

Important changes at Google

Recently, Google, arguably the most important search engine since it's deal last year with leading directory site Yahoo!, has made some changes to the way it ranks web pages. These changes threaten to force many website owners to rethink their current search engine strategy, increasing a site's "link popularity" through membership of a links program is no longer an option.

Links programs require members to keep pages on their website with links to the other members' sites. With few exceptions, all of these pages are identical. So, while members may have hundreds of incoming links from other members, it's very easy for a search engine to recognize that the links are part of a program.

Google has now decided to penalise websites that participate in such links programs. In some cases, the site's ranking on searches is just reduced, but in many cases, the offending sites are being dropped from Google's index altogether.

Google's rationale for doing this is obvious. They're trying to give their users the most relevant results for any given search. A site that's "well-known" and has a lot of incoming links from similar sites is usually a top authority on the subject.

By preventing sites from gaining an inflated ranking, Google is able to provide better search results. This is critical for Google - their partnership with Yahoo! came about because Google delivers great results for their users. We should expect other search engines to follow their lead.

If your website is participating in any kind of links program, we recommend that you drop out immediately and remove all links pages from your site. If Google actually drops your site, an apologetic email may get your site back in. Several people have reported success with this approach.

Google, and several other search engines, place a much higher priority on incoming links from the 3 major directories (Yahoo!, Looksmart, and the Open Directory). This means that getting your site listed in these directories will probably help you more than any other optimisation strategy.