

BrightEdge Point of View: Should You Worry About Algo Updates?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is in a very different place from where it was just a few years ago. Google has updated its search algorithm hundreds of times every year, making rapid, sometimes dramatic changes to how sites are ranked on search results pages.

It's become increasingly clear that Google and other search engines seek to move ranking factors closer and closer to user experience factors. What's good for user experience – quality content that answers users' questions, targeting keywords closely aligned with the brand and target audience's interests, clear site taxonomy, and clean navigation – is good for SEO.

Google has made the message clear: modern SEO should be about off-page and on-page optimizations that better connect users with the kinds of content they are searching for. It should not be about trying to "outguess" the next algorithm update, or finding black or gray hat techniques to gain short-term, tactical-level wins in the SERPs.

How has SEO changed?

Here is an outline of some of the most impactful changes made to the Google search algorithm since the early 2000s.

- **Personalized search (2005)** – Google starts tailoring individual users' search results pages based on personal search history
- **Panda (2011)** – Crackdown on thin content, low-quality content, and content farms
- **Penguin (2012)** – Major update designed to directly penalize sites engaging in artificial backlink inflation
- **RankBrain (2015)** – A change to Hummingbird, the core logic behind the Google search algorithm.
- **Local 3-pack and local SERPs (2015)** – Above-the-fold section displaying geo-specific results based on the search query

The trend, as noted by algorithm watchers, is an increasing cadence of updates with less explicit messaging around each one. More recently Google has stated that it will no longer confirm future updates of Penguin and discourages naming the updates.

The shortsighted response to all the trends outlined above – more frequent algorithm updates with less explicit messaging around them – would be panic, and increased attempts to second-guess search engine’s intentions. But in spite of the changes, the core tenets of strategic-level SEO have remained remarkably consistent:

- **High-quality content** serving users along the customer journey
- **Keyword strategy** matching your customer personas and mapped logically to site taxonomy
- **User experience** including page speed, clean navigation and internal linkage, and security with HTTPS
- **A backlink strategy** that regularly audits old backlinks and campaigns for new, high-quality backlinks
- **Design sites that are easily navigable by users as well as crawlers**

Though Google has decreased the amount of information it provides about algorithm updates, it has also been remarkably consistent in stating that new updates are based around the best practices already publicly available in their [Webmaster Guidelines documentation](#).

By adhering to these best practices, it seems likely that you can weather, and even prosper, the most turbulent of algorithm updates. Inversely, if subsequent updates are having an outsized effect on your organic search visibility, it should be a canary-in-the-coal-mine warning that your site and/or SEO strategy contains structural flaws. In such a situation, the first course of action should be to use whatever tools are available to isolate said flaws and address them in a systematic and decisive manner.

The Takeaway

No. Don’t focus on updates. Many of SEO’s best practices are now public knowledge and effectively evergreen across every new algorithm update. A brand that commits to these practices likely has little to nothing to fear from updates. Brands that do experience serious disruption in the SERPs in the wake of updates probably have site and technical errors.

If you would like to discuss the topic, please call your Customer Success manager or call us at 800-678-8023.

About BrightEdge

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