be another possible implication from all this ruthless updating and stuff from Google. We now are getting the feeling that Google is trying to monopolize the market for itself. Of course, it already has a monopoly of sorts. But it only has around 2/3rd (64%) share in the industry, and it wants more than that. By introducing all these updates, it wants webmasters to follow its own rules. In short, it is trying to bring the game to its own home turf. Other search engines are presented by a problem here. They either can copy the idea, and make Google look like the big guy who is also their mentor, or they can just ignore the changes and be taken by the tide that is Google. Now of course, Google takes a gamble with such big updates, because it doesn't make webmasters happy. But considering that Google is the biggest in the industry, it can take risks. Smaller engines can only look in awe.

#### Some problems with Google's algorithms

Now it also seems, that Google isn't entirely aware of what's happening with these updates. There are some loopholes that some webmasters know exactly how to exploit. And Google isn't aware of that. Otherwise, it would never allow such thing s to happen. Let me give you an example.

Type into your browser address bar, www.something.com. You'll find just one word on the entire site; "something". Yeah. That's right! But there's more. If you check the PR of that website, you will find that it's at PR 5! Consider this blog you are on right now. It is at PR 4. See the problem? Previously, this website came out on top of SERPs when you searched for the word "something". Thankfully though, that's been fixed by the Panda and Penguin updates. But the PR remains the same.

Google is also returning irrelevant search results since the Penguin update. Search for "Panda Recovery" on Google, and it will show you Pandora Recovery instead. Weird, huh? There's a lot more anomalies of this kind, and WPMU has written a detailed article on this.

What's happening here? Well, I'm not really sure. But looks like there are some flaws in Google's algorithms, which the veteran black-hat SEOs are striving to exploit. Hopefully, this will fixed in the next algo update from Google, because this gives black hatters an unfair advantage over people like us who write original and quality content.

**What is the ideal Word Count limit for an optimized Blog Post?**

#### What to consider?

While writing a blog post, there are a few things that you should consider. First of all, your niche. I wouldn't say there's a limit on blog post length, but I'd definitely say that length is niche dependent. Generally, sites that aim to inform have a lower average post length than sites that aim at interacting with people. Latest news websites don't need to have a lot of words, as the aim is to provide the most headlines to the readers in the shortest space possible. Technical and review websites have to be more detailed, since readers are looking for each and every detail about a product.

So it's really a matter of what niche your website is. This very blog you are reading of course is in the blogging niche, but in a broader spectrum, it falls under the 'inform and educate' people category, along with the technical and (sometimes) review categories. Hence, over here, we need to generally write long posts.

There one more important thing. Decide on your average word range, and try to stay close to it. That way, your blog will gain consistency. This does not mean you should restrict yourself to a word limit. Play around with those numbers, and check your analytics for any pattern. Once you decide on a suitable range, go with it!

#### What we recommend, and why?

I know I said there's no fixed rule, but you should set yourself a target. For most starting bloggers, this target should be around 500 words. And if you get a grip on things, you should set up a higher target. Here at MBT, we have set up a target of at least 800 words. Many people ask me why we have such high limit. Well, there are many reasons for this

**Why...?**

First of all, the latest google updates  have been all about content quality. Google's penalties have made it necessary that webmasters give more value to content by offering more text than other media such as videos etc. Crawlers and search spiders can be considered like readers. When they see a post that is short, alarm bells start ringing immediately. Short posts are usually seen as spam by search engines. People post short posts on other websites they own, and links those posts to their main website to increase backlinks. Hence, short posts can be seen as spam. You don't want search engines to get that bad first impression.

Secondly, Google is all of a sudden emphasizing a lot on spam. It's all about quality now. Who knows Google might start edging out short, spamy posts in future updates? For that, you need to have a decent amount o words, so that you can safeguard yourself against future update penalties. At some level, the Panda and Penguin updates have also penalized websites that lacked quality and had short posts.

Another advantage of having a sizable post length is, it will have the perfect keyword density. Too long a post will mean too many keywords, while a short post will have too few. The 500-600 range is perfect for optimizing your keyword density. Such a post can be adequately formatted and given proper structure easily, without making it too boring. This makes sharing on social media easy.

Last, but not the least, posts around 500-1000 words are reader-friendly. They aren't too long to be boring, and not too short so much so that readers might them inadequate and spam. In my opinion, this is the perfect post length range.

#### And in the end...

Before we leave off, there are some tips I want to share with you. These are more like guidelines than tips. And I wanted to include them here because I've seen a lot of people violating the 'writing code'.

First of all, always use headings. Use just one h1 per page, and use multi-level headings and sub-headings to your content. This makes it more interesting, and easier to scan and read. Readers like things that are organized.

Secondly, break your content into short paragraphs. It's more interesting that way. And if makes things easier for you, keep your sentences short. I've read countless articles where people try to express their chain of thought in one fluid sentence, but those sentences end up making little or no sense at all. This is something that will come with experience.

Finally, check your grammar. Blogging environments might have spell-checks (which you should always use), but most don't have grammar check. WordPress does have a simple grammar check, but it's not very efficient. Blogger has no such thing. But hey! Most of you use Microsoft's Word right? If you have the 2007 or later edition, then that's pretty cool. Paste your text in it, and run a grammar check. It will remove redundant, out of place, fragmented words. It will even check the punctuations for you. Hence, it is a neat little tool which you use to improve your post quality