



# GOOGLE PENGUIN STORIES (INTERVIEWS)

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## Personal Experiences of Google Penguin

Everybody who has been affected by Google Penguin has their own personal story. We interviewed many SEO professionals and internet marketers to find out what Google Penguin was really like for them.



# Table of Content

## GOOGLE PENGUIN STORIES (INTERVIEWS)

1.1	Andy Edwards	4
1.2	Arda Menduş	6
1.3	Ashley Turner	8
1.4	Barry Schwarz	11
1.5	Bartosz Góralewicz	13
1.6	Christiaan Bollen	15
1.7	Dave Naylor	17
1.8	Dawn Anderson	19
1.9	Debra Mastaler	21
1.9	Emir Dervisevic	24
1.10	Geir Ellefsen	26
1.11	Henry Silva	28
1.12	John Cooper	30
1.13	Julie Joyce	32
1.14	Kaspar Szymanski	34
1.15	Matthew Barby	36
1.16	Michael King	38
1.17	Mikkel deMib Svendsen	40
1.18	Natalie Wright	42
1.19	Neil Patel	44
1.20	Nichola Stott	46
1.21	Nick Garner	49
1.22	Paddy Moogan	52
1.23	Piperis Filippaios	54
1.24	Ramón Rautenstrauch	56
1.25	Rick Lomas	58
1.26	Roger Montti	61
1.27	Søren Riisager	65
1.28	Tom Black	67
	CONCLUSION	69

## 1.1 Andy Edwards



Andy is a professional affiliate marketer and has been in the online gambling sector since 2006. He has extensive knowledge of this sector along with gambling related SEO and has been an EGR power 50 affiliate for the past 3 years. He has a number of top affiliates sites and joined Link Research Tools to bring all his SEO for these sites in house.

**Andy Edwards**

*Owner and Founder at madaboutbingo.com*



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

After our main site got the dreaded unnatural link warning email, about a month later we lost 90% of our traffic over night :(

When did you first hear about Link Detox?

It wasn't till around August 2013, as we had employed several different SEO companies to try and remove the penalty but none of them seemed to know what they needed to do. I also knew SEO but I decided to take it up a gear and signed up for the LRT Associate training, as I wanted to fix the site myself.

Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

Yes, if all you have done is build a basic site with no real content and structure and just thrown 1000's of Xrumer links etc towards it. Then it would be better to scrap the site and start again, as even after you have cleaned it up it would be like starting from scratch by building new strong links. Easier to build a brand new site with the right structure and links from the start.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

It was on a competitor's site who I helped get a penalty lifted. They had been the victim of several black hat attacks all targeting specific keywords. Once I had found the links it was a case of getting as many as we could manually removed and then submitting a disavow file to Google. The very next update they came back even stronger.

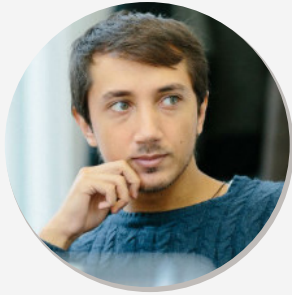
Have you any experience of Negative SEO?

Yes, this was one of the many reasons why our main site was so severely hit. We were ranking very high for extremely competitive keywords in our industry and as such this encouraged jealousy amongst some of our competitors. Because they couldn't outrank us naturally they took to black hat SEO in order to outrank us. We had Xrumer links, bad neighbourhood links, everything you could think of, pointed at the site.

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

Well... we all know about the upcoming mobile friendly algorithm on 21st April 2015, however I reckon between now and then we will see a refresh of Panda and Penguin. Then from May onwards I think there will be a lot of tweaks done to the algorithm like we saw when Panda and Penguin first launched.

## 1.2 Arda Mendes



After working as Head of Operations for SEOZEO, Arda Mendes currently does consulting for leading companies in Turkey.

**Arda Mendes**

SEO Consultant at [ardamendes.com](http://ardamendes.com)



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

I was trying different link building techniques to understand the best way to improve the rankings. When I was trying to improve one of my micro niche website's ranking, it punished me!

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

Absolutely no!

When did you first hear about Link Detox?

It's hard to remember but I think it was June 2013.

Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

The webmasters or website owners always make mistakes. According to the size of the business they could start over with a new domain as a fresh beginning. But big companies cannot! They have to suffer for a while.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

I've seen the best results by using The Orca Technique.

Have you any experience of Negative SEO?

I think it was one year ago. I was analyzing for a potential customer, I found some crappy links with the adult content anchor text keywords. It was a Turkish website but it had spammy links with English anchors. It looked like it was negative SEO.

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

They will try to serve the users in the best way. The Google Philosophy tells us everything about what they think!

The aim is to serve best and accurate results quickly to the users. They will update algorithms to serve the best. The focus point must be the users!

## 1.3 Ashley Turner



Ashley is the co-founder and head of search at the agency HelloBrave.com as well as owning his own market leading affiliate websites in various competitive niches. Previously, Ashley worked with clients in both the UK and EU corporate world providing strategic search and PR marketing solutions. Client experience includes companies like Tesco, Sainsburys, ASDA, Samsung, Virgin, BestBuy, IKEA and the UK Gov Department for International Development.

**Ashley Turner**

*Head of Search at Brave*



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

My first experience of the Google Penguin was painful on a biblical scale. While I don't ever use any blackhat SEO on clients' sites as I don't like risking people's incomes to gain fast results, back in 2010-2012 I took this gamble on my own affiliate sites. One of my personal affiliate sites was driving 6,000 sessions per day, held 48/50 #1 positions for the highest traffic terms in the industry and made £2,000 per day in affiliate revenue. Penguin 1.0 was released and it got deindexed. Plot twist: I actually recovered this website using Link Detox and it's back to 3,000 sessions a day with zero penalty problems.

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

If we were to move to the side the personal impact Penguin had on my own websites, I would have to say I sit on the fence with this one. I totally believe in creating natural growth through intelligent marketing campaigns and creative content, if people were gaming the system they deserved to get a red card. What I think is unfair is that the disavow tool did not launch until October 2012 which left total chaos, further to this the Penguin update does not refresh enough to recover quickly. Picture getting hit with negative SEO and a Penguin penalty... then you have to wait 12 months like last year for it to update again - Business can shut in that time.

When did you first hear about Link Detox?

Back in 2012 I adopted LinkResearchTools as many SEOs and business owners did to fix my own backlink problems. Previously, we just combined link reports by running our own Excel spreadsheet macros to filter and build reports that could be manually tagged and loaded into an outreach tool for link removal.

Link Detox provided not only a robust auditing engine, but a platform to launch our own recovery service as an agency that drove growth in many other areas of our business.



Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

I've never been approached with anything I thought was too hard to fix and we've worked on well-known brands in tough penalty niches like the insurance, gambling and porn markets. This being said I think the choice to scrap a site would depend totally on the situation and link metrics. Below are sample situations you could be in with a Penguin penalty:

**New websites:** I think if a site is fairly new and has hardly any natural backlinks it's safe to say you'll be better off buying an aged domain or new domain and migrating the content to that and doing SEO the right way.

**Networks:** By link network I mean real SEO networks or just a bunch of micro sites you've built for the sake of holding multiple first page rankings or local listings (doorway pages). If you run a link network like this and it gets blasted, it's safe to say it would probably cost way too much to fix the damage; Google is on to you, you're not as smart as you thought you were and it's probably time to focus on your strongest site.

**Blackhat only:** If you've got a site that is an aged domain but is stacked with 1,000's of dirty links and nothing natural, you should probably investigate the cost of migrating the brand.

**Whitehat / Blackhat:** if you've got a mix of good and bad links, you should 100% try to fix the problem. A well-constructed and audited disavow file, coupled with a Link Detox Boost will drive a positive increase in traffic while you have time to actually remove the toxic links and more importantly, earn natural ones!

**Whitehat:** If you've just got natural backlinks, don't think you're safe. Put link monitoring in place and be one with the link profile; spotting problems before Google does can save your neck.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

We had one client that had somewhere in the region of 150,000 backlinks - only 500 of these links were natural! We removed 146,000 of these backlinks over an extensive 12 month period whilst submitting multiple disavow files and 2 reconsideration requests. The site recovered and has first page rankings again, growing month on month but it took a lot of work.

Have you any experience of Negative SEO?

I would say 3/10 clients I take on have got some form of negative SEO applied to their website's backlink profile. The most common forms I find are scraped websites, scrapebox blasts and link directory spam. The best one I found is where a global insurance company with a turnover of £2,699,000,000 shot themselves right in the foot. They rebranded and bought an aged domain name for a ridiculous amount of money. The new domain's history was not checked and came pre packed with backlinks from virus ridden fake clothing backlinks (e.g. your traditional fake Gucci / Prada bag stuff).

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

I've been putting my money on Google penalising the use of fake social signals for a while, but with the way the landscape of ranking correlation is shifting I now would bet on user metrics.

It's no surprise that with the release of the 'mobile-friendly' algorithm we can see Google is putting a focus on the user (and so they should, being an ad revenue company). In 2014 click through rate and user signals were vital to ranking and I see more bots and on page blackhat tactics coming out to manipulate this. I believe more Google updates surrounding the quality of a website will be released to combat this growing issue.

## 1.4 Barry Schwarz



Barry Schwarz runs search Engine Roundtable, a popular search blog on very advanced SEM topics.

**Barry Schwarz**

*owner of RustyBrick, a NY based web consulting firm*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

I have never been affected by Google Penguin.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

No, it has not.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

No, I do not.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

I think on page SEO is fundamental to providing SEO services. It is much easier than off-page SEO and much more technically structured. There are key and structured steps you can take with on page SEO that work or do not work. So I think it is easier to do on page SEO but at the same time, it can get complicated in cases of internationalization, site moves, languages and much more. But for the typical site, on page SEO is pretty straight forward.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

I have to imagine Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future, simply because their algorithms can't keep up with the spam. They get link spam right, but it is common for them to get it wrong as well. That being said, links will still dominate for the next year or two, maybe even three. I don't think links will ever not become a ranking factor.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I think like most people, we had clients who wanted to know more about how to get exposure from search engines. Back in 2000 or so, I started reading a lot about it, quickly I gave a few seminars and now I write at the most popular search engine news blogs on the internet.

## 1.5 Bartosz Góralewicz



Bartosz Góralewicz specializes in link audits. He does consulting mostly for corporate customers and large sites. You can find some of his case studies or interesting posts at:

**Bartosz Góralewicz**

*Co-founder & Head of SEO @ Elephate Agency*



How have you been affected by Google Penguin?

We first started as an agency working only with our own affiliate websites and only a few small clients. When you make a living out of a few websites, you want to keep them as safe as possible, it was obvious for us and still is. Changing our business model from getting all the links and moving towards the detailed analysis of every single link was a hard decision back in 2012. I remember that really well, as it wasn't a popular approach. How many of you remember the "Google will never figure out black hat" approach?

Before Penguin 2.1, we weren't the cool guys getting all the links out there. But, there was one day that I remember really well.

October 5th 2013 - the Saturday morning after Penguin 2.1 was released, I woke up to find out that nearly all of my buddies doing SEO lost their websites, clients, rankings and God knows what else. This is where all the efforts we made with our internal strategy and with investing in LinkResearchTools paid off. Not only did we not lose that day, we gained a lot of the traffic that our competitors lost.

On October 5th, there was only one guy I could call to brag about that - my business partner, Wojtek. Since then, our agency has not only grown from a garage startup of 2, to a team of 16; we now happily share experience gained with our own sites with our clients to keep their websites as safe as possible.

How have you been affected by Google Penguin?

In 2012, it was all about getting as many links as possible. I know that it is popular now to claim that you were doing content marketing since 2006, but we all know the facts. I myself saw backlink profiles of a few thousand websites, and there wasn't one without the links that we now consider Black Hat. Selling SEO strategy, spending 2 months on on-page SEO, auditing links, conducting outreach to bloggers, etc. are all terms that would sound silly in 2012. Besides the fact that nobody would buy those from you, they most probably wouldn't have as much impact as they do now.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes I do. Not only for my own website, we've got more and more clients that ask us to monitor their link profile on a monthly basis. The funny thing is that it does not only help in keeping them safe; this approach is much cheaper in general than one huge link audit done usually just after the drop in Google. Some of our clients spend as little as \$300 for monitoring a small website's link profile on a monthly basis. This is simply an insurance for them.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

On-page SEO is now more important than it ever was and I can totally agree with that. Sometimes, you can increase the visibility of your client's website by 400 - 500% with 2 - 3 months of work on the client's on-page SEO. Still, when most of this work is done, you need links to move forward. I think it is now a 50/50 relationship. Links without on-page SEO are not worth much, just as on-page SEO with no backlinks won't get you to the top position.

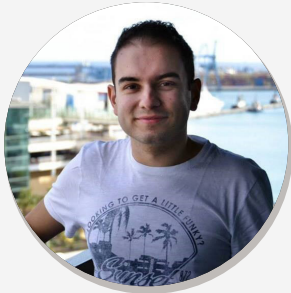
Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

I doubt it. With so much work invested in an almost perfect algorithm to prevent spam, why would they? Once they make it run all smooth for webmasters, so they don't have to wait for 13 months for a Penguin update, I don't see why Google would drop links as a ranking factor. User experience and other factors are much easier to fake than a GOOD link.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

We first started as an SEO agency in 2012, before that we were working with our affiliate websites, which of course needed a lot of link building and SEO done. Our experience in this field slowly led us to start an SEO agency.

## 1.6 Christiaan Bollen



Christiaan graduated as Professional Bachelor in Applied Computer Science – Application Development and started working as a software and web developer. During this time he built his own websites. In 2012, his entrepreneurial spirit made him decide to start his own web development company: Boljoro. Christiaan is also a gambling affiliate and learned a lot about SEO in this highly competitive market. He also did search engine marketing and became a Google Partner. Now Boljoro offers web development, search engine optimization and search engine marketing.

**Christiaan Bollen**  
Owner at *boljoro.com*



When were you first aware of Google's Penguin?

When the first Penguin was launched I wasn't into SEO that much yet. I first read about it on the internet. But I did buy domains that had mostly Penguin penalties, they were spammed with links from forums, blogs, Chinese/Russian sites.

But the one with the best domain name had a manual spam action. With the help of Link Detox I could remove the penalties.

Did you get links removed or just disavow links?

I just disavowed them because most of the sites were so spammy I never expected any answer. Or the sites were in a language I didn't understand.

Did that improve your traffic?

Not really, there were almost no links left and I created a new website for the domain. So I almost started from zero. But it was a good domain name.

Do you think it's better to just start over again sometimes?

Yes. If I did it again today I would just start over with a different domain name. But at the time I was convinced that the domain name would make a big difference. It cost me money to buy the domain name and a lot of work to get rid of the penalty. I think that my rankings would have been similar with a new domain. When I bought the domain name, I was not "smart" enough to test the domain backlinks. I don't think I knew about LinkResearchTools when I bought the domain.



## 1.7 Dave Naylor



David spotted the potential of the industry back in 2003 and bought the Internet Service Provider (ISP) Bronco Ltd. With his determined attitude he has built a successful business, a great reputation, and he speaks on the subject around the world - even the Search Engines call on him to talk to their people.

**Dave Naylor**

*Director of Digital at bronco.co.uk*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

Personally no, but when Penguin first started rolling out we had quite a few new clients approach us for help who had suffered badly from poor historic link building.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

From a technical SEO side not much really, keeping content unique and on one URL and ensuring that the site is fast and Search compliant. We check Webmaster Tools more often! Then from the Link building days where you could just buy your ranking we now take a focused PR route.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

From day 1 of a client working with Bronco, following a full manual link audit and cleanse, we check links weekly and actively remove or disavow anything we deem as “dangerous” to the long term success of the campaign.

There’s a lot of talk about the importance of ‘on page’ SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

Technical SEO (on-page) can trip you up just the same as bad links, I think people really underestimate how important good site structure and content is.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Hard to say, what can they replace it with? SEO's have broken into main stream media and we are getting coverage. We're also happy to get citations or backlinks, and we are actively building communities around the brands and we build great content relevant to the site. I think we have all our bases covered.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

When? LOL, before Google was a search engine I used to be a programmer and I built an inkjet cartridge site for a friend who was then ripped off by a crappy SEO company. He then asked me to help for a revenue share which is where I learnt my trade, and that revenue helped me start Bronco.

## 1.8 Dawn Anderson



Dawn is an organic search consultant and owner of Move It. Specialising in technical, database driven, dynamic and architectural SEO.

**Dawn Anderson**

*Director - Move It Marketing*



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

I remember it as though it were yesterday. I had just returned home from a family birthday celebration and checked over my daily rank checking tools, which monitor a few thousand terms, to find that the SERPs were all over the place. Not only on some of my projects, but competitors' sites who also had 100,000's of links historically and who had made great gains by building them. I'll also never forget Matt Cutts forewarning that that summer would be one which many SEOs would remember. He was right. I spent 6 months or so poring over links (including the whole summer (and it was hot)), working out 'the good, the bad, and the ugly'.

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

At first, yes, because it had affected me quite dramatically initially. All those 'cheap' and 'cheerful' links which had been built over the years to one of my main income generating sites, suddenly were just 'cheap'. There was no longer anything 'cheerful' about them. Now, I do see that the search results are an improvement over the pre-penguin results generally. The advent of Penguin did mean that we had to step outside our comfort zone and concentrate on the wider aspects of digital marketing and to some extent, PR. The quick and easy wins were not there as before. Painful at the time, but a steep learning curve I'm now grateful for. My main gripe was with the length of time it took Google to push out the latest Penguin update (too long), and the manner in which it was communicated (poorly), to the wider search community by them. The initial results of that update were underwhelming.

When did you first hear about Link Detox?

At a conference in Leeds. Christoph Cemper was speaking and I was looking for solutions to some link based issues. I signed up as soon as I returned back to Manchester and dived into learning how to use the tools.

Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

I would not do this on an established site. I have seen sites with over 90% disavowed links recover over time - some back to first page for their primary targets. Just a bit of time, patience, finding and fixing, technical TLC, and bringing a bit of respectability to the site seems to heal it over time. On a very young site, I would give scrapping it and starting again some serious consideration. That said, I am reluctant to lose any sites. There is always something to learn from them as search changes.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

A new project which I undertook, whereby the client did not realise that they had a manual penalty and Penguin. The target terms were to go for something which was much less competitive (they had not realised their own potential). Quick check on other engines made me realise that there was something wrong. Once the site had the manual action removed and recovered from Penguin with only 60% disavow (admittedly on over 1 million URLs, so they still had a lot to work with), they were back on page 1 for their primary targets - saving them around £200 per click.

Have you any experience of negative SEO?

Without realising it - yes. Prior to Penguin, I had spotted some rather unusual links with all the same anchor to both one of my sites and to a competitor site. They really were pure spam, same anchor, repeated. At the time, pre-Penguin, I had simply noted it, and it actually appeared to be doing me a favour. When Penguin hit, both my site and the competitor took a dive. I believe that a negative SEO campaign was underway prior to Penguin on that site, even in anticipation of it. Thank goodness for disavow.

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

Google's 'brain' is growing, but not quick enough for them. They are investing heavily in machine learning (they are advertising on LinkedIn for machine learning candidates regularly (Machine Learning was the most subscribed to class at Stanford this academic year)). The evolving web of data versus document to me means that everything will be connected much sooner than we believe. Silos will be broken down and those aspects of search which we thought would have no impact on SEO will begin to do so more and more. I wouldn't be surprised if the number of signals that they use to rank sites increases upwards drastically given all this additional data.



She has participated as a speaker at over 60 industry events. Debra has been a featured keynote speaker or topic panelist at venues such as Search Marketing Expo (SMX), Search Engine Strategies Conference (SES), Digital Book World, the High Ranking Seminars, Small Business Unleashed and more.

Debra is also a featured columnist on Search Engine Land and has written for, or been featured in, Tech Crunch, PC World, Search Engine Journal, Search Marketing Standard, CIO, Web Marketing Today, State of Search, ComputerWorld, Search Engine Watch and several others.

**Debra Mastaler**

*president and owner of Alliance-Link*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

Every link builder has a specialty, mine is working with the media and promotional partnerships. Since I do not rely on mass directory, profile, networks, forum or comment submits and most of my links end up on media outlets or are done privately, my campaigns are insulated from a lot of Penguin issues.

But I do work on sites affected by the Penguin filter, I have helped get brands and small webmasters out of penalties and boosted lost rankings. Most of these webmasters come to me as a result of previous link work outside my company.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

I do a handful of things differently, with link building I still concentrate on developing stories, content and promotions based on trending news items and promote them to specific targets. That has not changed in the years I've been a link builder. I do depend more on paid advertising now to support some of the content efforts but overall I still build links pretty much the same way.

I am more focused on capitalizing on certain aspects of a website, mainly its local presence if it has one. I make sure that the site has a very strong Google Local/Places profile and take advantage of all the promotional outlets there.

I have also made a point to become very familiar with the social networking sites like LinkedIn, you'd be surprised at the options and outlets they offer which many people don't take advantage of.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes, every Monday morning for my personal and client sites. I think it is smart to be proactive in this regard instead of waiting for a page to drop in the rankings or a love note to appear in WMT.

I don't blanket disavow, I will first try to have the link removed but I don't get worked up, spend a lot of time or money doing it.

If the webmaster is going to be unhelpful, then I disavow and move on. But before I do that, I make sure I have a campaign underway to bring in new links, no sense in removing the old links and leaving a hole there.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

It is really hard to give blanket answers to questions like this given the fluidity of the Web/Net and the fact every site, its history, backlinks, competitors and makeup are different. What works for one site might not work for another, there are so many factors at play.

That said, if by 'on page' SEO you mean having clean navigation, smart page titles, fast page loads, mobile ready, socially active fresh content then yes it is. Or basically, everything you have been doing all along now on a responsive site.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Links will always have a place and be part of the ranking algorithm given pages are connected by links. Their importance now and in the future will depend on the page they are sitting on. Listen to what Google SVP Amit Singhal said about Google's direction:

Google has to build a huge knowledge graph of interconnected entities and their attributes.

Moving forward I think it is a good idea to understand as much as you can about the Knowledge Graph and where/how your website fits within it.

I would focus more on finding ways to become less dependent on Google, it is never a good idea to rely on any one source for your business success. And keep an eye on Amazon and Facebook especially their mobile and ecommerce offerings. IMO the two of them are Google's real competition (sorry Bing and DuckDuckGo), how Google reacts to them will affect webmasters in trickle down effect.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

In 1999 I started a directory called The Organic Way Market, I had just retired from working 20 years in the marketing department of a Fortune 50 company and in the Civil Service. I marketed my little directory using the tactics I had used and understood in my 20 years of working, it grew and ranked well as a result.

Pretty soon my success attracted the attention of business owners and a couple brands (remember MotherNature.com?) and they started asking me to “SEO” their sites. Well... I had no clue what SEO was so I went online and found Jill Whalen, one of the owners of the now defunct RankWrite newsletter. Jill patiently explained that the way I was working the media and asking for links was something called link building which was a part of SEO. After some time and many emails back and forth with Jill, I realized I was happiest marketing the directory, rather than running it, so I gave it up and focused on link building full time.

I worked with Jill for a while to learn the ropes and then launched Alliance-Link in 2000. Even after all these years I still get excited when a big link comes through.

## 1.9 Emir Dervisevic



Emir started doing SEO and making websites more than 5 years ago.

He is the owner of about 20 websites that generate over 1 million unique visits monthly all together, mostly from search engines through SEO efforts.

**Emir Dervisevic**

*Webmaster at Zdravosfera*



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

I wouldn't have known about it if I hadn't seen all the crying on SEO and internet marketing forums. My sites stayed pretty much the same in regards to traffic. It was only in the second update that one of my sites had a 40% drop in traffic. The other sites were stable and are to this day.

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

I didn't, but a lot of people did. Some people based their whole lives on SEO traffic. That's usually not a good decision. Most SEOs are just gaming an algorithm basically, so it's not unfair to stop them, especially since to this day it's possible to game that algorithm.

When did you first hear about Link Detox?

About 5 months ago when I became a LinkResearchTools Associate.

Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

Yes. When you're hit with a very strong negative SEO attack on a weak or new domain. Your backlink profile becomes like 95% bad links from a different theme and 5% your own backlinks, so what else can you do?



What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

<http://www.jenningsmotorgroup.co.uk> that recovered by using 301 redirects and a bit of re-branding.

Have you any experience of negative SEO?

Luckily I don't because I keep most of my SEO-focused sites out of the spotlight and my competition isn't even focused on SEO that much.

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

To use more and more of the data we give them about ourselves to make more and more money. If you mean in terms of SEO, I think that mobile friendly sites will get a boost or they've already gotten it? And they will continue to reduce the influence of manipulative strategies on their algorithm.



Geir works as a senior SEO Consultant at MediaCom Norway.

**Geir Ellefsen**

*senior SEO Consultant at MediaCom Norge*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

I have never seen one of my clients been hit with a Google Penguin. I work mostly with Norwegian clients that are big brands. So it is not something we see often. I have seen a few cases in general. In my experience SEOs in Norway are mostly white hat and do not really do “black hat” stuff on a large scale. Except from affiliates of course.

We have had clients that were attacked by negative SEO and have cleaned up that. However, none of the attacks was successful. Because of Google Penguin I would say we are extra careful with links and teach clients about Google’s strict guidelines.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

I do not really talk about link building anymore. I do try to earn links, but not for the links alone. If we focus too much on links, that is asking for trouble. I do recommend focusing on doing remarkable stuff and making sure people know about it and that everything is search engine optimized. Easy to say, hard to do.

I try to never do anything that can put my clients at risk. After reading Nassim Taleb’s books that is something that I think more SEOs should focus on. Is a few great years with risky link tactics or spammy content really worth blowing up and losing it all the third year? I don’t think so. At least not for your brand and money sites.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

It depends on a client-to-client basis. We always do checkups as part of our audits. I would like to add stuff like that to our internal dashboards.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

I focus on 'technical' and 'on page' SEO, because that is usually where the big wins are for my clients. Our clients are well known brands with strong domain authority already.

If on page optimization doesn't earn you links, you might be doing something wrong. I don't mean H1s and title tags. But actually building great content.

I do think it depends on the client and the market. There is no one size fits all answer.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

I recently read that Yandex, who moved away from backlinks as a ranking signal in some competitive SERPs a few years ago, has switched back. I think that shows how important backlinks are.

I think Google wants to give less importance to backlinks, or not depend on them. It also makes sense. It is not always the most popular answers that is the most correct.

I don't see backlinks going away in the near future. If you have good backlinks, the traffic they send will be great, even if Google finds better ranking signals. I don't know what we can expect in 10-15 years and I don't really care :) Unless the robots have taken over.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

It is hard to say exactly when, but my interest came from being a computer geek and making websites. After seeing my affiliate websites get traffic from Google and connecting the dots there was no way going back. I was currently working in IT and it was not that exciting. I first got into the SEO industry after getting a summer internship at Verve Search, working for Lisa Myers. That was back in 2009. I think that was a great start looking back at it, and probably got me up to speed on a higher level much faster than if I tried to learn by myself.

## 1.11 Henry Silva



Henry has over 10 years experience managing SEO campaigns. He has worked with high traffic websites from UK, The Netherlands and Belgium, and in highly competitive niches such as gambling, real estate and travel.

**Henry Silva**

*Director of Caybara SEO (Lima, Peru)*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

By the time Google Penguin was released two big online marketing agencies in Europe, and one important travel company in The Netherlands and Belgium were hiring my company in Peru exclusively to build links. We were working for around 2 years already under this arrangement, and in high demand periods we managed to acquire more than 1,500 links per month for around 30 websites. It was crazy!

Results, in terms of organic rankings, were extremely good. A lot of people made a lot of money by then... until Penguin hit. All the websites we built links for were affected, and practically disappeared from SERPs.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

I see SEO now as a group of actions aimed to improve a website visibility in Google, focusing less on rankings for specific keywords, and more on the general landscape. It is also a job that involves constant education towards potential clients, since many people come to us thinking that SEO is just getting a website to be in top rankings in Google for a specific keyword, and they believe there's a special recipe for that.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes, we use backlink monitoring software in order to take quick actions in case we detect any link that may activate any alarm in Google algorithm.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

I think on page SEO is the foundation over which you'll built your future SEO strategy, so you need to invest as much time as possible making sure that your website covers all aspects that Google may consider as positive signals. Locally, over 90% of the websites we start working with have not considered on-page SEO aspects. Clients hire web designers and programmers, but they never think about hiring an SEO consultant when building a website for their business. We want to change that.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Yes. It actually seems already that link importance is decreasing within Google algorithm, but there ist still something to work on. Maybe in a few years Google will identify a set of factors that can be as much or even more important than incoming links.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

During my last few university years I started working at the online marketing department of a small local company. I thought Google might be a good traffic source with high conversion potential, so I started reading and working on it. Results were so good that the owner opened an SEO area which I started managing together with a friend.

In just a few months the team started to grow and the Canadian owner, together with my friend –quite good at sales- started getting clients from all over the world. The great results I achieved got the attention of a bigger company, and an offer to open an SEO company that I would own and manage myself landed on my desk. That's when everything exploded! We had great success for the next 2 or 3 years, growing our team to around 50 people.



He's been doing SEO for 4 years now, focusing mainly on link building.

**Jon Cooper**

*SEO consultant at PointBlankSEO*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

We had one client in 2013 that was affected from their prior work (we took them on a month before the penalty). Other than that, we avoid clients that have had past penalty problems, as we've had poor experiences of increasing rankings given the ambiguity of Google (even when they say you're out of a penalty) when trying to improve from there, as we'd simply be building links and getting zero movement. Overall, we've had the luxury of picking clean sites to work on, so we don't do any penalty work whatsoever.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

As an SEO agency, it hasn't changed much. The only thing that's changed is that our standards for prospect quality have become more and more stringent overtime. In terms of the strategy and the tactics we choose, really not at all.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

With BuzzStream. We manage all of our outreach in there, so it's quite seamless. We're only monitoring new links that we're responsible for. There's definitely other things out there that are more advanced, but it does the job for what we're wanting.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

I could be biased, but I honestly see it as a shift back to what's proven to work because link building has continued to get more difficult.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Yes. However, I'd more so think of it as "will Google give less importance to backlinks in the future relative to other signals." Ultimately, as new signals are added, everything is diluted. But in terms of what could take its place for its relative importance to anything else, I don't believe we've found a substitute yet, and won't for at least the next 3-5 years. I think we'll find one though; it's more of a question of when.

Given that, we still invest in link building because the rich get richer when they rank. There may be more organic signals that Google looks at in 5 years that replace links, but the amount of raw exposure that leads to those signals are reaped through ranking today, which is by links. So ultimately, even for those long-term thinkers, you play today's game for tomorrow.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

Between my sophomore & junior year of high school, because my neighbor hired me to basically do social bookmarking submissions (luckily I read and learned a few better alternatives for links later on...). Ultimately, I thought it was interesting. It was like a game. I wanted to think up what new way I could get a website to link to me. It was fun and still is!

## 1.13 Julie Joyce



Julie Joyce began working in search marketing in 2002 and soon became Head of Search for a small IT firm. Eventually, she started Link Fish Media, where she now serves as Director of Operations, focusing on working with clients in ultra-competitive niches all over the world.

**Julie Joyce**

*Director of Operations at Link Fish Media*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

Honestly I haven't yet. We've had a few clients who had issues but they'd all been using other link services so we can't tie anything to our work. That doesn't mean we weren't responsible, but they are the only cases of Penguin issues. Penguin has indirectly affected me of course as after the first rollout I did realize that we needed to tighten up our guidelines and keep focusing more on quality than quantity.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

We have not really changed anything we do other than to tighten up the quality guidelines. We've definitely had to adapt our discovery and due diligence as you can't just send a ton of emails to crap sites and expect that to work out well, but by and large we're still doing the same thing we were doing as far back as 2008.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

We do that internally with a crawler so we can check on whether or not links have changed, but we don't monitor it that closely and only run it monthly. For my own site I do monitor that so I can see any new links coming in.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

I think it's critical to take care of as links alone won't help you and even if they do, it will be brief. If I'm building links with a certain theme as the main anchor, it's stupid to not have that phrase on the page, but clients still try that. We used to be able to rank with links alone but it's not that easy these days, and when you do that I think you screw up the user side of it.



Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Google might do that but I don't see the importance going down too far. I don't see how they'd truly get away from links, but I can see other factors becoming more important than they are currently.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I kind of got thrown into it when I had been a programmer and the management knew I had an English degree so when they needed another SEO, it was me! I was in general/technical SEO until around 2008 when I joined my husband's company (Link Fish Media) and then started to focus on links.

## 1.14 Kaspar Szymanski



Kaspar left the Search Quality team in 2013, where he has been the driving force behind global web spam tackling initiatives since 2006, as well as the public face spearheading Google webmaster outreach and communication efforts in EMEA.

Kaspar is best known in the SEO industry for his public speaking and publishing on behalf of Google initiatives. He knows everything about the disavow links tool and reconsideration requests. Currently Kaspar offers as a founding member of SearchBrothers.com SEO consulting, risk audits and recovery services for online businesses.

**Kaspar Szymanski**

*founding member of SearchBrothers.com*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

Over the last 18 months we have worked successfully with a number of clients affected by Penguin, managing and mitigating their backlink risks.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

Please keep in mind that at this point in time I was still with the Google Search Quality Team. My focus before mid 2013 was as part of Google outreach and educating webmasters, more on investigating and tackling webspam. After refocusing on consulting, the primary objective has always been excellence and quality, both in terms of content and backlink signals. I often work with high value brands. My clients and business partners typically understand the risks currently associated with low quality or downright spammy backlinks. In that sense, there was no major strategy change as far as I'm concerned.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes. At SearchBrothers.com we also do that for a number of our clients as a service. Any site owner who cares for their site should keep an eye on their backlinks. There are great tools supplementing Google Webmaster Tools available. LinkResearchTools is obviously high up on that list.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

For some time on-page optimization has been neglected, as in comparison to optimizing backlink profiles. Since search engines have become increasingly proficient in detecting link quality many people in the SEO industry have turned their attention to what should be the core of a successful search engine optimization strategy to start with. Making sure that users and bots alike are able to access, navigate and understand their websites. As they do they often get surprised how crucial such basic steps are and how profound the impact may be, especially on managing and exceeding user expectations from the moment a page shows up in SERPs for a user query. On-page optimization is by no means limited to optimizing snippets only. Neither is it the all round solution to successful user experience marketing. But it is as essential as it has ever been; more and more people seem to accept that fact.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Links have been a fundamental part of the way the World Wide Web works since the beginning and they will remain so, for search engines to find and crawl content, but more importantly for users to navigate through the web. Having said that, Google and others constantly evolve search. The pace of development is breathtaking, if we consider that by the end of this day two algorithmic updates were likely released without most of the users even noticing any change. And some industry players are rumored to have already dropped links as a ranking signal altogether. The only thing we can be sure of is that the future of the SEO and link industry is as exciting as ever.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

That's three questions in one! I don't see myself in the link building industry but I most definitely work with links and help clients evaluate and mitigate their backlink risks. In 2006 I was offered a position within a Google team that became eventually more known as the Search Quality team. Aside from chasing web spam in Google Search results, I have been strongly committed to building a dialogue with webmasters.

After leading the webmaster outreach on behalf of Google for some time and in the process establishing a strong work relationship with Fili Wiese, my then colleague and now business partner at SearchBrothers.com, together we came to the conclusion that it was a good time to continue the work we have been doing, under our own brand. We work as consultants by helping online businesses to better understand the Google Webmaster Guidelines and grow their websites to the fullest potential in Search. That explains when and how. Why never occurred to me as a question really. It's an exciting field of work. I suppose I simply enjoy it :)

## 1.15 Matthew Barby



Matthew spent over six years as a digital marketing consultant, working with brands across the world to deliver results from their digital campaigns.

Alongside working with a range of international brands, he's a columnist for many of the major digital publications within the industry and speak at events across the UK that revolve around content marketing, SEO, social media and wider digital strategy.

Matthew is also a lecturer for the Digital Marketing Institute, where he shares his experience within digital marketing focused courses, both of-line and online.

**Matthew Barby**

*Digital Marketing Consultant*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

The first Penguin update was the biggest shock. I had a few sites that were hit hard and it prompted a BIG change in approach to SEO. I spent the next 12 months after the first update working with companies who had been affected to get them back on track. One of my clients had went from 5,000,000 visits per month to 5,000 per month overnight so you can imagine the help that they needed.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

They've focused a lot more around content. Pre-Penguin 1.0 it was fairly easy to manipulate the search engines (and to a certain extent, it still is), the only problem was that before Penguin 1.0 there were such minor barriers for dodgy SEO companies to come in and offer low-cost SEO packages that basically consisted of article and directory auto-submitters.

One of the good things about the increase in major link-focused algorithm updates has been that it's wiped out a load of the SEO cowboys from the industry and enabled agencies and in-house SEOs to focus on more brand-led SEO projects that have more of an impact on other areas of the business as opposed to being siloed within search.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Absolutely. I have alerts set up for all the websites I work on that give me weekly reports, monthly reports and real-time updates. I'll then tend to do quarterly 'deep scans' through link profiles to find large trends.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

This seems to have stemmed from the important role that it plays within local and mobile search. Traditionally, links have always been the most important factor within any SEO campaign, and in most situations they are. That said, since Hummingbird and Pigeon hit, plus Google's April mobile update, it shows the shift of importance that Google's placing on mobile. This makes on-page SEO more important than ever.

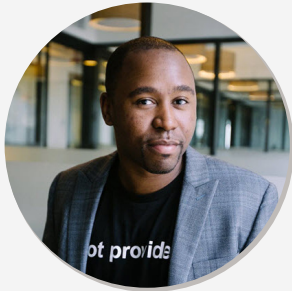
Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Unless Google makes a radical change to their search algorithm - no. I'd imagine that there will be some fairly significant changes over the next 5 years that will focus around implicit query factors but to say that links will have no role would be a BIG stretch. To say that they will become less important would be a fairly reasonable assumption, or moreso that certain backlink attributes like anchor text will become less important.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I first became interested in SEO when I was at university. The main reason for this was because I was completely broke and needed a way to earn money whilst fitting around my schedule. That's when I began affiliate marketing and mainly working within black-hat SEO. I learnt some hard lessons at that point in my life but they've helped shape my understanding of what works and what doesn't - more importantly, it taught me the value of testing!

## 1.16 Michael King



Equal parts marketing and technology. He leads an agency called iPull-Rank and that specializes in Content Strategy, Audience Research, Social Media, SEO and Marketing Automation.

**Michael King**  
Marketing Technologist



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

Penguin has been awesome for me personally. I haven't had as many clients coming to me to do link building at any cost, people are a lot more open to content driven link building which is a lot more fun for my team. Thanks Google!

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

They haven't as far as link building. We've continued to do audience-driven SEO and content driven link acquisition. We've always been surgical about anchor text and link quality. What's changed mostly is on the technical end. Things like Backbone and Angular have us really focusing on accessibility again. Page speed is also a big focus these days.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes, indeed. I try to sell clients on quarterly link audit. We'll take a cursory glance on a monthly basis to make sure nothing crazy is going on, but most clients only care about it when something goes wrong.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

I think that's incredibly important as more and more people are moving to JS MVW frameworks. While Google is getting more sophisticated in its crawling, it's still on the site owner's end to make sure things are accessible as possible.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

I'm not sure that they will, but I believe that they should. Links are meant to be like democratic votes for the web, but they are not really a reflection of a large enough sample of natural human behavior. More people have Facebook than have their own blog. More people send links in emails than post a link on a site. At a certain point Google is going to have to incorporate more signals that reflect what people are actually doing.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I was an independent rapper for 8 years, got into a bike accident and needed a job to pay hospital bills. The first place to hire me was an SEO agency.

## 1.17 Mikkel deMib Svendsen



Mikkel deMib Svendsen has years of professional experience with search engines. His primary work today is as CEO of Waimea Digital - a digital agency with a strong focus on search marketing. The agency specializes in getting large dynamic websites (such as content management (CMS) driven websites or eCommerce sites) indexed and ranked well in major search engines.

**Mikkel deMib Svendsen**  
*CEO of Waimea Digital*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

Except for the fact that we of course always adapt our recommendations and strategies to the ever evolving realities of how Google works, most of our clients haven't really been directly affected by Penguin. We have only had a few, in very competitive industries, that have had link penalties (from work done before we signed them).

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

We focus much more on Earned Link strategies now than we ever did before and in general pay more attention to maintaining a natural link profile for our clients. Also, less of our clients engage in the most aggressive link strategies than before.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes, of course we do! Anyone with the slightest interest in SEO should.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

On-page SEO has always been, and probably always will be, a very important SEO-factor – or to be more precise a bunch of factors. There have been times where links alone and literally no content could rank your website. That is much more difficult today.

Google have improved their content filters, they filter out more duplicate and thin content than ever and adjust mobile search aggressively for mobile-compliant websites. Speed is also more important than ever.



So the fact is: we have more on-page parameters than ever to deal with and their impact have increased. Good luck trying to optimize your slow loading, not mobile friendly website full of thin content and duplicate content today :-)

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Relatively – yes! As more, and possibly better, ranking signals are added each factor will have less impact. User Engagement data is a good example. I think this will, eventually, take over a lot of the link value – it is (when perfected) a much better quality signal than links and much more difficult to manipulate. So it's cleaner (for now).

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I began back in 1996/97 when SEO was not really invented at all. It was not a business – not a trade. We did not even use that word and we were very few people globally “working” with SEO :-)

I got interested in SEO for two reasons: I was curious why my sites did not rank – and because I realized hardly anyone knew anything about what to do about it, I decided that I wanted to know and figured it might be worth something down the road ...

In the early days of SEO, link building was of course not an issue at all – no search engines used it as a factor. Then FAST and AV started with this and then came Google. I think maybe around year 2000 we started working with links too but in the beginning it was very easy. Links were not a value yet – you could get them if you asked for them, and any links had value.

## 1.18 Natalie Wright



Natalie is an internationally experienced Search Engine Strategist, with a special interest in all things backlinks. Since getting her start at Site Visibility in 2011, she has been expanding her technical SEO foundation into broader areas of digital marketing and has gained her certifications in both Google Analytics and Adwords platforms. Moving forward, Natalie is excited to contribute to the SEO community with the hopes of helping digital marketers do what they do best.

**Natalie Wright**

*Freelance Search Engine Strategist*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

Penguin negatively affected a number of clients I was working with at the time of its original release, it also illuminated the importance of best practice within the realm of link building further for me. Although I've never actually participated in the building of "bad links" for any of my clients (I'm incredibly proud to say I've never once purchased a link, been a part of a link exchange or a link network! Hurray!) it was the case at the time of Penguin's first release that a number of clients I worked with had had past SEO work done with different agencies, and, of course, bad links haven't always been bad links and what we now see today as "unnatural backlink profiles" were pretty much the norm back in 2012. In short, Penguin prompted me to do around 20 link analyses, around half of those then prompted full blown link removals or link detoxes.

Google Penguin has also resulted in a little bit of a different on boarding process for me as an SEO. Now as part of the initial phase of work I do for a new client is much more focused on reviewing backlink profiles, which would have been less of a priority pre April 2012.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

I entered the SEO game in the same year as Penguin was released and purely because of that timing my SEO strategies, at least in terms of link building, haven't changed a great deal. I would say the main difference in this area of my SEO is that link building is much more intertwined with the rest of the discipline for me than it was pre April 2012. What I mean by this is that it's incredibly hard for me to talk about link building without talking about content creation and promotion and if you are still able to talk about link building as an entirely independent piece of your overall SEO efforts, maybe you're not doing it right.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Indeed I do! As I mentioned as part of my talk at BrightonSEO on Friday April 10th, I build dedicated checks into my weekly activities to make sure I'm checking in with all of my clients backlink profiles as regularly as possible. Primarily I use various reports within Majestic, but all to the same end - to make sure no unnatural links taint an otherwise strong backlink profile and to make sure my clients are always working within Google Webmaster Guidelines.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

Being a little in love with technical SEO myself, I may be a little biased on this one but the results I've gained through good on page SEO prove its importance for me. Whenever I begin a new campaign with a client the first thing I'll do is an on page/technical audit. Not because it's habit or routine, but because what's the use in jumping right into off page SEO activities when your on page is flakey? To put it more concisely, you can't build a house on sand. What's more is that I've seen clients succeed simply by fixing their XML sitemap or by optimising their homepage title tag, I kid you not! In short, not only are on page SEO changes the easiest for you to make, they can also bring you the easiest ROI.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

This is an interesting one. I'm tempted to say yes, they will give less importance to backlinks in the future. This definitely doesn't mean no importance, because backlinks are definitely a sign of authority within genuine users and customers and naturally occur with SEO aside - you have a website where you review games? Of course your users would find it helpful to link to websites which sell that game, so you will do so. Because backlinks will always have a legitimate use in this way, they will always be important to search engines in their fight to match users with the perfect result. I think right now, Google relies on them more than they will in the future simply because their algorithms are still developing, baby steps! It may even be that Google may have motivation to give backlinks less importance in an effort to further deter the manipulation of their results through questionable link building tactics that still have some impact.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I actually got involved with SEO as part of my University degree. My degree is BSc(Hons) Digital Media Development at the University of Brighton and In my third year (2012) I had the opportunity of working in the industry. Due to the website development nature of my degree, I had originally intended on pursuing UX as a career, however I opted for a position as Digital Marketing Trainee at SiteVisibility in Brighton. Ever since that 11 month placement, I've been hooked on all things SEO and now share that passion both in my work with international clients and with folks in the field at conferences like BrightonSEO!

## 1.19 Neil Patel



He co-founded Crazy Egg and KISSmetrics, and he has spoken at over 100 web marketing conferences.

**Neil Patel**

*serial entrepreneur, angel investor and digital marketing specialist*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

None of my sites have been affected by the Penguin update. I also don't do much consulting, but the clients I am working with haven't been affected either. By focusing on building long term links that are white hat you can typically avoid most Google link penalties.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

The main thing that has changed is all efforts are focused around content marketing. If you can create exceptionally good content, people will eventually want to share your content and link back.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

I don't. I haven't looked up my backlink count in over a year.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

On page SEO will always be important. If a search engine can't crawl your site you won't rank. But on page SEO won't have the biggest impact on ranking increases as it is something that most website owners can easily control.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

No, I think their definition of backlinks will change though. From co-citations to social shares, some of those things may go into how Google evaluates backlinks.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

No, I think their definition of backlinks will change though. From co-citations to social shares, some of those things may go into how Google evaluates backlinks.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I got into SEO when I was 16 years old. I started my first website and didn't know how to grow my traffic, so I started to learn SEO.



Responsible for the company ethos and approach to client marketing strategies, Nichola has extensive experience in digital communications and speaks regularly at industry conferences.

**Nichola Stott**

*manages theMediaFlow business strategy and direction*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

When I started theMediaFlow I had over a decade of experience in advertising, PR and search channels. With that combined background, bartered or paid link tactics were never part of our approach. Instead we build links by creating marketing campaigns that are composed of stories and assets. What this meant is that clients who had been with us a while were positively impacted by Penguin and a couple of our newer clients who had used other SEO agencies in the past were mildly impacted.

The second order effect was an increase in business for us as an agency due to our reputation for our message and content-led approach. The LinkDetox report was almost a daily use-tool for us at that time, and we still need it regularly whenever we take on a new client so that we know of any skeletons they may have in their closet.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

Our strategies haven't altered at all. Great technical SEO will always be critical and will always underpin all our strategies. Creative digital marketing campaigns laid over this well-optimised platform; if imaginative, resonant, different or emotive will attract links, shares and engagement activity. We help our clients be the most relevant answer to the search query by marketing their products and message in this way and algorithms reflect that campaign success because of the human symptoms i.e. links attracted, shares and engagement activity.

What has changed significantly and particularly in the most recent year, is client-attitude to SEO and appetite for content and understanding of what quality SEO is. It's a much easier sell for us now as people understand the value of what we do. We rarely have to educate clients as to why "I want X links a week/month" isn't the way to approach or evaluate success.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Absolutely. We do this for two reasons: firstly because we create content and message-driven campaigns, aside from outreach, we're not "in control" of who links to the asset and how. Monitoring links helps us understand how successful a campaign is and why, plus this helps us discover writers to develop relationships with. It could be as simple as advising our clients to interact with the linking writer socially with a public tweet of the nature "thanks for covering [message] in your great article on [title] [link to article]".

The second reason we monitor backlinks closely is to keep a handle on the activity of other agencies that our client may work with. As we work for large national and global brands our clients may have many other marketing agencies working for them, including PR agencies, brand marketers and such. I've lost count of the times we caught and nipped potentially dangerous activity from a well-meaning PR agency who has placed the same story with the same link-anchor with bloggers. We find the LRT link alerts can be really handy for an early warning on this kind of situation. We're clear with our clients at the start of a relationship that we must own link activity so this never creates a problem, just an education opportunity as we're [agencies] all working to the same business goals.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

Here's the thing. Search engines have a responsibility to drive returns for their shareholders. Google already have market domination so to increase shareholder value the biggest driver of this is profit. To drive profit you need as much of the commercial process taking place on your properties. In the past Google was a conduit to get the buyer to the seller, taking their ad revenue when a paid listing is part of that journey from buyer to seller. In recent years, move after move we've seen Google spread their offerings to allow them to control far more of that buyer to seller journey; from Shopping to their own affiliate results in travel and finance, to in-SERP answers facilitated by semantic mark-up.

My point is that on-page SEO is going to become more and more important as the more Google can truly understand about your page the better quality results they can show plus the greater the potential for commercial activity data this provides them.

I see a not-too distant future of artificially intelligent algorithms driving more and more answers and commercial activity implementations in more channels, running in pretty much real time. Be ready for the organic search slice of traffic to get smaller as commercial channels grow.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

Not at all. That wouldn't make commercial sense. Links are the very stuff of the web, the core feature of what makes it unique as an information repository. Instead we will see far greater investment and focus on link criteria and evaluation.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

In 2005 I started working for Yahoo! So five years on one side of the fence, and now five years on the other.



## 1.21 Nick Garner



Founder and Chief Strategy Officer of 90 Digital

**Nick Garner**

Founder and Chief Strategy Officer of 90 Digital



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

In the iGaming sector (online gambling) and other competitive verticals, Google Penguin has almost been like a tax on SEO. By that, I mean links that had previously worked, suddenly didn't work. Because these sectors are so competitive and profitable, it meant huge brands with huge budgets would just go out and acquire fresh links that were less likely to be Penguin-ized. If you couldn't compete in the links arms race, you gave up on SEO and concentrated on PPC.

Above Penguin, I think the biggest changes in SEO have come from Google's social engineering. Penalties are very motivating and we've seen so many brands having had them at one time, now preaching the gospel of better content and being less aggressive in gaming Google.

When you combine the diminishing supply of junk links that work, along with the fear of penalty, you then get a better Internet with less spam.

So thank you Google for starting to clean up the mess you created from the links arms race...

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

Following on from my answer in question one, since 2012, we've seen a lot more responsiveness to creative link acquisition and digital PR.

I'll preface what I'm going to say by this: people buy things mostly because they have to. A combination of penalties and Penguin has forced them to think like this, because if they play the old links game and get a double penalty... They will be thrown into exile forever.

Brands are getting more into the idea of Google as a way of communicating a positive message to consumers and less as a raw traffic generator.

For many years, I've talked about Google being the centre of the web universe for consideration. Google did a large piece of work in 2011 around something called zero moment of truth, where they interviewed 5000 people about their purchasing behaviour, focusing on how people seek out information which helps them make a purchasing decision.

In summary, when we consider a purchase, we are as likely to use a search engine as a friend to make that final decision about buying something. On top of all of that, Edelman one of the largest PR agencies in the world, have an ongoing survey called the Edelman Trust Barometer.

For the first time Google is seen as the most trusted source of information there is. They are now more trusted than mainstream media. Saying in the year 2015, a search engine would be the most trusted source of information on the planet... These are changing times.

So, you ask are our tactics changing? Of course. Were becoming what I called the new generation of PR agency, one that gets the right message into the right online publication, which will subsequently rank on keyphrases that people are making purchasing decisions on. The most important phrases of course are brand phrases, which incidentally are generally very uncompetitive.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

We are relatively obsessive about monitoring back links, bearing in mind there are two sides to this; firstly monitoring backlinks we've placed - which were very obsessive about, and monitoring backlinks into domains we work with, which we are also obsessive about because it's very easy for annoying things like spam attacks from people who are out to cause trouble.

For placed backlinks we use Buzz Stream and for general backlink analysis we use Majestic in combination with a lot of spreadsheets. One of my favourite reports is to get all back links within a given timeframe, pivot tables and then look at the pivot table by date link acquired. From that you can get a very good idea of how links are coming into a particular domain on a very granular level.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

On page SEO is important, but on the other side of the coin Google is increasingly able to make more sense of a website than ever before. Within SEO, we get obsessed with making a site Google friendly, when in reality sites we deal with, probably account for a relatively small percentage of all websites out there.

If you think about it, 60% of all content management systems on the Internet are WordPress and there are something like 932 million websites on the Internet... How many of them have had an SEO expert working on them?

In reality, on-site SEO has improved because of companies like Automattic, the people behind WordPress.

So, in the big picture of things, I think Google is making huge efforts to interpret sites which have very little SEO input. Therefore in a funny kind of way I think on page optimisation isn't important, but of course it is critical if you really want to get the best out of search engines...

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

I certainly do think back links are getting less and less important and what's filling the vacuum is user engagement on search results in combination with building trust and authority on a domain. We have done a lot of research into this area and a lot of testing around click through rate manipulation. It's remarkable how malleable search results are when you can do effective CTR manipulation.

My guess is that within three years links will be a very low level indicator of importance. They won't go away, but the SEO industry will start focusing on other areas like enhancing click through and engagement rates to websites, knowing that it will directly affect rankings.

Broadly, it's very good news for the Internet because it takes us away from that link acquisition arms race and moves us towards doing things that users actually want to engage with.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

In the old days back in 1998, I was faced with a choice; either acquire traffic for websites I was working on or go down the road of building things in Macromedia Flash (yes that thing) fortunately I decided traffic acquisition was more important and that search engines were where I should focus... So began a long journey which continues today.

On link building; since the emergence of Google and Google PageRank, it's always been a huge issue. Whilst working in-house within a large iGaming brand back in 2006, I made some big decisions about taking the high road or the low road. Fortunately I took the high road, even when spamming was absurdly easy and produced massive results, I had faith in Google that would make spamming not worthwhile. Sadly I had to wait another eight years before Google Penguin penalties started to come in.

Off the back of all of this, I've built a strong agency which specialises in Digital PR and link acquisition that works.

## 1.22 Paddy Moogan



Co-Founder at Aira, Digital Marketing Agency in Milton Keynes

**Paddy Moogan**

*Co-Founder at Aira, Digital Marketing Agency in Milton Keynes*



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

We've had clients come to us who have been hit by Penguin and want it to be fixed, but fortunately, none of our existing clients were hit by Penguin which was nice!

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

I actually wrote a blog post on Moz recently about how I feel things have changed since April 2012 which covers a lot of my views on this. Personally, after April 2012 it was clear that any link building tactics that were scalable were at risk of being targeted by Google at some point. Interestingly, the main shift in my mind was the idea that Google were now prepared to actively hurt websites as opposed to just making the links not work. This meant that I didn't want to take any risks on client websites as the consequences could be quite severe. I still tested various techniques on my own websites - but those are more for fun so it doesn't matter if I mess those up :)

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes we keep an eye on the links of our clients but at the same time, try not to obsess too much over them. Instead, we prefer to focus on the metrics that matter most to the business such as traffic and conversions. It's important to keep an eye on link profiles just in case a competitor starts pointing low quality links at them, but fortunately it's not been much of a problem so far.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

On-page is still very important to get right and the way I look at it is that you need a solid foundation if your link building is going to be as effective as possible. Building links can be difficult so when you do get them, you want the website itself to be performing well too. It's also important from a user's perspective because if you're getting links on high-traffic websites, you don't want the people who click through to have a bad experience.

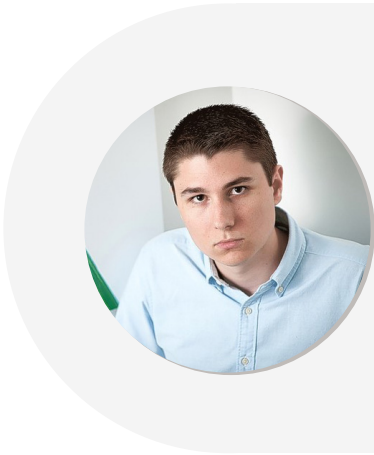
Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

No. I think they will always be a big factor, but we will see them bring in other signals where they can. For example, I think we'll see more and more use of AI and machine learning which will make search results harder to explain, but links will always be a big part of rankings.

When, why and how did you get in touch with link building or SEO?

I first got into SEO when I was at University studying for a Law degree. I got a little bit bored in between lectures and started to read about making money online. I'd always known how to build websites as I'd learned this when I was about 14, so I picked it back up again and started to read about affiliate marketing and AdSense. Naturally, I wanted to know how to make my websites rank well, which led me to SEO blogs and naturally, link building! Once I left University, I got a job with a local web development company and did SEO for the websites they built and that was it!

## 1.23 Piperis Filippaios



Piperis is the director of Kent based digital marketing agency, Digital Beans. Now working with clients around the world, he first ventured into digital marketing over 13 years ago whilst still in his teens. Piperis is obsessed in turning data into tangible results for his and his clients' companies.

**Piperis Filippaios**

*Director of the Digital Beans Marketing Agency*



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

My first real experience of Penguin was when we received a call from a locally based e-commerce business that had been hit by Penguin. Years of spamming resulted in their several million pound turnover being cut to a 1/3. Helping this company was my first real experience of dealing with a Penguin victim.

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

No, not really. If anything it was a relief to finally see Google do something about all the spammers that were ranking number 1.

Have you used Link Detox?

Yes, we're regular users of Link Detox and love it.

Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

Yes, in some situations it would be better. The costs and time involved for each scenario need to be considered. In fact the site I was referring to above is a perfect example of this. The site was a badly coded site that wasn't mobile friendly, with thousands of pages of duplicate product descriptions, no valuable content and hardly any worthwhile links. In these sort of scenarios I think reinvesting in a new site and a content and SEO strategy is far better.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

There are a lot of good Penguin recovery stories out there... Not sure I can pick a best. Each has its own merits.

Have you any experience of negative SEO?

Yes, though not to the scale that others have probably seen. It has mostly been by competitors trying to pull down a site's rankings with some cheaply outsourced "SEO".

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

I think a lot of what Google still has planned will follow a similar path to what we've seen recently. Apart from improving their Penguin and Panda algorithms, I think a lot of future changes will revolve around usability. The recently tested "Slow" label is a perfect example of this.

## 1.24 Ramón Rautenstrauch



Ramón Rautenstrauch has been involved in the Internet Business since the year 2000 and specializes in Competitive Research, SEO, SEA and conversion boosting for Spanish and International websites.

Although he is German, he runs the digital Marketing Agency “Apasionados del Marketing” based in Valencia, Spain.

Ramón works on customer projects and also on affiliate projects owned by the Agency.

**Ramón Rautenstrauch**

*Digital Strategist at Apasionados del Marketing*



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

The first few days after Google Penguin rolled out we (were) in shock. A part of our affiliate marketing websites had suddenly completely disappeared from the SERPs. Google had taken away a quite big part of our income. Fortunately none of our customers was seriously affected by Google Penguin. In these days we were not happy.

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

Of course we knew the Google Webmaster Guidelines, but nevertheless we thought that Google was being very unfair. Google hadn't taken action in the past years and suddenly they changed the game. At this moment we realized again that it's their playfield and that they make and change the rules. What made us angry (and still makes us angry) is that there were still quite a lot of websites in the first positions of the SERPs that were not affected by Google Penguin and now, three years later, there are still some that are not affected.

Have you used Link Detox?

I first heard of Link Detox at the end of October 2012 when Christoph C. Cemper presented the “Link Detox Revolution”, the third update of the tool. Some German SEO friends had been urging me to try the tool, because they thought it was very useful and professional. This is still the most important advantage of Link Detox and all the Link Research Tools: professional tools made for professionals.



Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

Yes, in some situations it would be better. The costs and time involved for each scenario need to be considered. In fact the site I was referring to above is a perfect example of this. The site was a badly coded site that wasn't mobile friendly, with thousands of pages of duplicate product descriptions, no valuable content and hardly any worthwhile links. In these sort of scenarios I think reinvesting in a new site and a content and SEO strategy is far better.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

The best Penguin recovery we have seen in our agency is a domain that had lost all the good rankings with Penguin 2.0. They contacted us to recover the domain and after using Link Detox and removing and disavowing thousands of links, it recovered the rankings after Penguin 3.0. This has been a great effort from the domain owner and our agency, but the effort got a rewards: the domain is ranking again in the first positions.

Have you any experience of negative SEO?

We have quite a few experiences with negative SEO and that's why we are monitoring all our customers and our most important projects. When we detect a very fast increase in backlinks we immediately start analyzing and take action. We think it's very important to have the information as fast as possible (and) being able to react.

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

In the future we should see Google updates happening more frequently. Semantic analysis should also become more important, so that low quality content and machine generated content will be less likely to rank. Links will remain important for the next few years, so it's important to continue making quality linkbuilding.

## 1.25 Rick Lomas



Rick is from the UK, but has lived in the French Alps since 2001. Rick built his first website in 1997 when the main search engine was Altavista and the word Google didn't exist. Since then he has learnt SEO from the ground up and has lived through every update Google has thrown at us. In 2012 his income was decimated by Google Penguin 1.0 and a Manual Spam action. In 2015 he has an SEO business which involves removing Google Penalties.

**Rick Lomas**

*Owner of Indexicon*



What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

In 2012 I was doing SEO work mostly on my own sites, rather than client sites. There was one in particular that was doing really well. It was a lead generation site for a UK based camper van rental company. It was on my birthday, April 7th, when I got a message in Google Webmaster Tools about unnatural links to my site. I had been building crappy links with spun content and SENUkeX for years. In fact I had used every black hat SEO technique I knew of. I was worried, but the site was still making lots of money.

Everything changed on Monday April 23, 2012. I had been driving from the south of France all day, heading for England via the Calais-Dover car ferry. When I drove on to the ferry at Calais, I checked the stats on my iPhone. I had made almost no money that day and my site had vanished from Google. The next day the boss of the campervan company called me. He asked me why his sales team were staring at blank screens. I didn't know what to say or what to do. The following day five sales staff lost their jobs.

I learnt during the week that this was an effect of Google Penguin and a Manual Action. My site limped along for the next two years on traffic from Bing, Yahoo and a few long tail keywords that still ranked in Google.

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

At the time I did yes, because I had gone from enjoying quite a luxurious lifestyle to being almost homeless. I noticed spammy looking sites ranking where mine used to be, which felt unfair. I was totally aware that I had been violating Google Webmaster Guidelines for years though. In that respect I was 100% guilty. I was annoyed with myself too for not diversifying my income.

When did you first hear about Link Detox?

During 2013 I was really suffering financially and I knew I had to get rid of the Manual Action to get myself out of the mess I had created. I think I saw a Link Detox Facebook ad saying 'Clean up your backlink profile today!' - I guess that was around November 2013. I made a decision at the beginning of 2014 that I was going to become a Google Penalty removal guy. I got the Superhero account in January 2014 and my Manual Action was revoked in April. I then went on to remove another nine manual actions for clients during 2014. I loved Link Detox and the other tools so much and wanted to know how to use them fully. I did the LinkResearchTools Training and became a LRT Certified Xpert in July 2014; I've not looked back since.

Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

Yes I do, for example sites like the one I had! I had been trigger happy with SENukeX for too long and about 99.9% of my links were total junk. I persevered with it, but in retrospect I think my time would have been better used building a new site and starting again.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

At the end of 2014 I took on a client who had bought an ecommerce website selling self-defense weapons in the US. I felt quite sorry for him as he had bought the site in good faith as a viable business. When he installed Google Webmaster Tools he saw straightaway that he had a Partial Match Manual Action.

I ran Link Detox on the site and used Link Detox Boost two days later. I then submitted a Reconsideration Request to Google. Within one week the traffic started to climb rapidly, so I was confident that the Manual Action would be revoked. To my surprise the reconsideration was refused. The initial increase in traffic must have been an algorithmic Penguin lifting as the disavow file took effect. After a second Reconsideration Request one month later, the Manual Action was revoked. The traffic has continued to increase ever since.

Have you any experience of negative SEO?

Ha! I have certainly had clients who believed they have been attacked. I usually find it is because they have used a terrible backlinking gig from Fiverr or hired an overseas SEO company who only know '2011 style' SEO. I know it happens, but my clients so far have escaped Negative SEO.

Oddly enough there is an SEO Agency in Briançon, France where I live, who seem to suffer really badly from Negative SEO. I think it is because they specialise in narrow niches which are very lucrative, like luxury yachts. I guess if you only have a handful of competitors and your product is a 500,000€/week yacht charter it is worth fighting dirty!

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

Private Blog Networks (PBNs) seem to be all the rage at the moment with black hat SEOs. I even wrote a case study for LinkResearchTools about how to make a powerful PBN. I think that Google will crack down on these soon by discounting links that never get clicked and sites that do not share many common backlinks with their competitors.

## 1.26 Roger Montti



Roger Montti is an independent web publisher of popular websites, a consultant and a Moderator of the Link Building Forum at WebmasterWorld.com since 2004. He has presented at Internet marketing conferences such as SES, SMX, PubCon and Affiliate Summit.

**Roger Montti**  
web publisher



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

I haven't been affected by Penguin myself but a greater understanding of what Penguin involves has nudged the industry to double down on content strategies, particularly strategies with a strong emphasis on building awareness and sales. I like strategies that are not explicitly focused on links as the end goal. Setting links aside as the explicit goal of a link building campaign sounds counterintuitive but consider this: The goal of a link campaign is never the links, it is always increasing traffic or sales. That's the end goal, the real goal, not the links themselves.

When you isolate link building to just the links, to where links are the end goal, that's not good. That is when you get into aberrations in tactics and strategies that lead to penalties. A whole world of opportunities open up when you refocus the end goal to traffic and sales. This isn't theory, this is real-world experience. In the real world, all of the search engines have classifiers baked into their algorithms to spot links acquired through methods focused on links as the end goal. Dropping links as the end goal and making links the implicit goal, something that happens along the way to achieving your real goals of sales building traffic, you are actually engaging in cultivating the circumstances that result in natural links.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

Explicit link building strategies are flagged, tagged and bagged. That's what Penguin is all about. Penguin notes all the characteristics of an inbound link that is controlled; it notes the many statistical characteristics typical of links that were acquired for the purpose of manipulating the algorithm. Penguin is about classifiers keyed to the characteristics of acquired links. I don't believe it's a coincidence that Panda rolled out prior to Penguin. This is pure speculation on my part, but I believe Panda could be said to have cleaned up the link signal by creating a massive set of sites with positive on-page characteristics. I've never read anything that says so, but that is the effect, isn't it?

Can you imagine how much cleaner the link signal is when search engines discard and discount the link signal of sites that are low quality? One can believe that Google prefers brands and sulk about it. But there's no scientific research that will support such an approach to SEO. I propose thinking a little deeper and start with Panda, what that does to the link signal and considering how that might affect the SERPs. That's actionable information. Now you can do something. The SERPs begin to make a little more sense.

There was a time when SEOs believed Google was using Optical Character Recognition technology (OCR) to read GIF images and determine if the image had the words, BUY NOW on it, then using that information to keep ecommerce sites out of the SERPs for phrases that weren't directly about shopping. Was it a bias against shopping or was it simply a case of being irrelevant for the phrase, not what the majority of searchers were looking for?

We now know that informational searches do not convert as well as shopping related phrases, phrases with words like buy, cheap, etc. You can see this in action today with PPC bidding. But back then there was no PPC, the focus was on obtaining massive loads of traffic. So when relevance tightened up it was interpreted as a bias against ecommerce and OCR technology to identify ecommerce sites. Nowadays the popular hypothesis is that Penguin and Panda are pro-brand algorithms and that's really the modern version of the old fairy tale that Google was on a witch hunt against ecommerce or affiliate sites. It was never that the sites were ecommerce or affiliate, it was the thin content. You can't ever get a parent to understand that their baby is ugly. But really, that thin content affiliate baby was ugly.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

No. This is a contentious and polarizing topic, partially because some publishers would rather believe their site dropped rankings because of a negative SEO campaign than face up to the idea that maybe, just maybe, their site might be affected by Panda. Part of it is the Ugly Baby Syndrome, where a parent won't admit their "lovely child" is less than lovely. I'm not saying negative SEO doesn't exist. I'm stating that one, low quality links have always been attached to any site that manages to rank in the SERPs. Low quality links have always been there even when the good times were rolling. A publisher doesn't notice them until something goes wrong. And that leads to number two, some who believe they suffer from negative SEO might be better served by taking a second look at their on-page SEO and at least entertaining the possibility of a Panda related quality issue there.

There's a lot of talk about the importance of 'on page' SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

Some of the practices commonly associated with on-page SEO might backfire simply because they're the hallmarks of poor quality sites. Nowadays, on-page SEO is more than optimized keywords on a page, in a title tag, or top-level category pages that resemble doorway pages. The common concepts of what on-page SEO consists of, those are the very things search engines have turned into low quality signals.

Some of the practices commonly associated with on-page SEO might backfire simply because they're the hallmarks of poor quality sites. Nowadays, on-page SEO is more than optimized keywords on a page, in a title tag, or top-level category pages that resemble doorway pages. The common concepts of what on-page SEO consists of, those are the very things search engines have turned into low quality signals.

Thus, some of what were commonly accepted elements of on-page SEO are going away and more importantly, what's replacing them are practices such as strengthening time on page metrics, post-transaction interactions (email communication, reviews on the site and reviews of the site, cultivating return customers), better user experience (less in-your-face advertising) because those metrics have become part of the algorithms as ranking factors and re-ranking factors. It's not just keywords anymore. On-page SEO has evolved to include user experience metrics.

There are dozens of research papers describing algorithms that take into account how users interact with SERP listings and then take into account what users do once they hit your site, how long they stay on a page, probabilities of them going to another page on your site and what that length of time means about how successful the ranking algorithm was and whether or not that particular site should be bumped up or down in the SERPs. There are algorithms that consider probabilities based on prior experience, of what might happen if a different site should rank. Part of it is quality control (what went wrong with the algorithm to suggest an unsatisfactory result) and part of it is ranking related (this site has the ingredients of satisfying a search query).

So really, now more than ever, on-page SEO must include user experience metrics. It's not about being feel-good and making site visitors happy. I'm pragmatic. I'm not out to make site visitors happy. That doesn't pay the mortgage. Pragmatic SEO is about getting your site to number one using available knowledge of what the search engines are looking at and using that information to make more money. So if reducing the size of advertising above the fold is part of ranking better, do it. If increasing time on page metrics is part of ranking better, do it.

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

In twelve to fourteen years yes, they will give less importance to backlinks. In one of my recent newsletters I discussed several research papers involving deep learning and artificial intelligence, how this will change search technology. In a nutshell, The Director of Engineering was explicitly tasked to devise an artificial intelligence that can understand sights, sounds, meanings of text, meaning of pictures, all of it and be able to function like a personal valet, help you choose colors for a room (and where to buy it!), make you a smoothie by controlling your kitchen, convert grams to ounces, find Cheap Flights to Vegas, all of it. In the near term however, links will still play a role in identifying authority.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

I jumped into this in the late nineties as a way to earn a living by publishing my own websites, by learning to get my own websites to rank better. I wasn't a consultant. I learned how to do it by doing it, experimenting, then writing about it. That was a period of swift evolution in search engine technologies and monetization strategies, including the birth of PPC, rise and fall of paid links, directories, reciprocal links; I was there when certain SEO paradigms were born, eyewitness to the reasons that underpinned them. In 2004 I was offered the Link Building Moderator hat at WebmasterWorld, which gave me a front row seat at the dawn of modern link building, which gave me the opportunity to play a small role in the formation and refinement of the way link building is done. Goal number one has been to report and inform. Never did it enter my mind to promote myself as a marketer to marketers. That's not what I am. I am first and foremost a marketer sharing my experience and insight. That's pretty much it.





SEO boss and partner at WebJuice.dk ApS

**Søren Riisager**

SEO boss and partner at WebJuice.dk ApS



How have you (or your clients) been affected by Google Penguin?

As one of the old “blackhat guys” I’ve seen a ton of pages getting hit by Penguin updates. Today I run my own search agency in Denmark and I’ve have chosen to only rescue a few of my old sites. Especially Penguin 1.0 have been hard to get rid of.

How have your SEO strategies changed since April 2012?

Regarding Penguin we have changed our link building strategies altogether. The methods we used in 2012 are out. One of the major changes in how I work with my team and our clients is that we are not counting the number of links anymore. Today we “count” the quality and are targeting links from pages with high authority and trust.

Do you monitor your backlinks on a regular basis?

Yes, especially after having been exposed to negative SEO in the form of link building, we now monitor links on selected domains.

There’s a lot of talk about the importance of ‘on page’ SEO at the moment, what are your thoughts about this?

On page SEO is as important as it has always been. It is fundamental to ensure that the search engines have access to crawl and understand your pages properly. It’s also the only way to send the right signals such as putting keywords and related keywords as the first thing in title / meta, place the keywords high on the page and place the page close to the landing page. Basic: YES! Important: YES!

Do you think that Google will give less importance to backlinks in the future?

I don't think that Google will give links less value than today. But I think that Google is constantly trying to add more signals to their algorithms and thus links algorithms will be diluted by other factors.

When, why and how did you get involved with link building and SEO?

In 1997 I started my very first web shop. That was how I first became acquainted with Online Marketing and SEO. I sold the shop back in 2001 to go all in on SEO. During the first many years I worked mainly in the blackhat niche of SEO since that was where the money was back then.

Today Google has become too smart and blackhat is no longer the easy or wise way to go about SEO.

## 1.28 Tom Black



Tom has a vast experience in the Search industry and has worked on SEO and PPC campaigns in a number of highly competitive industries including web hosting, legal and SEO. His experience includes freelance, in-house and agency work. In his spare time he enjoys spending time boating on the south coast of England as well as on the British Inland Waterways. Currently Tom works as a Head of Search at Bootcamp Media Ltd in Birmingham, UK. Tom specialises in Competitive Research, Link Audits and SEO strategy and is available for consulting.

**Tom Black**

*Head of Search at Bootcamp Media Ltd in Birmingham*



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What was your first experience of Google Penguin?

The first Penguin update didn't affect any of the projects I was working on at that time, I guess I was lucky. My real adventures with Penguin started with the 2.0 update in 2013. I have "inherited" a number of projects and some of them had been affected by Penguin 2.0. By the time Penguin 3.0 came out, I was already an LRT Certified Professional and our clients were safe. I'm really thankful to the LRT team and the fantastic community of LRT professionals for sharing all of their knowledge and experience.

When Google Penguin rolled out, did you feel that Google was being unfair?

It's hard to say. Some people have benefited and some people have lost out. One thing is sure, the world of SEO will never be the same again.

When did you first hear about Link Detox?

I think it was at some point in 2013 and it was from the Link Detox site. At first I wasn't aware of the whole LinkResearchTools suite. I thought it was just one tool (Link Detox).

I must say I was very impressed with the tools.

Do you think there are situations when someone should scrap a site and start over with a new domain?

Yes. I believe in some cases this may be the best solution. Of course this is not a simple decision and one will need to consider all the pros and cons.

What is the best Google Penguin recovery you have ever seen?

There are plenty of good case studies on <http://www.linkresearchtools.com/case-studies/>. The LRT Certified Professionals are doing a great job.

Personally, I still remember the morning after the Penguin 3.0 update. My favourite client, who are in the film and video niche, fully recovered with all their main keywords moving back to page one. We had been working on this project for months using a combination of Link Detox, link removal, disavow and Link Detox Boost. This recovery made a big impact on my client's business and their pockets. I still remember bragging about it on one of the LRT live seminars <https://youtu.be/g9-7TRuhR5A?t=58m29s>

Have you any experience of negative SEO?

No, not really. People keep talking about it but I've never seen a 100% documented case study of negative SEO. Having said that, I think that link risk management is more important than ever.

What do you think Google might be planning for the future?

There is no doubt that links are the key part of their algorithm and I believe they will continue with more Penguin or "Penguin type" updates.

# CONCLUSION



It's no longer optional to monitor the risk of your backlink profile continually. Yes, it can be extremely difficult and time-consuming (especially if you do it manually), but we assure you that dealing with the fallout of a manual or algorithmic penalty is a lot more difficult and time-consuming.

The web is ever evolving. Google regularly changes the rules of the game. You can choose to adapt, or you can stand by and watch your organic traffic disappear. You can't afford to be blind to the risks. Ensure your organic traffic by instituting link risk management.

Here's what we recommend moving forward with the Real-Time Google Penguin. Some SEO principles remain, and one new aspect is the game changer – “Real Time”. Your website can trigger a Google Penguin algorithmic filter any day.

**Link Risk Management**, the practice of proactive link audits and disavows gets, even more, important for your business – and we always recommended to do it on a weekly basis. Maybe faster in the future.

The post-penguin basic principles for link building and SEO remain:

- **A link can help or hurt** - positive to negative effect, vs. positive or nothing pre-Penguin.
- **You need to analyze your FULL backlink profile** – it's about ratios. It's wrong to think that the few percent that Google Search Console gives you in links would be enough to audit. And don't show any penalized sites, so you're missing out if you're not aggregating all sources you can. LRT is made for that.
- **Use a machete, not a scalpel for bad links** – I know that it's tough to let a so-so link go, but remember it's about ratios.
- **Disavow shady scraper links** – Google has better things to do than detect all sorts of scraper spam, so they put it on us.
- **Be careful with redirects** – as I **found out in Penguin 2.0 update**, Google passes penalties on with redirects for a while now.
- **Be careful with redirects 2.0** – temporary redirects are handled differently than just a few years ago and can convert into permanent redirects. Did you know?
- **Content relevance and the “AI” part** – “RankBrain” is here – Google rolled out their new machine-learning in October 2015 that can and will impact search results.

Let's see how this works out.

# LinkResearchTools



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# Link Detox



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# Impactana



[www.impactana.com](http://www.impactana.com)

Learn more about the use cases of LinkResearchTools and Link Detox  
FREE eBook: [32 Ways To Ease Your SEO Work With LinkResearchTools](#)

