

Manual penalties in Google's March 2024 update

The large number of manual penalties signals the largest impact in the history of Google's March 2024 core update. Here are six things to know and lessons to learn.

1. Updated March 2024 qualifies as primary

I've been following every Google update, and in my opinion, the March 2024 core algorithm update clearly has a similar level of impact as the Florida , Panda , and Penguin updates in terms of widespread influence. Experienced marketers agree that this update is one of the major updates.

While the Medic update was a change in the algorithm, what's happening now is more than just a major change. It's a profound change in the way websites are ranked. So it's helpful to review what's being penalized to understand the scope of this update.

2. Websites that survived previous updates did not escape this update

Social media posts demonstrate that Google is removing entire websites from search results and from the search index. Some reports are from observers praising the removal of low-quality websites that have clung to the SERPs through Google's previous updates.

Other posts were from publishers who were confused as to why their network of sites had completely disappeared.

A post in the private Affiliate SEO Mastermind group recounts the plight of a publisher whose entire network crashed.

The main detail of that post is that all eight affected websites were created within the last two years and each covers a different niche topic. The author of the article claims the content was created manually with just a little help from AI. All websites are showing zero traffic impressions.

Perhaps a clue as to why that person's websites were affected is that they are all on different topics, which could be a sign that the authors of the websites may not have the same knowledge. ?Deep subject matter expertise that Google is searching for.

The person who posted that Facebook post said they were giving up and focusing their future efforts on YouTube.

Jeff Coyle of MarketMuse AI Content Planning tweeted that a group of websites he tracks as a measure of the effectiveness of Google's search algorithms have finally been removed from the search engine's results pages (SERP) of Google.

Jeff tweeted:

'I was checking a SERP group I follow to find a collection of horribly spammy websites that have been around and been around for 12-18 months. Many have been completely de-indexed, and others are hidden in filter=0 or are literally grouped at the bottom (the actual bottom, like the final findable URLs) of the SERP.'

@barelypurple replied to Jeff's tweet:

'Some pure trash destruction is great but my main concern is that we will see the big websites getting even more traction.'

3. Punishments happen quickly

Another interesting feature of this update is the speed at which websites receive manual actions.

@ratneshkumar684 tweeted:

'Looks like @googlesearchc did the Spam update very quickly this time.

One of my friend's websites was completely de-indexed this morning.

He recently received this manual penalty that affected all pages.

This website publishes news in the entertainment industry.'

Picture 1 of Manual penalties in Google's March 2024 update

Lily Ray tweeted about ten websites that disappeared overnight:

Gael Breton tweeted:

'I'm seeing AI spam websites being completely de-indexed now.

It's going to be interesting'

@PureAffiliate responded with a tweet about a self-described 'link building agency' being completely removed from Google search results.

4. Inconsistent communication regarding manual operations

Jeannie Hill (@essentialskill) posted about businesses asking her for help but reported inconsistent notifications from Google about manual actions, with some receiving emails about it while others noticed manual action in their Google Search Console. Interestingly, one case saw traffic drops before receiving messages through Google

search console.

Ollie Ryman @ollie_ryman commented on manual actions regarding an 'abusive experience', where manual actions did not appear in Google Search Console and the only notification was via email.

Ollie tweeted:

@tonythill shared that everyone he asked about the manual action reported not receiving email notifications.

5. Websites with small AI content may be subject to manual penalties

Someone on Twitter suggested that Google could detect AI-generated content thanks to the huge amount of content published in a short period of time.

@PeteReynolds_ responded to the above tweet with his real-life experience with a small website of AI-generated content that didn't compete with anything and basically just sat around. That seemingly unimportant website received a manual penalty.

Pete tweeted:

Another thing to consider is statistical analysis that uses more than one data point (like content posting rate). The precision of statistical analysis is increasingly precise with more data points, and this has been a characteristic of statistical analysis in search engines for nearly twenty years.

6. Old websites receive manual penalties

Another aspect of this update is that it affects older websites that have not previously received manual actions.

@simransingh931 tweeted:

'Even one of our websites was manually penalized.

I started it in 2013, a brand new domain, ranked well and received good traffic over the years. Today I received a manual penalty for it.

No Spam, articles written by trusted authors, everything from screenshots to content is our own.

I thought it was just us, but searched and found this thread and a few others.'

Lesson learned: Reflect before acting

The scope and impact of the manual penalties reported by the search marketing community validated Google's announcement that the update contained major changes to its ranking system and algorithms.

The Florida, Panda, and Penguin updates introduced new technologies that exposed weaknesses in popular SEO tactics of the time. Search marketers have responded with a period of recalibration of search strategies to determine the next best path forward.

This update will take up to a month to complete deployment. My opinion is that you should familiarize yourself with the websites that receive manual actions to understand the common patterns for websites that are penalized. However, as always, the most prominent problem is not necessarily the most serious.

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