

Google Reconsideration Requests & Replies; understanding the evolution

Posted on Aug 09, Posted by [David Harry](#) Category [Forensic SEO](#)

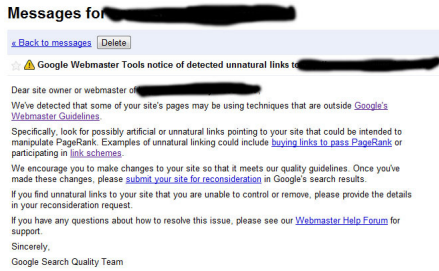
Has anyone else noticed that there seems to be some changes to the replies one receives when filing a reconsideration request with Google? I have.

Reconsideration requests are all the rage with the fashionable SEOs since 2012. Everybody's doing it. We hear about them at every turn. But there really doesn't seem to be much out there on actual replies. I guess folks are shy huh? We hear a lot about the context of the initial WMT messages, but very little about actual replies after the recon is filed. Today we're going look at some we collected to get a sense of what's happening.



Manual v Algorithmic

The first thing we should note is that reconsideration requests are filed when you get notifications from Google in Webmaster Tools, the most common being the '[unnatural links](#)' [messages](#)'. They generally look like this;



[Back to messages](#) [Delete](#)

The background

This particular journey began a few weeks back when one of my [warrior brethren](#) passed a recent reply someone they knew had received from Google. It contained some terminology I hadn't seen before as well as some actual examples of 'inorganic links' pointing to the site in question.

That got me thinking that there wasn't really a source to monitor potential changes and/or responses. As such I started reaching out to folks on social channels and my own networks.

Google states that these activities are '*manual*', what we have seen is that the replies are indeed **automated/templated**, only some details of each changes. Many of the examples we had were substantially the same text.

Past examples of Google replies

To get some context on what we believe is a change in the way Google is responding, let's look at some of the ones prior to May 2012.

Dear site owner or webmaster of [XXXXX],

We received a request from a site owner to reconsider [prospect's site] for compliance with Google's Webmaster Guidelines. We've reviewed your site and we still see links to your site

that violate our [quality guidelines](#) .

Specifically, look for possibly artificial or unnatural links pointing to your site that could be intended to manipulate PageRank. Examples of unnatural linking could include [buying links to pass PageRank](#) or participating in [link schemes](#)

We encourage you to make changes to comply with our quality guidelines. Once you've made these changes, please [submit your site for reconsideration](#) in Google's search results.

If you find unnatural links to your site that you are unable to control or remove, please provide the details in your reconsideration request.

If you have additional questions about how to resolve this issue, please see our [Webmaster Help Forum](#) for support.

Sincerely, Google Search Quality Team

In this one we're still seeing the mentions of 'artificial or unnatural links' and the rest of it is fairly non-descriptive. At this point they also tell you to provide details on links you are "unable to control or remove". This later seems to change into "regardless of who created the links".

Ok, now for what seems to be part II in the evolution;

Hello, thank you for your request.

We've reviewed your site and we believe that some or all of your pages still violate our quality guidelines, which can be found here: <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=35769#3>

These guidelines outline illicit practices which may lead Google to take action on a site in order to keep webspam out of search results. In addition to this email, you may also receive a notification in Webmaster Tools regarding the outcome of your reconsideration request.

Specifically, look for possibly artificial or unnatural links pointing to your site that could be intended to manipulate PageRank. Examples of unnatural linking could include buying links to pass PageRank or participating in link schemes. Here are a couple of articles describing these techniques:

Buying links to pass PageRank; <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=66736>

Link schemes; <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=66356>

To illustrate how these articles could apply to you, here are examples of pages that contain inorganic links to your site:

(I have removed the LINKs, details on them below)

Link One

Directory site; Homepage TBPR5 – Indexation; 48k
Domain Backlinks; 12000
Actual page; indexed - TBPR0

Link Two

Directory site; Homepage TBPR8 – Indexation; 14k
Domain Backlinks; 3560
Actual page; indexed – TBPR0

To find more links to your site, you can download a list in Webmaster Tools by doing the following:

1. Click on your site at <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/>
2. Click on 'Your site on the web' and then 'Links to your site.'
3. Under 'Who links the most,' click 'More.'
4. At the top of the page, click on 'Download more sample links.'

Please correct or remove all content that is outside our quality guidelines. You might consider reaching out to the webmasters of the sites with the inorganic links on them. For advice on how to go about contacting them, read <http://support.google.com/websearch/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=9109>.

Once you have updated your site, reply to this email noting the specific changes you made. Only after there has been a significant decrease in unnatural linking will we consider reviewing your reconsideration request again. If there are still links that you could not remove, we will look for an explanation of why you were unable to do so.

If you'd like more specific advice for your site, consider posting in our Webmaster Help Forum, where a community of webmasters may be able to help you. You can post to the Forum by visiting [the following link](#):

Sincerely, The Google Search Quality Team

This was the first time, that I can tell, that we've seen not only the use of 'inorganic links' (in addition to 'unnatural') and the appearance of actual URLs to links that may have been an issue. It also contains the 'some or all pages' reference. Does that mean there is an element of on-site and off-site issues? It's hard to say.

As with some of the others, directories were highlighted. Does that mean they are the root of the issue? No. I have also seen a variety of other issues from WordPress template (footer) links and review blogs that are wide in relevance and low on trust.

More recent replies more detailed?

More recently we started seeing responses that look like this;

Thank you for your request.

We have received your updates and completed our investigation into your site's backlinks. At this time we are still seeing a significant number of inorganic links to this site and have taken action to prevent them from artificially inflating your site's ranking. Please note that we try to be granular in our actions as we focus on the inorganic links to your site, preserving organic recommendations.

Below you can find examples of back links that still violate our guidelines,

(I have removed the LINKs, details on them below)

Link One

Directory site; Homepage TBPR0 – Indexation 2400
Backlinks; 560
Actual page; indexed - TBPR0

Link Two

Crap site (blog?); Homepage TBPR3 – Indexation 720k
Backlinks; 27300
Actual page; not indexed TBPR0

Link Three

Directory; Homepage TBPR2 – Indexation 1530
Backlinks; 2590
Actual page; indexed - TBPR0

Link Four

Directory; Homepage TBPR3 – Indexation 25k
Backlinks; 515
Actual page; not indexed - TBPR1

Link Five

Directory; Homepage TBPR0 – Indexation 361k
Backlinks; 172

Actual page; not indexed – TBPR0

At this time, we have determined that no further actions are required on our end. We will need to see more progress on the removal of the inorganic links before any actions on those links are revoked.

Regardless of who created the links, in order to protect the quality of our search results, we have taken action to reduce the trust of inorganic links to your site. Webspam techniques such as link schemes attempt to trick our systems into ranking sites higher than they should, which can affect our ability to provide high-quality search results to our users. We take these webspam violations seriously.

In the meantime, we recommend that you continue to work on cleaning up the inorganic links to your site. As a reminder, if you'd like more specific advice for your site, consider posting in our Webmaster Help Forum, where a community of webmasters may be able to help you. You can post to the Forum by visiting [the following link](#):

Sincerely, The Google Search Quality Team

That one is particularly as it mentions 'inorganic' links a few times and actually gives examples of 5 links (4 of them being from directories).

Again, it should be noted that directories again were given as examples but that doesn't make them the only issue. That being said, we did see enough mentions of them to make it an area I'd be looking at (as an SEO). Just don't be myopic on what 'inorganic links' may mean.

And this, "*we have taken action to reduce the trust of inorganic links to your site*" ? Why not just devalue them, instead of penalizing? More on that in a bit.

Follow up to the initial request

From these, we start to see some formats that aren't as template driven as the first responses tend to be;

"Thank you for your request and all of the follow up analysis. We've reviewed your case again, and unfortunately there are still many inorganic links pointing to the site. For example:..."

Or

"Thank you for your follow up email and all of the information provided. The documentation you provided was very helpful in processing and understanding this case.

After re-evaluating your site's backlinks we are able to partially revoke a manual action. There are still inorganic links pointing to your site that we have taken action on. Once you've been able to make further progress in getting these links removed, feel free to reply to this email with the details of your clean-up effort" ([source](#))

In the later, we see there has been a 'partial' reduction in the manual action. Does that mean it's entirely manual? It is possible that removing the links has brought (certain pages?) within a more acceptable limit and/or threshold. Other pages on the site, may still be above that.

On-site Web Spam?

The world of links isn't the only examples we've come across. In the following example it seems there might be some on-site issues at play;

Dear site owner or webmaster of XXXXX,

We received a request from a site owner to reconsider XXXX for compliance with Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

We've reviewed your site and we believe that some or all of your pages still violate our quality guidelines.

In order to preserve the quality of our search engine, pages from XXXX may not appear or may not rank as highly in Google's search results, or may otherwise be considered to be less trustworthy than sites which follow the quality guidelines.

If you wish to be reconsidered again, please correct or remove all pages that are outside our quality guidelines. When such changes have been made, please visit <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/reconsideration?hl=en> and resubmit your site for reconsideration.

If you have additional questions about how to resolve this issue, please see our Webmaster Help Forum for support.

Sincerely, Google Search Quality Team

It doesn't really give information as to what exactly the problem may be, "some or all of your pages" does seem to intimate that. In talking with some other folks (I didn't get a copy of actual dialogue) I've also heard about

- Links to 404 pages
- No Followed links
- AFF links that go through redirect script.

Point being, that there are some things happening that are on site, not just links. The on-site ones I've seen are certainly in the minority, but that might just be the data I had access to. If anyone has had a dialogue with Google about on-site elements, please do let me know.

Nothing to see here

Next up we also have some examples of websites that were told there weren't any manual actions taken against the site. In these cases it is most likely that it was related to an algorithmic change such as Panda/Penguin or another update.

Dear site owner or webmaster of XXXX,

We received a request from a site owner to reconsider XXX for compliance with Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

We reviewed your site and found no manual actions by the webspam team that might affect your site's ranking in Google. There's no need to file a reconsideration request for your site, because any ranking issues you may be experiencing are not related to a manual action taken by the webspam team.

Of course, there may be other issues with your site that affect your site's ranking. Google's computers determine the order of our search results using a series of formulas known as algorithms. We make hundreds of changes to our search algorithms each year, and we employ more than 200 different signals when ranking pages. As our algorithms change and as the web (including your site) changes, some fluctuation in ranking can happen as we make updates to present the best results to our users.

If you've experienced a change in ranking which you suspect may be more than a simple algorithm change, there are other things you may want to investigate as possible causes, such as a major change to your site's content, content management system, or server architecture. For example, a site may not rank well if your server stops serving pages to Googlebot, or if you've changed the URLs for a large portion of your site's pages. This article has a list of other potential reasons your site may not be doing well in search.

If you're still unable to resolve your issue, please see our Webmaster Help Forum for support.

Sincerely, Google Search Quality Team"

I haven't decided if this is a good thing, or a bad thing. If you get one of these, and have lost significant traffic, it is more likely you've been hit with something algorithmic such as Panda, Penguin or some unnamed beast.

Dealing with Google Penalties

Of course the million dollar question is; what am I supposed to do now?

For the most part people have been running about trying to get links removed and inevitably a few companies have cropped up to help you with your efforts. While we'll leave examples of what to remove for next time, by and large I'd be looking at the quality and relevance of the site where the link resides.

Of course link un-building can be a huge issue and the stated attitude of "*Regardless of who created the links*" leaves the door open for potential ['negative SEO'](#) for websites that have weaker, less diverse profiles.

NOTE; takes time to get links 'removed' from the index depending on crawling of site where they are. Just because you get the link removed, doesn't mean Google doesn't still 'see' it.

If you're getting a manual penalty for on-site issues, that kinda be a bit more of an issue. We didn't see a lot of actual examples to webmasters. If you're doing suspect on-site SEO, then you likely already know. If it's something that's happened without your knowledge (CSS gone mad, CMS features) it may not be so easy.

Ultimately I don't believe you should just 'sit tight' and do nothing. If you've lost rankings and have [established it wasn't Panda/Penguin](#) (looking at roll out dates helps here) then a reconsideration request is likely the way to go.

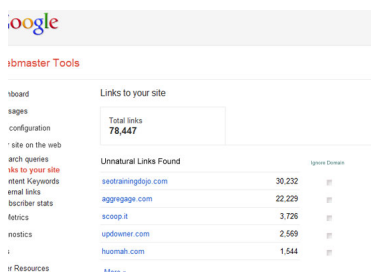
Where is this all headed?

To my thinking this line is huge, " *we have taken action to reduce the trust of inorganic links to your site* ". If Google can and has removed the value from the suspect links, why not just do that and call it a day? Inform the webmaster of the types of links which aren't passing value, instead of penalizing them. This would surely end a given link building tactic in short order without the risk of 'negative' SEO.

At some point one would have to believe that Google might want to just **give webmasters the option to discount links**

. If it's negative SEO or just some poor website owner who trusted an SEO that strayed to close to the edge, making people jump through hoops and expend resources, just doesn't seem like the right answer. Especially for past indiscretions on tactics that Google didn't seem to mind (even I have done WordPress themes in the past, for example).

It's like changing the speed limit on the street in front of my house and then giving me a speeding ticket for last year when I was driving the old limit.



The screenshot shows the Google Search Console interface. On the left is a navigation menu with items like 'board', 'pages', 'configuration', 'site on the web', 'arch queries', 'links to your site', 'intent keywords', 'email links', 'subscriber stats', 'metrics', 'notifications', and 'resources'. The main content area is titled 'Links to your site' and shows a box for 'Total links' with the value '78,447'. Below this is a table titled 'Unnatural Links Found' with columns for 'Links to your site' and 'Open Domains'. The table lists several domains with their respective link counts.

Links to your site	Open Domains
30,232	seo-training-101.com
22,229	aggrpage.com
3,726	scop.it
2,569	updownier.com
1,544	huomah.com

I had [written about that back in April](#) and since that time Google has intimated on a few levels that this may indeed be something they implement at some point. Sadly, it won't be soon enough for many of the websites already caught in the grips.

If you have received a reply to a Google reconsideration request and are willing to share (non-disclosure assured) please do get in touch. The more we can learn the better.

Until next time, play safe.

ADDED; July 19 2013

Today I was wandering around the Google Webmaster forums and [found this thread](#) . In there they mention getting a message that read;

Google has detected that some of your pages may be using techniques that are outside our [Webmaster Guidelines](#)

As a result of your site having thin content with little or no added value, Google has applied a manual spam action to laptop7.com/. There may be other actions on your site or parts of your site.

And after asking around, Nichola Stott mentioned seeing one a few weeks back. This one has a few additional details;;

We've detected that some of your site's pages may be using techniques that are outside Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

Specifically, we've detected low-quality pages on your site which do not provide substantially unique content or added value. Examples could include thin affiliate pages, doorway pages, automatically generated content or copied content. For more information about unique and compelling content, visit <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=66361>

We encourage you to make changes to your site so that it meets our quality guidelines. Once you've made these changes, please submit your site for reconsideration

While's it not likely to be THAT new, I haven't seen that one in my travels. It certainly does seem like it's aimed at ' [Panda-like](#) ' type issues. Can we consider that there's a threshold from Panda to massive thin content that causes a manual action? Entirely possible.

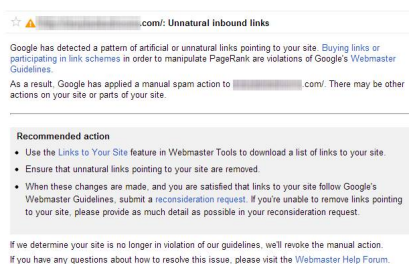
Interesting indeed...

(August 08 2013) We came across another interesting manual penalty notice;

Google has detected a pattern of artificial or unnatural links pointing to your site. Buying links or participating in link schemes in order to manipulate PageRank are violations of Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

As a result, Google has applied a manual spam action to <domani>. There may be other actions on your site or parts of your site

Screen below;



The screenshot shows a notification from Google regarding 'Unnatural inbound links'. The text reads: 'Google has detected a pattern of artificial or unnatural links pointing to your site. Buying links or participating in link schemes in order to manipulate PageRank are violations of Google's Webmaster Guidelines. As a result, Google has applied a manual spam action to [redacted].com/. There may be other actions on your site or parts of your site.' Below this, a 'Recommended action' section lists three steps: 1. Use the 'Links to Your Site' feature in Webmaster Tools to download a list of links to your site. 2. Ensure that unnatural links pointing to your site are removed. 3. When these changes are made, and you are satisfied that links to your site follow Google's Webmaster Guidelines, submit a reconsideration request. If you're unable to remove links pointing to your site, please provide as much detail as possible in your reconsideration request. At the bottom, it states: 'If we determine your site is no longer in violation of our guidelines, we'll revoke the manual action. If you have any questions about how to resolve this issue, please visit the Webmaster Help Forum.'

While this one above was from the UK, I had not really seen one this thin before. Is that related

to the recent changes in the [Google Link Schemes page](#) ? Hard to say.

Tags: